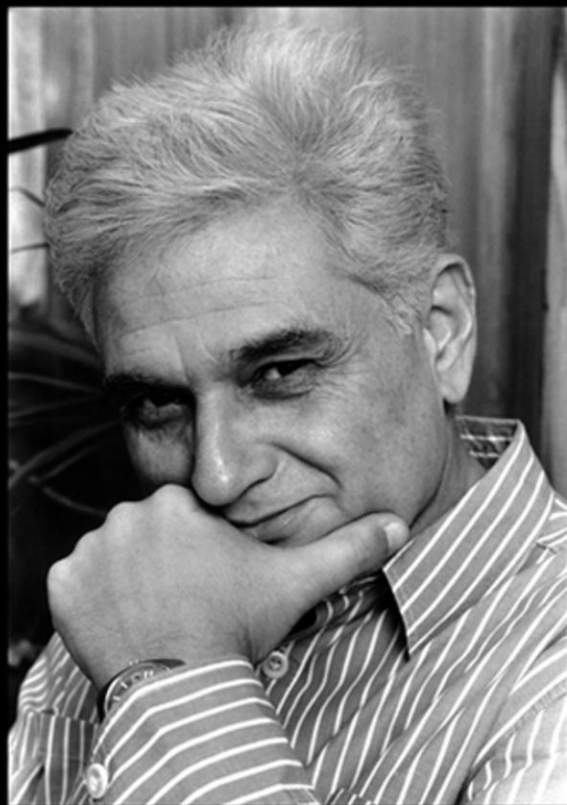


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A Companion to Derrida

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Edited by

Zeynep Direk
Leonard Lawlor

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List of Abbreviations (Works by Derrida)

- A *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).
- AA “Antwort an Appel,” *Zeitmischrift: Journal für Ästhetik*, 3 (Sommer 1987): 79–85.
- AD *Arguing with Derrida*, ed. Simon Glendinning (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001).
- AEL *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- AF *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- AFT “Afterw.rds: or, at least, less than a letter about a letter less,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Afterwords*, ed. Nicholas Royle (Tampere, Finland: Outside Books, 1992): 197–203.
- AIWD “As If I Were Dead: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Applying: To Derrida*, ed. John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins, and Julian Wolfreys (London: Macmillan, 1996): 212–226.
- AL *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1991).
- ALT *Altérités*, with Pierre-Jean Labarrière (Paris: Osiris, 1986).
- AP *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- AR *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002).
- ATH *Athens, Still Remains*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).
- ATON “An Apocalyptic Tone That Has Recently Been Adopted in Philosophy,” trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Fenves (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993): 117–171.
- AVP “Avant-propos,” in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 2003): 9–11.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BIO “Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (1989): 812–873.
- BS1 *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- BS2 *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 2, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- CDD “Ce que disait Derrida . . .,” with Franz-Olivier Giesbert, *Le Point* (Paris), October 14, 2004, 106–11.
- CF *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001).
- CIP “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” trans. Gila Walker, *Critical Inquiry*, 33(2) (Winter 2007): 441–461.
- CIR “Circumfession,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 3–315.
- CLW “Afterword,” with Jeffrey Kipnis, in *Chora L Works*, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (New York: Monacelli, 1997).
- CP “On Colleges and Philosophy,” in Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Postmodernism: ICA Documents*, ed. L. Appignanesi (London: Free Association Books, 1989): 209–228.
- CPT *Counterpath: Traveling with J. Derrida*, with Catherine Malabou (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
- CS “Countersignature,” trans. Mairéad Hanrahan, *Paragraph*, Special Issue on Genet, 27(2) (2005): 7–42.
- CSF “Le cinéma et ses fantômes,” interview with Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Jousse, *Cahiers du Cinéma* (April 2001): 75–85.
- DFT *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- DIS *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- DM “Double mémoire,” followed by “La vieille Europe et la nôtre,” in *Le Théâtre des idées: 50 penseurs pour comprendre le XXe siècle*, ed. Nicolas Truong (Paris: Flammarion, 2008): 15–27.
- DMV “Du mot à la vie: Un dialogue entre Jacques Derrida et Hélène Cixous,” with Aliette Armel, *Magazine Littéraire* (April 2004): 22–29.
- DNG *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).
- DNS *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, with John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

- DP *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge, 1996).
- DTP *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
- DVA *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, ed. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- EC “Et Cetera,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide*, ed. Nicholas Royle (New York: Palgrave, 2000): 282–304.
- EF “Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Derrida,” in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (London: Routledge, 2005).
- EO *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).
- ET *Echographies of Television*, with Bernard Stiegler, trans. J. Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).
- EU *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. Jan Plug et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
- FL “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority,” trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992): 3–67.
- FK “Faith and Knowledge,” trans. Samuel Weber, in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998): 1–78.
- FPU “Fidélité à plus d’un,” *Cahiers Intersignes*, 13 (1998): 221–265.
- FT “Following Theory,” in *life.after.theory*, ed. Michael Payne and John Schad (New York: Continuum, 2003): 1–51.
- FTA *French Theory in America*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen (London: Routledge, 2011).
- FWT *For What Tomorrow . . . A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
- GD *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- GD2 *The Gift of Death*, 2nd edn, and *Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- GL *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).
- GT *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- HCFL *H.C. for Life, That is to Say . . .*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- HAS “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budich and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989): 3–70.
- IJD “An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” with Michael Rosenfeld, *Cardozo Life*, Fall 1998, <http://www.cardozo.yu.edu/life/fall1998/derrida/>, accessed February 20, 2014.
- IMD *The Instant of My Death*, with Maurice Blanchot, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- IOG *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).
- JDPE “Jacques Derrida, penseur de l’événement,” interview by Jérôme-Alexandre Nielsberg, *L’Humanité*, January 28, 2004.
- JJDS “Abraham, the Other,” in *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*, ed. Bettina Bergo et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007): 1–35.
- LD *The Late Derrida*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell and Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- LDM “La langue et le discours de la méthode,” *Recherches sur la philosophie et le langage*, 3 (1983): 35–51.
- LI *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).
- LLF *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, NJ: Melvillehouse, 2007).
- LO “Living On: Borderlines,” trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, with Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller (New York: Continuum, 1979): 75–176.
- MB *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- MDM2 *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 2nd edn, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
- MLO *Monolingualism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- MP *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
- MS “Marx & Sons,” trans. G.M. Goshgarian, in *Ghostly Demarcations*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 2008): 213–269.
- NEG *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- OG *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
- OGC *Of Grammatology*, corrected edn, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

- OHD *The Other Heading*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
- OHO *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- ON *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).
- OS *Of Spirit*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- PC *The Post Card from Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- PCV “Penser ce qui vient,” in *Derrida pour les temps à venir*, ed. René Major (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2007): 17–62.
- PERM “Perhaps or Maybe: Jacques Derrida in Conversation with Alexander Garcia Düttmann,” *PLI: Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 6 (Summer 1997): 1–17.
- PF *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997).
- PFI “Politics and Friendship: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” with Michael Sprinker, trans. Robert Harvey, in *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1993): 183–231.
- PG *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy*, trans. Marion Hobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- PM *Paper Machine*, trans. R. Bowlby, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- POS *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- PSY1 *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rotenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- PSY2 *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 2, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rotenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).
- PT *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, with Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- PTS *Points . . . Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elizabeth Weber (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).
- QG *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).
- RES “Responsabilité – du sens à venir,” with Jean-Luc Nancy, in *Sens en tous sens: Autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Francis Guibal and Jean-Clet Martin (Paris: Galilée, 2004): 165–200.
- ROG *Rogues*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- RPS *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- SCH “Schibboleth: For Paul Celan,” trans. Joshua Wilner, in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 3–74.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- SIG *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand, bilingual edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
- SM *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006).
- SOV *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).
- SP *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972).
- SPM *Séminaire: La peine de mort*, vol. 1 (1999–2000) (Paris: Galilée, 2012).
- SPR *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- TJLN *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- TOJ “The Time is Out of Joint,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 14–38.
- TRN “Terror, Religion, and the New Politics,” in *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).
- TRP *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- TS *A Taste for the Secret*, with Maurizio Ferraris, trans. Giacomo Donis, ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).
- TWJ “Two Words for Joyce,” in *James Joyce: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Mary T. Reynolds (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992): 206–220.
- VB “La vérité blessante ou le corps-à-corps des langues,” with Evelyne Grossman, *Europe* (Paris) (May 2004): 8–28.
- VP *Voice and Phenomenon*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011).
- WA *Without Alibi*, trans. and ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- WD *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
- WM *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- WOG “We Other Greeks,” trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *Derrida and Antiquity*, ed. Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 17–39.
- WP *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1*, trans. Jan Plug (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- WRT “What Is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?,” trans. Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry*, 27(2) (2001): 174–200.

Notes on Contributors

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Introduction

ZEYNEP DIREK AND LEONARD LAWLOR

Companions need to provide good introductions to the basic concepts and problems in a philosopher's works, and Part I of this *Companion to Derrida* introduces and clarifies concepts such as truth; the transcendental; difference; deconstruction; ethics; time and history; signature; and remainder. Part II aims to help the reader to see how Derrida's philosophical reflection is conjoined not only to other thinkers such as Plato, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, Barthes, de Man, Heidegger, and Nancy, but also to other philosophical movements and ideas: psychoanalysis; cinema and photography; feminism; religion (Christian and Islamic); and education. Finally, Part III indicates areas of investigation that Derrida's thought has inspired or within which his thinking might be inserted: animal studies; forgiveness; cosmopolitanism; violence; and the law. Overall, we wanted to show that, by disturbing classical ways of doing research and investigation, Derrida's thinking (deconstruction) occupies subversive positions.

Undoubtedly, Derrida's writing was an explosion of revolutionary energy from within the formal educational machinery of the French Academy. What made it so interesting in the 1960s and 1970s was that, on the one hand, it was fully immersed in the traditional philosophical methodology. However, on the other hand, it aimed to show that this approach might be missing what matters. It misses what is at stake in the philosophical corpus of which the most traditional approaches and procedures speak. Stemming from his immersion in the traditional techniques of reading and writing found in the French institutions of philosophy, Derrida formulated his fundamental philosophical question as a question of writing. Calling for a step beyond

the knowhow of explanatory dissection of texts, Derrida's new notion of writing moved towards an experience of the trace that indicates the dynamic play of the forces that constitute texts. As Sarah Kofman has said, Derrida attempted to psychoanalyze texts by attending to their ambivalences, displacements, condensations, anxieties, and defense mechanisms. He aimed to show that writing in the sense of archi-writing has been repressed and is the repressed. Metaphysics aimed at separating the good object from the bad ones by desiring purity, integrity, original innocence. It fed the faith in the possibility of having access to the totality of real objects by way of controlling the interiorized ones. As an *unheimlich* concept, Derridian writing unrelentingly repeats patricide in order to liberate logos from its subjection to the norms of the metaphysics of presence (Kofman 1984, 114).

Derrida's statement found in *Of Grammatology* "There is nothing outside the text" (*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*) immediately produced a philosophical scandal because it looked to mean that "nothing exists except text"; through this interpretation, it looked to be an attack on realism (OGC, 158). If it were impossible to verify (or falsify) the propositions presented in a philosophical discourse by consulting an extra-linguistic object, then the question would have to be: how could philosophy as a concern with truth distinguish itself from all sorts of other discourses? Derrida, however, was making an overarching ontological claim. A text does not have an outside which may or may not confirm its truth claims; for everything that looks to be outside is an effect of writing. In other words, all presence deemed to be fundamental for a correspondence theory of truth is constituted by the play of traces or the movement of archi-writing. This ontological claim did not amount to idealism because the trace is irreducibly material; the sense that inhabits the world is also produced and disseminated by archi-writing.

"There is nothing outside the text" then has often been interpreted as a negation implying that there can be no such a thing as truth. Nonetheless, it can certainly be read as a step taken on the way toward determining the transcendental constitution of truth. The defense of a correspondence notion of truth – as if Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Nietzsche, and Heidegger have not existed and as if Derrida is the only philosopher responsible for the destruction of this naïve faith in truth – must be seen as a distortion. This volume begins by showing that it would be an oversimplification to claim that Derrida has given up on or has neglected the question of truth. After all the deconstructive strategies which complicate the philosophical reflection on its possibility, the question of truth still prevails. Christopher Norris in his essay "Truth in Derrida" shows how Derrida's notion of "writing," which marks "the absolute horizon of intelligibility or the precondition for whatever is to count as 'real,' 'true,' 'factual,' 'self-evident,' 'veridical'," has in fact been grossly misinterpreted as the elimination of truth. "Writing" is, for Derrida, what enables the sense and the truth-value of statements or propositions to be communicated from one context to the next, but also, as he argues in quasi-Kantian vein, the necessary and transcendentially deducible condition of possibility for any such process to occur.

Olivia Custer explicitly takes up Derrida's Kantian vein; her contribution aims to show us how Derrida transforms the Kantian heritage. Derrida, she argues, is at once continuous with fundamental Kantian commitments and discontinuous with certain concepts indelibly associated with Kant. Her key insight revolves around a phrase from Derrida's late *Without Alibi*, in which he says that he is working toward "the unconditional without sovereignty" (WA, 276). In Derrida's later phase (starting, say, in the 1990s), he always speaks of the unconditional in the most hyperbolic sense. Custer argues that his use – whether he mentions Kant or not – alludes to Kant's radical notion of goodness as we find it, for instance, in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. But she also stresses that each time Derrida takes up this Kantian radicality – dignity beyond all market price – Derrida uses Kant's radicality to set up the necessity of being more radical than even Kant's radical call to the unconditional. The result is that the unconditional Derrida wants to affirm does not exactly correspond to Kant's unconditional. It is, to say this again, "unconditional without sovereignty." Thus, Derrida also contests Kant's idea of sovereignty, which for Derrida is cruel. Custer, however, also shows how Derrida (or deconstruction) outdoes Kant's methodical radicality when he aims to determine conditions of possibility for what is structurally impossible. Custer's example here is Derrida's logic of the supplement (from the Rousseau reading found in *Of Grammatology*), a logic that is itself contradictory. But we know that with Derrida all contradictions are based in difference.

Claire Colebrook in her essay "Difference" addresses the priority of difference to identity in Derrida's philosophy. She argues that the concept of difference can be elaborated in at least four different ways: "difference" as it functions in Derrida's critique of the structuralist account of meaning as generated through systems; difference as it operates in Derrida's raising of the post-phenomenological problem of time; difference as it plays out in sexual difference; and the difference between human and non-human animals. Derrida's position in relation to the structuralist affirmation of difference over identity is most indicative. Colebrook argues that Derrida is offering a critique of structuralism by rethinking the relation of identity and difference as *différance*. The structuralists take language to be a system of relative and negative differences and consider the relations within such a system; they do not consider the positive, productive or ungrounded difference, which Derrida calls *différance*. This is the difference or differencing that allows any system to emerge. This movement allows for the iterability that produces meaning and therefore possesses an irreducible sense of truth. For Derrida, concepts have strict boundaries and serve to identify something. But concepts have emerged because each differentiated term has the capacity to be used again and again, across time and space, with each instance itself being different. Thus, a term is the same (or identical or recognizable) only if it can be different from itself (used again and again, differently). Thus *différance* relates difference and identity by means of iterability. The role of iterability in the synthesis of time and space, retention of retention, protention of protention, and

so on, points to the function of difference as spacing and temporalization (as found in phenomenology). Indeed, neither difference as space nor difference as time could be separated from sexual difference and animal difference. *Différance* therefore helps to deconstruct the construction of man as self-same (and differentiated from woman) and it dispels human exceptionalism (from non-human animal) as these constructions are found in the tradition of Western metaphysics.

Because the term “writing” arose from the then contemporary French structural linguistic and literary investigations, and because the term exceeded its ordinary connotation, Derrida’s use of the term “writing” (*écriture*) was seen to be obscure. But, his use of “différance” was seen to be even more obscure. The obscurity was not dispelled but intensified by Derrida’s 1968 “Différance” essay. Gary Gutting’s essay “The Obscurity of ‘Différance’” offers a close reading of Derrida’s essay and illustrates in which respects it remains unclear if this text is treated as an independent piece. Indeed, some of Derrida’s statements fail to be clear if we do not appeal to other texts written before it because the term “*différance*” is introduced as a way of summarizing earlier investigations. It is, so to speak, the conclusion drawn at the crossroads of readings, and put forward as the thesis that connects a number of commentaries which might look like parts of different projects. Derrida introduced the term by showing that Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Saussure, and Levinas could be read as thinkers of difference even though they could not go as far as acknowledging the non-teleological, origin-deferring movement that is at the heart of both the production and the expenditure of all differences. Derrida thought of *différance* as a general economy underlying the restricted economy of metaphysics. The movement of *différance* is the generosity of giving in being; the dissemination allowing the potentiality of insemination and its loss, the wasting away of energy and sense. Thus a close reading of *différance* would not suffice to make sense of the term without taking into account the critique of structuralism, the deconstruction of metaphysics in general and of phenomenology in particular. When Derrida insists that *différance* is not a concept, he also means it is not a *Begriff* whose dialectical movement unfolds as the identity of identity and difference. We could reverse this formula as difference of identity and difference in order to make the case that according to Derrida difference lies at the heart of all identity.

Geoffrey Bennington in “Metaphor and Analogy in Derrida” argues that, in earlier remarks about metaphor found in Derrida’s 1971 essay “White Mythology” and its 1978 follow-up “The *Retrait* of Metaphor,” Derrida objects to the traditional reduction of philosophy to rhetoric and poetic. A careful reading of these essays shows that Derrida is not interested in taking up a position that could be characterized as sophistic. In his discussion of the role of metaphor in philosophy, Derrida argues that, even though metaphysics relies on the good metaphor which is expected to function in the service of the propriety of meaning, metaphor is capable of functioning in the radical absence of the first proper term or the final proper term. Metaphor is irreducibly polysemic, open to overdetermination, semantic drift, and

dissemination. Bennington contrasts Derrida's early treatment of metaphor in philosophy with his late engagement of analogy in relation to the questions of *telos* and the regulative idea in Kant's philosophy. He emphasizes that the difference between these discussions can be described as a difference of horizon.

Deconstruction has a history in Derrida's philosophical career, in which it undergoes reinvention and plurification. In *Of Grammatology*, it works through the disparity between a text's theses and its language, its style, its metaphors, rhetoric, and performance. Derrida stressed on several occasions that deconstruction is not one. At first, the term was intended as a translation of Heidegger's destruction, but in *Of Grammatology*, *Voice and Phenomenon*, and *Writing and Difference* deconstruction undergoes a process of reinvention in accordance with Derrida's own philosophical agenda. The task is no longer to go to the original experiences in order to reopen the forgotten question of Being, but to show that the question of sign and of writing precedes the question of sense as such and of being as presence. Nonetheless, deconstruction is still premised upon the closure of philosophy, while the possibility of opening is given by a reflection that welcomes the sensible, the technological opacity and death at the heart of a reflection on life. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida adopted a structuralist approach to metaphysics, whose structures needed to be dismantled for obtaining a glimpse of the underlying movement that sustains the philosophical discourses grounded on presence. For Derrida metaphysical terms such as substance, *energeia*, causality, object, subject, God, spirit, consciousness, will, and will to power ultimately refer to presence. But, as *Voice and Phenomenon* shows, presence can never be conceived as originary plenitude without traces. Even though the history of deconstruction is well documented in Derrida studies, the relation between the early and late deconstructions and their ethico-political implications continue to be an important subject of research.

According to Kelly Oliver in "The 'Slow and Differentiated' Machinations of Deconstructive Ethics," the thread that can tie all deconstructions together has to do with deconstruction's being, as her title suggests, a slow and differentiated operation. Deconstruction suspends the prominent metaphysical oppositions that abide in the traditional metaphysics in order to point to the fluid differences within categories. And realizing differences beyond oppositions is already a matter of responsibility. Oliver argues that Derrida's hyperbolic ethics is not liberalism. His discourse on pure concepts such as hospitality, forgiveness, and justice interrupts liberal discourses that revolve around property and self as sovereign; moreover it also puts in question communitarian discourses that appeal to ethnic and racial purity. This hyperbolic ethics puts into question our values, and the metaphysical hierarchies underlying our ethical decision making.

Leonard Lawlor in "Deconstruction" concentrates on perhaps the most intriguing terms that characterize the movement of *différance*, which is at the heart of the deconstruction, such as "iterability" and "undecidability." If the movement at stake has any law-like character, it comes from "iterability" and "undecidability."

Iterability accounts for the universalization necessary for the institution of something as an object of knowledge and undecidability implies a heterogeneity that precedes the discursive division in oppositions and dualities such as truth and falsity, inside and outside, presence and absence. Indeed these key terms served at the early phase of deconstruction to deconstruct logocentric and phonocentric philosophical discourses. In *Of Grammatology* the focus was on the opposition between nature and culture in modern philosophies of language and culture. Derrida adopted a strategy that extends writing as the iterability of the trace and the undecidability of meaning into the medium of voice, thereby inscribing the technological at the heart of nature. Metaphysics has always dreamed a non-mediated access to full presence; this is why it privileged voice as hearing one's self speak, an experience that denounces the metaphysical fantasy of dispensing with signs. What metaphysics takes as the originary experience of auto-affection is in fact irreducibly a hetero-affection. But if the structural relations of metaphysics are the effects of such a movement, the experiences of revelation, truth, and certainty to which the metaphysical discourses appeal would only be possible as products of this originary play. The same argument is found in *Voice and Phenomenon* even though there the task is to deconstruct Husserl's conception of transcendental life as pure. In Derrida's reading, Husserl's transcendental philosophy is a philosophy of life. As the ego is conceived as a living being, phenomenology makes no room for death. Even if it is not a vitalism, it is based on the "living present," a notion that conjoins the notion of life with the experience of the consciousness.

At stake in *différance* (as the two verbs of *différance*, to defer and to differ, imply) are spatialization and temporalization, that is, the opening of space and time, and the distribution of signs and things in them. If this is cast in the language of transcendental philosophy, the movement of *différance* is spatialization and temporalization. Its peculiar logic can be seen as both the condition of the possibility and impossibility of decidable oppositions. Terms such as "pharmakon" and "supplement" designated this undecidable logic generative of the stability of the structures it gave rise to and which it destabilized at the same time. Hence they function as the transcendental conditions of metaphysics of presence, which make all experience of truth as certainty and evidence possible and impossible at the same time. Rodolphe Gasché in *The Tain of the Mirror* had already called terms such as "trace," "*différance*," and "supplement" "quasi-transcendental" (Gasché 1986, 274). Although Derrida's specific contribution to the transcendental tradition is not completely clear, Maxime Doyon's essay, "The Transcendental Claim of Deconstruction," like that of Custer, explains how deconstruction relates to the transcendental foundationalism that characterizes the Continental tradition since Kant. Doyon argues that Derrida has never in fact left the terrain of transcendental investigation even though he exceeded it with an ultra-transcendental reflection.

Björn Thorsteinsson's essay focuses on the problems involved in the early phase of Derrida's encounter with Levinas. The essay focuses mostly on "Violence and

Metaphysics” and Derrida’s critical engagement with Levinas, which is still very central in making sense of Derrida’s own position concerning the relation between self and other; metaphysics and ethics; and ethics and politics. Derrida questioned Levinas’s use of the term “exteriority” in order to characterize the radical alterity of the Other as challenging the conceptuality of Western philosophy that assimilates or subordinates the Other to the Same. Derrida pointed to the ways in which Levinas’s metaphysical discourse motivated by the desire for the Other fell into the logocentrism of Western metaphysics that cannot accommodate what differentially contaminates it, that is writing. Derrida also points out that the metaphysics of the face is caught in the traditional system of distinctions between human and animal, masculine and feminine, living beings and things, dead and undead, and so on. Derrida’s desire to welcome radical alterity beyond these oppositions makes him in *Specters of Marx* relate ontology to ethics and politics by way of hauntology. Both in ontology and ethics the attempt has to be made to go beyond the opposition between presence and absence, actuality and non-actuality, life and non-life.

Derrida’s appreciation of the Abrahamic tradition and the deconstruction of the opposition between faith and knowledge have opened a new area in Derrida studies. There are more and more works being done on Derrida and religion. In this *Companion* Martin Hägglund, Ben Vedder and Gert-Jan van der Heiden, John Caputo, Recep Alpyağıl, and Kas Saghafi have focused on how religiosity occupied Derrida and what he said in particular on the Abrahamic religions. Recently, the question whether or not there is a religious turn in Derrida late in his career has been at the center of attention. Hägglund argues against a religious turn in Derrida. For him, Derrida’s philosophy involves a radical atheism. To justify his argument Hägglund points to “Faith and Knowledge,” where Derrida notes that in his notion of spacing, the spacing of time cannot be characterized in religious or theological terms; it has nothing unscathed, pure, sacred, or holy about it. Moreover, Hägglund claims that the proliferation of religious themes in Derrida’s discourse is compatible with that radical atheism. What then does Hägglund mean by “radical atheism”? Radical atheism does not make an external critique of religious concepts; it does not aim to show that they are illusions aiming at controlling and domesticating life’s forces. In reflecting on these concepts Derrida seeks to turn them *against themselves*, in order to reveal their atheological and irreligious condition of possibility. Derrida’s radical atheism is also connected with his own notion of radical evil, which is based on a suspicion of the metaphysical opposition between good and evil. The possibility of evil is intrinsic to the good that we desire, and the good would not be what it is if the possibility of evil had not been rooted in it. On the other hand, as the possibility of the Good may be opened by the worst, sworn faith may result from perjury. Derrida deconstructs religious faith as commitment to unscathed good and the sacred as immunity to evil. He does not believe in the Christian notion of immortality as an eternal state of being of the soul in the afterlife; in that sense he affirms finitude. The desire for survival is a temporal process of living on and would be still within finite

existence, an existence which is not one's own. As life is not immune to death, good remains open to evil and peace is risked by violence. Even if we can distinguish between good and evil, life and death, peace and violence, the possibility of contamination and undecidability cannot be eliminated. By what right then does Derrida license himself to speak of something like the unconditional? Hägglund argues that the unconditional is neither God, nor anything ontotheological. Nor can it be conceived as the law of a universal reason, for that would be a ruse to make my own reason an absolute. Derrida thinks of the unconditional in the form of call, as performativity. Messianic is a structure of the experience, the openness of the future to that which is to come; unconditionality on the other hand, originates in the temporality of the performative.

Françoise Dastur in her essay "Play and Messianicity: The Question of Time and History in Derrida's Deconstruction" shows how Derrida's deconstruction is different from Husserl's "Abbau" and Heidegger's "Destruktion." In order to explain the difference, Dastur points to the peculiar way Derrida interprets Saussure's account of language and signification. According to her, Derrida's reading of Levinas's notion of "trace" has determined deconstruction since its first appearance in *Of Grammatology*. Dastur investigates the implications and effects of an understanding of the presence of the present in terms of trace in Derrida's reading of time and history in Husserl and Heidegger. By evaluating Derrida's early critique of the metaphysical concepts of time and history in Husserl and Heidegger, she explores the background in which Derrida has attained a new concept of history as "play" and "writing." The question she raises concerns the compatibility of this account with the messianic concept of history that Derrida develops in his last writings. Persuasively, she concludes that they do not make for a comfortable compatibility.

Peggy Kamuf takes up the theme of signature in Derrida to show how the signature, which is a *sine qua non* element of literary institution, does not go without an element of counter-signature. Derrida's most important work on signature is found in *Glas* (1974) and *Signéponge/Signsponge* (1975). Whether or not, why, how, for whom does the signature takes place? What is the signature effect? How do a philosopher and writer sign? The signature makes the writing belong to someone or makes it proper, even though there would be no institution of literature without signature, writing, and *a fortiori* archi-writing, all of which resist being attributed to what is proper. How could the other, forces of alterity, voices that resist appropriation, be excluded from literary and philosophical writing? This non-exclusion explains why the possibility of signature can never be separated from that of counter-signature. The gesture of counter-signing is the singular event that happens to language in a way to undermine the text as property of a sole signatory. Counter-signature interrupts and changes the signature's relation to itself. According to Kamuf, counter-signature is the signature of the other. The irreducible "contre" opens the text to repetition by another.

The aporetic turn that deconstruction took could be interpreted as following from Derrida's reflection on the relation between Hellenism and Judaism in Western ethical thinking. In his attempt to consider Derrida's legacy as a question of the heritage of Europe, Rodolphe Gasché takes this heritage to be comprised of the Greek culture and the Abrahamic culture. Coincidentally, this heritage involves the elements of universalizability and that which resists being universalized, such as *khōra*. *Khōra* cannot be identified, for it is a pre-originary origin that does not allow being said by any genus of being or discourse. In the *Timaeus*, Plato remarks that, even though the oppositions between the sensible/intelligible, visible/invisible, form/without form fail to properly belong to it, *khōra* can be a general place for all kinds of determinations, translations, and identifications. As such, *khōra* would be the immemorial, undeconstructible remainder that the metaphysical tradition cannot appropriate. If *khōra* is part of the Greek contribution to the heritage of European thought, the specifically temporal dimension of "messianicity without messianism," as a fundamental openness of experience and the faith in justice that correlates with it, would be the Abrahamic contribution. If *khōra* escapes appropriation by metaphysics, messianicity without messianism escapes assimilation by ontotheology. These two remainders constitute the core of the double memory of Europe or of the West. "Faith and Knowledge" associates the twofold nature of the European heritage with the problem of a genuinely universal "World," which could be a "place" for all. Indeed, according to Gasché, *khōra* and the "messianic" are the spatial and temporal "forms" of an "alter-mondialiste" world, a world exempt from ethnocentricity in its European and non-European versions.

Many of the essays we have already described suggest that many if not all of Derrida's fundamental themes and concepts were developed in conjunction with other thinkers. In particular, as we just say, Rodolphe Gasché argues that Derrida's thinking must be considered as Derrida's thinking "and" the Greek-Abrahamic tradition. The essays collected in Part II of our volume take up this "and" in explicit ways. In particular, Michael Naas's essay continues the reflection on the conjunction of Derrida's thinking with the Greek side of the European tradition. In "Derrida and Ancient Philosophy (Plato and Aristotle)," Naas ties Derrida's early investigation of Greek philosophy in his 1968 essay "Plato's Pharmacy" to his 1992 essay "We the Other Greeks." Through the theme of inclusion and exclusion, Naas argues that this philosophical relation is not a simple return to the Greeks. It is always mediated by Heidegger or it is a contestation of Heidegger. For Derrida, Greek thought was never self-identical, because, as he shows in "Plato's Pharmacy" by focusing on the term "pharmakon," there is a semantic oscillation at the foundation of Greek philosophy. This semantic oscillation disrupts the unity of Greek thought as a system, corpus, and identity. Like Gasché, Naas argues that the same undecidability is found in *khōra*.

Robert Bernasconi pursues the relation between the Greek and the Jew as the issue with which Derrida opens his inaugural essay on Levinas, "Violence and

Metaphysics.” Bernasconi shows the different kind of impact the exchange has made on each of these philosophers by giving their thinking a further direction. Even though Derrida may sound as though he is inviting Levinas to acknowledge Western metaphysics’s resources of alterity, this identity as *différance* did not exclude the Judeo-Christian from it. Bernasconi’s essay shows the extent to which the philosophical encounter between Derrida and Levinas is caught up in the racial politics of the twentieth century. However, he also argues that the philosophical importance of this exchange should not only be restricted to the twentieth-century struggle against anti-semitism; it should be part of the European history of philosophy, in which philosophy, in the second half of the eighteenth century, is redesigned as assimilating racial and cultural pluralism. Since then, European philosophy has served colonial ends, a colonizing role of philosophy that neither Derrida nor Levinas have ever addressed.

Sabrina Aggleton compares Derrida and Merleau-Ponty’s rethinking of presence as a relation of intimacy and alterity. Because the mundane, the impure cannot be excluded from presence, “self-presence” to which phenomenology appeals can only be “a crystallization of the impossible” as Merleau-Ponty says. Aggleton puts Derrida’s reading of Merleau-Ponty in question by arguing that the belonging together of the self and world does not amount to the reduction of the other to the same and that Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm offers a model of complex intimacy in which alterity remains inappropriable.

Edward Baring offers an analysis of Derrida’s discussion of writing in *Of Grammatology* with Althusser’s new theory of reading. Althusser helped Derrida be hired by the École Normale Supérieure (ENS), even though, unlike Althusser himself and his students, Derrida did not commit to the communist agenda. According to Baring, Derrida’s early work on Husserl and phenomenology must be understood through the intellectual atmosphere at the ENS when Derrida entered it. Derrida had to respond at once to the philosophers of science such as Vuillemin and Cavailles who called for a rejection of Husserl’s work on grounds of the ahistoricity of mathematics and to the Althusserians’ reduction of phenomenology to ideology. According to Althusser, phenomenology was structured from a “myth of origin,” an “original unity undivided . . . between the real and its knowledge.” What he called “science,” in contrast, was based on the separation between knowledge and the real world. As Baring argues, in *Of Grammatology* Derrida associates logocentrism to “ideology” and grammatology to “science” in the Althusserian sense. The point Derrida made to Althusser concerns the instability of that distinction. Just as the deconstruction of structural linguistics which brings forth the new concept of writing cannot be a radical break with metaphysics, Althusser’s new concept of science remains ideological insofar as it is still structured by the signifier–signified dyad.

In “Derrida and Psychoanalysis,” Elizabeth Rottenberg investigates Derrida’s relation to psychoanalysis, which she conceives through friendship. Derrida is a friend of psychoanalysis who is at once faithful and unfaithful; he respects psychoanalysis

disrespectfully. Derrida published several texts on psychoanalysis beginning with his 1967 “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” and ending with the 2000 “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of His Soul.” Rottenberg argues that psychoanalysis undertakes to look at the experience of cruelty without any metaphysical, theological, humanist, scientific alibi. Since his first readings of Freud, Derrida puts his difference in effect in interpretations of the unconscious and rejects a metaphysical interpretation of psychoanalysis’s figural inventions and rhetorical tools. On the other hand, Derrida would be critical of psychoanalysis’s silence at the face of social and political violence.

Louise Burchill in “Derrida and Barthes: Speculative Intrigues in Cinema, Photography, and Phenomenology” argues that cinema as “medium,” “apparatus,” and as “experience” instantiated a logic of spectrality for Derrida, thus calling into question the distinction between imagination and reality, between perception and hallucination, in the constitution of the “appearance of immediate reality.” Nevertheless, she also reveals that Derrida’s own experience of film-making as actor and subject with Safaa Fathy’s *Derrida’s Elsewhere* involved a tenacious resistance to the cinematographic techniques that partake in the creation of the cinematographic effect of the “living present.” Burchill compares the phenomenological framework that Barthes uses in *Camera Lucida*, which refers the photographic to a referent which in its having been remains unique and invariable as a source of luminous emanation, to Derrida’s consideration of the “noema” whose phenomenality remains a spectral intrigue. Even though in “Copy, Archive, Signature” Derrida casts Barthes’s position in terms of the same problematic of the deconstruction of Husserl’s originary impression, Derrida’s own resistance to the cinematographic apparatus returns us to the question of an alterity irreducible to auto-affection.

Derrida’s philosophy has made great impact in literary studies at the last quarter of the twentieth century. Derrida has written on Blanchot, Ponge, Celan, Joyce, Artaud, Jabès, and Kafka. In general, he put the literary institution in question. What is literature, where does it come from? Derrida stressed that the literary principle of “being able to say everything” is the socio-juridico-political guarantee given to literature. Literary texts make metaphysical assumptions as much as philosophical texts; there can however be rhetorical devices that destabilize such metaphysical semantics and thematic. Such destabilization is what the literary critics who have associated themselves with deconstruction have tried to do. A text is full of forces, some of which torment the hierarchies that consist of other forces. Hillis Miller considers the history of the relation between Derrida and Paul de Man, which begins in 1971 with de Man’s response in his essays in *Blindness and Insight* and ends with Derrida’s 1998 “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) (‘within such limits’)” where Derrida offered a discussion of de Man’s theory of the machinal effects of performatives. Miller shows that this complex exchange concerned the limits of the linguistic and the limits of the rhetorical. He argues that, although they have both given deconstructive readings of literary texts, Derrida and de Man had quite different rhetorical strategies and devices.

Derrida's work has also been subject to feminist inquiry. Should he be read as a thinker of sexual difference or of in terms of gender conceived as a differential relation between nature and culture? Feminist interpretations of Derrida could accommodate both kinds of readings. Derrida's *Spurs* offered a deconstructive perspective on Nietzsche's discourse on woman as truth. His *Geschlecht* essays questioned why Heidegger was silent about sexual difference: where are we to locate sexual difference in the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*? The debate over the relation of sexual difference to ontological difference has frequently set the terms of encounter between deconstruction and feminism. Derrida is interpreted as responding to Luce Irigaray and the second wave feminism by affirming sexual difference beyond the division into two, male and female. Since *Of Grammatology*, Derrida emphasized that the hierarchical opposition between man and woman is constitutive of metaphysics and could be found as intricately bound with other oppositions. He also pointed to the fact that the metaphysical apparatus is phallogocentric. In late Derrida, the emphasis is again on the hierarchical relation between oppositions. He is mainly concerned with how the distinction between human and animal relates to the distinction between man and woman: why is the second distinction subordinated to the first? The questions such as "What is the connection between logocentrism, phallogocentrism, and carnocentrism?" and "How do phallogocentrism and carnocentrism confirm and consolidate each other in logocentric metaphysics?" belong to the core of Derrida's last course, *The Beast and the Sovereign*.

Penelope Deutscher's "Fraternal Politics and Maternal Auto-Immunity: Derrida, Feminism, and Ethnocentrism" argues that Derrida's *Of Grammatology* can be read in terms of political philosophy with an interest in sexual difference. Rousseau appeals to a natural teleology as if there is an original motherhood, even though his text reveals the maternal operation to be a chain of substitutes, something that calls for supplements. Derrida has always questioned the traditional idea that the father's identity remains uncertain whereas the mother's identity is indubitably clear. Maternity would be as artificial and as symbolic as paternity. However, not only metaphysics but also the political organization of social life by means of the bond of friendship is founded on the exclusion of women. In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida shows that "the great philosophical and canonical discourses on friendship will have explicitly tied the friend-brother to virtue and justice, to moral reason and political reason" (PF, 277).

Tina Chanter turns her attention to Derrida's reading of Antigone in *Glas*, where sexual difference is very much at stake. As Chanter argues, everything that is said of the text applies to sex. As the text is sexualized, the sex is textualized. Sexuality oscillates, duplicates, doubles, and becomes undecidable. Irigaray in "The Eternal Irony of Community" had made a discussion on Hegel's exposition of *Sittlichkeit* in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, with a focus on how Hegel appealed to and treated Sophocles' female character Antigone. Irigaray considered Antigone as the trace of the sexual difference that has been obliterated by the patriarchal Western culture, as the ineradicable feminine figure that resists assimilation by Hegel's dialectic, whose

machinery produces spirituality by means of assimilating the feminine alterity to the same. In *Glas*, Derrida had also spoken of the figure of Antigone in a context in which he commented on Hegel's account of family. Scholarship on Hegel's discussion of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* involves two strands. In the first strand, the focus is on the emerging of the conflict of values in *Sittlichkeit* as giving rise to a dialectical movement at the end of which modernity's legal subjectivity comes into being (Thompson 1998). In the second strand however, the focus is on the struggle for recognition in terms of which Hegel sets the stage for the emergence of consciousness into self-consciousness (Critchley 1999). Chanter prefers the second strand to the first, because it contests the separation between the master–slave dialectic with its struggle for recognition from Hegel's views on slavery. Such a separation would be achieved by distinguishing ancient slavery from the modern, new world slavery. By contesting this strategy, Chanter shows that Antigone should be read not only in terms of sexual difference, but also in terms of racial difference. She raises the question whether Derrida himself did not fall prey to Hegel's fetishization of Antigone, if he was not seduced by a white Antigone? Hegel's desexualizing representation of Antigone as a virgin castrated her femininity. By assimilating her voice to religious piety, he also tamed the political threat she posed to the existing order. Nevertheless, an attentive reading of Sophocles' text discloses many allusions to Antigone as the stranger, the non-white, and the non-Greek.

In *Truth in Painting*, Derrida made a reflection on the artwork as a pictorial artifact. Thereby, by referring to thinkers such as Kant and Heidegger, he reopened the question of painting's relation to language. In "Art's Work," Andrew Benjamin considers the place, legacy, and limits of *ekphrasis* (the linguistic description of a visual artwork) for a deconstructive consideration of painting. Such a deconstruction might be a reconsideration that liberates the "object" from the hold of *ekphrasis*. If the substance of that "object" is always already actative, which makes a work of art art's work, the deconstruction of painting attempts to understand art as mattering. Hence, Benjamin looks at the way Derrida relates to the works of Artaud ("Forcener le subjectile") and Atlan ("De la couleur à la lettre") with a particular focus on how Derrida questions the distinction between the subjective and the actative. However, through Derrida's engagement with these two artists, Benjamin investigates the emergence of the artwork as a particular in its very relationality or generality. In short, Benjamin's essay concerns the event-character of art.

The question of alterity has always been at the heart of deconstruction's relation to ethics and politics. The ethical and political implications of deconstruction have become more explicit as deconstruction turned from a criticism of metaphysics to the anthropological. The first deconstructions Derrida produced had targeted the founding texts of philosophy. These deconstructions seemed to operate within a temporal horizon that reminded one of Heidegger's history of Being. In contrast, after about 1989 (the publication of "Force of Law"), Derrida explored the ethical or political experience such as that of the gift, of hospitality, the secret, forgiveness,

and sovereignty. In the deconstruction Derrida produced during the last 15 years of his life, he showed that these experiences are aporetically structured. He deconstructed these experiences less as a historical project and more as a “logical” or “structural” project. A text like *Politics of Friendship* seems to be a history of the concept of friendship; however, the text is filled with aporetical conclusions regarding the internal workings of the concepts of friendship in which this history consists. This second, more recent, and more “logical” vein of deconstruction explores the double bind between the conditional and the unconditional requirements that constitute the essence of these ethico-political experiences. As François Raffoul emphasizes in “Heidegger and Derrida on Responsibility,” Derrida is not interested in normative ethics, in systems of moral rules, and norms; he is more concerned with the sense and the possibility of ethics, which are rooted in “responsibility.” Responsibility supports various ethico-political experiences and endows them with a logical complexity. Why is there such a complexity at the heart of ethics? As Raffoul argues, for Derrida, “ethical responsibility can only happen as impossible, that is, undergo an experience of what will remain *inappropriable* for it.” Indeed, aporias participated in Derrida’s ultra-transcendental reflection since they lay out the conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility. The aporetic structure complicates decisions about the right thing to do. It even puts in jeopardy the identity of the judging ethical subject. An aporia can also be seen as a relation between finitude and infinity. On the one hand, it presents the rules and norms that govern the existing conditional social, political, historical, and economic reality; and on the other hand, it challenges that reality by a relation of listening to radical alterity. Derrida insists that the impossible demands that the other makes on me are always already inscribed in the logic of the ethico-political experience at stake.

Ben Vedder and Gert-Jan van der Heiden, in “On Faith and the Holy in Heidegger and Derrida,” discuss “faith” and “holy” as two sources of religion. Heidegger gives a certain role to the holy in his thought of Being, but characterizes faith as religious and excludes it from thinking. Given that, in “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida deconstructs the opposition between faith and knowledge in science, technology, and philosophy, Vedder and van der Heiden raise the question of how Derrida reformulates the relation between philosophy and religion. Religion involves a process of indemnification; it struggles against the contamination that disassembles and uproots what is proper. It aims to reassemble and to re-root the proper in the form of community and tradition. By insisting on the fact that the unscathed is always already contaminated by tele-technology (here taking support from Heidegger), Derrida paves the way for a reflection on how indemnification and the holy cannot do without the mechanical and thereby uprooting repetition.

Kas Saghafi considers the philosophical relationship, which starts in the 1970s, between Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. Saghafi focuses on religion, which is the topic of their last exchange. According to Saghafi, for Derrida, “religion” aims at keeping the living – the adherents of “religion” – safe, unscathed, and intact. “Religion”

desires to indemnify: to prevent hurt or damage, compensate for loss and reinstate purity. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, there is no safety and intactness for the living, only the deceased may be untouchable. Religion does not save; it only wishes safety for those with whom the religious faith is concerned. Derrida reveals the fatal auto-immune logic of the unscathed, which prevails in the experiences of the sacred, saintly. The auto-immune logic points to the irreducible violence that is inherent to the relation to alterity. Saghafi then turns to Nancy's elaboration of Christianity as a religion of touching and Derrida's response to his discussion of resurrection in the "Foreword" to *Chaque fois unique* (2003). Saghafi also comments on Derrida's argument in his 1999–2000 seminars "*La peine de mort*" [*Death Penalty*] that Nancy's project of "The deconstruction of Christianity" is "a Christian deconstruction."

John Caputo concentrates on Derrida's "religion without religion," in which God is conceived as an effect of "the play of traces." When it functions as something like an ontotheological placeholder, the name "God" arrests the play of traces. Then the presence it signifies would be performatively evoked in order to justify or challenge the existing social and political world order. This trace, however, also solicits us to pray for the impossible. Caputo makes clear that, although Derrida's religion is a religion without dogmas, creeds, ritual, religion books, it also affirms faith. Derrida's religion without religion values non-knowledge, the promise, and messianic openness. Caputo argues that Derrida's faith, as inscribed in the *khōra*, is more profound than atheism and theism, *khōra* being the groundless ground of faith.

Derrida was a Jew who confessed to being an atheist. Although he did not have profound knowledge of the religious tradition, he seemed to be more in touch with the impact of Judaism in philosophy. He also seemed to be more reflective about the surfacing of Jewish ideas in his own philosophy. Christian theologians have also shown a lot of interest in Derrida's work, not only because he addressed faith in Kierkegaard, the *mysterium tremendum* in Patočka, and negative theology in Meister Eckhart, but also because deconstruction welcomes the interpretations that lead Christianity beyond ontotheology and metaphysics of presence. In contrast to Judaism and Christianity, Derrida has said very little on Islam. And most of his remarks on Islam are made in response to questions raised in a context determined by the panic, horror, and fear created by 9/11, that is, when Islam really started to look like a threat to Western culture. Indeed, very little work has been done to explore the possible, even virtual relations between Derrida and the Islamic philosophical tradition. Therefore, our *Companion* contains an essay by a Muslim theologian Recep Alpyağıl. In his essay, Alpyağıl attempts to compare undecidability in Derrida with the undecidable elements in the philosophical discourse of Ibn 'Arabi. He tries to show that the orthodox trends in Sufism involve fluid transitions that permeate the well-known metaphysical oppositions in Muslim ontotheology. Ibn 'Arabi's mysticism would go as far as inscribing sexual difference within God "himself."

If one is going to investigate Derrida's political philosophy, it will make sense to begin with his political struggle with French educational institutions about the

teaching of philosophy. In “Derrida and Education,” Samir Haddad takes up Derrida’s writings on the role and place of philosophy in the French education system between 1975 and 1985. These writings are published in English as two volumes *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1* (2002), and *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (2004). Derrida played a prominent role in the establishment of the Collège International de Philosophie in the early 1980s and he had been a member of GREPH (Groupe de Recherches sur l’Enseignement Philosophique). Haddad pursues themes such as the role of the teacher, the age of the student, and philosophy’s relation to a national language. He explains how Derrida’s position, in fact, fought two opponents at once, the government that aimed at implementing the 1975 Haby reforms, which changed the compulsory eight hours of philosophy in the final year of high school into something optional, and the nationalist objections to the Haby reforms, which defended philosophy by identifying it as part of French identity.

We can easily see that the essays we have collected into the second part of our *Companion* open up, primarily through Derrida’s more ethical and political writings, certain areas of investigation: feminism, religious thinking, and education, for instance. The essays we have grouped in Part III pursue these areas explicitly. So, in “A Philosophy of Touching Between the Human and the Animal: The Animal Ethics of Jacques Derrida,” Patrick Llored considers what he views as the most important question of Derrida’s late philosophy, the question of animality. He argues not only that the question of animal is at the heart of deconstruction, but also that Derrida’s late thought presents a philosophy of non-human life. Llored draws from Derrida’s evaluation of touching in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* as a basis for a Derridean animal ethics. As the sense of the living, touch is opposed to the traditional haptical philosophy, which is anthropocentric since it grants the capacity of mediated touching to the human hand. In contrast, touch is really the sense by virtue of which living beings place themselves in space; touch enables them to have encounters with each other. As an existential condition, as “the absolute reflection of self-presence,” touch, according to Llored, exceeds the physiological and zoological function. It emancipates the living beings from natural determinism, that is, from the reign of bare life, toward an intersubjectivity that does not exclude the non-human animals.

Nicholas Royle also speaks of animality by way of Derrida’s approach to poetry. In Derrida’s “The Double Session,” the guiding thread for this reflection on poetry comes from one line of Mallarmé: *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (“a roll of the dice will never abolish chance”). The task is to show that the materiality of language, the chance effects created by the play of the letter in poetry, makes something happen in language, transforms our sensibility and thinking, and alters the way we live our lives. Royle argues that the strangeness and uncertainty of poetical writing leads us into an experience of the realm of animality. Poetry therefore is able to make us question, in unprecedented ways, the distinction between the human and non-human animal. Since *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, which dates from the 1997

Cerisy conference, and up to the final courses on *The Beast and the Sovereign*, the animal question is at the heart of Derrida's philosophy. Even though this theme has been reflected upon in commentaries in the eco-critical style, the theme of animality had not been made relevant to Derrida's reflection on poetry. Royle points to the poetic or "poematic" as the experience of the impossible, which perhaps then amounts to a way of "giving speech back to animals." The poem invites us to recognize animals as faces. It thus undermines the logo-phono-anthropocentrism of prose.

Ann V. Murphy addresses the question of forgiveness. In particular, she is interested in the official public apologies made by heads of state or government for the violence that happened in the past in order to restore social peace. Leaders of states generally make such apologies for genocides, forcible removal of aboriginal communities, and gross violations of human rights. The apologies aim at redressing these wrongs, reconciliations, and healing the national identity of the state's own citizens, an identity of course that is fully determined by ethnic, racial, sexual, and cultural norms. This politics of memory and historical justice is indeed a necessary component of Derrida's cosmopolitanism. Derrida's interest in the truth and reconciliation commissions led to his reflections on the idea of unconditional forgiveness. He commented on forgiveness for the first time in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (1992), and came back to the topic in "To Forgive," a 1999 presentation made at Villanova University, published in *Questioning God* (2001). In his essay "On Forgiveness," which was published in *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001), Derrida repeated that such public apologies be offered "in the spirit of reconciliation" and that they have to be made "without qualification." Murphy notes that silence is part of the experience of forgiveness, for an act of asking for forgiveness can always be self-annulling. And indeed Derrida's discourse on forgiveness is full of silences.

In "Cosmopolitanism to Come: Derrida's Response to Globalization," Fred Evans raises the critical question of how cosmopolitanism and the values it promotes can effectively fight the unregulated exploitation of natural resources, which is clearly the harmful side of capitalism. Evans explains the kind of transformation cosmopolitanism undergoes in Derrida's political philosophy. Derrida conceived cosmopolitanism without a homogeneous identity, open to diversity and difference, and without reference to a univocal notion of the common good. Derrida looks for a political philosophy that allows for pluralism and a solidarity that does not presuppose homogenization. This special alliance of unity and difference paves the way for a democracy to come, which is inseparable from Derrida's understanding of cosmopolitanism. From a genealogical point of view, cosmopolitanism has a Euro-Christian history. However, it also suffers from racist prejudices against the non-European races. Democracy to come in the cosmopolitan context is not just a principle or a regulative idea but an "unforeseeable coming of the other," in other words, the coming of the law, responsibility, and the decision from the other. According to Derrida, democracy is essentially auto-immune. In *Rogues*, he notes that the fascist and Nazi totalitarianisms came to power through democratic elections. The curtailing of democratic

rights justified by the democratic exercise of power by the majority reveals the paradox of democracy. In order to respond to the paradox, we must recognize that democracy cannot be reduced to voting. Evans also emphasizes that the injunction for democracy cannot be a demand for anything less than pure democracy, in the sense of an engagement in democratic dialogue, of the earthly voices that belong to the social body. According to Evans, universal solidarity without homogenization calls for democracy to come, which implies unconditional openness to questioning, hospitality, and freedom.

In his second essay in our *Companion*, “The Flipside of Violence,” Leonard Lawlor investigates the implications of Derrida’s notion of violence. In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida had explicated Levinas’s claim that to understand the other, to bring the other under light, is to make the other appear as a phenomenon. From Levinas’s viewpoint, the phenomenalization of the other is tantamount to violence, since intentionality is a way of bringing the other to the same by an eidetic delineation in advance of the sense of the other’s manifestation. Levinas thus situates the encounter in which the other’s face expresses itself from itself in a breach of intentionality, which brings the other to the same. In order to make Levinas’s meaning clearer, Derrida invents the distinction between “empirical violence” and “transcendental violence.” This transcendentalization of violence can be made a problem, if it justifies blindness and leads to indifference to various sorts of empirical violence in our lives. Lawlor argues that the impossibility to eliminate violence even in the most non-violent experience, should lead us to question our good conscience and suspect what seems “good enough” to us. The transcendental aspect of violence does not annul the promise of fighting against the existing injustice. On the contrary, it should make us even more vigilant in our efforts. And even beyond vigilance, Lawlor argues we must discover the ethics implied by what may be Derrida’s greatest principle: “tout autre est tout autre.” It is only through this principle of universal singularity that we may be able to reduce the violence that essentially contaminates all experience.

Part III’s “Areas of Investigation” arise primarily from Derrida’s more political and ethical writings. We complete the *Companion*, therefore, with an important text on law by Pierre Legrand. Legrand argues that Derrida takes an anti-positivist position in philosophy of law. Positivists conceive law as posited and try to fix its meaning in the semiotic stability of a propositional language. In contrast, deconstruction targets “what lies within the existing law about which law has lied (even to itself), that which law, for an array of institutional reasons, has “officially sought to dissimulate or deny, to bury or repress.” Law has another language to uncover, it is trace affected. Positivists fantasy that by being cast in a solely descriptive juricentric propositional language law could be cut off from any relation to hyper law and counter law. Derrida makes clear that law is neither autarkic nor monogenealogical; it is embedded in a multiplicity of intensities and in a plurality of forces and relations to space and time

that cannot be accounted for by an ontology but transforms the study of law into a hauntology.

It is perhaps fitting that we close this introduction with the word “hauntology.” It is only ten years since Derrida’s death. All of us who have been inspired by his work are still mourning his passing. Like Hamlet’s father, Derrida’s specter calls us to “swear” that we will never give up on deconstruction. The time is still out of joint.

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Part I

Fundamental Themes and Concepts in Derrida's Thought

Truth in Derrida

CHRISTOPHER NORRIS

1. Truth and Writing

At one time, and not so long ago, anybody writing on the topic “Derrida and Truth” would most likely have felt obliged to begin by asserting (and then making good the claim through lengthy citation of the relevant passages) that it didn’t amount to a downright absurd, indeed a near-oxymoronic coupling of name and noun. Of course there are plenty of quotable passages where, so far from rejecting or denouncing the notion of truth, Derrida can be found insisting on its absolute indispensability to philosophical enquiry in general and – more specifically – its crucial pertinence to the project of deconstruction (LI, 162–254). In fact they became more frequent in his later texts and interviews where he went out of his way to controvert the widespread belief (put about chiefly by detractors in the mainstream analytic camp) that deconstruction amounted to nothing more than an update on ancient sophistical themes or a bag of crafty rhetorical tricks with absolutely no regard for reputable, truth-apt standards of debate (Searle 1977). All the same Derrida’s reiterated protests – asserting his strict and principled allegiance to just those criteria of valid argument, logical rigor, and conceptual precision – are often dismissed, by those so minded in advance, as a routine show of respectability designed to conceal his indifference to truth in whatever commonplace or technical guise.

On this view Derrida’s work can best be set aside for all serious philosophic purposes by treating it as a kind of modish anti-philosophy designed to seduce certain credulous types – literary theorists mainly – into thinking that they might be advantageously placed (by reason of their own special gifts or training) to score easy points

off Plato and his progeny. That is, they might count themselves better (i.e., more attentive and meticulous) readers of philosophic texts than the official, academically accredited custodians of those texts and their veridical content. Thus Derrida's notion of "writing" as in some sense ubiquitous – as marking the absolute horizon of intelligibility or the precondition for whatever is to count as "real," "true," "factual," "self-evident," "veridical" – has typically been taken by misinformed admirers and detractors alike as an instance of extreme anti-realist or ultra-"textualist" thinking whose logical consequence was a solipsistic outlook that counted the world well lost for the sake of the new-found descriptive or creative freedoms thereby opened up. On this reading of Derrida, advanced by "post-analytic" philosophers like Richard Rorty and by not a few literary acolytes, the "descriptive" versus "creative" distinction is one that should no longer be regarded as possessing any more than a culture-bound, conventional, or merely discipline-specific force (Rorty 1982). However, what both parties – the "analytical" foes of deconstruction together with its "literary" admirers – ignore is the irreducibility of writing to any such narrowly (albeit customarily) restricted scope.

I must refer readers back to his own intricate and nuanced treatment of the topic for a full-scale exposition of *arche-écriture* ("primordial" or "generalized" writing) as Derrida conceives and deploys that term throughout his early texts on Rousseau, Hegel, Husserl, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Austin, and others (*Voice and Phenomenon*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Writing and Difference*). Sufficient to say that, so far from condemning us to a prison-house of language, textuality, or Peircean "unlimited semiosis," it serves to make a very reasonable point and one quite consistent (as I have argued elsewhere) with a robustly realist epistemology and ontology (Norris 1997a, 1997b). That is, it amounts to a particularly striking – and to that extent perhaps misapprehension-prone – means of putting the case that our truth-claims though not our ultimate conceptions of truth must always acknowledge, whether overtly or not, their dependence on some given system or structure of representation. That Derrida should choose to articulate this point through recourse to the term "writing" along with its sundry analogues and derivatives ("trace," "graft," "mark," etc.) has understandably given rise to much confusion and to both of the above-mentioned partisan responses, namely its literary-critical uptake as a license for unending textualist "freeplay" and its cursory dismissal by many philosophers as merely a warmed-over version of long familiar skeptical or ultra-relativist themes. However, this ignores his constant emphasis on the non-restriction of "writing" to its commonplace (graphic or alphabetical-phonetic) usage, the usage to which it has mostly been confined by that deep-laid logocentric/phonocentric bias that Derrida tracks with such extraordinary zeal and tenacity in its multiform manifestations down through the history of Western thought (OGC). Such readings fail to register the way that "writing" comes to stand as a more encompassing and adequate term for those various intermediary figures and devices – "ideas," "concepts," "intuitions," "impressions," "sense-data," "stimuli," and so forth – that philosophers across the whole

range of doctrinal attachments from rationalism to empiricism and even radical naturalism, physicalism, or materialism have called upon by way of closing the gap between mind and world, subject and object, or knowledge and object-of-knowledge: “encompassing” insofar as it includes and subtends all those diverse particular idioms, and “more adequate” insofar as it shows them all to partake of a representationalist model of mind that is itself chronically unstable since forever suspended between the different orders of priority entailed by those various epistemological conceptions.

This is one aspect of the undecidability that Derrida seeks to communicate by way of his most famous neologism, the portmanteau term *différance* with its calculated slippage of signification between “difference” and “deferral” together with “deference” as a third, less prominent but far from marginal constituent sense (VP). Thus the word – not a full-fledged or unitary “concept,” as Derrida insists – serves on the one hand to indicate “difference” as that which (following Saussure) renders meaning a product of the contrasts, distinctions, or differences “without positive terms” endemic to the endlessly elusive “structure” of language (Saussure 1983). On the other it serves to connote “deferral” as that which ensures the non-positivity, i.e., the lack of any one-to-one relation or punctual correspondence between signifier and signified while none the less making communication possible, despite all the resultant problems for any systematic philosophy of language or project of structural linguistics. This it does through what Derrida terms the “iterability” of speech-acts conceived on the generalized model of writing rather than the human voice as a locus of meanings that somehow bear within themselves the authentic mark of expressive, sincere, and (to the speaker) transparently accessible first-person utterance (MP, LI).

I cannot here offer a detailed account of his critical engagement with this logocentric conception as it typifies the discourse of thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and (especially) Husserl and Austin. Nor shall I dwell on the various ways that it continues to haunt the thinking of those – most notably Wittgenstein and his legion of disciples – who count themselves mercifully free of any such lingering attachment to bad old Cartesian notions of privileged first-person epistemic access. What I do wish to emphasize – since it bears so directly on the topic of my essay – is the fact that writing (*arche-écriture* or “proto-writing”) is precisely what allows the maintenance or conservation of sense from one context of utterance to the next at least in the minimal degree that is required in order for communication to occur. Thus it stands as the figure *par excellence* of that which remains and continues to exert a certain signifying function despite and against the fugitive, evanescent character of an utterer’s meaning, intentional purport, or expressive (as opposed to indicative) sense (VP). Hence the error of those – Searle chief among them – who take Derrida to deploy “writing” in its conventionally narrow usage and then, by a perverse (or plain muddle-headed) twist of argument, to vastly over-extend its scope so that every speech-act is thereby exposed to endless reinscription within any range of no matter how far-fetched contexts, situations, or imaginary scenarios. This

characterization is not so wide of the mark when applied to some of Derrida's more intemperate or less philosophically informed disciples in the literary-theory or cultural-studies camps. However, it comes nowhere close to describing the complexity – always a truth-functional or truth-related complexity despite its provenance in textual close reading – of Derrida's engagement with philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to the recent past. Thus “writing” is not only his favored term for that which enables the sense and the truth-value of statements or propositions to be communicated from one context to the next but also, as he argues in quasi-Kantian vein, the necessary and transcendently deducible condition of possibility for any such process to occur (Gasché 1986; Norris 1987, 2000a).

Exemplary here is his early Introduction to Husserl's essay “The Origin of Geometry” where Derrida shows how a certain, structurally requisite though largely implicit recourse to the *topos* of writing is precisely the means by which Husserl accounts for the periodic stages of advance – or, so to speak, of punctuated equilibrium – that have characterized the history of mathematics and the other formal sciences to date (IOG). Thus it is wrong – a very definite misreading or, more likely, the result of not reading at all – to suppose that the ubiquity of writing as Derrida conceives it is such as to consign truth to the dustbin of outworn “metaphysical” notions or else (pretty much the same thing) to a limbo of wholly indeterminate textual significations without any remnant of logical, conceptual, or referential bearing. Indeed, if there is one deep-laid prejudice that his work seeks to dispel it is the idea that a close, even minute attentiveness to matters of textual detail must go along with an indifference to truth or a belief, as per the widespread but false understanding of Derrida's notorious claim that quite simply and literally “there is nothing outside the text” (OGC, 158). On the contrary, such a reading is uniquely well equipped to discover the anomalies, aporias, logical dilemmas, or hitherto unlooked-for complications of sense that an orthodox approach has expelled to the margins of commentary or beyond. Moreover it is by way of them that reading/thinking encounters those kindred moments of referential slippage, uncertainty, or aberration that signal a corresponding problem with regard to some aspect of the relevant topic-domain.

2. Reading as an Argument: The Logic of Deconstruction

Most importantly in the present context, this realist outlook goes along with – indeed depends directly upon – a commitment to the classical requirements of bivalent logic right up to the stage where that logic confronts an insuperable block to its continued application or a textual aporia that cannot be resolved by any means at its disposal (Norris 2004, 2007). According to Derrida, this is the sole mode of thought that is able not only to respect the validity-conditions for determinately true or false statements but also, by its holding fast to those conditions for as long as possible, to take due stock of the particular resistance encountered when a text (or the portion of

reality to which it refers) turns out to harbor anomalous features of just that recalcitrant kind.

To phrase the matter thus is of course to invite yet further resistance – even downright incredulity – amongst philosophers trained up on the dominant view of how things have gone over the past century in terms of intellectual, historical, and geocultural affiliation. They will be apt to take it, understandably enough, that the formative background to Derrida's thought lies squarely on the mainland-European side of a strong and well-buttressed (if not quite impermeable) barrier between the "continental" and "analytic" (i.e., principally Anglo-American) lines of descent. Moreover they will have good warrant for this on straightforward textual-evidential grounds since by far the greater portion of Derrida's work is devoted to thinkers – chief among them Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas – of whom Kant alone can plausibly be claimed as common property by both camps, albeit property to which they attach very different exegetical-descriptive labels (Norris 2000b). On one schematic yet suggestive story this parting of the ways can be traced right back, via sundry intervening episodes like the Russell/Moore repudiation of Hegel and the Frege versus Husserl debate, to deep-laid rifts in the Kantian-idealist aftermath and even to the different, arguably incompatible projects pursued in the "Transcendental Analytic" and "Transcendental Aesthetic" sections of the first *Critique* (Beiser 1987; Braver 2007; Norris 2000b). Although that particular version of the tale has come in for a good deal of qualification and revision during recent years it is none the less likely to prompt skepticism with regard to my presenting Derrida as a stickler for truth, logic, and the typecast analytic virtues.

In his case, moreover, the apparent incongruity is heightened by the fact of Derrida's having engaged so persistently with certain *topoi* – such as the structure/genesis antinomy in Husserl or the Heideggerian thematics of being and presence – which belong very much to the tradition of thought with its source in the "continental" Kant and its genealogy very firmly on the "other" side of the English Channel. There can be no denying that when Derrida raises the question of truth it is often in just this context, with overt or implicit reference to a certain primordial "metaphysics of presence" that has been in place throughout the long reign of Western post-Platonic logocentrism, that is reaffirmed (though subject to intensive critical scrutiny) in the thought of Husserl, and that finds its most powerful though acutely problematical rendition in Heidegger's brooding existential meditations (OGC). It would clearly be unwise to ignore the repeated assertions that his thinking would never have taken the direction that it did without Heidegger's example or indeed, more specifically, Heidegger's lessons in the "deconstruction" (*Destruktion* or *Abbau*) of truth as heretofore conceived (Heidegger 2010; OS). Just as clearly, there is a strong Heideggerian influence when Derrida examines those varied inherited conceptions – from Plato's doctrine of forms to Aristotelian *homoiosis* (truth-as-correspondence), and thence to their diverse progeny in Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Husserl among others – that make up what might be called (from a more

Nietzschean-Foucauldian perspective) a history or genealogy of truth. However this would be a highly misleading characterization, as becomes very plain in his early essay on Foucault (“Cogito and the History of Madness”) where any such “radical” move to historicize truth or reason is shown up as both philosophically naïve and procedurally self-defeating (WD, 31–63). His point is not at all the obsolescence of truth-talk or the need to replace it with a Nietzsche-inspired genealogy of power-knowledge. Rather it is the failure of logocentric thinkers from Plato down to make good on their express or implicit claim for a pure, unimpeded access to truth through a range of candidate items (concepts, ideas, primordial intuitions, sense-data, and so forth) that might ideally be relied upon to grant such access by reason of transparent *rapport-à-soi* or intrinsic self-evidence.

As I have suggested already, Derrida’s way of bringing this out is a procedure of linguistic-conceptual-logical analysis that has a lot more in common with certain forms of analytic philosophy than has so far been acknowledged on either side of the (no doubt much exaggerated) Great Rift. In fact a better grasp of Derrida’s precise placement in this regard would itself be a large step toward grasping just how much exaggeration has gone into that widespread idea and how far the “two traditions” have in fact – *contra* the orthodox chroniclers of intellectual history – traveled a common path. Thus Derrida’s repeated and handsome acknowledgments of Heidegger as a source of philosophic inspiration should not be allowed to outweigh or obscure his equally insistent critique of Heidegger’s nostalgic harking-back to themes of origin, presence, and primordial Being (OS). After all, that way of thinking can be seen to have played a decisive role – at whatever “philosophical” remove – in his commitment to National Socialism and his belief, very forcefully expressed for a while and never explicitly renounced, that it alone might have brought cultural renewal on the scale or at the depth required by the current situation. However my point, less dramatically, is that despite Derrida’s close and long-lasting engagement with Heidegger’s thought he always maintained the kind of critical distance from it that also sets him very firmly apart from the company of signed-up Heideggerians. More than that, his readings – early and late – exhibit a degree of conceptual and logical precision, along with a resistance to what Adorno (less politely) labeled the “jargon of authenticity,” which again leaves Derrida ambiguously placed as regards the “analytic” versus “continental” fault-line (Adorno 2002).

What emerges most strikingly here is the propriety of using the term “analytic” in connection with Derrida’s work, or the clearly marked convergence of aims between an immanent critique in the deconstructive mode and the kinds of critical exegesis that analytic philosophers very often pursue when treating canonical texts with a view to their present-day interest or relevance. If this convergence has tended to escape notice then one likely explanation – quite apart from their failure (or refusal) to read Derrida – is the widespread idea amongst many analytic philosophers that their “continental” *confrères* are one and all in hock to a conception of knowledge or truth as ultimately tied – with whatever doctrinal nuances or

refinements – to a notion of first-person privileged epistemic access. Such was the gravamen of Frege’s objection to Husserlian phenomenology, the main (ostensible) reason for Gilbert Ryle’s losing his erstwhile interest in Husserl and Heidegger, and the limit-point of various attempts, like that of Michael Dummett, to review the Frege/Husserl exchange and ask whether maybe the “two traditions” had more in common than generally supposed. (See Norris 2000b and 2006 for more detailed discussion.) In each case – and in numerous others – the assumption is that phenomenology, even in its transcendental guise, must finally amount to a form of covert psychologism or a subjectivist appeal that dare not speak its name. However this ignores a large weight of evidence to the contrary, including (most directly to the point here) that whole dimension of Husserl’s thought with its source and model in the formal procedures of mathematics and that equally central part of Derrida’s project that involves the conceptual analysis and critique of logocentric assumptions such as (precisely) the idea of truth as involving some lucidly self-present state of conscious awareness. That is to say, in both thinkers there is a major concern with shaking off, overcoming, or moving beyond the Cartesian fixation on philosophic problems that result from just that narrowly (if not exclusively) first-person epistemic purview.

More than that, both thinkers – along with many other continentals, French and German alike – offer grounds for rejecting the commonplace account wherein that entire history of thought is deemed to have taken successive wrong turns through its failure to achieve a decisive break with the myth of privileged access. Indeed, they give strong reason to doubt the very idea of those “two traditions” as involved in some kind of stand-off or running feud. On the continental side it fails to take account of a different and closer-to-home dichotomy, namely that between two distinctively “French” but otherwise disparate tendencies, the one having to do with experience, perception, and subjectivity and the other with logic, conceptual analysis, and structures of thought. As Alan Schrift has pointed out, these movements have a shared source in Husserlian phenomenology though the former points back to *Ideas I* and the *Cartesian Meditations* while the latter found its inaugural texts in the *Logical Investigations* and *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (Schrift 2006, 38). Where the one led on to a broadly hermeneutic understanding of phenomenology, notably in the work of Paul Ricoeur, along with various critiques of its grounding premises, Derridean deconstruction included, the other had its chief influence on developments in philosophy of science (Bachelard and Canguilhem) and philosophy of mathematics (Jean Cavailles). Moreover, it left a deep imprint on the thought of those first-generation structuralists – Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, and even (despite his vigorous disavowals) early Foucault – who were equally determined to oust the subject from the privileged position it had hitherto enjoyed under the auspices of existentialism and “a certain” phenomenology (Dosse 1997). For there remained that other, incipiently structuralist component which had its place in Husserl’s mathematically and logically oriented works, and which then became a major point of

reference for those with a primary interest in developing an adequate theoretical approach to the history of the natural, formal, and (in Foucault's case) the social and human sciences.

It was here that Derrida entered the scene with the body of work that finds its most succinct formulation in his classic early essay "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology" (WD, 154–168). The genesis/structure antinomy is one that shows up not only as a fault-line throughout Husserl's own writings but also throughout their reception-history as an unresolved aporia between, on the one hand, a phenomenological foregrounding of subjectivity or lived experience and, on the other, a countervailing stress on those *a priori* structures that he took to constitute the conditions of possibility for thought, judgment, knowledge, and experience in general. Thus Schrift cites Husserl as referring to certain "laws of thought" that have to do with "categorical concepts," and which "are so abstract that they contain no reference to knowledge as an act of a knowing subject" (Schrift 2006, 38). However, this anti-subjectivist outlook in philosophy of the physical, formal, and social sciences was something quite distinct from that more flamboyant post-humanist rhetoric that took hold in many quarters of literary-cultural theory from the mid-1970s on. It was driven not so much by a strong though vaguely formulated wish to break with existing modes of language, discourse, and representation but rather by a striving for greater conceptual precision and a surer means of advancing from common sense-intuitive or experiential to scientific modes of knowledge. So it was that phenomenology gave rise not only to a "philosophy of consciousness" but also to "a philosophy of the concept which can provide a theory of science" (Schrift 2006, 64). Only by ignoring this second line of descent from Husserl has the belief taken hold among analytic types that "continental philosophy" remains in thrall to a subject-centered, hence "psychologistic" and naïve, conception of knowledge as tied to individual states of mind.

Indeed so far from the truth is this idea that thinkers in both lines can be seen to have devoted much of their effort to resisting its delusive appeal, whether (line one) by engaging it critically through a deconstruction of the various discourses in which it figures or else (line two) by adopting a radically alternative "philosophy of the concept" modeled on mathematics, logic, and the formal sciences. Derrida belongs to both in so far as his work – especially in its earlier (pre-1980) phase – involves on the one hand a meticulous critique of the "metaphysics of presence" (or the myth of privileged epistemic access) in thinkers from Plato to Husserl and Heidegger, and on the other a decisively articulated break with all such residual Cartesian notions. The latter is most evident in those passages where he offers a relatively formal statement of deconstructive procedure, sometimes with reference to Gödel's incompleteness theorem, to the self-predicative paradoxes of set theory, or to various likewise problematical results that have emerged in the course of mathematical and logical enquiry. (See especially MP, 219.) The former requires no documentation since it constitutes in many ways the philosophic heart of his project and also the aspect

most familiar to those – whatever their view of it – who take him to have been primarily engaged with the issue of truth “continentally” conceived, that is, as it has figured in the wake of phenomenology rather than in the wake of proto-analytic thinkers like Frege and Russell.

Of course the sheer tenacity of that engagement, especially in his writings on Husserl, has yielded some hostages to fortune by allowing his opponents in the analytic camp to claim that only a philosopher still very much in hock to certain deep-laid Cartesian or subjectivist notions would feel the need to expend so much effort on the business of “deconstructing” them. However this ignores two main points that Derrida’s detractors are apt to overlook in their zeal to show that his “radical” claim is really no such thing but in truth just a re-run of bad old ideas that have long been laid to rest on the analytic side. First is the point that those notions are indeed deep-laid, and that they actually require just such a vigorous and sustained effort of exorcism if they are not to re-emerge with all the more captivating power for their having been expressly denied or disavowed. Second is the point that Derrida’s deconstructive readings of Husserl – and, more generally, his critique of logocentric (first-person-privileged) ideas of truth, knowledge, or epistemic access – themselves require a kind and degree of critical detachment which cannot be achieved except by way of that “philosophy of the concept” developed by thinkers in the other, non-subject-centered line of descent. Deconstruction as defined by Derrida’s exemplary procedures is a critique not just of “Western metaphysics” or the “metaphysics of presence,” in some vague since all-encompassing sense of those terms, but of the more specific form that such thinking takes when conjoined with an epistemological doctrine of knowledge as vouchsafed through some uniquely intimate *rapport-à-soi*.

That these ideas are hard to shake off, that they may be not so much illusions as strictly inescapable though often misleading or seductive tendencies of thought like those diagnosed by Kant in the first *Critique*, is evident enough from their continuing hold in so many quarters of present-day debate (Kant 1964). Nowhere is the evidence plainer to see than in Wittgenstein’s and various Wittgenstein-influenced attempts to lay to rest the Cartesian ghost by showing how “certainty” can never be more than assurance according to the epistemic norms of some given language-game, discourse, or communal “form of life” (Wittgenstein 1958). For this is to set the issue up in terms that construe all truth-talk – unless hedged around with some such qualifying clause – as just another instance of the bad old idea of first-person privileged access. It is to assume that, on any but a Wittgensteinian (linguistic-communitarian) conception, truth must be a matter of indubitable knowledge while such knowledge must itself depend upon the mind’s having direct, immediate access to a realm of “clear and distinct ideas” beyond reach of skeptical doubt. However, that Cartesian way of thinking has been subject to a range of powerful challenges – including, most recently, arguments mounted from an externalist or reliabilist standpoint – which flatly reject this forced dilemma and which instead locate truth in a mind- and language-independent domain that knowledge is able to track, if at all,

only in so far as it latches onto various constituent features, structures, attributes, or properties thereof. Thus truth is conceived, in objectivist terms, as always potentially transcending or eluding the scope of present-best knowledge, and knowledge as accountable to normative standards beyond those that happen to characterize some given (communally sanctioned) state of best belief (Norris 1997a, 1997b).

For Wittgensteinians, conversely, it can make no sense to think of truth as objective – or “epistemically unconstrained” – since that would involve the absurd, indeed self-contradictory claim that one possessed knowledge of certain truths that one didn’t (couldn’t) know (Dummett 1978; Tennant 1997). But this is a travesty of the realist/objectivist position, which holds rather – with plentiful warrant from the history of scientific progress to date – that we are perfectly justified in claiming to know that the best state of knowledge at any given time (including the present) will fall short of truth in certain unknown or yet-to-be-discovered respects. These debates have run high in recent analytic philosophy, with anti-realists mostly putting their case in logico-semantic terms, as a matter of requisite conditions for the utterance and uptake of truth-apt (or assertorically warranted) statements. At which point realists typically respond by asserting that we had much better trust to scientific knowledge – or knowledge that has resulted from methods and procedures developed over the long course of human scientific and other kinds of enquiry – than to anything so highly contentious and inherently dubious as a language-based theory that affects to cast doubt upon all and any truth-claims in that regard (Devitt 1991; Norris 2004). It is my contention that Derrida’s work, or those parts of it most relevant to this essay, should be seen as having strong realist implications, or as always allowing for the possibility that truth will turn out to have eluded the grasp of present-best knowledge. In the case of a deconstructive reading – more specifically, a reading of the kind exemplified in many of Derrida’s texts – the discrepancy is that which might always open up between truth conceived according to dominant (logocentric, ideological, or common sense-intuitive) norms and truth conceived as what might potentially emerge as the upshot of a more attentive, rigorous, and logically consequent perusal.

It is precisely the openness to this possibility that enables such a reading to break with ideas like those of self-present intentionality or privileged first-person epistemic access that would otherwise pass unquestioned owing to their force of seeming self-evidence. My point, to repeat, is that Derrida is thereby engaged in a critique of certain deep-grained assumptions that are also subject to challenge in numerous quarters of current analytic debate even if his way of conducting that critique through a practice of sedulous textual close reading is one that strikes most analytic philosophers as needlessly roundabout, oblique, or long-drawn. When he sets out to diagnose the symptoms of a “metaphysics of presence” in thinkers such as Plato, Rousseau, Husserl, Heidegger, Freud, and Saussure his project has that much in common with various attempts – like those of Wittgenstein and Ryle – to exorcise the “ghost in the machine” or finally lay to rest the myth of privileged access (Ryle

1949; Wittgenstein 1958). However, I would argue, it differs from theirs in making more adequate allowance not only for the sheer tenacity of these beliefs as items of (supposedly) plain, self-evident truth but also for the need that their seeming self-evidence be countered by something altogether stronger than Wittgensteinian linguistic therapy or Rylean advice to stop thinking in that bad old way. This additional strength comes from Derrida's practice of reading as a mode of immanent critique, or immanent critique as a mode of reading that involves the utmost vigilance concerning any conflict between the orders of overt and covert, manifest and latent, or express (intended) and strictly entailed or logically implicated sense.

Analytic philosophers have been prone to misrecognize this intensive engagement with issues in the subject-centered post-Cartesian mainstream of continental philosophy as an allegiance to it on Derrida's part, and therefore as a sign of his failure to learn one major lesson on offer from their own side. For this reason they have also been apt to ignore those aspects of his work – especially his earlier work – that have a great deal in common with analytic methods and procedures, not least in his rigorously argued as well as textually detailed way of pointing up the various aporias or blind-spots of logocentric prejudice. However, their attitude has found a mirror-image in the tendency of some Anglophone “continental” types to take for granted that Derrida's thought belongs squarely on their own elective home-ground, so that any claim for its relevance to issues of a more “analytic” nature must surely be missing the point through some distorting special interest or *parti pris*. In what follows I shall further contest that assumption – one with its own very marked distorting effect – by looking more closely at truth-related aspects of his work that raise large problems for the whole idea of a continental/analytic split. This they do through a detailed and rigorously argued process of conceptual analysis, one that shows how that work must count as “analytic philosophy” on any proper (non-partisan or non-parochial) usage of the term. Moreover, they serve to emphasize how the treatment of his better-known topics or preoccupations – such as the deconstructive critique of “Western metaphysics” from Plato to Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and beyond – is always and inseparably bound up with the issue of its cogency on just such analytic terms.

To this extent Derrida is fully in agreement with his erstwhile colleague and friend Paul de Man, who wrote that “[r]eading is an argument . . . because it has to go against the grain of what one would want to happen in the name of what has to happen; this is the same as saying that reading is an epistemological event prior to being an ethical or aesthetic value” (de Man 1978, xi). To be sure, de Man continues, “[t]his does not mean that there can be a true reading,” in the sense of a definitive interpretation or work of textual-conceptual exegesis that would obviate the need – or exclude the possibility – of further reading and debate. Rather it is to say that “no reading is conceivable in which the question of its truth or falsehood is not primarily involved” (ibid.). It seems to me that the idea of reading as an “argument” – an argument sustained in, by, and through the practice of textual analysis – is one that takes us to the philosophic heart of Derrida's work.

3. Deconstruction, Truth, and the Realist/Anti-Realist Debate

This argument-oriented interpretation of Derrida entails that there is simply no grasping the project and the practice of deconstruction as Derrida conceives it without the commitment to a realist (i.e., in logical terms, a classical or bivalent and ontologically speaking an objectivist or recognition-transcendent) conception of truth. Moreover, the close alignment of these latter positions is brought out by contrast through their joint repudiation by anti-realist thinkers, that is to say, philosophers who deny the intelligibility of any claim to the effect that there exist truth-conditions for certain statements – those of the “disputed class” – whose truth-value we are unable to discover, prove, or ascertain by the very best methods available to us in this or that field of enquiry (Dummett 1978). The realist holds that such statements, so long as they are well formed, are objectively true or false quite aside from our present-best or future-best-attainable state of knowledge concerning them. The anti-realist holds that they are epistemically constrained, or that ascriptions of truth (more aptly, on this view, ascriptions of assertoric warrant) must always be subject to the scope and limits of whatever we can justifiably claim to know or discover through some presently conceivable advance in our investigative methods, explanatory powers, or capacities of formal proof.

It seems to me – on the evidence of a good proportion of his writings, but especially those of his earlier (pre-1980) period and, above all, his intensive studies of Husserl – that Derrida must be counted a realist as defined by this currently prevailing idea of what constitutes the main point at issue. For were that not the case – if he subscribed to the anti-realist thesis advanced by Dummett and company – then deconstruction could not possibly achieve the critical purchase to which it lays claim, such is its capacity to detect, draw out, and make explicit those signs of logico-semantic or conceptual strain that in turn serve to indicate the presence of certain unresolved issues regarding the particular theme or topic in hand. Thus the upshot may indeed be to complicate matters to a point where the text under scrutiny proves incapable of any coherent exposition on classical (bivalent) terms. In which case the only choice of exegetical procedure consistent with its multiple or downright contradictory trains of implication may be the resort to some alternative, deviant, or non-bivalent (e.g., three-or-more-valued) logic that offers a means to make room for their otherwise nonsensical (since mutually destructive or reciprocally canceling) claims (Haack 1996; Priest 2001). However – crucially – this is a stage arrived at only by dint of a reading that satisfies the two basic conditions on any deconstructive exegesis *stricto sensu*, as opposed to readings in the more free-wheeling, rhetorically permissive, or “literary”-deconstructive vein. These latter, for all their occasional interpretative brilliance and flair, cannot properly be said (as can Derrida’s essays on, for instance, Plato, Rousseau, Kant, or Husserl) to exhibit a distinctively philosophic acumen as distinct from a striking, novel, or ingenious way with texts. If they are to

count as philosophical-deconstructive readings – in some other than merely notional sense – then they will have to do more than respect the call for a close, meticulously detailed engagement with the text in hand along with its rhetorical structures of ambiguity, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, semantic displacement, condensation, and so on. They will also need to acknowledge the requirement for a rigorously argued analytic account that perseveres in applying standards of bivalent truth/falsehood right up to the point (one determined by just such a mode of textual exegesis) where those standards prove incapable of offering the requisite conceptual or logico-semantic resources.

Of course I used the term “analytic” just now not in its narrowly proprietary sense (“concordant with the methods, procedures and professional ethos of mainstream academic philosophy as practiced over the past half-century and more in Anglophone university departments”) but rather in the probative sense that applies to any self-respecting or properly conducted philosophical project. Thus I meant by it “concordant with standards of logical precision and truth that may encounter certain limits when deployed in the deconstructive reading of certain texts but which cannot be abandoned except in consequence of discovering just those limits through the rigorous and consistent application of just those standards.” Which is also to say – against a sizable weight of prejudice to contrary effect – that Derrida is indeed an “analytic” philosopher to the extent that he practices deconstruction in this logically exacting mode, one that predominates in much of his early and middle-period work. Moreover, it is still deeply involved as a presupposed background or conceptual resource when it comes to his later, on the face of it less closely argued or (at times) more discursive or quasi-anecdotal writings. Such are Derrida’s reflections on the gift, on hospitality, and on “auto-immunity” as that which leads certain biological, environmental, or social and political systems to self-destruct through the over-activation of precisely those protective means or measures that are aimed to preserve them from harm. As he puts it:

I am trying to elaborate a logic, and I would call this a “logic,” in which the only possible *x* (and I mean here any rigorous concept of *x*) is “the impossible *x*.” And to do so without being caught in an absurd, nonsensical discourse. For instance, the statement according to which the only possible gift is an impossible gift, is meaningful. Where I can give only what I am able to give, what it is possible for me to give, I don’t give. So, for me to give something, I have to give something I don’t have, that is, to make an impossible gift. (AD, 55)

This argument is no less rigorous for producing the kind of paradoxical consequence that typifies Derrida’s later work. At any rate he is clear that deconstruction cannot do without such adherence to a classical (bivalent) conception of truth since it is only by applying that standard so far as can possibly be achieved with respect to the particular text or subject-matter at hand that thinking is enabled to probe the limits of some given ideology or dominant mode of representation.

Indeed – a crucial point in the present context – if Derrida’s project is to claim any real critical purchase then the kinds of logical anomaly turned up in the course of a deconstructive reading must always be taken to indicate some corresponding error, confusion, or failure of adequate conceptual grasp as concerns that particular subject-matter. That is to say, deconstruction strictly *has no choice* but to stake its authority as a critical discourse on the prior claim of being able to expose the gap between truth and various, more or less partial or distorted representations of truth. Furthermore, if this claim is to be made good, then a deconstructive reading must respect not only the formal validity-conditions for statements of distributed (bivalent) truth/falsehood but also the requirement that language be construed as typically – though of course not in every case – involving a dimension of extra-linguistic (i.e., referential or denotative) import. After all, it is only by way of that dimension that any given discourse, whether spoken or written, can achieve both the necessary measure of real-world cognitive-descriptive purchase and the necessary measure of semantic stability for those statements to signify and have a fair chance of communicative uptake or success (Norris 1997a).

As I have said, this goes flat against the received view of deconstruction as founded on the ultra-textualist premise that truth-talk, along with reality-talk, has now gone the way of all other such outmoded or delusive “metaphysical” ideas. However, as concerns Derrida at least, that view is so grossly distorted – so heavily based on the constant recycling of a few passages taken out of context – that it can only derive from a second-hand or at best very snippety acquaintance with his work. As soon as one returns to that work with anything like an adequate degree of attentiveness one must surely be struck by the way that such charges of textualist “freeplay,” hermeneutic license, interpretative irresponsibility, and so forth, rebound straight back on the detractors’ heads. That is, they go to show how the received account itself very strikingly exemplifies the process whereby certain kinds of ingrained prejudice – in this case the fixed idea of deconstruction as belonging more to the province of rhetoric or literary theory than to that of philosophy proper – may well produce readings of a markedly myopic character.

Nor is that claim in any way compromised by the fact that the upshot of Derrida’s analyses is most often to bring classical (bivalent) logic up against its limits when confronting some strictly unignorable instance of textual aporia or – what amounts to the same thing given his priorities in this regard – some strictly irresolvable case of conceptual or logico-semantic impasse. On the contrary: a deconstructive reading of this type (a “philosophical” reading, let us say, as opposed to one that explores the outer limits of hermeneutic license) has a genuine title in that regard just in so far as it inhabits a zone – however complex or difficult to map – where language retains both a referential function and a basic allegiance to the axioms of classical (bivalent) logic as laid down in the first-order predicate and propositional calculi. If such readings always lead up to a point of aporia or insoluble dilemma beyond which an alternative logic comes into play – a deviant, non-classical, non-bivalent,

“differential,” “supplementary,” or “parergonal” logic – then, as I have said, that point is arrived at only by dint of an argument conducted in accordance with the strictest standards of logical accountability as well as the tightest constraints on what counts as a sufficiently detailed and attentive exercise in textual exegesis.

Deconstruction thus reveals certain highly specific anomalies or conflicts of overt and covert sense brought about *on the one hand* by certain likewise specific complexities pertaining to the topic in question, and *on the other* by various attempts by commentators of a more orthodox persuasion to bring that text into line with their own fixed ideas of interpretative fidelity and truth. Or again, in somewhat more Kantian terms: it is precisely the aporetic nature of those topics – their inbuilt tendency to generate just such contradictory modes of reasoning – which produces all the symptoms of unresolved logical tension or conceptual strain that mark other, more conservative or fideist readings.

In this context I would cite Derrida’s by now canonical readings of Plato on the role of writing *vis-à-vis* speech as it relates to a range of wider philosophical issues; Rousseau on the topics of language, music, civil society, and personal (autobiographical) truth-telling warrant; or Kant on the question of aesthetic judgment as a problematic *topos* that reaches into various likewise problematical areas of his thinking about epistemology, ethics, and politics. His later work often tends to adopt a more directly thematic approach – an address to topics such as death, the gift, friendship, hospitality, terrorism, auto-immune disorders (in the context of post-9/11 world politics), the prospects for a federal Europe – but always with a view to their inherently aporetic or paradoxical character and mostly, as before, through a close reading of salient passages in some pointedly relevant text. If these works seldom offer the kind of intensive yet remarkably sustained or long-range exegetical engagement to be found in his early readings of Plato, Rousseau, or Husserl they are none the less conducted with a care for precision of statement and logic together with a strength of conceptual analysis that saves them from appearing lax, indulgent, or merely anecdotal by comparison. Indeed their conciseness and their singular evocative as well as argumentative power are such as to invite application of the nowadays much-debated concept “late style,” despite the clear risk – especially in Derrida’s case – of our thus falling prey to the fallacious providentialist wisdom of hindsight (Said 2007). At any rate it is wrong to suppose that these writings signal a falling-off in terms of philosophical acumen or depth of critical-conceptual grasp. At no stage, early or late, does Derrida’s work bear the least resemblance to the account of it routinely given by his detractors in the “analytic” camp whose pronouncements very often belie that designation by exhibiting a singular lack of analysis – indeed a patent failure (or obstinate refusal) to read let alone analyze his texts – and hence a marked contrast to Derrida’s own practice.

This was the main burden of his second-round response to John Searle on the topic of Austinian speech-act philosophy, where he is able to show without too much difficulty that Searle’s accusations (his casting of Derrida as a latter-day sophist or

perverter of reason) in fact apply more aptly to Searle on his own professed terms of debate. Thus Searle charges Derrida with having deliberately muddied the philosophic waters by holding Austin's speech-act taxonomies subject to standards of strictly classical or bivalent truth/falsehood that are out of place here since the relevant conditions of speech-act "felicity" – of what properly counts as a binding, valid, or successful performative in this or that context of utterance – cannot be specified with anything like that degree of logical precision (Austin 1962). At which point Derrida can quite justifiably retort (although not without a certain mischievous pleasure in thus turning the tables) that this leaves Searle in no very strong position to lay any such charge. After all:

[f]rom the moment that Searle entrusts himself to an oppositional logic, to the "distinction" of concepts by "contrast" or "opposition" (a legitimate demand that I share with him, even if I do not at all elicit the same consequences from it), I have difficulty seeing how he is nevertheless able to write [that] phrase . . . in which he credits me with the "assumption," "oddly enough derived from logical positivism," "that unless a distinction can be made rigorous and precise, it is not really a distinction at all." (LI, 123)

Searle gives up too quickly or readily – with a kind of breezy pragmatist shrug – on the "legitimate" demand that philosophic arguments, even those put forward in the context of speech-act theory and concerned with matters of "ordinary language," should aim for a greater degree of conceptual clarity and logical precision than would normally be found in everyday parlance. By contrast, deconstruction, at least in so far as it claims philosophical pertinence or warrant, not only presupposes a default commitment to the axioms of classical (bivalent) logic but applies that logic with maximal rigor and consistency until it confronts its limit in some particular instance of textual aporia or some obdurate (classically irresolvable) conflict of logical implications.

So when Derrida twits Searle in this way, effectively retorting "call yourself an analytic philosopher!", it is not just a nose-thumbing gesture on his part. Nor again should it be seen (as Searle chose to see it, along with those other analytic philosophers who have taken their cue from that somewhat ill-starred exchange) as just a piece of maverick pseudo-philosophical sport. Rather it is a perfectly serious point about the way that thinkers with certain kinds of fixed preconception, when confronted with a novel or unlooked-for challenge to their powers of logical grasp, may react by leaning so far in the opposite direction as to leave themselves bereft of some strictly indispensable concepts, categories, or distinctions. Chief among them are those pertaining to the basic apparatus of modern, post-Fregean first-order quantified logic along with the classical requirements of bivalence and excluded middle. Nobody who has carefully read (as distinct from read about) Derrida's more extended texts on, say, Plato, Rousseau, Husserl, or indeed Austin could entertain serious or reasonable doubts concerning his acute and highly developed powers of logical

analysis. Nor could that reader remain unaware of his joint determination to respect those requirements so far as logically possible and yet make room for the distinct possibility – one borne out in the process of close reading – that they may not be able to accommodate certain anomalous passages or long-range logico-semantic complexities beyond such a classical (bivalent) accounting. This is where Derrida most emphatically parts company from anti-realists like Dummett or logical revisionists like Quine and the later Putnam (Quine 1961; Putnam 1983). Their readiness to suspend, modify, or abandon the classical ground-rules has the consequence – whether aimed at or more or less willingly taken on board – that they must also give up certain bivalence-dependent conceptual resources such as arguments by *reductio ad absurdum*. For if bivalence goes then so does the procedure of double-negation elimination, in which case – as with Dummett’s intuitionist philosophy of mathematics and his anti-realist outlook generally – one can no longer mount any form of argument based on the uncovering of entailed contradictions and hence the necessity of restoring logical order by renouncing one or another premise (Dummett 1977, 1978).

While convinced anti-realists welcome this consequence and revisionists live with it happily enough, there is no room in a deconstructive reading for any such over-willing allowance that bivalent truth-values might always drop out in response to some recalcitrant item of empirical data (Quine) or some unlooked-for textual aporia (as with other, less rigorous modes of self-styled deconstruction). Rather it is required of such a reading not only, as I have said, that it sustains those values to the utmost of their applicability in any given case but also that it keeps them firmly in mind even at or beyond the crucial point where they meet with some strictly unignorable token of textual resistance. Bivalent truth/falsity is no less an absolute desideratum when following out the *logical* implications of any contradiction, dilemma, or anomaly such as those that Derrida brings to light across a great range of philosophical texts. This is what places deconstruction in the realist camp, at any rate on the logico-semantic understanding of realism (i.e., as entailing the existence of objective, non-epistemic, or recognition-transcendent truth-values) which has characterized most debate on the topic in analytic circles since Dummett’s decisive intervention. Or again, it brings out Derrida’s firm and principled allegiance to what might perhaps be called anti-anti-realism (with more than a nod to the procedure of double-negation elimination) on account of its resistance to any idea that truth might be exhausted by some notional appeal to present-best or even best-attainable human knowledge.

The kind of realism here in question – precisely what is rejected *a priori* from the standpoint of Dummettian or logico-semantic anti-realism – is also precisely what enables Derrida to infer certain substantive truths about language, music, history, and civil society from his deconstructive reading of Rousseau or certain likewise substantive and far-reaching truths about the relationship between genesis and structure in mathematico-scientific thought from his deconstructive reading of Husserl. That possibility is rejected out of hand by any approach, such as anti-realism

or the more “literary,” less rigorous or disciplined modes of deconstruction, which takes it as read (supposedly with good Derridean warrant) that the appeal to truth-values or truth-conditions is nothing more than a symptom of adherence to the outworn “metaphysical” or “logocentric” paradigm that readings of this sort are out to expose. I hope to have shown why such ideas are misconceived, since if this were indeed the case then deconstruction quite simply could not work. That is to say, it could not do what it demonstrably manages to do through a close critical engagement with various texts and moreover – by the same token – with the various themes, subjects, or topic-areas which those texts themselves critically engage, albeit most often in a symptomatically complex and oblique way. This requires not only a mode of analysis premised on a logic of bivalent truth-falsehood but also, what anti-realism flatly denies, a conception of language as intrinsically truth-involving and *ipso facto* of truth as intrinsically world-involving. That Derrida’s work has so often been taken to espouse just the opposite position – that it has attracted such a deal of praise or blame as the *ne plus ultra* of “textualist” anti-realism – is a measure of its highly distorted reception-history and of the need for more careful and rigorous protocols of reading.

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A Certain Truth: Derrida's Transformation of the Kantian Heritage

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In later years, Derrida often described what he was drawn to, dreaming of, or working toward, using the phrase: “unconditional without sovereignty.” As he explains, “I will affirm that there is, it is indeed necessary that there be some reference to the unconditional, an unconditional without sovereignty, and thus without cruelty, which is no doubt a very difficult thing to think” (WA, 276). This formulation economically evokes a mode of thinking which seemed to be hovering as a possible possibility, one which Derrida admires insofar it has already made its evanescent trace felt here and there in the works of the Western tradition and one he aspires to insofar as it is to come. What he seeks to affirm “is” and it is “necessary that [it] be,” but it is also “a very difficult thing to think.” The warning gives a particular modality to the necessity Derrida is ascribing to this unconditional: it reads both as the necessity of that which could not *not* be and as the necessity of that which should be made to come to be. In other words, the unconditional Derrida affirms is already, the affirmation is a *reaffirmation* or a “siding with,” *and* the affirmation is a prospective hope for what is not yet. We have then, in this short statement of purpose, a first indication that Derrida works in a space in which the axiom of the excluded middle has been suspended: this unconditional without sovereignty both is and is not. Both this logically problematic structure and the Nietzschean overtones of affirmation as a mode of operation immediately signal that Derrida's relation to the metaphysical tradition is contentious. The two terms he uses to describe the object of affirmation further reinforce the understanding that Derrida is taking on metaphysics both in the sense of adopting it, and in the sense of challenging it. Indeed affirming the unconditional by charting its importance and its effects is, in a sense, what the long tradition of philosophical thinking

has been all about and by insisting that he is affirming that in his own way, Derrida is hardly dissociating his own efforts from that tradition. And yet, the second term, the one he emphatically insists on dissociating from, namely “sovereignty,” is not “just” the key concept of political power which holds in place forms of cruelty; it is the name of whole structures of thought and argumentation which sustain theoretical thinking in general, from Plato to today. In other words, “sovereignty” is, in Derrida’s understanding, a privileged metonymy for Western metaphysics, for traditional philosophy and the tradition of philosophy. Thus, if doing “without sovereignty” is one of Derrida’s imperatives, then that is an imperative to do without the metaphysical fulcrum.

The formula “unconditional without sovereignty” thus encapsulates the necessity Derrida works under to do something complicated with, and to, traditional philosophy “in general.” It can also be read more specifically as a convenient shorthand for the complicated relationship to Kant in which Derrida found himself. The relationship involves both a continuity with – or even a renewed allegiance to – fundamental Kantian commitments, and an explicit rejection of a concept indelibly associated with Kant. The phrase “unconditional without sovereignty” begins by affirming the term which for Kant marked the specificity of Reason (“unconditional”) and then, in the same breath, says “without” what is for Kant also a mark of Reason, sovereignty. Derrida reiterates a demand for the unconditional *and* he wants to get away completely from submission to the unconditional command of the sovereign. Clarifying the dynamic of the peculiar relation to Kant of this double affirmation is one way of getting a sense of what Derrida’s work may have given us as a possible relation to the metaphysical tradition – that is to say to what continues largely to organize our world and our experience. It is not of course the only way to approach the problem: the relations his work invents to Plato, Heidegger, Hegel, Descartes, Levinas, and others provide alternative points of entry in Derrida’s work. Mapping any of those relations can lead to an account of what Derrida does, providing a description of the tactics of Derrida as a reader and producing some story about what Derrida, as the name of a body of work, has done for those of us who read in turn. My purpose in what follows will be to articulate in very general terms the manner in which Derrida transformed the Kantian heritage. I will emphasize that the transformation involves both opening a different perspective on some of Kant’s key concepts and developing a new relation to the methodology which critical philosophy inaugurated. There is no claim here that considering the relation to Kant is the only way to measure deconstruction’s relation to metaphysics. Nevertheless it does provide one measure, and the double and redoubling movement to which it draws attention is exemplary.

1. Double Kantian References

Let me begin by situating the terms “unconditional” and “sovereignty” as they resonate in Derrida’s later work for which Kant was a recurrent reference. Unconditional

is a term Derrida used regularly in the work he did in the 1990s and beyond. The “conditioned–unconditional” distinction came to be ubiquitous in a series of seminars around questions of responsibility when Derrida organized his exploration of a number of concepts (hospitality, pardon, friendship, etc.) by formulating the *aporia* he detected in each concept, and verifying the effects of these *aporias* in all the texts he scrutinized. Although Kant often makes an appearance in exploring these themes, what I wish to underline is that Kant’s conceptual framework accompanies Derrida’s investigations whether or not Kant is explicitly invoked. In particular, Kant’s distinction between the conditioned and the unconditional accompanies all of Derrida’s analyses even when these analyses part ways with Kant at certain points, or fail to mention him at all.

For a first taste of how “unconditional” works in Derrida’s parsing of the paradoxical requirements of certain concepts, consider the example of friendship. In a long cycle of work on the theme, ostensibly cued by Aristotle’s famous “oh my friends, there are no friends,” Derrida does not pick up the proposition “there are no friends” to lament that empirical friendships fail to live up to an ideal, but instead to show that it being impossible to live up to the ideal is in a sense inscribed in the very idea of friendship. Or, to put it another way, friendship has “built in” a certain requirement to be unconditional. To put this in the “common sense” terms which Derrida regularly turned to in order to gloss the logic he found operating in the texts he worked with, one could say that you are not much of a friend, if you are only a friend on condition that . . . When Derrida takes up that idea he stretches it to argue that, in all rigor, friendship, “real” friendship would have to be *unconditional* in a sense which goes well beyond what he finds explicitly conceived in the philosophical tradition. Who has ever pushed the theory of friendship to the rigorous end of the thought that it should impose no conditions, not even that of asking a name, or making the demand for a response which any engagement seems to impose?

That it would have to be unconditional to be worthy of the name is a thought Derrida will follow again and again, concerning not only friendship but many other concepts. Only the unforgivable can be forgiven, you can only decide the undecidable, a true welcome would have to welcome the unwelcomable – these typically Derridean formulations all reflect an understanding that the very concepts of forgiveness, decision, or hospitality have a hyperbolic logic written into them. In an explicit nod to Kant, Derrida used the term “unconditional” to signal that what we might, on first approximation, think of as the ideal embedded in these concepts must actually be not simply a more general, or generous, version but instead be of a radically different order. Although one can think a gradation of forgiveness running from a “weak” form in which one forgives something easy to forgive, to a “strong” sense which forgives something harder to forgive (it’s not the same to forgive a trivial mishap or a profound betrayal), Derrida wants to mark that this gradation has to be extended even “further” until it is no longer a matter of degree if we are to “get to all the way” to what might properly be designated by the term forgiveness. Forgiving is required

precisely when/because there is a resistance to forgiving, when what is to be forgiven cannot easily be integrated, accepted, or forgotten. In that sense it is indeed only “what cannot be forgiven” which requires forgiveness. When he makes an analogous point about decision, Derrida explains that although it seems a decision involves a choice made on the basis of weighing the pros and cons of the alternatives, it is also the case that if a simple calculation of the relative merits of the alternatives were enough to determine it, the selection would not require an actual decision as it would be the automatic outcome of a procedure. In each of these cases, Derrida is out to make the point that, whereas one might be tempted to think that the strong sense of the term (the unconditional version of the concept) can be conceived by progressively refining a weaker sense, in fact, the strong sense seems to require a radical break from the more mundane use of the concept in question.

There is a clear Kantian precedent for this type of argument. Consider the radical specificity Kant imposes on “good” as a moral term. The first sentence of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* signals that, according to Kant, what can be called good in an unlimited, or unconditional sense, has nothing to do with good as we use it in everyday language where the concept is open to degrees, but is instead of a different order (Kant 2002, 9). Kant insists that when we speak of more or less good deeds, good people, good habits, or good food we are not using good in its proper moral sense for, as the famous first sentence of the *Groundwork* states, “[i]t is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be taken to be good without limitation, except a good will.” This single claim – that the only thing which is unconditionally good is a good will – marks that, for Kant, the good is an Idea of Reason and as such is radically different from even the most general concepts of the understanding. From this it follows that the Idea of good cannot be derived from experience. Thinking the good without limitation cannot be done by considering examples of very very good people; it can only be done by moving to a different terrain. The distinction Derrida wants to make between the examples of friendship or forgiveness from which one can begin thinking about those concepts, and the unconditional form which the concepts require, is a distinction *as* radical as the distinction for Kant between the everyday use of the term and the critical concept of the good. Indeed, it is not only *as* radical, it is *twice* as radical. For when Derrida consistently insists that what he is after is *not* an “Idea in the Kantian sense,” it is not because Derrida does not want to take on the difference between a concept and an Idea, but on the contrary because he wants to gesture towards an unconditional which would be even *more* unconditional than Kant’s “without limitation,” without conditions. Indeed, from his earliest writings, the phrase “Idea in a Kantian sense” marks a certain limit of thinking which Derrida is attempting to move “beyond.” Derrida is always interested in detecting a certain articulation of thinking (the unconditional) which *even* Kantian logic cannot account for. This is not a dismissal of the Kantian unconditional so much as a call for the need to redouble Kant’s rigorous distinction.

In the series of analyses which make explicit a haunting logic of the im-possible, Derrida moves away from a strictly Kantian conception of the unconditional by in some sense redoubling Kant's precedent. Although, as I sketched earlier, a sort of formal "common sense" analysis shows that friendship demands an unconditional element, Derrida also insists that, as the briefest of thought experiments can attest, without the reality which comes with specificity or conditions, friendship would be impossible. Thus, although it makes sense to us that you are not supposed to black-mail your friends by imposing conditions through some equivalent of "I won't be your friend unless . . .," it also makes sense that friendship only exists in, and through, experiences which *do* involve conditions. One can take this to mean simply that insofar as the concept must be able to refer to some empirical (and therefore limited/conditioned) reality, without conditions friendship would have lost all consistency. But Derrida's way of describing the dependency on conditions manages to make this not simply an empirical point. When he points out that even asking a name is imposing conditions, it is also an argument that even on a purely theoretical level, if such were possible, friendship has to involve imposing, invading, making demands. In fact it becomes clear from this perspective that it is integral to the concept of friendship that it include (the risk of) making demands or imposing conditions. Thus, on Derrida's analysis, for there to be friendship it has to be unconditional *and* it has to be conditioned. Both of those requirements are equally important, and even connected, however much they may seem to be at odds with one another.

One of his explicit references to Kant can help clarify the ways in which the connection Derrida makes between conditioned and unconditional both takes up Kant's perspective, and changes it dramatically – although even in that second movement Derrida might be taken to be simply reiterating points made by Kant's text. Derrida's reading of the third article of Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace* looks to that text to celebrate the bold move Kant makes to inscribe "universal hospitality" as a necessary requirement for peace. Derrida however then insists on the fact that what Kant describes is actually a right to a hospitality which is only extended if necessary because to refuse it would be to send someone to their death, and even *then* it is only a temporary right which can be lost at any point if the guest fails to conform to the law. Having drawn attention to the fact that this "universal" form of hospitality seems rather severely circumscribed to say the least, it is of course easy for Derrida to set up his own project as the search for a less restricted, or conditioned, way of thinking hospitality. Kant is used to set up the necessity of being more radical than even Kant's radical call to the unconditional. But Derrida also uses *Perpetual Peace* to emphasize that it is only insofar as it becomes effective through conditioned limited forms that "universal hospitality," even in Kant's sense, signifies anything at all. It is only instantiated in the world, it is only when it "exists" as specific rights, that any hospitality can be called hospitable. In other words, it is only *as* conditioned, that unconditional hospitality is possible. Derrida thus takes a double lesson from his reading of Kant to insist that unconditional hospitality is im-possible: only possible as impossible.

The unconditional that Derrida wants to affirm does not then exactly correspond to Kant's unconditional. Nonetheless, the Kantian reference is essential not only because the Idea in the Kantian sense offers a first approximation but also precisely because it is at the same time a counter-model for Derrida. The ways in which Kant can be seen to shy away from the unconditional even as he affirms the necessity of a universal hospitality allows Derrida to map out his own project, namely to articulate an unconditional which Kant would not have recognized, one which is both further from the conditioned form than he seems able to formulate even when he is being daring, and more closely bound to the conditional than Kant would have admitted.

Although it is slightly less obviously the case than for the term "unconditional," Kant is also a crucial reference to understand the stakes of "without sovereignty" as Derrida uses the phrase. Of course, the concept of "sovereignty" comes to us down through a tradition which is much older than the eighteenth century. Indeed, if Derrida is so worried by sovereignty, it is precisely because he sees in it a notion, or structure, which has pervaded the entire tradition of metaphysics. Not only was sovereignty always a fundamental concept in philosophical thinking, it might even be said that, on Derrida's reading, sovereignty is the mode of persistence of metaphysics beyond its proclaimed end. Consider his early analysis of Husserl in which Derrida insists that his claim is *not* simply that there is some leftover metaphysical baggage in Husserl's phenomenology but rather that the very project of this most rigorous attempt to come to terms with the end of metaphysics or the disappearance of truth is "commanded" by metaphysics. Derrida insists that it is at the very level of the project that phenomenology is unthinkable without metaphysics, arguing that although it was designed precisely to find an alternative to metaphysical analyses, the method of eidetic reductions would not make sense without a buried, barely legible, but conceptually crucial, reference to the metaphysical scene. In what is perhaps the first account of a hauntology, this very early work of Derrida's demonstrates the hidden return of metaphysics. That the hidden return of metaphysics is a claim about the influence of metaphysics is clear; however, the claim can also be read as a claim about sovereignty. The term Derrida chooses here can be heard as describing a mode of remote control, but it is also the term for a sovereign order. (The construction recurs several times in *Of Grammatology* when Derrida wants to refer to a remote, somewhat effaced, but determining effect; the reference to sovereignty is sometimes effaced by the translation of "*commandé*" as "governed," for instance in the passage quoted below [OG, 290]). As much as a lesson about the power of metaphysics, Derrida's demonstration that it "commands" even those projects which seek to escape its realm can be taken as a lesson that sovereignty is not easily disposed of – either by banishing the term or by deposing monarchs. Certainly Derrida himself seems never to forget that lesson. His acute sensitivity to the capacity of sovereignty to reassert its prerogative where or when least expected might be linked to his early experience of the brutality of a suddenly revoked citizenship. In any case he was skeptical, to say the least, of post-Foucauldian readings of the world which eschew

the analysis of sovereignty in favor of biopolitics as a framework of intelligibility for contemporary power phenomena. He was convinced that sovereignty's grip on concepts, language, and institutions would take new forms, not fade away. Thus, for Derrida, both politically and philosophically, sovereignty is a problem which is both ancient and contemporary.

To understand why Derrida is committed to affirming "without sovereignty," although he himself was so acutely aware that for philosophical thinking escape was likely to be illusory, the Kantian reference is doubly helpful. First, in quite general terms, we can note that when Derrida began his philosophical work, it was in a context in which sovereignty was strongly associated with a conception of subjectivity taken to be Kantian. Anyone who held Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud to have fundamentally altered the landscape, and who wanted to be operating in a new landscape marked by those thinkers, understood them to have collectively made untenable the description of the subject as sovereign-subject, where sovereignty marks the subject's capacity for self-determined agency. *Who Comes After the Subject?* – the title of a famous collection of essays to which Derrida contributed – clearly marks a time and place in which the shared understanding was that something/someone had to come "next," after the Kantian subject. For, although there are of course other important philosophers who contributed to the reign of the subject – and Descartes would inevitably be a reference here – paternity of the schema of the subject characterized by sovereignty over his acts was generally attributed to Kant. One of the reasons to affirm the necessity of thinking "without sovereignty" will always be, from Derrida's perspective, to contest Kantian subjectivity.

In those very general terms then, Derrida was always part of a broad movement of thought which resisted Kant. By the end of his career, however, Derrida develops a much more precise axe to grind with Kant concerning sovereignty. When Derrida turns to the analysis of the death penalty, devoting several years of his seminar explicitly to the subject (BS1, BS2), Kant comes on the scene to pinpoint the problem Derrida encounters as he searches for a philosophical principle specifically attuned to opposing the death penalty. Very briefly put, Kant appears as *the* one to answer: not only is he a supporter of the death penalty, on Derrida's analysis Kant's work shows the death penalty, as the sovereign prerogative, to be the keystone of the legal structure which critical philosophy *must* advocate. In exploring abolitionist discourses, Derrida finds time and again that they rely on the very principles that Kant shows lead to the requirement, for a criminal law to be possible and consistent, that there be the exceptional penalty. Although of course abolitionist arguments can and have been made, and although they can, and Derrida hoped would, have an increasing impact on effective practices, the fear is that as long as they implicitly rely on principles which are also Kantian, they sustain a sovereignty which must always "command" a return of the death penalty. According to Derrida, to construct a radically abolitionist discourse would require providing an alternative to the cruel sovereignty Kant so effectively embedded in critical philosophy.

Considering Kant's legacy can thus provide crucial indications as to what Derrida had in mind when he affirmed the necessity of working towards an "unconditional without sovereignty." In fact attention to the Kantian reference shows that what Derrida seeks to affirm is an unconditional which would be decidedly different from Kant's, if anything aimed precisely at escaping Kant's sovereignty. And yet, as he describes his opposition to the Idea in the Kantian sense, it transpires that Derrida is in effect redoubling the radicality of Kant's distinction between conditioned and unconditional. As for finding a way to do "without" the sovereignty which seems unavoidable, Derrida's tactic is neither to avoid the Kantian legacy, nor to circumvent it, but rather in some sense to push it further and further until it becomes unrecognizable. At least that is the suggestion I will develop in the following section.

2. Reiterating Kant's Move – Beyond Recognition

As I indicated in the previous section, when, late in his career, Derrida describes what he is seeking to affirm in terms of an "unconditional without sovereignty," the phrase has distinct Kantian resonances. At that point, Derrida had written extensively about Kant. It is notable however that in the early years of Derrida's work there are few references to Kant: there are no texts devoted to him in the late 1960s and early 1970s and in fact for a long time Derrida seems mostly to refer to Kant through the locution "an Idea in the Kantian sense." One might think then that Kant is a late companion for Derrida. On the other hand, it is not those one talks to most, let alone those one talks most about, who are necessarily the most important companions. As Derrida himself was so good at showing, sometimes companions "beneath the radar" are those who "command" work or thought, whether one knows it or not, and certainly in more ways than one understands. Indeed, that is one of the reasons why "the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language he uses" (OG, 158). In the interest of sketching a very general picture of what Derrida's work does with, and to, the metaphysical heritage it questions, I would like to venture that Kant can be thought of as an invisible companion even in the earliest years. I will try to show that we can detect a certain Kant animating, if not commanding, Derrida's work well before the years in which Kantian vocabulary gains prominence or Kant seems important as an interlocutor.

To consider how his relation to Kant can illuminate the relation Derrida has to metaphysics, I will focus on questions of method. In other words, my interest here is neither in what Derrida says about Kant when he engaged with his texts directly, nor in what certain Kantian concepts look like when Derrida has reworked them, but rather in how Derrida reworks certain Kantian *imperatives*. First, a brief reminder of what "Kant" marks. Kant's critical philosophy is held to be a turning point in the history of metaphysics because it marks a new approach to old questions, it proposes

a new method which reconfigures the problems philosophy takes on, and it produces new imperatives for philosophical investigation. Without going into the complexities of the Copernican Revolution, we can take it at least to signify a change in the understanding of the relation of the investigator to his object of investigation. Kant uses the phrase to signal a dramatic shift in perspective, requiring an equally dramatic shift in intuitions, which allows the investigator to discover simplicity where there was a muddle on the condition of understanding his task to be that of accounting for appearances. No longer are appearances inadequate or deceptive images of a truth hidden behind them. No longer is knowledge thought of as pertaining to a realm lurking behind appearances. As Kant famously put it, what we know are appearances, not things in themselves. Phenomena then are what we know, they are what we analyze in order to reach knowledge, but that analysis is not trying to reach “beyond” phenomena but just to know – phenomena. Transcendental Idealism, the perspective developed and made possible by the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is about finding out what relation to truth we can have, and what truths we can aspire to capturing, once we have made the radical shift from thinking of true knowledge as external prey to thinking it must be sought in the appearances which we contribute to producing as appearances for us (Kant 1998, 110).

In the *Critique*, Kant explains how he can sustain both the rather peculiar contention that we find in nature only what we have put there ourselves, *and* the idea that this does not preclude true knowledge of the world being possible. How does Kant show that knowledge is possible? The key innovation of critical philosophy is to do this not by indicating, or arguing for, the truth of any particular proposition but by asking under what conditions knowledge could be possible, given that we only have access to phenomena. The strategy is to analyze the conditions of possibility of knowledge, given that we have access only to phenomena which are produced by our faculties’ encounter with the world, or rather as those encounters, and then to show that those conditions can be fulfilled. Kant argued that phenomena must be produced by us through a synthesis of concepts and intuitions. He then had to show that this synthesis is not arbitrary and idiosyncratic but can be the source of truth. That in turn he showed to be possible only on the basis that synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible, and thus it fell to the *Critique of Pure Reason* to explain the conditions under which synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible (Kant 1998, 132–133). Asking after conditions of possibility is thus Kant’s signature move: not only is the question “under what conditions is (true) knowledge possible?” the question which gets Kant’s investigation going, asking after conditions of possibility is thereafter the task prescribed for all further philosophical analysis. Among the discoveries this method leads to, the articulation of the conditions of possibility of experience itself is a signal accomplishment. Famously Kant shows that space and time are not objects of experience but *conditions* of experience. Asking after, and identifying, the conditions of experience, Kant shifted philosophical inquiry, imposing new imperatives for research. Although still interested in truth as one of the great metaphysical

questions, Kant changes our relation to truth by demonstrating that thinking about truth as being truth “for us” does not necessarily condemn one to relativism.

Since my intention is to suggest Kant’s method is a not quite overt but nonetheless powerful model for deconstructive reading, I will now turn to one of Derrida’s analyses to consider how this model helps makes sense of his reading. I choose this example both because it has canonical status and because it is drawn from Derrida’s early work in which Kant is not a strong explicit presence. The example is the famous demonstration, in *Of Grammatology*, that “supplement” is a good name for the logic which organizes Rousseau’s way of articulating the relation between nature and culture, or speech and writing. Choosing the term “supplement” from Rousseau’s own corpus, although not from a part of it which would usually be taken seriously as a resource for understanding the *tour de force* of the *Social Contract*, Derrida shows how the term helps articulate diverse and diverging parts of Rousseau’s corpus, different texts, different strands within single texts, and so on.

If we look from a distance at what Derrida’s reading accomplishes, we can see it as demonstrating the possibility of a reading that refuses two classic approaches to dealing with contradiction. Indeed, Derrida’s point of departure is the identification of two apparently contradictory motifs in Rousseau’s writing concerning the relation of speech to writing, one in “praise of living speech,” the other “a perpetually reanimated mistrust with regard to the so-called full speech” (OG, 141). There are two classic alternatives for a reader who judges the co-presence of these conflicting motifs to be a contradiction. The first alternative is to judge the contradiction as a sign of a disqualifying incoherence, grounds for wholesale dismissal perhaps. The second alternative is to (more or less) dismiss *one* of the motifs as an aberration, either by deciding that one is more important than the other and downplaying the tension between them, or by finding reasons to justify ignoring one of them completely. Derrida takes neither of these paths. Instead he insists on taking *both* motifs seriously, and taking seriously the need to make sense of their conflict as integral to Rousseau’s thought. Through a careful unpacking of the logic of the supplement, Derrida will show how these two motifs fit together, how the praise and mistrust of full speech are both crucial aspects of Rousseau and how their conflict is not resolved but rather made productive – to produce Rousseau’s writing. In other words, Derrida’s account shows how it is possible that the very different motions of Rousseau’s text only appear disparate until we have grasped the logic, much as Copernicus is credited with having shown that the retrograde motion of the planets only appears to require proliferating epicycles until we grasp the correct perspective.

One of the now classic descriptions of what Derrida does when reading is that he deconstructs binary oppositions. It is indeed the case that, through Derrida’s commentary on Rousseau’s text, the structuring opposition of the binary pairs – nature/culture or speech/writing – is deconstructed; or, as Derrida would put it, they deconstruct themselves. Derrida shows that the oppositions that Rousseau mobilizes are not sustained. While it seems important for Rousseau’s arguments that nature

and culture be distinct, there are also places in his text in which they cannot be conceptually distinguished. Or again, Derrida shows that whereas it seems important to Rousseau's argument that speech has priority over writing, his text also reveals that the converse must be the case. But, *pace* both those who fear him to be destroying the pillars of rationality *and* those who turn to his work in the hope that it provides means, or authority, for declaring metaphysical rationality without foundation, Derrida himself is not out to simply denounce binary oppositions for being unsustainable. Nor does he consider that showing they are unsustainable is an end in itself. Rather, just as Nietzsche famously declared that "the falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection" only to move from there to a novel question about whom these judgments serve, the unsustainability of an opposition is for Derrida a point of departure for investigation. In some sense it is precisely once Derrida has identified the phenomenon of a text which relies on oppositions that deconstruct themselves that he can get to work: it is of this phenomenon – a text that relies on oppositions, which deconstruct themselves – that Derrida will ask his version of the question "what are its conditions of possibility?" It is the possibility of that which is impossible according to standard logic, but which nevertheless appears to Derrida to require the sorts of investigations he leads to figure out what makes it possible as something other than nonsense, or to out the figure of the universe in which it is possible that such a phenomenon appears to us.

On Derrida's analysis, what allows nature/culture or speech/writing to function as they do in Rousseau's text, thereby allowing Rousseau's text to work, can be thought of as a "rationality" which "governs" a writing in the "enlarged and radicalized" sense that *Of Grammatology* develops (OG, 10). As Derrida shows, when Rousseau calls on writing to supplement speech, he seems to be calling for two different things: on the one hand he calls for writing to add to speech, on the other he calls for writing to replace speech. To further complicate matters, if one tries to identify which of these is the more important idea, it turns out it is *because* writing adds to speech that it can *replace* speech, and vice versa. This logic, which Rousseau, or rather his text, comes closest to acknowledging, or making explicit, when supplement is the term which describes key relationships, is the peculiar logic which holds Rousseau's text together. It is a rationality of sorts which makes Rousseau's corpus possible in that it makes it possible for it to be coherent with its conflicting motifs. Such is the logic of the supplement – addition and replacement are not (only) mutually exclusive operations but (instead also) dependent on one another; they are indissociable from one another despite the fact that they must also be conceptually distinct. Granted, the logic of the supplement is unreceivable according to traditional logic – it flies in the face of the axiom of the excluded middle. And yet Derrida's attempt to articulate a logic which does not take that as an axiom is no more peculiar than those attempts to articulate geometries which suspend one of Euclid's axioms: just as non-Euclidean geometries turn out to be necessary to describe some spaces, so the logic of the supplement turns out to be necessary to describe the space of

writing, where writing is no longer that which is opposed to speech but writing in the enlarged and radical sense that Derrida produces in order to account for the possibility of Rousseau's text.

What does this have to do with Kant? As I have just suggested, Derrida's articulation of the logic of the supplement can be read as a Kantian response insofar as it operates by asking after conditions of possibility of Rousseau's contradictory corpus. I would like to claim, however, that what makes this more than a passing resemblance between Derrida and Kant is the *status* of that which is uncovered by the investigation. What Derrida uncovers, bringing it to light while insisting that it was always already there, is a logic but it is also a space, a space *not* as an object of experience but as one of its *conditions*. Consider Derrida's claim about inscription, the claim by which he does more than reverse the usual priority between speech and writing. Derrida argues that, despite what Rousseau says explicitly about speech's priority over writing, what emerges from a close reading of his writings is that inscription is not something which can happen as an accident to speech but instead the very condition of speech. It is that inscription which Derrida calls "writing" in the sense of writing which is always already possible "before" (in a logically anterior sense) any speech or writing. The conclusion of Derrida's close analysis of Rousseau's text is that there is a "scriptoral space" (OG, 290) which is not an object of writing but the *condition* of writing. In fact, in a particular page where Kantian vocabulary is suddenly very insistent in such a way as to discretely signal the relation I am describing more laboriously here, Derrida asserts that "the possibility of inscription in general, not as a contingent accident which happens to an already constituted space but which produces the spatiality of space" should be a guide towards "a new transcendental aesthetic" (OG, 290). Having shown that the logic of the supplement sustains Rousseau's arguments about speech and writing, it thus transpires that Derrida is making a claim not about some idiosyncrasy of Rousseau's but about writing in general. The investigation of the conditions of possibility of Rousseau's text produced the description of something like a new rationality, a new transcendental logic, but they could also be said to lead to a new transcendental aesthetic.

It is then the transcendental status of the concepts Derrida extracts from his reading of Rousseau which most clearly indicates that Derrida has in some sense rehearsed Kant's moves. Indeed if one does not pay attention to that, one might reduce Derrida's reading to an explanation of the work as a consequence of the author's psychology, resorting to the slightly titillating culturally clichéd site of sexuality to "explain" the work as some therapeutic (or not) "coming to terms" with the author's "condition." The point is, however, that Derrida's reading of Rousseau sounds like (dubious) popular psychology, only if one takes this to be an empirical explanation; the status Derrida means to attribute to it is rather different. And here again the Kantian precedent is essential. If one fails to keep clear on the fact that empirical and transcendental psychology are not the same thing, much of Kant falls flat, or sounds stupid, while the same passages read as *transcendental* psychology are

important constitutive elements of his account of the possibility of knowledge. The same holds for Derrida's work: his claims about the significance of Rousseau's relation to the absent (m)other or to his own onanistic habits are important not as psychological arguments exactly, or at least not as empirical psychology; rather they hold significance insofar as they reveal the structure of a transcendental psychological space. That "[o]ne cannot help wishing to master absence and yet we must always let go" (OG, 142) can in some sense be considered a psychological lesson Rousseau drew from his particular experience; it might even be a general rule of experience, but Derrida refers to it here not as an empirical law but as the "profound law that commands the space within which Rousseau must move" (OG, 142). It is when it is understood not as merely a psychological reality but as the principle which organizes an economy of signs that this rule becomes important as a law of the space of (possible) writing. For Derrida, as for Kant, the analysis of the conditions of possibility leads to conclusions in a transcendental register.

Or rather – and here we begin to measure that Derrida's reiteration of Kant's move leads to a space which is decidedly *not* Kantian – that is *one* of its registers. It is the case for Derrida, just as for Kant, that one only understands the power of the analysis by attending to claims as transcendental claims. However, and this is the case for Derrida the way it is not for Kant, Derrida actually often manages to make claims which are readable in *both* registers. Indeed, often Derrida *is* saying two things at once. He develops a particular idiom which manages to allow both a simple common sense proposition *and* a highly, perhaps hyper, theoretical proposition to resonate in the same phrase, sentence, or argument. Where Derrida operates, there is both the infinite distance of qualitative difference *and* proximity between the "naïve" and the hypercritical. The proximity of "everyday" thinking with "high theory" is neither purely analogical, nor purely identical. And this is perhaps where we can see that the reiterations of Kant's move have unexpected consequences. When Derrida asks of the particular phenomenon which is Rousseau text "what makes this possible?" he seems to be simply reiterating the critical question. Derrida reiterates it in the sense of asking again, or again and again, since he follows up on what he credits Rousseau with having the intuition of, namely that scriptural space is determined also by social space, by technical, religious, economic space (OG, 410), and so asks after the conditions of possibility in many directions and multiple modalities. In other words, he disseminates transcendental analysis on many levels and the result of this intensification-dissemination-repetition is that something strange happens to the transcendental-empirical distinction which makes possible such analyses in the first place. Indeed whereas Kant was adamant about keeping the transcendental and empirical modes of analysis distinct and held the confusion to be always dangerous, Derrida both accepts the importance of the distinction and is willing to venture where it would be irresponsible, in the sense of failing to be responsive, to ignore their congruence.

The transcendental–empirical distinction is but one important Kantian reference to which something peculiar happens in Derrida’s work. One might also look at the ways in which already in the logic of the supplement, but more explicitly in the related concepts of *différance*, or the trace, time and space are no longer as hermetically distinct as they are for Kant. Yet even as Derrida leads us to a way of knowing which requires us to develop both a logic and intuitions which the Königsberg scholar would have objected to, it does seem possible to tell the story of Derrida’s encounter with Rousseau (and many others) as one in which the imperatives for thinking which Kant set out in some sense animate Derrida’s project. According to this narrative (and including narratives among the conditions of possibility of theoretical discourses is one of the things Derrida teaches us to do), Derrida can be seen as affirming the possibility of repeating Kant’s move, again and again, until it is not Kantian at all anymore. Derrida reiterates Kant, beyond all recognition.

3. After Truth

“Unconditional without sovereignty” – what Derrida seeks to affirm is difficult to think because it requires disengaging from the hold of a tradition in which a certain sovereignty determines both the understanding of subjectivity and ethical and legal frameworks. If there is a chance for that, if it is to be(come) possible to think in this way, it will therefore be crucial to disengage from Kant’s heritage. I hope to have shown that beyond giving us reasons to do so, Derrida’s work may provide a suggestion for *how* to do so even where that work is the least explicitly concerned with Kant. If it is the case that even in his early work one can understand Derrida to be in some sense reiterating Kant’s method, taking seriously the prospect that what we know are only phenomena, asking after conditions of possibility, and drawing from the analyses of those conditions certain conclusions about the conditions of possibility of experience in general, then it would at first seem unlikely that this could provide indications for an escape from the grip of cruel sovereignty. And yet, if it is also the case that through his reiteration of Kant’s method, Derrida stretches the transcendental method beyond recognition, it might just paradoxically be the case that this does in fact provide an opening towards a thinking which is not caught up in the scene of recognition owed to the sovereign.

The scene has shifted. To give at least an image, or rather a phrase, for this shift, let us return to the passage I quoted earlier, where, describing what he has done in *Of Grammatology* as exposing a rationality which governs writing in the enlarged sense, Derrida adds an essential proviso: the “rationality” in question “no longer issues from a logos” (OG, 10). Here Derrida announces that this “rationality” inaugurates the “de-construction” (later the hyphen will be dropped) of all significations that have their source in logos, particularly the signification of *truth*. What then did

Derrida do to truth? For however important it is to emphasize that Derrida always had some impatience with philosophy, it can also be said that Derrida was always after truth. He was “after it” as in “in pursuit.” He was after it from the start because that is what caught his interest or drove his desire, because he could not quite help hearing philosophical questions everywhere, or seeing them set up by big world events or daily domestic rituals, global trends, intimate transitions, or conversations. In other words, he was after truth in the way it can become a possible, or even therefore, a necessary habit, when one has philosophical inclinations, to question appearances and look for “the truth behind them” as one might put it in classical metaphysical language. But Derrida was also after truth not to catch it, but to avoid being caught. He came after a time in the history of philosophy when aspiring to truth could be taken to be unproblematic as a project, however problematic its implementation. When Derrida began his philosophical education he was plunged into a context in which it was a given that Truth as a goal was in a certain sense *passé*; it was clear that becoming philosophically adept required learning to perceive the ways in which the very idea of a Truth is a central element of the metaphysical heritage which must be overcome to avoid epistemological dead ends, ethico-political disasters, or philosophical naïvety. Truth was if not the enemy, at the very least what one had to go after and detect in order not to be fooled by it, or stopped in the movement which sent one in the chase in the first place. How then did Derrida take on truth and how did the gesture of de-construction affect its signification? It seems to me something of that is conveyed in the proposition that Derrida sought a certain truth. The expression is pleonasm for the tradition which holds that certainty is one of the qualities of truth. But, to use a Derridean phrase, could one not also say the opposite? If one understands “certain” to denote only one among many, then “a certain truth” would be an oxymoron from a classical metaphysical perspective in which the partial aspect of such a truth would be at odds with the supposed total, or immutable, character of truth. But what is either a pleonasm or an oxymoron for Kant, is for Derrida *both* – but for the opposite reasons. “Derrida” produces a certain truth which is not characterized by certainty, and is definitely partial in that Derrida’s readings never claim to be the only ones possible of a given text or a broad problem. Not eternal, but enduring, “Derrida” endures, animating future reiterations of engagement with the metaphysical tradition. Not least of his resistance to cruelty is the help “Derrida” provides to endure a certain truth.

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Difference

CLAIRE COLEBROOK

There are (at least) four ways in which one might approach the concept of difference in the work of Jacques Derrida: difference as a poststructuralist critique of the supposedly post-metaphysical attention to meaning as generated through systems; difference as the post-phenomenological problem of time; sexual difference; and the difference between humans and non-humans. In all cases it is necessary to mark a distinction between difference, as the relation between two terms or identities, and *différance* which marks or traces out the problem of the relation between identity and difference. That is, there can be a difference between two identities only if there is some system, network, or field of relations (such as language, consciousness, or even a space in which beings are distributed so that they might differ from each other); but as soon as we think this condition for the difference between or among terms we are returned to an identity (by saying that differences are produced by time, culture, language, space, or even life), and we have then already assumed some distinction between the system of differences and the cause or ground of those differences. In the case of structuralism, we might say that language is a system of differences without any grounding or foundational term, but then language becomes just such an excepted or undifferentiated condition. Or, we might say that there can only be differences among beings because of some synthesizing consciousness, but such a consciousness can only experience differences through time if it remains relatively stable, and such ongoing maintenance or stability requires the difference between present consciousness and the experiences it synthesizes. Identity requires difference (for something can be what it is only if maintained through time as the same), but difference requires identity, for the understanding of anything as different places difference-identified terms in relation. One might – for example – want to make a

claim for sexual difference, in which women's identity was not defined in relation to men, but this pure difference – as long as it relied on the concept of woman – would always be caught up in a system of relations. One might also want to destroy all notions of human exceptionalism, both because there would be no pure predicate that marked out all humans as both the same as each other but also uniquely different from all other species; but simply destroying this difference and becoming happily post-human would nevertheless require some other identifying concept (such as “life” or, as in the case of some animal rights discourse, a common capacity to suffer). On the one hand, concepts are impossible, precisely because a concept operates by indicating or intending an identity or sameness that never arrives (such as “man” or “humanity”); on the other hand, concepts are also necessary insofar as any criticism of a putative sameness relies on some ostensibly more foundational or more inclusive (more differentiated) otherness that has been excluded by the concept. This impossibility of concepts and at the same time the need for concepts might seem to generate the structure of a negative theology – that we can only know pure difference or identity from the compromised position of a concept, or that we can only think universal sameness via various approximating instances. Against the conceptual relation between identity and difference (where a concept indicates a relative sameness across different instances), Derrida inscribes another difference that is literal rather than conceptual – that precedes thinking, identification, and determination but traces out the distinctions that make such conceptual procedures possible: “*In its literality at least*, but the difference between metaphysical ontotheology, on the one hand, and the thought of Being (of difference), on the other, signifies the essential importance of the *letter*. Since everything occurs in movements of increasing explicitness, the literal difference is almost the entire difference of thought” (WD, 146).

In this chapter, I will deal with each of these problems of difference and the concept (the problem of structure, of phenomena, of humanity, of sexual difference); but it is also important to begin by saying that *différance* is not a concept. In his argument with John Searle, Derrida made a claim for the force of concepts: a concept cannot have “fuzzy” boundaries, for a concept may only operate *as a concept* if it indicates a sense that would remain the same regardless of who speaks or how the concept is articulated: “when a concept is to be treated as a concept I believe that one has to accept the logic of all or nothing. . . . Whenever one feels obliged to stop doing this (as happens to me when I speak of *différance*, of mark, of supplement, of iterability, and of all they entail), it is *better* to make explicit in the most conceptual, rigorous, formalizing, and pedagogical manner possible the reasons one has for doing so, for thus changing the rules and the context of discourse” (LI, 128). This “all or nothing” understanding of the concept might seem to dampen down the work of difference. Whereas Searle wanted to argue that we use language differently on each occasion and that a concept's meaning would vary according to context (and that we could therefore say that we know what something means by looking at how it is used and what the speaker wants to achieve), Derrida insists that a concept has a

strict boundary that exceeds any single context, and indeed that we can only have various contexts of individuals speaking together because of a presupposed or intended sameness of sense. If concepts must possess this sameness of sense, and a concept indicates something that would be identical, through time, then Derrida's creation of the word *différance* aims to do something other than mark something that we could identify as the same through time. My four "examples" of how Derrida writes about difference – if we take seriously the notion that difference is not a concept – will not be four instances of some shared quality, but four operations or strategies. In all cases, Derrida's most significant interventions by way of the thought of difference are themselves different; if there is something that unites all Derrida's uses of the word "*différance*," then it is the opposite of the force of a concept. A *concept* of difference would produce some indicated sameness that would apply across a series of instances and uses; a strategy of difference would be different on each of its occasions.

1. Poststructuralist Difference

One of the most often quoted statements regarding difference is the linguist Ferdinand Saussure's claim that a language is comprised of "differences with no positive terms." It would not be the case that a language would label already present meanings, such that the words or concepts would simply map directly onto the world or the mind's distinct entities. Rather, it would be the entire system or structure of a language that would be required for any single term (OGC, 52). It seems quite natural that the world consists of discrete things – cats, dogs, tables, chairs – and that language follows from our wanting to speak about these things. On reflection, though, one can easily imagine a language that had one word for all domestic animals, did not have concepts for the distinct pieces of furniture but had a wide array of different words for various types of snow. What this difference among languages would indicate is that meaning does not begin with experience, which then captures some full presence and conveys this sense through time via language. Rather, it is because structures such as languages create distinctions that the world can be lived meaningfully; and it is this structure of meaning, dividing the world into identifiable entities, that allows an ongoing sense of that which remains the same through time. The structuralist account of difference is primarily methodological: if we want to study a language or any other social structure it is more fruitful to look at the way systems generate differences, rather than assume that various structures simply label the same common reality. But structuralism also has implications for the limits of knowledge and for how we think about reality. If it is the case that meaning emerges from a language's system of differences then we cannot know any meaning in itself, or grasp the sense of the world in some neutral or fully present manner; we would always be dependent upon a structure's articulations. We could never grasp the

world in itself, nor express the absolutely singular and unique nature of our own lived experience; any expression or articulation would be submitted to the already constituted structure that enables us to speak and write.

Several methodological consequences would follow. There could be no truth as such, for anything we might say or write would require articulation in a specific system that would be unique to each culture. Our individual experience would always be belied by the conditions of each conversation, where we would be compelled to submit to the shared conventions of language. The meaning of any term would be relative, differing according to the other terms with which it was placed in relation.

Derrida's two responses to structuralism's approach to difference expose the problems with any methodological abandonment of truth, meaning, or reality. Derrida insists both on the ways in which structural differences cannot be mastered or contained *and* on the inescapability of the sense of truth. Indeed, by focusing on the differences between Derrida and the structuralist thinkers with whom he first articulated the significance of the process of difference, it is possible to note that some of the dismissive claims made about deconstruction – that it abandons truth, meaning, and reality to focus on the free play of differences – are far from accurate. First, we might consider the problem of truth. Let us imagine that we accept the structuralist claim that we think, write, and speak within a system of differences with no positive terms. If that were so then any supposed truth – anything that appeared to be positive or simply to *be* – would actually be the effect of a system of relations that was produced only by differences *between* terms. We could only have the concept of “cat,” because we have a practice of differentiating among animals, and – in turn – of differentiating animals from humans and so on. Those differences between terms are negations, and we never arrive at anything positive, anything that simply *is*. But Derrida poses two objections to this acceptance of negative or relative difference. We cannot, without contradiction, abandon claims to truth and remain within a system of differences. The structuralist claim that one might look at systems in relation to each other, without any sense of what might be true above and beyond any system, is itself a truth claim; indeed, “a certain structuralism has always been philosophy's most spontaneous gesture” (WD, 159). It is now structure (or culture, or language) that functions as the new unquestioned ground of truth. This is because the structuralist conception of difference is relative and negative; the structuralist considers relations within a system (relations between terms) but does not consider the positive, productive, or ungrounded difference that allows any system to emerge. Derrida makes this clear in his reading of Lévi-Strauss's account of kinship systems. Lévi-Strauss describes the way in which he compares cultures, and the differences *within* cultures, as a form of *bricolage* (WD, 288). That is, rather than having some neutral or foundational position outside of structures, Lévi-Strauss concedes that the anthropologist is himself caught up in systems of difference. The only thing he can do is examine structures in relation to each other, piece by piece, never finding some grand

truth or foundation from which to undertake analysis. Different mythic systems divide the world and manage relations in their own way; our relation to those systems can be comparative, but can never establish truth or ultimate reality. We have to abandon such claims as metaphysical.

By contrast, Derrida, both in this essay on Lévi-Strauss and in his essay on the relationship between structuralism and phenomenology, insists on the problems of truth and genesis, even if this is an “untamed genesis” (WD, 157). If, following Lévi-Strauss, we were simply to accept that we were always already operating within structures, this acceptance would still leave the problem of the genesis or justification of our enclosure within differential systems. Lévi-Strauss explains his method by arguing that kinship systems and the emergence of basic oppositions that make sense of the world are the result of the repression of natural indifference: in the beginning is a world without prohibition, law, or distinction. There is no structural division between, for example, those of one’s own kind and others; there is no prohibition on incest, for there is not yet a differentiation between mother, father, and child – no structure that establishes formal relations among bodies. It is only with the prohibition of incest that social structure emerges. All cultures establish different systems of relations; and all cultures possess their own myths regarding the emergence of culture or civilization. There is no “truth” of these relative truths. There are only differences, without positive terms. Against this seeming relativism or empiricism Derrida argues that Lévi-Strauss’s account of the emergence of difference, like all seeming relativisms, remains foundational and metaphysical. For Lévi-Strauss offers an account of difference as the passage from nature to culture, and it is *this* difference that explains and contains all other differences (WD, 282). Is this difference, between nature and culture, natural or cultural? If it is natural – if we argue that nature must come to be organized through various cultural systems – then we have once more fallen back on some foundational term to explain the emergence of systems. But any concept of nature is itself part of a system of relations. The same applies to culture; we cannot abandon questions of truth simply by resigning ourselves to cultural systems, because “culture” then becomes a foundational moment of true explanation outside (and explanatory for) all systems. Against this relativism of structures and this abandonment of truth, Derrida makes two (seemingly mutually exclusive) counter-arguments. First, Derrida argues for two conceptions of differential play; the first would be play conceived in terms of closed structures, such that we would only know the differential relations among terms. The more radical understanding of differential play would be open, and would refer to the difference *from which systems of difference emerge* (WD, 280). This archi-difference would be neither the difference within a system nor the difference between or among systems. Instead, *différance* would refer to the movement or marking out of differences that would then allow for something like a relatively stable time and space. Thus difference would not be the difference between spatial points, nor the difference between two moments in time (such as a before and after), for these differences are secondary to an ungrounded

différance that cannot be located in a temporal origin or event within the world (such as language or culture): “it is this constitution of the present as an ‘originary’ and irreducibly nonsimple (and therefore, *strictu sensu* nonoriginary) synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protentions . . . that I propose to call . . . *différance*. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporalization” (MP, 13).

Second, and alongside affirming this concept of playful difference that refuses to be located within systems or structures and precludes just the sort of detached and neutral observations claimed by structuralism or relativism, Derrida also asserts the force of truth. In an essay on the relationship between structuralism and phenomenology, Derrida asks the question of the *genesis* of structures. This, for Derrida, is a question structuralism sought to suspend for the sake of remaining rigorous. But for Derrida this question is unavoidable. If we try to account for systems such as mathematics, logic, or geometry by locating their sense *within* a structure, by arguing that these practices are cultural phenomena that can be historically located, then we miss the meaning of formal systems: “Pure truth or the pretension to pure truth is missed in its meaning as soon as one attempts . . . to account for it from within a factual totality” (WD, 160). Mathematics and logic are not just arbitrary systems of differences located within cultures, for the sense of a mathematical or logical statement is that these utterances would be true for any system whatever, at any time whatever, regardless of context. Indeed, any utterance within a system or context can only have meaning if it possesses a force that could be repeated and maintain some sense in a different context. You and I can understand each other, speaking together, only if we share a system (such as language) that goes beyond the present context. This is because a meaningful system of differences has a force of differential creation that is also a force of truth: any term in a language only works if it can be uttered on more than one occasion by more than one speaker. Meaning occurs in this repeatability or iterability through time. A term cannot be reduced to the unique occurrence of a speaker or, more importantly, what that speaker wants to say; regardless of what I want or intend, a term has its own sense. I can only use a term, here and now, in this present, if it is recognizable by the person to whom it is addressed; and it is precisely that shared recognition that requires that a term also operate beyond any of its current or past speakers and instances. A term’s sense exceeds both the speaker *and the system of differences*: in this respect, then, in addition to the differences already constituted within a system (such as the difference between terms), each differentiated term has the capacity to be used again and again, across time and space, with each instance itself being different. Thus, a term is the same (or identical or recognizable) only if it can be different from itself (used again and again, differently).

One might refer to the structuralist difference as a closed, relative, and systemic difference, but then one might say that this difference is possible only because of a capacity for each term to be different. That second difference could not be contained by a structure but would be what enables a structure to be both produced and to

continue to operate; this second difference might therefore be referred to as *différance*. Any difference between terms is never completed once and for all but requires ongoing repetition, and so occurs through time and is always deferred; at the same time, any system of difference is never present all at once, but is also spatially distributed – across speakers, material inscriptions and tokens, and various contexts. The condition for a present structure of differences is a spatial distribution, and a temporal deferral: for this reason Derrida coins the term *différance*, combining both temporal delay or deferral and spatial difference.

2. Post-Phenomenological Difference

Prior to Derrida's deconstruction, there had been a long-running phenomenological tradition of arguing that difference was a condition for identity. The argument depends on a certain understanding of the primacy of appearance or appearing. The three intellectual traditions that had theorized the status of appearances to which Derrida responded were Kantianism, Hegelianism, and Husserlian/Heideggerian phenomenology. For Kant, we cannot know things in themselves; insofar as we *know* anything this is because it is given to us and is therefore always a phenomenon. The phenomenon is known only in relation, and is therefore caught up in the differences of time, space, and the categories through which the world is organized. For Kant, then, there is the thing-in-itself or the *noumenon*, that simply *is* and then there is the thing as it is *for us*. Kantianism places identity before difference: there are things in themselves, and the noumenal subject, but we only know these self-present identities in relation. It is because there are identities – such as things and subjects – that we then necessarily always know the world on the basis of the fundamental difference between the subject and object. By the time Derrida theorized difference, French Hegelianism, French readings of Kant, and the importation of German phenomenology had already questioned the primacy and possibility of a self-identical noumenon. For Hegel, the task of philosophy is to overcome or “sublate” the difference between being-in-itself, and being-for-itself; he achieves this through a theorization of the difference between subject and object. If I want to think of the thing-in-itself, some absolutely independent and self-sufficient being, then this identity is always thought as that which is the same as itself, in relation to nothing other than itself. But if we examine this pure self-relation we can see that it is the effect of difference. So, reversing Kant, it is not the case that there are things in themselves that then appear to us. Rather, it is through appearing that there is both the thing in itself and the subject who is set over and against the object. For Hegel this means that we must redefine philosophy, knowledge, subjectivity, and the relation thought bears to what is not itself. It is not the case that there is some infinite, absolute, or absolutely true world that thinking and philosophy must come to know. Rather, there is the coming into

being of appearance, and when that appearing is both experienced and reflected upon *as experienced* then we have achieved both the difference between subject and object, and the overcoming of difference. When thought arrives at the late stages of philosophy, it comes to realize that there is not thought on the one hand, and then on the other the appearing world. Rather, there is just one infinite, absolute, and self-presenting world that appears to itself and realizes that it is nothing more than this self-appearing. In the beginning, then, is not identity but difference. Or, more importantly, true identity for Hegel *is difference* that appears to itself and recognizes itself as possible only through differing from itself. It is by way of Husserl's phenomenology that Derrida challenges this conflation or sublation of difference with the absolute self-appearing subject (IOG, 45). For Hegel it is the philosophical subject who appears to himself and then understands himself to be nothing more than self-appearing; objectivity is not opposed to the subject's finitude, for without the difference between subject and object there would be no coming into appearance and no way for the absolute or any being at all to be. For Husserl, by contrast, appearance is not assumed to be the appearance of beings to a subject. His phenomenology does not – as Hegel had done – begin from the question of the absolute or knowledge (IOG, 30). If Kant restricts our finite knowledge only to what can be given *to us* (or phenomena), then Hegel insists that absolute knowledge is phenomenal, for only what appears *to itself* can overcome all difference and return to, know, and arrive at itself. By contrast Husserl neither assumed the difference between subject and object, nor assumed that absolute knowledge would be the overcoming of all difference to arrive at self-differing subjectivity. Instead, he began with the principle of examining appearances without any presupposition of what appearances were appearances of.

From this methodological move Husserl argued that any appearance is *already different from itself*. Before something can appear to consciousness, there must be an event of appearing; this is the premise of phenomenology – to begin with appearances. If, for Hegel this leads to absolute knowledge – and the absolute as such – being nothing other than appearance appearing to itself, recognizing itself, and returning to itself, then for Husserl it is the phenomenon that precludes absolute knowledge. Appearances, *as appearances*, are given as appearances of something that is never fully present. Spatial objects can appear as spatial only if certain sides and views are presented as not yet present, and even ideal, personal, or pure meanings – such as logic, numbers, memories, and the experience of the most proximate sensations – are given as present only through an unfolding and deferred time. For something to appear, or be present, it must be located in time and space; presence can be given as “here and now” only in a synthesized or traced manifold. For Husserlian phenomenology, this synthesized manifold means that transcendental subjectivity (but not a self-present subject) becomes the condition for all appearing. This transcendental subjectivity is not a differentiated thing but that which flows as continual self-differing, with the retention and protention of a relative stability that is never fully present or absolutely given (SP, 102). Here, though, is where *différance* becomes

significant for Derrida. For Husserlian phenomenology, it is appearance that already harbors difference, for any present appearance already offers other future and retained aspects, *and* never to be presented aspects:

... this appearing of the Ideal as an infinite *différance* can only be produced within a relationship with death in general. Only a relation to my-death could make the infinite differing of presence appear. By the same token, compared to the ideality of the positive infinite, this relation to my-death becomes an accident of empirical finitude. The appearance of the infinite *différance* is itself finite. Consequently, *différance*, which does not occur outside this relation, becomes the finitude of life as an essential relation with oneself and one's death. *The infinite différence is finite.* (SP, 102)

For Derrida, difference is a far more radical process of absence or non-appearing. Consider his most famous example of the notion of writing, where we tend to think of a present experience (either of speech or even perception) that is then taken up and repeated in an inscribed system of differences, such as writing. This assumption of the difference between present speech and the system or text of writing relies on an unexamined presupposition of proximity: in the beginning is something like the pure perception that *then* presents different sides, or the speech act that *then* requires text or formalized language to be conveyed (SP, 93). Rather than argue for the ways in which the proximate or present appears to itself, through time and space, Derrida argues that the proximate, the near or the seemingly undifferentiated pure now or point *is an effect*. But even this language of effect that would suggest that there is a process of difference or splitting from which something can be presented is already a repression of difference because it is phrased in terms of a before and after, and is therefore already subjected to a relative sameness. So it makes sense if we want to think about difference as a radical condition then we might have to try and abandon the logic of conditions. We might have to question the basic philosophical approaches that privilege priority and even of logic. If philosophy really is the possibility of asking questions without assuming some already given truths, then all the constituted terms that have enabled us to pose these questions (such as the subject, the present, the origin, and so on) are already the effect of a process of differences that can never be brought to present. We might then have to say that *différance* is not a concept precisely because a concept operates by indicating an identifiable repetition through time. What Derrida is aiming to articulate is a non-identical or differing time that is not yet organized into before and after, and a space that does not have a centered point of view synthesized into a here and there. When Derrida argues for a radical notion of text or writing, this is not because he believes in the primacy of language as some organizing system, for any such system of constituted and *dispersed* differences or terms is given through time and space via the operation of traces (such as sounds, material inscriptions, and constantly repeated but different differences). This means that our usual or “vulgar” understanding of time as chronological succession

is contaminated by space, precisely because it relies upon a point that gauges time passing. Similarly, our understanding of space relies on time, or the capacity to synthesize a field of dispersed points or distances into some plane within which these points and distances differ from each other. Before there are differences (between now and the past, or here and there, or subject and object) there is *différance*, which is both temporal deferral and spatial dispersal.

Différance is not a concept because a concept intends a relative sameness through different instances; nor is *différance* a word, not just because Derrida creates a term not already in the French language, but also because a word operates through being different from all the other words in the system whereas difference is partly different (in spelling) but awkwardly the same. The linguistic unit, “*différance*,” is indiscernible at the level of sound from the word “difference,” and is marked as different only through an inscriptive trace which is not present in the voice.

3. Sexual Difference and Human–Animal Difference

Consider two prevalent theories of sexual difference: either there simply are two different sexes (indicated via chromosomes or the physical differences that unfold from chromosomes), or, chromosomal differences are insufficient to determine sexual difference and it is the cultural process of gender differentiation that operates to produce the opposition between male and female. The first position is realist or biological; whatever role language, culture, or consciousness plays sexual difference simply is. The second position is structuralist; it is language or culture that carves up reality, using the gender system and distinguishing between male and female. The binary structure would overlay an otherwise insufficiently differentiated reality. The “sex/gender” distinction has become a grounding assumption in feminist theory and gender studies. Perhaps some of the most sophisticated versions of this “gender overlay” or structuralist approach emerged from psychoanalysis where it was argued that the entry of the subject into culture occurs through the taking on of the system of language (Mitchell 1975). To be a subject is to be subjected to a system of differences, differences that are lived as the imposition of law; it follows then that desire can never be articulated as such but lies outside the law and beyond language, and is lived as a prohibited, lost, or maternal/feminine beyond.

Some theorists have drawn on Derrida’s concept of *différance* to intervene in this field. Perhaps the three most notable have been Drucilla Cornell, Diane Elam, and Judith Butler. For Butler, the supposedly original and undifferentiated “sex” that is seemingly divided discursively by the system of gender is the effect, not the ground, of a differential movement that is neither natural nor cultural but marks out the distinction between the two. Butler’s argument is indebted to the Derridean concept of difference insofar as she argues that the supposedly original ground – biological

sex – appears *as original* only after a movement that distinguishes sex from gender, creating gender as secondary:

For there is an “outside,” an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive “outside,” it is that which can only be thought – when it can – in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders. The debate between constructivism and essentialism thus misses the point of deconstruction altogether, for the point has never been that “everything is discursively constructed”; that point, when and where it is made, belongs to a kind of discursive monism or linguistics that refuses the constitutive force of exclusion, erasure, violent foreclosure, abjection and its disruptive return within the very terms of discursive legitimacy. (Butler 1993, xvii)

Drucilla Cornell, in a slightly different appropriation of difference, focuses on the concept of woman. Just as Derrida argues, against Searle, that a concept’s capacity to be used in an infinite series of different contexts precludes the concept from ever being determined, so Cornell argues that “woman” always exceeds any given woman, thus creating a constant difference between actuality and the movement of the concept. Feminism should not be a form of accommodation – where we would deploy the concept of women for the purposes of sameness and solidarity – but should push beyond accommodation to focus on a concept’s force of difference (in excess of already constituted differences) (Cornell 1991, 109). For both Butler and Cornell, deconstruction precludes the notion that sex provides an already distinct and determining difference (biological realism), and this is because difference can never be exhausted by any single difference between two terms; by the same token, difference cannot be contained within the linguistic or cultural systems of difference that would organize bodies. To argue that there is something like nature that is then differentiated by language and culture both assumes a distinction between nature and culture and – as Diane Elam insisted – assumes that nature remains essentially the same rather than subject to all the processes of difference, delay, deferral, and non-presence that characterize systems like writing. Butler, Cornell, and Elam neither attribute a privileged status to biological sexual difference, nor see sexual difference as a simply imposed or arbitrary distinction. In Elam’s words:

The body is not real or essential; we will not find all the answers that we seek within it. However, feminism cannot dispose of the body any more than it can simply inhabit it. The difference of bodies remains a fact – a fact that menaces instead of legitimates our understanding of sexual difference. (Elam 1994, 60)

Despite feminists, following Derrida, having labored to locate difference at the level of the body and materiality, some of the easily lifted Derridean quotations about difference being textual, or akin to text, trace, or writing (such as “there is nothing

outside the text”) have recently led to a series of reactions against deconstruction and the undecidability of difference. This turn to matter or the body is required, supposedly, because deconstruction, in its attention to complexity and ramified difference, would erase the specificity of sexual difference. For Elizabeth Grosz, the contrary is the case: it is because the sexual binary of male and female organizes difference into a stable opposition, that we are unable to think the pure or positive nature of a sexual difference that recedes as soon as it emerges in some differentiated actuality:

But just as, for Saussure and Derrida, pure difference can never appear as such because it must constantly erase its contribution to signification and linguistic value, because for it to appear as such is for it to transform itself, to render itself present, so too sexual difference is a framework or horizon that must disappear as such in the coding that constitutes identity and the relations between the sexes. Sexual difference is the horizon that cannot appear in its own terms but is implied in the very possibility of an entity, a subject, an other and their relations. (Grosz 1994, 209)

The supposed turn to the body or matter after deconstruction not only misses the extent to which Derrida himself often deployed the possibility of sexual difference to complicate any notion of either cultural construction or refusal of the body’s complexity, it also fails to address the extent to which the concept of man – and the impossibility of this concept – has been at the heart of Derrida’s complication of difference by *différance*. It is not surprising then that not only sexual difference, but the difference between animals and humans becomes increasingly important in Derrida’s work. The metaphysics of presence or logocentrism operate by positing a ground of identity that will be the basis or origin of difference: languages, misunderstandings, forgetting, loss, violence, contradiction, conflict, simulation – all can be referred back to a foundation that could, ideally, be re-presented. The being who is able to re-trieve and re-live the sameness or identity from which distinction has emerged has always been man. It follows then that the thought of sexual difference (a difference that cannot be traced back to some unified humanity or single cultural system) might open a space for a new thought of *différance*. Similarly, if there were no stable identity that comprised “the animal,” then all those features of man that had guaranteed presence – the capacity to reason, to touch, to speak, to look, to remember, to archive – would be under threat.

In his writings on Husserl, Hegel, and Kant, Derrida had noted the extent to which these pure or transcendental projects relied on the figure of man – the being who presents himself to himself in order to maintain and survive as the same and identical in a mode of pure auto-affection. Man has always been the being who gives himself his own end, who differs from himself in order to be that passage of difference to self-presence and self-recognition. Writing on Hegel, Derrida referred to this as “phallogocentrism” (GL, 133). Derrida constantly questioned the extent to which

philosophy's figures of democracy, friendship, and universality might break free from all determinations of man, and the extent to which man had been figured as a self-same being without difference:

A virtuous man, a good man, a man sufficient unto himself, in the way God is – would such a man need a friend? Would there be a friend for him? And if a friend were sought out of insufficiency, would the *good* man be the most autarkic, the most self-sufficient, depending only on himself in his initiative and in mastery over himself? (PE, 210–211)

In his work on Husserl and truth, Derrida also ties the problem of man and difference to the questions of truth and meaning. On the one hand, the very idea of truth cannot be contained within any specific context, and certainly cannot be reduced to a specific appearance of man as a being within the world; truth is that which – in its very meaning – would remain the same across different and distanced contexts, cultures, and epochs *for any subject whatever*. Truth is that which remains the same or survives, across distance and difference. And yet, this idea of truth, Derrida argues, must presuppose some idea of humanity, an underlying ground or sameness. Man is not some being within the world with a delimited history but has figured himself as the subject of truth, who differs from himself in order to recognize himself, and who has no end other than the end of essence he gives to himself. Man is the figure of sameness or self-maintenance through difference, for which various epochs and contexts can be read and recognized as stages in a time of continual self-constitution. Against this history of continuity and unfolding revelation of sameness, Derrida suggests “a completely other history: a history of paradoxical laws and non-dialectical discontinuities, a history of absolutely heterogeneous pockets, irreducible particularities, of unheard of and incalculable sexual differences” (PTS, 93).

Différance, then, is always to some extent sexual difference: *différance* does not refer to a distinction or difference between beings, but gestures to the untamed, anarchic process that produces the ongoing sameness through time that allows for the emergence of distinction as such. To think the other of this underlying sameness that synthesizes difference, would be – for Derrida, writing through Nietzsche – to think the non-self-same of woman:

There is no such thing as the essence of woman, because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depthless depths to its ruin. There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of that abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is “truth.” Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth. (SPR, 51)

Just as Derrida's deployment of *différance* charts a way between and beyond the difference between men and women, arguing neither for sex as a difference between otherwise equal humans nor as an essential difference between distinct beings, so *différance* also shatters human exceptionalism *and* any unified theory of the sacredness of "life" in general. If we were to make a claim for human exceptionalism, then we would need to appeal to some sameness that guarantees a proper mode of man, and this can be achieved only by assuming a difference between man and his others. This difference, like sexual difference or any difference between terms, relies on *différance*, or an ongoing, contaminated, impossible, and unmanageable border. That is, the features that have marked out man from his others, such as the capacity to speak, write, or touch, are not man's own and are not proper to man. Not only does man's speech and even the hand that allows him to touch and gesture take part in a system of differences and traces that can never be contained within the human, it is also the case that man's relation to "the animal" bears a rogue power to destroy the mastery man possesses of his own self-conception. One example, very close to the home of phenomenology, is the hand, which needs to be distinguished from a simple material thing or object, precisely because the hand enables the human self to touch a world that can then be synthesized as spatially and temporally present. Derrida's work on human-animal difference neither collapses the distinction back into some general sacredness or ecology of life, nor does he leave the distinction untouched. Instead, he problematizes the relation between same and different. Here, again, we see that something like *différance* precludes the easy distinction between two beings; the human is an effect of processes that cannot be contained within the human, just as "the animal" is a seeming identity that is contaminated by all the potentialities that would safeguard the sanctity of the human, or man as ground of the same. Man becomes the self-identical being that he is only by way of systems such as writing, speaking, or touching that allow him to affect himself, feel himself, and return to himself. The animal must therefore be external to this self-affecting self-relation, and be denied such a process. And yet, man's constitution of himself as the same through time, always took a detour by touching on the difference of animals, always failed to touch upon the animal's own difference, and always denied touch to the animal. The hand that writes, gestures, touches, and caresses enables man to think of himself not as a simple object within the world, but a being *for whom there is a world*. Derrida therefore talks about the constitution of the border of man as a mode of "humanualism" [*humainisme*] (TJLN, 185). Such a differentiation of the human from the animal operates by denying powers of touch and gesture, or even grasping and working, to animals:

And concerning life, where the sense of touch is in question . . . , it is practically man only that comes into question, and especially the fingers of the human hand. The "animal" never seriously comes up, though it is a living being – not even the body proper of animals whose members or organs resemble hands, and even with fingers!

And what about opportunities for so many handless animals to touch and be touched in countless ways! (TJLN, 168)

If difference has been constituted as a difference between identities, then this is because it has been assumed that differences are grounded on the same. But such a preceding sameness, that would always remain potentially present, proximate, or capable of being touched, must therefore be capable of being placed at a safe but always surmountable difference. The privilege of the same is a privilege of the proximity, and there can only be proximity, retrieval, recall, representation, and restoration if there has already been the rupture of difference. The closeness of touch always presupposes the distance of difference.

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4

The Obscurity of “Différance”

GARY GUTTING

Critics most frequently reproach Derrida for the deep obscurity of his writing: they simply cannot make sense of what he is saying. Of course, the inability of some readers to understand a text may be their own fault. They may lack essential background knowledge presupposed by the text, have failed to consult a dictionary to learn the standard meanings of key terms, or simply lack the patience to work through the complexities inevitable in discussing a difficult topic. Even when a writer is at fault, the defect may be overcome by a reasonable amount of readerly engagement: providing logically required connections and presuppositions that the writer has omitted, untangling unnecessarily gnarled syntax, providing examples that clarify overly abstract presentations. We should all be willing to meet half-way authors whom we think have something important to say.

Some critics think Derrida is culpable for the obscurity of his texts, even to the point of rejecting them as worthy objects of philosophical attention. But we seldom if ever find careful and detailed defenses of such conclusions, just striking phrases such as Foucault’s “obscurantisme terroriste” (reported by John Searle) or aghast citations of a few brief quotations that are apparently regarded as decisive cases of *res ipsa loquitur*.

Here I want to undertake a much more serious reflection on the question of Derrida’s obscurity, based on a close reading of one of his most important texts, the 1967 essay, “La différence.” My procedure will be to tease out what Derrida is saying, often paragraph by paragraph or even sentence by sentence, posing as I go along questions about how to read particular passages, with a view to seeing in what ways Derrida’s essay falls into obscurity.

Derrida begins by telling us that he is going to write about the letter *a*, allegedly, he says, the first letter of the alphabet. In particular, he will talk about his introduction of the misspelling *différance* in his discussions of writing. These writings develop along different lines, lines that, at various points, employ this gross misspelling of “difference,” thereby violating the rules that regulate writing. One can always eliminate the misspelling in any particular case (either ad hoc or in accord with some principle) on the grounds that it is inappropriate, or even defend it as amusing. Each case needs to be analyzed in its own right, although they all come down to the same thing. One can pass over the “misspelling” in silence, but even then, this ignoring is something that we can anticipate from the fact of the misspelling. Also, one can always act as if the substitution of *a* for *e* “makes no difference.” Derrida says that he does not intend to justify – not to say apologize for – his misspelling. The misspelling was a playful move, and he intends to intensify this playfulness.

The claims that Derrida makes here about the substitution of *a* for *e* in difference are not unclear in themselves. It is obvious that a misspelling violates a rule of writing and that, although we might urge correcting it for various reasons, they all come down to the fact that it is a mistake. It is also clear that one can always pass over the misspelling in silence. What is unclear is why Derrida is making these points. It is helpful to know that Derrida is not concerned with justifying his introduction of *différance*, but it is not clear just in what sense the introduction is “playful” and why.

Derrida next says he will base his discussion on work he has already published, gathering together in a “sheaf” his various uses of *différance*. He says he speaks of a sheaf for two reasons: to emphasize that his treatment is not an historical, developmental account but rather a systematic one and to note that his uses of *différance* are an interweaving of different threads. But he points out that this project is, strictly speaking, impossible.

Once again, what Derrida says is clear, but why he says it is not. Why does he want to gather his uses of difference into a sheaf? And why does he think this is strictly impossible?

Derrida next notes that he introduced *différance* to express a difference (the silent difference between the *a* and the *e*) that can be conveyed only in writing. It cannot be heard. He goes on to compare the silence of the *a* in *différance* to that of a tomb, particularly a pyramid: the capital A has a pyramidal shape and Hegel called signs tombs (because they are the material repositories of immaterial meanings that we can call “souls”). Further, Sophocles in *Antigone* refers to a tomb as an everlasting, underground *oikēsis*, a virtual synonym for *oikos* (home), which is the root of “economy,” a term Derrida makes much of in discussing Hegel, a term now tied to the tomb and so an “economy of death” (MP, 4). (As the translator notes [MP, 4 n. 2], these references to Hegel recall his famous discussion of the Antigone myth, a family story tied to tombs and death.) Derrida also anticipates inserting *différance* itself into this metaphorical mix: the A is the tomb of “the proper” (connoting proper

[literal] meaning, property, and propriety, all kinds of tyrants [kings] rightly buried in pyramids), in which *différance* somehow produces the economy of death.

Much of this is strange, but its meaning is not especially unclear. Derrida is playfully constructing a series of free associations that connect the letter *a* to a tomb, the Greek work for tomb to the Greek word for home, and hence to economics, which suggests Hegel's system and then the myth of Antigone. As before, we are mainly puzzled about why Derrida wants to make these connections. It is, however, unclear what Derrida means when he says that *différance* produces the economy of death. It is not clear what "economy of death" means, and it's not clear what it could mean for *différance* to produce such an economy.

Derrida deftly slips from the tomb metaphor back to the theme of the silence of the *a* in *différance*: "it is a tomb that cannot even be made to resonate" (MP, 4). This silence itself is then used as a transition to Derrida's emphasis on writing (the graphic). The *a* is silent only because our system of writing, not to say our entire culture, is phonetic (tied to expressing sounds). If our letters did not express sounds, there would be no sense saying that a few exceptional letters are silent. But the existence of silent letters, Derrida says, also reminds us that "there is no phonetic writing"; more carefully, "there is no purely and rigorously phonetic writing" (MP, 5). "Reminds us," rather than "shows" because, although there could be a phonetic language without silent letters, "so-called phonetic writing, by all rights and in principle . . . can function only by admitting into its system nonphonetic 'signs' (punctuation, spacing, etc.," (MP, 5). Saussure gives us the reason: linguistic meaning depends on differences between signs, and, even in phonetic language, these differences are not themselves expressed phonetically. There is not, for example, a sound in our alphabet that expresses the difference between the sound of an *m* and the sound of an *n*; "the difference which establishes phonemes and lets them be heard remains in and of itself inaudible, in every sense of the word" (MP, 5).

Here Derrida has a clear and cogent point about the dependence of phonetic meaning on differences that cannot be expressed phonetically. By similar reasoning, it follows that graphic (written) differences are likewise not visible: there is no letter shape that expresses the difference in shape between *m* and *n*. From this Derrida concludes that *différance* resists the distinction between writing and speech because it is "located . . . between speech and writing" (MP, 5).

At this point, it becomes clear that *différance* is not just an orthographical trick or joke. Derrida is now using it as a term that refers to linguistic differences that cannot be expressed in either speech or writing, so that it itself can be said to be somehow "beyond" both speech and writing. Further, since speech (an object of our sense of hearing) and writing (an object of our sense of seeing) are the only two sensory forms of language, it follows that *différance* refers "to an order which no longer belongs to sensibility" (MP, 5).

The reader finally, then, has some sense of Derrida's point in introducing *différance* as a term of art, with its "misspelling" an orthographical metaphor for the

phenomenon it is designed to express. But the reader may well feel that there was little point to Derrida's earlier mystification of this fairly straightforward motive behind his introduction of *différance*. This feeling of the introduction of the term having little point, however, may depend on whether one has a taste for the esoteric and involuted whimsy that characterizes Derrida's opening pages.

In any case, Derrida now pushes forward with his philosophical deployment of *différance*, claiming that it is not only beyond the order of sensibility but also beyond the order of intelligibility. It is, he says, no accident that we speak of intelligibility in terms that are tied to sensibility; for example, "theory" has its root in the Greek word for "seeing," and "understanding" (*entendement*) in French derives from *entendre*, which means "to hear." Given that intelligibility is rooted in sensibility, it follows that the differences expressed by *différance* are somehow beyond both sensibility and intelligibility. Here, however, Derrida seems to be substituting an etymological connection for the argument he needs to show that intelligibility is based in sensibility, thereby giving *différance* a philosophical significance he has not established.

Derrida next connects *différance* to what he sees as the core of traditional metaphysical thought, presence. He cannot, he tells us, "expose" *différance* because "one can expose only that which at a certain moment can become *present*, manifest" (MP, 5). At the very least, this claim means that *différance* cannot be the object of an intellectual intuition, given to us in the fullness of truth, as "a being-present [*étant-présent*] in its truth" (MP, 6). Derrida does not hide the Heideggerian overtones of his talk of *différance*, employing Heidegger's device of crossing out terms that evoke traditional ontology: "if *différance* is [crossed out] (and I also cross out the [crossed-out] 'is') what makes possible the presentation of the being-present, it is never presented as such" (MP, 6). Suddenly, what seemed to be a playful device in a punning discourse becomes a key term in an effort to think beyond ontology, to speak (or write) that which "exceeds the order of truth at a certain precise point, but without dissimulating itself as something, as a mysterious being." (And, the translator notes, there is a glancing allusion, for those who have ears to hear, to Lacan's "topology of castration" [MP, 5].)

This passage will be obscure to those who are unfamiliar with Heidegger on ontology (or Lacan on castration), but there is nothing especially problematic in Derrida's tying *différance*, which he has been using to refer to cases in which sharp distinctions (between speech and language, sensibility and intelligibility) fail, to Heidegger's rejection of the presence-absence distinction that underlies metaphysical thought. Where obscurity lies is, rather, in the flirting with self-contradiction that follows from the effort to reject distinctions that seem essential to coherent thought. Derrida is blunt in letting us know that there will be no exposition, no explanation in familiar terms, of *différance*. All he is prepared to offer us is a vocabulary that walks the edge of contradiction or meaninglessness, precisely because it concerns what lies beyond consistency and meaning, beyond presence.

Derrida notes the similarity of his talk of *différance* to the language of negative theology: his "detours, locutions, and syntax . . . will resemble those of negative

theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology” (MP, 6). For example: “*différance* is not, does not exist, is not a present-being (*on*) in any form; . . . it has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent” (MP, 6). But negative theologies deny everything of God only to reassert him as having a hyper-reality beyond being and its categories: they “are always concerned with disengaging a superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence.” “God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being” (MP, 6). As we would expect, Derrida makes the contrasting claim about *différance*, which “is . . . irreducible to any ontological or theological – ontotheological – reappropriation.” But he goes on to add that “as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology – philosophy – produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return” (MP, 6, italics added).

In distinguishing the language of *différance* from negative theology, Derrida does avoid the apparent contradiction of trying to make affirmations about what has been said to be beyond all affirmation. But that still leaves us with the question of how he can claim to say anything about what he says does not allow of any affirmative assertion at all. And there is the further question of how we can make sense of *différance* as playing what seems to be the ontological role of “opening the space” in which ontotheology exists, a role that involves *différance* both “inscribing” and “exceeding” the project of ontotheology. Here we encounter the fundamental obscurity of courting self-contradiction by trying to say what, by one’s own account, cannot be said.

Although Derrida does not face up to this problem, he does acknowledge that we cannot expect a discussion of *différance* to proceed “simply as a philosophical discourse,” starting from a fixed beginning (*arché*), “operating according to principles, postulates, axioms or definitions, and proceeding along the discursive lines of a linear order of reasons” (MP, 7). Philosophy, in this sense, is ontotheology, presupposing a “transcendent truth present outside the field of writing” that “can govern theologically the totality of the field” (MP, 7). Talk of *différance* is meant precisely to avoid this sort of “foundationalist” enterprise. Use of this language must be “strategic and adventurous.” It is strategic in the sense that it cannot be oriented by any fundamental presence or truth outside the field of its own writing; every move is determined entirely in terms of the game we have determined to play (or, perhaps better, find ourselves playing). Nor is the strategy itself directed, even just in terms of the game being played, to “a final goal, a *telos* or theme of domination.” Rather, the strategy is itself adventurous, “a strategy without finality, what might be called blind tactics” (MP, 7).

We are able to clarify this idea by using an obvious example from playing chess. It is not just that we are playing chess simply to win according to its rules (with no concern for external values such fame or money); we are also not even necessarily

playing for the purpose specified by the rules of the game itself (to checkmate our opponent). We are playing chess for our own purposes (which perhaps vary over time). This play does not follow the linear path of "philosophical-logical discourse" or even the "symmetrical and integral inverse" path of "empirico-logical" discourse. It operates beyond this opposition, "announcing . . . the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end" (MP, 7).

The very fact that the introduction of *différance* is strategic in the above sense implies that it may well one day be superseded: the play of chance and necessity may lead to a new strategy, which has no place for it (or only a subordinate one). Nonetheless, Derrida maintains that, for the present, *différance* is the best means to "think, if not to master . . . what is most irreducible about our 'era'" (MP, 7). This claim, however, cannot be justified (in the standard philosophical way) because it will be only through *différance* and its "history" that we will be able to develop the appropriate sense of who "we" are and how our "era" should be defined.

The suspicious reader will still have to agree that Derrida has been quite clear about what he wants his language of *différance* to do: he wants it to provide a way of talking about what is beyond the domain of sharp conceptual distinctions, the logical dichotomies enforced by the law of non-contradiction. But such a reader will still insist that Derrida has not explained how the language of *différance* – or any other language – could do this.

As if to respond to such worries, Derrida offers to "attempt a simple and approximate semantic analysis" of *différance*, approximate because, as he has emphasized, *différance* is not, strictly, either a word or a concept (since it is meant to be somehow prior to words and concepts). He begins from the duality of the French verb *différer*, which, like its Latin root, *differ* but unlike its English counterpart, means both "differ" and "defer." The "defer," Derrida says, can be understood in terms of "temporization": "to take recourse . . . in the temporal and temporizing mediation of a detour that suspends the accomplishment or fulfillment of 'desire' or 'will'" (MP, 8). He says we will see later how temporizing "constitutes" both time and space. The French noun *différence* can express neither deferral (temporization) nor even the (polemical) "difference" of "difference of opinion," whereas *différance* (economically) conveys the full range of the meanings of the verb *différer*. The neologism *différance* also has the advantage of suggesting the active character of the verb that inspired it, since the *-ance* is used in forming the present participle (verbal adjective) (*différant*). Because of this active sense, *différance* might be taken to "designate a constitutive, productive, and originary causality" (MP, 9). But the *-ance* softens this connotation, since in French parallel terms such as "mouvance" have a sense between the active and the passive, like the middle voice in Greek. *Différance*, therefore, corresponds to an "operation that cannot be conceived as either passion or as the action of a subject on an object" (MP, 9). Perhaps, Derrida says, (traditional) philosophy constituted itself by "repressing" this "middle voice" or "nontransitivity" in favor of the sharp distinction between active and passive (MP, 9). We can imagine how this would lead to the

distinctions of presence-absence, true-false, and so on, which characterize the philosophical enterprise.

Derrida next asks how the two different senses of *différance* can be connected, and seeks an answer “from the problematic of the sign and of writing” (MP, 9). When a thing is present to us, we are said to have direct access to it. The sign is “put in the place of the thing itself” and so “represents the present [thing] in its absence.” The sign, therefore, gives us access to the thing even when it is not present. “The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence” (MP, 9). This account of the sign, Derrida says, “is the classically determined structure of the sign in all the banality of its characteristics” – the standard view of signs and their referents. He does not express disagreement with this general picture, but does question the classical assumption that “the substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both *secondary* and *provisional*” (MP, 9). “Secondary” because the assumption is that the sign derives from “an original and lost presence,” and “provisional” because it is assumed that the sign is meant to lead us, by “a movement of mediation,” back to “this final and missing presence” (MP, 9).

In the example of the sign, we can now see how differing and deferring are connected. A sign differs from that which it signifies, so that when we are dealing with a sign the thing signified is deferred (not present). On the standard view, however, we can overcome both the difference and the deferral by gaining access to the signified in its own right, without the mediation of the sign. If this view that we are able to gain access to the signified in its own right is correct, then there is no need for *différance* as an essential aspect of thinking, since, ultimately, the difference and deferral it expresses can be overcome in a direct experience of the presence of the signified. On the other hand, questioning the secondary and provisional nature of signs, as Derrida does, will lead us to “see something like an originary *différance*,” although not originary in the traditional sense, which sees origins (and related notions such as *arché*, *telos*, *eskhaton*) as presences.

Here, I think, even the unsympathetic critic will have to admit that Derrida is making a reasonably clear and even plausible point. Like many philosophers from Kant on, he is rejecting the idea of foundational experiences that gives us the world just as it is in itself, free of any interpretation through concepts and/or language. But what the critic will very likely still find confusing, even obscurantist, is Derrida’s apparent suggestion that *différance* is some sort of hyper- (or infra-) ontological force that disrupts what would otherwise be a perfect fit between signs (representations) and their objects. *Différance*, as Derrida portrays it, seems to be that which undermines presence by introducing the contrary characteristics of negativity, incompleteness, complexity, dependence, and derivation, thereby compromising the “integrity” of metaphysical and epistemological presence. But here Derrida seems to be making more metaphysics out of his anti-metaphysics. Just as traditional metaphysicians posited a positive principle (the Forms, God, the thing-in-itself) as the source of the order of the universe, Derrida seems to be positing a negative principle, *différance*, as the source of the disorder of the universe. Derrida further assumes that there can be

meaningful language – the language of *différance* – expressing this disorder. But the very possibility of meaningful language requires the conceptual distinctions that *différance* is supposed to undermine. How then are we to make any sense of Derrida's talk of *différance*?

A possible line of response lies in Derrida's use of Saussure's linguistic theory to develop the need for talk of *différance*. For Saussure, the significance of signs derives solely from their *differences* from one another. The intrinsic characteristics can be of any sort whatsoever, just as long as we have them vary in the appropriate way. So, for example, English sentences can be expressed in the ordinary written alphabet, by uttering the standard phonemes, in Morse code, via hand signs, by a system of pressures (as Helen Keller did), and so on. (Similarly, chess can be played with pieces of any shape or even with blinks of the eye.) Signs are, accordingly, differential (in their distinction from one another) and arbitrary (in their intrinsic features). Moreover, the "principle of difference" applies to the sign as both signifier and as signified; that is, as physical token (images, sounds, etc.) and as ideal concept. (Saussure himself defined the sign as the set containing the signifier and the signified, so that strictly neither alone is a sign.) Derrida is particularly interested in the consequences for concepts (signifieds). Saussure's account eliminates the need to refer to any intrinsic meaning of a concept: "every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences" (MP, 11). (Here, of course, we have a rejection of common-sense representationalism, which sees the meaning of linguistic signs, for example, based on their reference to intrinsically meaningful concepts.) Saussure's differences are the sources of concepts and words, the "possibility of conceptuality" and of language, and therefore, like Derrida's *différance*, themselves neither concepts nor words. This differential source allows us to "explicate" the relation of the one to the other.

The explication, Derrida says, is apparent once we recognize that, although semiological differences function as a source of random "play" within the system of signs (imposing arbitrary distinctions between them), they themselves are effects; "they have not fallen from the sky fully formed" (MP, 11). This claim suggests that we think of *différance* as "the playing movement that 'produces' – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences" (MP, 11). But here we may well think Derrida is once more turning toward the path of obscurity. Why must we insist that there must be some principle (*différance*) that "produces" semiological differences? Derrida hastens to insist that he does not mean that *différance* is a metaphysical cause, a subject or a substance, existing fully present and self-contained prior to the effects it produces. It is, rather, "the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences" – although, of course, this means that "the name 'origin' no longer suits it" (MP, 11) and that the differences are not effects in the standard sense of the term. Nonetheless, Derrida says he will speak of *différance* as "the movement according to which language . . . or any system of referral in general, is constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences" (MP, 12) and allow himself to say that

différance “produces” or even “creates” differences. But he notes that he utilizes concepts such as *constitution*, *production*, *creation*, and even *history* “only for their strategic convenience and in order to undertake their deconstruction at the currently most decisive point” (MP, 12). In any case, we must keep in mind that standard oppositions such as static/genetic and structural/historical “have not the least pertinence to *différance*,” which is precisely what “makes the thinking of it uneasy and uncomfortable” (MP, 12).

But are the scare quotes that surround the key terms of Derrida’s discussion here – “produces,” “creates,” “historically” – anything more than the last refuge of the obscurantist? Do they represent anything more than a vain effort to deny that Derrida is talking metaphysics when that is just what he is doing? The same questions arise when Derrida deploys *différance* to attack the notion of presence that is, in his view, the final fortress of traditional metaphysics. He tells us: “It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself” (MP, 13). This claim means that what is present nonetheless is what it is (a signifier or a signified) only in virtue of its relation to what is not present; that is, related to elements from the past and from the future to which it must be related for the system of differences that determines its signification to be operative. In other words, the present is what it is only in virtue of its relation to what it is not. According to Derrida, this relation disrupts the very presence that it determines: “An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself” (MP, 13).

We understand from what Derrida has already said that there must be an “interval” separating the present from the past and future that it is not and that this interval is necessary for the present to be what it is (because it can be this only in relation to that from which it differs). But why does this interval (which he says we can call “spacing”) also “divide the present in and of itself”? Presumably the point is that the interval, the spacing, separating the present from the past and the future, is itself an essential aspect of the reality of the present, even though it is not, strictly, present. Along these lines, Derrida says that the interval constitutes itself by “dividing itself dynamically” and that this self-constitution of the interval “is [the] constitution of the present,” specifically, a constitution of it as an “irreducibly nonsimple . . . synthesis of marks or traces of retentions and protentions” (MP, 13). Here, however, Derrida’s key terms – “constitution,” “self-constitution,” “synthesis of protentions and retentions” – are borrowed from Husserl, the paradigmatic philosopher of presence. Derrida gives us no suggestion of how he can consistently appropriate such terms into the language of *différance*.

Derrida does not respond to this sort of criticism but moves in another direction, arguing against the idea that presence constitutes *différance* rather than vice versa. He asks, “What differs? Who differs? What is *différance*?” and notes that, if we take

such questions at their apparent face-value, "we would immediately fall back into what we have just disengaged ourselves from"; namely, the idea that *différance* originates from the standpoint of a "present being," "some thing, a form, a state," perhaps even a "subject." In the last case, in particular, this being would be the origin of *différance*, which would appear through its actions (out of "a 'need' or a 'desire,' or by differing from itself" [MP, 14–15]). If this subject existed, then presence would itself "constitute" *différance*, not the opposite. To eliminate this possibility, Derrida turns once again to Saussure, who reminds us that "language [which consists only of differences] is not a function of the speaking subject" (MP, 15, citing Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 37, Derrida's brackets). This claim that language consists only in differences implies, he says, "that the subject (in its consciousness of its identity with itself, its self-consciousness) . . . becomes a *speaking* subject only by making its speech conform . . . to the system of the rules of language as a system of difference" (MP, 15). This way of thinking is contrary to the hypothesis that "the opposition of speech to language is absolutely rigorous" (MP, 15), where the "rigorous opposition" of speech to language implies a priority of speech. Given this priority, an utterance derives its fundamental meaning from the speaker, with language as a differential system being merely a means to express this fundamental meaning. Viewing language as simply a play of differences "excludes the essential dissociation of speech and language" and thereby undermines any foundational role for "a determined and invariable" present substance or subject.

There is, however, Derrida points out, a tempting objection. Granted that a subject is able to speak or signify only "in its commerce with the system of linguistic differences," this claim seems to mean only that the subject "could not be present to itself, as speaking or signifying" without the differential system of language (and hence *différance*). Nonetheless, could there not be, prior to speech, or indeed any relation to signs, "a presence to itself of the subject in a silent and intuitive consciousness" (MP, 16). In other words, why couldn't there be a pre-linguistic self-consciousness? Derrida points out that to posit such a consciousness is to suppose that "consciousness, before distributing its signs in space and in the world, can gather itself into its presence." But then, he asks, "What does consciousness mean?" Typically, the idea is that "consciousness offers itself to thought only as self-presence, as the perception of self in presence" (MP, 16). Just as the (metaphysical) subject in general is thought to require a reference to an underlying substance (*hupokeimenon*, *ousia*), "so the subject as consciousness has never manifested itself except as self-presence" (MP, 16). Accordingly, to posit a pre-linguistic consciousness is to posit consciousness as *pure presence*: "The privilege granted to consciousness therefore signifies the privilege granted to the present." According to Derrida, "this privilege is the ether of metaphysics" (MP, 16), that aspect of our thought that catches it up in the language of metaphysics. The only way to challenge the metaphysical limits of our thought (to, as Derrida puts it, "delimit such a closure") is by "soliciting [to approach or request, but also, etymologically, to shake up] the value of presence that Heidegger has shown to be the

ontotheological determination of Being” (MP, 16). In other words, to question the suggestion that consciousness is pre-linguistic, we need to undertake something like Heidegger’s effort to show that presence is not the “absolutely central form of Being but . . . a ‘determination’ and . . . an ‘effect’” (MP, 16). Or, to use Derrida’s own terminology, to show that presence is “a determination or an effect within a system which is no longer that of presence but of *différance*, a system that no longer tolerates the opposition of activity and passivity, nor that of cause and effect, or of indetermination and determination, etc.” (MP, 16). He further notes that, in speaking of “consciousness as an effect or a determination,” he is (as we saw earlier) operating, “for strategic reasons that can be more or less lucidly deliberated and systematically calculated,” employing the language (“lexicon”) he is interested in “delimiting” (MP, 17).

As before, Derrida’s case is reasonably clear and even plausible as a critique of a metaphysical foundationalism that gives an absolute privilege to immediate subjective experience and does not recognize that subjectivity itself depends on linguistic capacity. Analytic philosophers such as Sellars, McDowell, and Brandom have made similar cases, and we can readily imagine calibrating Derrida’s line of thought along their lines. (In this regard, Richard Rorty has suggested some promising parallels.) But, again as before, Derrida eschews any such approach and insists on making his case by developing a “language of *différance*” that falls into incoherence in trying to make *différance* an anti-metaphysical metaphysical principle. The remainder of his essay, which derives talk of *différance* from reflections on Heideggerian themes, is strongly marked by the obscurity of this incoherence.

I will pass over Derrida’s transitional discussion of Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, and Levinas (MP, 17–21) and turn directly to his reflections on the relation of *différance* to Heidegger’s thought, focusing, moreover, on Derrida’s central reading of Heidegger’s essay on the Anaximander Fragment (the one remaining fragment we have from the pre-Socratic philosopher’s writings). Derrida begins from Heidegger’s claim that the metaphysical tradition of Western thought has “forgotten Being” by forgetting the essential distinction between Being and beings (the things that are). “Heidegger recalls that the forgetting of Being forgets the difference between Being and beings.” As a result, for Heidegger, “the difference between Being and beings . . . has disappeared without leaving a trace” (MP, 23). Now, Derrida tells us, “*différance* (is) (itself) other than absence and presence.” As neither absent nor present, it must be understood as a trace; or, noting its status beyond action and passion, we can say (in what is effectively a middle voice), “it traces” (MP, 23).

We must, therefore, understand *différance* through the notion of the trace. A trace is, of course, not a presence. “It properly has no site” because it “dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself.” Derrida expresses this self-displacement by saying that “erasure belongs to its [the trace’s] structure” (MP, 24). The point, then, is not just that the trace is always subject to erasure but also that “erasure . . . constitutes it from the outset of the trace.” The problem here is that the idea of a trace has been

radicalized to the point of unintelligibility. We ordinarily understand a trace as a small remnant of something that had been more fully present. A trace, therefore, is a presence, just less of one than there was previously. *Différance*, however, is said to be not a presence of any sort, nor is it the trace of anything that has been more fully present. In what sense, then, could it possibly be a trace?

Derrida develops his account in specifically Heideggerian terms, saying that "the erasure of the early trace (*die frühe Spur*) of difference is . . . the 'same' as its tracing in the text of metaphysics" (MP, 24). In the language of metaphysics, such a structure is highly paradoxical, since we are required to say (speaking the language of presence) that "the present [is] the sign of the sign, the trace of the trace." Derrida does not explain how this follows, but presumably the idea is that the present itself derives from *différance* and so is the "residue" or trace of *différance*, therefore itself not a presence but a trace (though Derrida also says the present is "a trace of the erasure of the trace," which would make *différance* the erasure of a trace). In any case, such statements make no sense in terms of any ordinary understanding of "present" and can be understood only as a way of rejecting the entire framework in which we think of things as present or absent. We might think that Derrida is endorsing some sort of process metaphysics, for which there is no being but only a becoming, with nothing that itself becomes. This way of thinking has its own problems about intelligibility, but Derrida does not suggest that this is what he means and would presumably reject it, as Heidegger does, as just another version of metaphysics. Derrida maintains that it is via the trace, so understood, that "the text of metaphysics is *comprehended*." Presumably, this means that we cannot take the claims of metaphysicians, who speak of being and presence, at face value, but must read them in terms of *différance* as trace. Doing this, Derrida says, means that we read metaphysics through its limit; but this limit does not surround what it limits (is not at its margins) but traverses it, putting its "limit" at its very center. But how can something be both at the center and at the limit of metaphysics? There is nothing wrong with paradoxical (apparently contradictory) language to formulate difficult truths. But there is an obligation to show how the language is, in fact, not contradictory. Here Derrida's obscurity consists in his failure to show this non-self-contradictory status of his own discourse. The problem is only intensified by Derrida's further characterizations of the trace as "simultaneously traced and erased" and therefore both living and dead. Nor does he help matters by drawing a cryptic comparison between a trace, which is "living its simulation of life's preserved inscription" and the text of metaphysics, which is a "pyramid," not a boundary (*une borne*) one could jump over but like an inscription carved into a stone wall, needing to be deciphered, "a text without a voice" (MP, 24). Quite simply, Derrida's text gives us no way of making coherent sense of these claims. Derrida does betray some sense of contradiction as a problem for his account of *différance* as trace. He says that "one can think [trace] without contradiction or, at least, without granting any pertinence to such contradiction. The way to do this is to think of the trace as both "perceptible and imperceptible"

(MP, 24). It is imperceptible in the sense that “the ‘early trace’ of difference is lost in an invisibility without return.” But it is nonetheless perceptible because “its very loss is sheltered, retained, seen, delayed. In a text. In the form presence” (MP, 24). In this way we have a “contradiction without contradiction.” The only charitable way to read this passage is as maintaining that the apparent contradiction in Heidegger and Derrida’s formulation is due to two different meanings of “perceptible.” The trace is not perceptible because it is “lost in an invisibility without return,” but perceptible because “its very loss is sheltered, retained, seen, delayed.” But there is no resolution of the apparent contradiction in this distinction. The trace is said to be lost, invisible, and without return; but at the same time retained, seen, and delayed. What is lost is not retained, what is invisible is not seen, and what is without return is not (merely) delayed. So the contradiction is not resolved and we are left with the meta-level contradiction of Derrida’s claim to have presented a “contradiction without contradiction.”

Finally, Derrida uses Heidegger’s discussion to suggest that trace and *différance* “refer us beyond the history of Being” (MP, 25). (I pass over his transition to this suggestion through reflections on Heidegger’s proposal of *Brauch* (customary usage) to translate Anaximander’s *to kheron*.) If trace and *différance* refer us beyond the history of Being, do they not, Derrida asks, also refer us “beyond our language and everything that can be named in it?” And do they not therefore “call for a necessarily violent transformation of [the language of Being] by an entirely other language?” (MP, 25) Such a language – the language of trace and *différance* – would, of course, be “other than the text of Western metaphysics”: because it “vanishes quickly,” the trace “escapes every determination, every name it might receive in the metaphysical text.” (But it is also true that “it is sheltered and therefore dissimulated, in these names” [MP, 25].) If the trace “does not appear in [these names] as the trace ‘itself’ . . . this is because it could never appear itself, *as such*” (MP, 25). Similarly, “there is no essence of *différance*: it (is) that which not only could never be appropriated in the *as such* of its name or its appearing, but also that which threatens the authority of the *as such* in general, of the presence of the thing itself in its essence” (MP, 25–26). So, it seems, the way to conceive *différance* is to conceive it as that which cannot “appear itself, as such” and that which has no essence. From this it follows that “there is neither a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it engages *différance*” (MP, 26). That *différance* cannot appear as such reinforces Derrida’s initial claim that *différance* “refers us beyond the history of Being.” Nonetheless, Derrida goes on to say that “for us, *différance* remains a metaphysical name,” apparently because names are “as names, metaphysical” (MP, 26). In particular, this is so when “these names state the determination of *différance* as the difference between present and absence” and, especially, “as the difference of Beings and being” (MP, 26). It follows that, precisely as “‘older’ than Being . . . *différance* has no name in our language”; it is “unnameable,” and not because our language does not yet have a name for it or even because we need another language (“outside the finite system of our own”) to name it.

Différance is unnameable "because there is no name for it at all, . . . not even that of 'différance,' which is not a name" (MP, 26). The reason "*différance*" is not a name is that it lacks "nominal unity"; it "unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions" (MP, 26). By saying that "*différance*" is not a name, Derrida insists that he does not mean that it is an "ineffable Being which no name could approach." The unnameability of *différance* arises simply because "it is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relative unitary and atomic structures that are called names" (MP, 26). So, for example, even "the nominal effect, 'différance,'" is itself "enmeshed" in "chains of substitution" that are made possible by "the play of this unnameable" (MP, 26–27). It seems, then, that when we try to name this unnameable with the name "*différance*," we fail to do so, because precisely as a name "*différance*" is possible only because of the play of the unnameable we are trying to name. Here we again encounter the obscurity of logical incoherence. Derrida wants to say that *différance* is unnameable. However, because for us saying anything about something requires naming it, we will inevitably have to say that "*différance*" is the name of the unnameable, which implies that what can have no name has a name.

According to Derrida the conclusion of this entire discourse (it would be knowledge, "if it were simply a question here of something to know") "is that there has never been, never will be, a unique word, a master-name" (MP, 27). What we need to think, rather, is that "there will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being." And "we must think this without nostalgia" – affirm it, with a Nietzschean laugh and dance (MP, 27). This, he says, will mean giving up "Heideggerian *hope*," which centers on the "quest for the proper word and the unique name." But "inscribed in the simulated affirmation of *différance*" is the question of whether there can be an "alliance of speech and Being in the unique word." However, to attempt to speak the language of *différance* is not, as Derrida suggests here, merely to deny that there is a "master-name" that could, for example, be the unique name of Being. It is also to undertake a project that, for all Derrida has to say about it, remains irreducibly self-contradictory. It is to claim to speak a language that cannot be a language. The ultimate obscurity of Derrida's text is to continually trade on this and similar contradictions without ever indicating how they can be resolved.

Conclusion: The Obscurity of Différance

What, then, have we learned from our effort at a close reading of "Différance"?¹ We can say that Derrida's essay has a rather arch beginning, putting forward substantive claims without justification and discussing topics with no explanation of their relevance. He also sometimes replaces argument with puns and other forms of linguistic play, and he often assumes the reader's acquaintance with Lacan, Heidegger, and other difficult thinkers. All of this is disorienting, especially for readers not already well acquainted with Derrida's work, but the persistent reader can eventually get a

good sense of what his topic and approach is: a rejection of traditional metaphysics, particularly its notion of presence, though a development of a notion that he calls “*différance*.”

A deeper problem of obscurity arises because, although Derrida makes it clear what he wants his leitmotiv, *différance*, to do – undermine the basic assumptions of traditional metaphysics – he is not clear about how he proposes to do this. It is, in particular, unclear, from very early on, how there could be a language of *différance*, when the whole point of the term seems to be to undermine the sort of stability required for any linguistic expression. Derrida’s “semantic analysis” of *différance* is, on the other hand, quite lucid and suggests an interesting argument from the essentially differential nature of linguistic meaning to the untenability of metaphysical claims about the fundamental role of presence and subjectivity. Admittedly, this line of argument is merely sketched in the present essay. But Derrida has elsewhere (e.g., in *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*) offered a more detailed case. Unfortunately, Derrida’s focus in “*Différance*” and in much of his other major works is less on arguing in an accessible way against the metaphysics of presence and more on developing a radically new vocabulary, the language of *différance*, that is supposed to somehow subvert or undermine the traditional philosophical vocabulary that, he maintains, supports presence-centered thinking. The problem, as we have seen repeatedly, is that he is unable to develop this new language in a coherent way. Every formulation is paradoxical, that is, apparently self-contradictory, and Derrida never makes a convincing effort to resolve the contradictions. Supplying this lack has been a major enterprise of sympathetic commentators, who receive minimal help from Derrida’s texts and are, in any case, always suspected of misrepresenting the true originality of his position. There are those who find charm and even profundity in this accumulation of paradoxes with no effort to explain or resolve them. Such writing may be a distinctive genre of literature, producing an aesthetic frisson by repeatedly skimming the edge of contradiction. But it is very hard to see what it contributes to philosophical understanding.

I am not claiming that this sort of obscurity destroys Derrida’s philosophical contribution. There is still much that we can learn from his work. But obscurity does infuse the work, making it unnecessarily difficult to extract the veins of philosophical gold. The above line of criticism may seem to derive from a refusal to take Derrida’s project seriously in its own terms, to insist on analytic criteria of “clarity” that beg the question against what he is doing. I do not agree with this response, since, in my view, the sort of non-contradiction I am insisting on is essential to any genuine communication. Let me nonetheless try to make my point in a way that explicitly derives from Derrida’s project.

Derrida’s essay does not undertake to refute the doctrine of presence: insofar as he tries to do this, the project is carried out in his critique of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* and in various “deconstructions” of classical distinctions in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere. Rather, he is trying to develop a language to replace (or at

least oppose) the traditional philosophical languages built around presence. This language flows from "*différance*," a term designed to escape from and undermine all the allegedly fundamental distinctions of traditional philosophy. But once the language of traditional philosophy has been discredited, why replace (or supplement) it with another language? Why not just turn away from the philosophical use of language and restrict ourselves to the sublunary domains that require no claims of ultimate truth? (Why not, in other words, just go Rortyan?) Here there would seem to be two possible responses: (1) that, although the ultimate truth cannot be expressed in the distinctions of traditional philosophical language, it can be expressed (or at least approached) via the non-dichotomous language of *différance*; (2) that we continually tend to absolutize the dichotomies of our language and need the language of *différance* as a counter to this tendency. We could, that is, see *différance* as either itself the language of ultimate truth or as the language that protects us from the illusion of ultimate truth.

The problem I see for Derrida is that, although his official position of course requires response (2), his actual deployment of the language of *différance* leads him to (1). Nor is this an accident. Although we may have an unfortunate tendency toward the metaphysics of presence and so need continual reminders against it, Derrida's language of *différance* is not suited for this purpose. Neutralizing the tendency requires recognizing precise ways that standard dichotomies go wrong when they are extended too far (e.g., a detailed analysis of the mistake made when, to use an example of Rorty's, we move from distinguishing between a real and a fake Rolex to asking whether even a real Rolex is really real). Evoking *différance* (or trace, etc.) provides no such analysis; it at best provides a generic retrospective label for all the results of such substantive analyses: there's another example of *différance*.

At the same time, the language of *différance* is best suited as a way of talking (or trying to talk) about an ineffable non-conceptual truth that escapes all ordinary language. This way of trying to talk is apparent from the fact that Derrida continually has to steer us away from taking this language as an effort to describe ultimate reality (the constant bracketing and scare quotes and promissory notes deferring the task of deconstructing misleading expressions such as "source," "cause," and "prior"). It is also apparent from the strong similarity of *différance*-talk to traditional negative theology and the ease with which such talk blends with late Heideggerian hopes for an understanding of Being beyond the metaphysics of presence. Derrida obviously wants to dissociate himself from both these enterprises, but his evocation of *différance* is an obstacle, not an aid, to this effort. As such, it undermines his own project.

Note

- 1 It might be pointed out that close reading is not the only way of trying to understand "Différance." Most importantly, there are other writings by Derrida, particularly the

books of 1967, VP, WD, and OG, which provide essential background on “Différance.” There is also a discussion between Derrida and his audience that followed his presentation of “Différance” as a public lecture, and of course the reams of explications produced over decades by commentators trying to explicate this now classic text. But readers turn to such materials precisely because of the obscurity of Derrida’s essay. Moreover, it is not as if Derrida’s other works are on the whole more accessible than “Différance.” The problem of his obscurity just intensifies, as when we turn to the 1967 books, which themselves are highly resistant to close reading. Derrida can be clearer in informal discussions and interviews, but these have nothing like the interpretative authority of his formal publications, and he would be the first to warn us that informal explanations are oversimplified, that, as he so often insists, “it is much more complicated than this.” The size and nature of the Derrida commentary industry is the clearest indication of the obscurity of his work. There are major contemporary philosophers (mostly analytic, such as Rawls and Kripke) who write clearly about highly difficult issues and attract many commentators primarily interested in evaluating or extending their work. But the major selling point of most of the best Derrida commentaries (e.g., Caputo 1987, 1997; Critchley 1992; Lawlor 2002) is that they put the reader in a better position to understand his otherwise bewildering texts.

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Metaphor and Analogy in Derrida

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Derrida's earlier work (up to and including the books published in 1972) has a good deal to say about the question of metaphor. "Metaphor is never innocent," says Derrida in an essay from 1963 (WD, 17). That lack of "innocence" goes a long way, apparently, as metaphor is "everything in language except the verb 'be'" (WD, 7). Very strikingly in view of Derrida's later thematic interest in the question of animality, metaphor is also presented in a piece on Edmond Jabès as an "animality of the letter," as "the primary and infinite equivocality of the signifier as Life" (WD, 88–89). Metaphor as this kind of animal life of language is indeed almost the whole of language, "if there is history only through language and if language (except when it names being itself or nothing: almost never) is elementarily metaphorical" (WD, 114). An indirect way of getting at that being or nothing can apparently be found by thinking metaphor *as* metaphor: "Before being a rhetorical procedure in language, metaphor would be the welling up of language itself. And philosophy is only this language; can only at best and in an unusual sense of this expression, speak it, say metaphor itself, which comes down to thinking it in the silent horizon of non-metaphor: Being" (WD, 140). These early scattered (and quite obscure) reflections seem to call for a more systematic approach, and this is duly provided, especially in the important 1971 essay "White Mythology," along with its subsequent follow-up piece "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" (1978), designed to clarify the earlier essay in light of Paul Ricoeur's (1977) (mis)reading of it. "White Mythology" will provide the matrix for the early part of our discussion here, and can plausibly be seen to be a provisional culmination of Derrida's thinking on this matter. Late Derrida talks less directly about metaphor and more about analogy, and in doing so returns to the

question of being which is not so prominent in “White Mythology” itself, and I will present some of those late reflections in the latter part of this chapter.

1. “White Mythology”

“White Mythology” argues for a certain irreducibility of “metaphor in the text of philosophy” (this phrase is the article’s subtitle). Although this gesture has often been understood as a promotion or celebration of the “literary” aspects of philosophical texts over their “conceptual” aspects, or as what Habermas sternly called a “leveling of the genre distinction” between philosophy and literature (Habermas 1987, 185ff.), it seems clear that that is not quite what Derrida is doing in his essay. There already exists a quite traditional literary, poetic, or rhetorical attempt at a reduction of concept to metaphor: Derrida illustrates it on the basis of a text by Anatole France¹ quoted in the opening part of the essay, according to which concepts are really no more than hidden, effaced, or “dead” metaphors, coins worn smooth by centuries of use. This involves a double process for which Derrida uses the French word *usure*, meaning both (1) wearing or wearing away – the original sensory meaning of philosophical terms has on this view become worn away through repeated *usage* – and (2) a philosophical form of *usury* whereby the value of the original term is increased through the increased spirituality supposedly gained in that wearing away. Despite its manifest interest, and the surprisingly varied collection of authors who have espoused it, this is a view of philosophy that Derrida is explicitly *not* endorsing in his text. “It goes without saying that the question of metaphor as we are repeating it here, far from belonging to this problematic and sharing its presuppositions, ought to the contrary delimit them” (MP, 215): this “delimitation” – both tracing the limits and undoing them – involves among other things identifying in this tradition a “symbolist” and noun-based view of language that is certainly not Derrida’s own. No more is Derrida quite advancing a *theory* of metaphor in this essay, as some analytic philosophers might have been tempted to think, seeing in this text an apparent engagement with an issue recognizable to them.² Rather, as is often the case in Derrida’s writing in the 1960s and 1970s, his point is at least in part to resist the then somewhat triumphalistic claims of the so-called “human sciences,” which were busy claiming to reduce philosophy to a variety of positive – especially linguistic or at least discursive – conditions. This resistance involves something of a defense of (transcendental) philosophy against such attempted reductions: but that defense is always merely provisional, and always leads Derrida to a further questioning of the transcendental as such, in a way (often since Rodolphe Gasché’s important book *The Tain of the Mirror* called “quasi-transcendental”)³ that in fact threatens the traditional claims of philosophy more radically than the “human sciences” ever could. The potentially confusing unity of the two gestures – or rather the double gesture – involved here (a certain defense of philosophy that seems to

leave philosophy in ruins, that just being deconstruction “itself”) is still far from having been fully understood in the current Continental Philosophy scene, which seems largely to have ignored the difficult implications of Derrida’s thinking and to have bifurcated between a continuation of the “human science” reduction route (more especially in the wake of Foucault), and an unabashed attempt to reinstate the most traditional transcendental claims of philosophy as ontology and metaphysics (more especially in the wake of Badiou).

Proposing neither a theory of metaphor, nor promoting a particular *practice* of metaphor, “White Mythology” attempts to show (1) that “metaphor” is a philosophical concept (“metaphor remains, in all its essential features, a classical philosopheme, a metaphysical concept” [MP, 219]), and so cannot be applied to philosophy *from the outside* by rhetoric or poetics to dominate or reduce philosophy as the human sciences might wish; (2) that philosophy itself cannot in principle dominate or master its own metaphors (or “the metaphorical”) *from the inside* by means of that concept; and (3) that this means that philosophy is unable to secure the propriety of *any* concept whatsoever, is unable in other words to establish its “one and only thesis,” namely “the thesis that constitutes the concept of metaphor, the opposition of the proper and the non-proper, of essence and accident, or intuition and discourse, or thought and language, or the intelligible and the sensible, etc.” (MP, 229). Through what can seem to be a bewildering array of references and quotations, including critical accounts of some previous attempts to discuss metaphor in philosophy, most of which I leave aside here, the essay makes its most substantive claims initially via a formal argument (advanced in the section untranslatably entitled “Plus de métaphore”), and then through a close reading of Aristotle’s account of metaphor, taken by Derrida to provide the matrix for all subsequent philosophical discussion, and constituting Derrida’s most sustained reading of Aristotle in his published work. The relationship between the more formal and the more historical aspects of the essay itself raises questions to which we shall return.

The deceptively simple formal argument of the “Plus de métaphore” section goes as follows: philosophy appeals to a number of “basic” or “fundamental” or “foundational” concepts (already so many metaphors). It is tempting to try to identify one such concept on the basis of which all the rest can be explained, or to which all the rest can ultimately be reduced. But the attempt to do this involves removing the one concept supposed to do the explaining or reducing from the field of concepts to be explained: so at best it can explain everything except itself. If I try to say in the wake of the Anatole France dialogue: “all philosophical concepts are really only (dead or effaced) metaphors,” then I withdraw the concept of metaphor from the set of concepts thus supposedly explained: as the untranslatable title of this section of the essay explicitly suggests, this means that there is *no more* (“plus de”) any concept of metaphor in the set of concepts thus explained, and *one more* (“plus de”) metaphor left over from the explanation of all the other concepts in the field, which renders the explanation incomplete. This simple but powerful argument creates insuperable

difficulties both for a traditional transcendental philosophy (it is stuck with a supposedly all-explaining concept it cannot itself explain: in due course we will wonder what happens when this concept is that of “being” itself), and for a “human sciences” discourse (it claims to be reducing all transcendentals to some positive condition and cannot see that in so doing it is itself helplessly in thrall to a transcendental concept it is surreptitiously or blindly using to operate the supposed reduction in the first place). This argument seems to work with devastating effects on any claimed reduction of philosophy (be it to the social, the material, the historical, the linguistic, the psychic, and so on), and shows the human sciences to be unable to account for their own ability to do what they claim to be doing, but it also works to prevent any symmetrical triumphalism on the part of the philosopher, on this account left holding a transcendental term that is in and of itself perfectly useless:

On the one hand, it is impossible to dominate philosophical metaphors as such, from outside, by using a concept of metaphor which remains a philosophical product. Only philosophy would seem to wield any authority over its own metaphorical productions. But, on the other hand, for the same reason philosophy is deprived of what it provides itself. Its instruments belonging to its field, philosophy is incapable of dominating its general tropology and metaphors. It could perceive its metaphors only around a blind spot or central deafness. The concept of metaphor would describe this contour, but it is not even certain that the concept thereby circumscribes an organizing center; and this formal law holds for every philosopheme. (MP, 228)

Derrida’s effort will be to avoid these two symmetrical positions, which the formal argument shows to be unsatisfactory, and shows indeed to constitute something of an aporia, but one which that argument in and of itself does nothing to resolve.

The point is not, however, to consolidate symmetrically what Polyphilos [one of the characters in the Anatole France dialogue] chooses as his target; rather to deconstruct the metaphysical and rhetorical schemas at work in his critique, not in order to reject them and throw them out but to reinscribe them otherwise and above all to begin to identify the historico-problematic terrain on which it was possible systematically to demand of philosophy the metaphorical credentials of its concepts. (MP, 215)

For the aporia to be more interesting than a mere blind alley, “White Mythology” proposes a second type of approach, which at least at first has a more “historical” feel than the formal argument rehearsed above. “Historical,” however, in a very “long” sense of the term – Derrida is implicitly critical of Foucault for making claims about the specificity of thinking about language in the “classical age” without paying due attention to the longer genealogical sequences which lead back from that supposed “age” to the ancients – and here that “historical” approach notably involves a close reading of Aristotle’s doctrine of metaphor. As always in deconstructive work, the point is neither to endorse Aristotle nor to refute him, but to show how

the Aristotelian account of metaphor opens itself up, somewhat in spite of itself, to possibilities it cannot quite account for in terms of its “official” doctrine. These possibilities will allow Derrida to postulate a kind of “originary metaphoricity” that will itself be shown to precede the terms of the aporia identified by the formal “plus de” argument, and thereby to open onto the “eve” of philosophy, a “tropic and pre-philosophical resource” that is answerable neither to criteria of propriety nor to the *philosophical* concept of metaphor (which requires a contrastive notion of the proper). On the basis of that originary metaphoricity, which then converges with other Derridean terms such as archi-writing, *différance*, trace, and *pharmakon*, another possibility opens up that cannot itself be captured within the initial terms of the debate (most notably the oppositional terms of proper and figural). “White Mythology” shows this process at work with a clarity perhaps greater than that of other essays from this period, and one understands why it is on the basis of this very text that Gasché should have developed his influential account of the “quasi-transcendental” as a way of understanding what Derrida is doing in general.

Aristotle’s account of metaphor, then, puts in place the basic parameters within which metaphor will be discussed in the subsequent tradition. Metaphor, understood within a philosophy of language firmly centered on the word and especially the noun, is a “transfer” of meaning from one noun to another. Although such a transfer clearly compromises the strict propriety of naming, it is not simply to be condemned by the philosopher, to the extent that it can be understood within a more general theory of mimesis. Metaphor understood in this way is the result of a natural human propensity to see similarities or resemblances: the perception of similarities is pleasurable and it can give rise to knowledge. Within this understanding, the best type of metaphor (arguably in fact the only kind within Aristotle’s classification that would today be called a metaphor) is the kind that works by proportional analogy: when I say that old age is the evening of life, or that the lion is king of the jungle, I am working with a relationship between two pairs of terms (old age is to life what evening is to day, the lion is to the jungle what the king is to the kingdom, *a* is to *b* what *c* is to *d*) such that the terms of each pair can exchange places on the basis of a perceived similarity between the two relations. In the actual statement of such a metaphor, however, at most only three of the four terms are usually stated, meaning that the reader has to find the fourth which remains implicit: when she does so, the effort of finding it is rewarded with pleasure and knowledge. In other words, metaphor allows for a certain *risk* with respect to meaning and truth (perhaps I simply won’t find the fourth term and so remain ignorant and unhappy) in the interests of a return to a revived propriety (I understand more clearly the true nature of old age after this – however minimal – risk of not actually finding the fourth term at all). Metaphor (at least “good” metaphor) works in the service of (proper) meaning and truth, but in doing so puts the propriety of meaning at least minimally at risk, and to that extent is always to some extent “bad” (MP, 251). Derrida will pursue this moment of risk via an argument that is probably more familiar from slightly later

work, namely the argument of *structural* or *necessary possibility*. For the metaphor to function correctly in this Aristotelian schema, there *must* be the risk of not finding the fourth term: this means that metaphor is always marked by a “necessarily-possibly-not” (just as, in a famous essay from the same year, a performative can be felicitous only if it involves the necessary possibility that it misfire, and, a few years later, the arrival of a letter at its destination is made possible, and will remain haunted by, the necessary possibility of its non-arrival). There is an implicit story, a “secret narrative” as Derrida calls it (MP, 243), in the process of metaphor, and there is a danger that that story will have no satisfactory end. This danger is increased when the metaphor is stated without any proper term being used: in Aristotle’s example, on the basis of the proportional analogy between Ares and his shield on the one hand and Dionysos and his cup on the other, I can refer to the cup as “Dionysos’ shield,” but I can also leave out any literal reference and say “cup without wine” and mean “shield.” As Derrida points out (and as Borges memorably illustrates in his essay on the Icelandic *kenningar*), this process can then go on further:

No reference properly being named in such a metaphor, the figure is carried off into the adventure of a long, implicit sentence, a secret narrative which nothing assures us will lead us back to the proper name. The metaphORIZATION of metaphor, its bottomless overdeterminability, seems to be inscribed in the structure of metaphor. (MP, 243)

And more importantly, suppose there is a case where not only is the fourth term more or less hard to find, but there simply is not a proper term for it. Aristotle himself gives an example of such a case: the sun relates to the light it sheds like a sower relates to the grain he sows, but there is no proper term in Greek available for what the sun is doing here. At this point the metaphor seems nonetheless to function, but in the radical absence of a first or final proper term. According to a “metaphor” that Derrida pursues throughout his text, there is a non-reappropriable dissemination of light and meaning that Aristotle struggles to bring back into the logic of the one, the proper, and the natural that determines philosophical discussion of metaphor throughout the tradition.

On the basis of this example of a possibly radical non-propriety, Derrida attempts to show that Aristotle’s explicit doctrine of metaphor (as always supposed to return to the proper and the true) is in fact radically compromised. For metaphors *always* involve, at least implicitly, a reference to the sun (one of the essential properties of which we now know has no proper name). Metaphor affects everything under the sun (all metaphors are thus “heliotropic” in Derrida’s words) and this means everything under the sun is affected by an essential non-propriety: if the sun is irreducibly metaphorical, with no final proper term to be recovered, then so is everything in the sensory world: instead of a unitary light shed by an organizing solar center, we have a shimmering, plural, nocturnal, stellar, or even artificial light:

If the sun can “sow,” this is because its name is inscribed in a system of relations that constitutes it. This name is no longer the proper name of a unique thing onto which metaphor would *supervene*; it has already begun to say the multiple, divided origin . . . If Aristotle does not concern himself with this consequence of his theory, it is no doubt because it contradicts the philosophical value of *aletheia*, the proper appearing of the propriety of what is, the entire system of concepts which invest the philosopheme “metaphor,” burden it down by delimiting it. By barring its movement . . . (MP, 244)

The concept of metaphor (as here exemplarily developed by Aristotle), is, then, officially speaking (i.e., in terms of Aristotle’s manifest intention, meaning by this not some projected or imagined content of his mind but simply the reading that his text most obviously proposes of itself), the concept of metaphor-resolving-into-the-proper: but the text *also* provides resources that undermine that “official” position by opening up the (necessary) possibility of a dissemination, beyond mere polysemia, that cannot be securely recovered by the notion of the proper, and thus escapes Aristotle’s notions of meaning and indeed of the human:

A noun is proper when it has only one meaning. Better, it is only in this case that it is properly a noun. Univocity is the essence, or better, the *telos* of language. No philosophy as such has ever renounced this Aristotelian ideal. Aristotle recognized that a word can have several meanings. This is a fact. But this fact has right of entry into language only to the extent that the polysemia is finite, that the different significations are limited in number and above all sufficiently *distinct*, each one remaining one and identifiable. Language is what it is, language, only to the extent that it can then master and analyze polysemia. Without remainder. A nonmasterable dissemination is not even a polysemia, it belongs to the outside of language. . . . Whenever polysemia is irreducible, when no unity of meaning is even promised to it, one is outside language. And consequently outside humanity. What is proper to man is, no doubt, to be able to make metaphors, but in order to mean some thing, and only one. In this sense, the philosopher, who has only ever one thing to say, is the man of man. (MP, 295–296, 247–248)

Quite against its own manifest intention, then, Aristotle’s text itself provides the means to begin to think a non-humanist and non-logocentric functioning of language, and so of a language that would no longer simply “be” language. Further on in the text, in the context of a discussion of later rhetoricians, Derrida suggests that the notion of catachresis, which names a kind of figure for which no proper equivalent exists, might be a useful term here, and glosses what is at stake in it in a footnote:

What interests us here is then this production of a proper meaning, a new sort of proper meaning [i.e., one that is not in fact proper in any usual sense] through the violence of a catachresis the intermediary status of which tends to escape from the opposition of the

primitive and the figured, occupying the “middle” between them. When the middle of an opposition is not the passage of a mediation, there is every chance that the opposition is not pertinent. The consequence is without measure. (MP, 255–256n.)

As is often the case in the earlier years of his thinking, Derrida has, then, through a process of reading, put pressure on a concept that is, metaphysically speaking, *constitutively secondary*. As with the concept of sign in *Voice and Phenomenon*, or of writing in *Of Grammatology*, the metaphysical determination of metaphor is that of its tendential disappearance in the service of meaning and truth. Whence the thought that the concept of metaphor as thought by philosophy is the concept of metaphor’s disappearance or death, its resolution or sublation into a recovered propriety. And just as, in *Voice and Phenomenon*, one can attempt a certain effacement of the metaphysical concept of the sign as constitutively (self-)effacing in the service of meaning – that’s logocentrism – by insisting on the sign *itself* as not quite so (self-)effacing, as never entirely recoverable by the metaphysics of presence, so here the “death of metaphor” that just is the classical concept of metaphor can be resisted by holding metaphor short of that death, and thus by suggesting *another* death of metaphor, whereby metaphor becomes generalized and no longer opposable to any countervailing “proper.” Once metaphor is generalized or disseminated in this way and has no contrary, no contrastive “proper,” it can no longer strictly be called “metaphor” (whence the appeal to the term “catachresis”: or, in “The *Retrait* of Metaphor,” the eponymous and untranslatable word *retrait*, marking both metaphor’s *retreat* or *retracting* from the scene – it has no contrary and knows no bounds, and thus escapes restrictive definition – and its *retracing* as something other than it always was). This generalized or “originary metaphoricity,” here, as in “The Double Session,” associated by Derrida with the notion of a syntax in excess of any semantics (DIS, 193, 211, 220), then becomes, in a fashion entirely characteristic of Derrida’s earlier work, one name for the general *milieu* out of which the classical opposition of the metaphorical and the proper could conceivably have emerged in the first place. The “proper” (and its associated values) is then no longer the primary term, but a secondary determination of this originary metaphoricity, and therefore never entirely proper at all. By this means we have avoided the symmetrical positions identified earlier and made some progress in what looked like an aporia: positing this “originary metaphoricity” endorses neither the metaphysical position nor its claimed “poetic” or “rhetorical” reduction. Nor does this amount to a *recommendation* on Derrida’s part of some deliberately chosen *practice* of uncontrolled figural drift (which is in any case unavoidable [PSY1, 50–51]), still less to a proposal to read philosophy as though it were poetry, but is an attempt to suggest that, “before” metaphysical oppositions set in, an “earlier” movement can be thought, and shown to be at (variably subversive) work in the very texts that are attempting most strenuously to control it, here exemplarily in Aristotle.

2. Analogy in “White Mythology” and in the Later Works

As always, the deconstructive reading is not brought to bear on its object from some position of exteriority or superiority, and must itself enter into the logic of the text being read (failing which it would not be a reading at all); and when the text in question is philosophical, this means accepting, if only up to a point, a degree of stabilization of meaning in the interests of some degree of conceptual clarity. The way in which such stabilizations are provisionally accepted with a view to destabilization elsewhere shows up in the Aristotle reading in a *prima facie* strange claim by Derrida to do with the notion of analogy itself. As we have seen, “analogy” in the strong sense of a proportional relation involving four terms provides Aristotle with his definition of the “best” kind of metaphor, and gives Derrida his opening to the affirmation of the risk of semantic drift, dissemination, and perhaps the meaninglessness and therefore inhumanity that his Aristotle cannot officially accept. Bringing out this other dimension of Aristotle’s text involves among other things Derrida’s attributing to Aristotle a theory of “the analogy of being,” which in this essay he invokes more than once without further explanation, and which is on the side of the “official,” metaphysical Aristotle that Derrida’s reading is attempting to displace:

Everything, in the theory of metaphor, that is ordered according to this system of distinctions [i.e., the account of language based on the theory of proper naming] or at least according to its principle, seems to belong to the great immobile chain of Aristotelian ontology, with its theory of the analogy of being, its logic, its epistemology, and more precisely its poetics and its rhetoric. . . . Analogy is metaphor par excellence. . . . This privilege articulates Aristotle’s entire metaphorology with his general theory of the analogy of being. . . . As soon as one admits that all the terms in an analogical relation are already caught up, one by one, in a metaphorical relation, everything begins to function no longer like a sun but like stars, the punctual source of truth or propriety remaining invisible or nocturnal. Referring in any case, in Aristotle’s text, to the problem of the proper name or the analogy of *being*. (MP, 236, 242, 244)

The third of these references calls up a footnote in which Derrida refers the reader to work by his contemporary Pierre Aubenque. This reference is curious to say the least, because one of the major claims of Aubenque’s book on Aristotle and several subsequent articles⁴ is that there is in fact *no* concept of an “analogy of being” in Aristotle himself, and that it is a later, essentially Thomistic, invention designed to bring Aristotle’s recognition of the “many ways” of saying being into harmony with (neo-)Platonic and Christian doctrine. Although neither Aubenque nor Derrida would have known this at the time, this is a position also taken by Heidegger at least as early as 1931.⁵ Aubenque convincingly shows that “analogy” in the sense invoked by Aquinas in the doctrine of the *analogia entis* is precisely *not* analogy in the strong

proportional sense used in Aristotle himself, notably in his description of metaphor, and indeed that the so-called “analogy of being” could not occur in Aristotle, simply because the strong sense of analogy requires two series of comparable terms, and there is no second series to which “being” itself could conceivably be compared. Aristotle’s *pros hen* view of the equivocality of “being” should not be understood on the basis of analogy, but in the looser sense of a “focal meaning” toward which the many ways of saying “being” are directed, but which does not entail any strictly analogical relation (for example with a higher being, which is the point of the Thomistic ontotheologization of Aristotle). Aristotle’s efforts to characterize the type of unity that “being” might have in the face of its multiple and equivocal saying do not in fact produce an “immobile ontological chain,” but a more or less loosely related dispersion of at most dialectical investigations (Aubenque 1962, 205).

Derrida’s references to Aubenque’s work seem, then, curiously enough, to attribute to the latter (and through him to Aristotle) a doctrine that is precisely not Aristotle’s.⁶ As is arguably quite often the case in Derrida’s treatment of Aristotle, the identification of what is “metaphysical” in Aristotle seems to accept a tradition of reading Aristotle in (neo-)Platonic and eventually Christian terms that Aristotle’s text might also quite plausibly be said explicitly to resist. In the current case, this would mean that there may be still more resources in Aristotle’s so-called “ontology” and the *pollachōs legomenon* of being than are explicitly being allowed for in “White Mythology,” and it is at least arguable that these supplementary resources many years later allow for Derrida’s more explicit return to the possibilities of analogy, even though this return is never explicitly a return to Aristotle, but to that modern Aristotelian Immanuel Kant, himself read with and against that even more modern Aristotelian Martin Heidegger, from whose account of metaphor Derrida was already taking his rather discreet distances in “White Mythology” (MP, 226 n. 29) as subsequently explained at some length *contra* Ricoeur in “The *Retrait* of Metaphor.”⁷

Aristotle allowed that analogy in the strict proportional sense could give rise to knowledge, and therefore has a strictly philosophical interest beyond mere poetics. This emphasis of the strict proportional sense indeed makes it seem as though metaphor as analogy is being philosophically tolerated only insofar as it returns to the concept in the end, *ana logon*, “according to the *logos*.” Derrida’s demonstration is that this “return” must be affected by a “necessarily-possibly-not” that entails an “always-in-some-sense-not” that remains to haunt the philosophical recovery of meaning with the threat of loss. But if we accept Aubenque’s understanding of analogy in Aristotle, whereby it is not and cannot be grounded in anything as immobile as an “analogy of being,” then analogy is *already* being released from ontology, even in Aristotle’s “official” position, in a way that can seem more germane to deconstruction than might at first have appeared. Once the idea of an “analogy of being” is refused as re-grounding in any simple unity the multiple sayings of being, then we might be tempted to seek a further and more immediate affinity (or analogy?) between deconstruction and analogy, and this does indeed appear to happen in Derrida’s later work.

The trajectory of Derrida's thought here is especially difficult to capture, but seems to be circling around the question of being itself (it will be remembered that some of Derrida's earliest remarks on metaphor relate it, if a little obscurely, to the question of being) and to involve a crucial detour via Heidegger, and more notably his notion of the *als-Struktur*. As early as *Aporias* (first delivered as a lecture in 1992), Derrida suggests that this *als-Struktur* in general becomes vulnerable once Heidegger's eagerness to establish that only Dasein (as opposed to the animal) can die (rather than merely end or perish) is called into question. If it can be shown (as Derrida believes it can) that the distinction Heidegger wants to make in this regard between Dasein and the animal is dogmatic, then the *als-Struktur* supposedly also reserved for Dasein comes into doubt, as does the concept of the "world" with respect to which Heidegger's animal is notoriously "poor." As always in such cases, Derrida's point is not so much to concede to "the animal" privileged features or abilities previously reserved for man or Dasein, but to contest their being straightforwardly available to man or Dasein in the first place. The doubt that Derrida opens as to Dasein's supposed access to what we might call the *as such as such*, and therefore as to Dasein's clear distinction from the animal, cannot help but recall (even though *Aporias* explicitly mentions neither metaphor nor analogy) the much earlier association of metaphoricality with "the animality of the letter," and the thought that the dissemination it entails breaks with Aristotelian humanism: which will, much later, allow for a measured retrieval of what, now on the basis of Kant, Derrida comes to call humorously the *Alsobstruktur*, his relation to which he summarizes by saying "I'm sometimes tempted to act 'as if' I had no objections to Kant's 'as if's'" (BS2, 271). If the Heideggerian *als* comes to be affected by a quasi-Kantian *als ob*, then *something like* analogy will have re-entered the picture in a way that will inevitably return us a little differently to the question of being, and indeed to the question of the analogy of being, but – so the thought would go – to displaced versions of those questions, such that they would no longer be mortgaged (as in Kant) to the official doctrine of the regulative idea, nor (as in Heidegger) to the thought of a unifying gathering of being, albeit supposedly under the sign of difference.⁸ This question would then become a crux for understanding Derrida's general, notoriously complex, relationship with Heidegger throughout his thinking.

The apparently humorous relation to the analogy as concentrated in Kant's *als ob* itself concentrates a good number of the most significant issues in Derrida's later thinking. If the Aristotle readings in "White Mythology" were, as is usually the case with Derrida's earlier work, more obviously concerned with questions of *arché*, of origin, the pre-originary and pre-philosophical (the "eve of philosophy") and the *nachträglich* constitution of the origin after the fact of the *faux départ*, the later work is more concerned with questions around the *telos*, the ends or the end. If the reading of Aristotle was concerned to unsettle the proper and its propriety initially in terms of where it comes from, the remarks about Kant in the later work (remarks that never really amount to a sustained reading) are all concerned with where we might be

going, with the teleologically inflected concepts that mark much of our “ethical and political” thinking. This later concern is not of course absent from the earlier work, and “White Mythology” itself describes the metaphysical definition of the death of metaphor in explicitly teleological terms,⁹ so it would be possible to suggest that what has been mistakenly termed the “ethical turn” in Derrida involves simply a more explicit and sustained interrogation of the question of ends than was the case in the early work.¹⁰

It is striking that in “White Mythology” itself Derrida should spend some time on the concept of the “idea,” and indeed use that discussion as a way of clarifying the procedure of deconstruction, recognizing a semi-autonomous “syntax” of that concept and term in Hegel, for example, but also recognizing the long historical tradition that brings “idea” to Hegel with at the very least an active memory of Plato. And deconstruction always seems to involve a relationship between “syntax” in this sense and traditionality (MP, 253–255). This is all the more striking in our case because nowhere in that discussion does Derrida mention Kant, Kant’s Idea, and indeed Kant’s explicit retrieval of his Idea of Idea from a reading of Plato and Plato’s Idea. But despite this absence from “White Mythology,”¹¹ it is in his increasingly explicit engagement with Kant’s so-called regulative idea that the later engagement with analogy plays itself out.

The reasons why this might be so are not difficult to see. Although Derrida repeatedly, and from his earliest work, casts doubt on the motif of the “Idea in the Kantian sense” (the more especially as it is wielded by Husserl), some appeal to that motif is in fact instrumental in the deconstruction of phenomenology as a manifestation of the “metaphysics of presence.” Precisely to the extent that the Idea (in the Kantian sense) is infinitely deferred, at best the object of an endless asymptotic approach, it can be used to undermine the watchword of phenomenology “to the things themselves” and thereby complicate the metaphysics of presence: phenomenology *itself*, on Derrida’s reading of Husserl, is an Idea, and to that extent can never become fully thematic to the phenomenological gaze. This situation is the root of the dramatic conclusion to *Voice and Phenomenon*, where Husserl’s “essential distinctions” are shown to be incoherent in the light of this infinite deferral of the Idea, and where the enigmatic slogan “infinite différance is finite” attempts to capture something of the fallout from this situation. However difficult understanding that slogan remains, it seems both to rely on an appeal to “Idea in the Kantian sense” and to undermine it: and precisely this tension is what shows up in the word or concept “différance,” which it is very tempting to read in terms of the Idea, but which must be distinguished from it if Derrida’s thinking is to be recognized in its specificity, and deconstruction to be separable from critique. Although this complex issue can be tracked across all of Derrida’s work (it is arguably the very crux of deconstruction), it shows up in a specific way around the late return to the question of analogy. If, as I have argued elsewhere (Bennington 2000a, 141–152), deconstruction is *especially* not critique in the Kantian sense, then its relation to the Idea (and its attendant operator

of analogy) needs to be clarified. Derrida does not seem always to be very impressed by Kant's use of analogy (see, e.g., TRP, 117, which relates Kant's analogism to his anthropocentrism, even though the same text suggests earlier some more mysterious and interesting possibilities of analogy [TRP, 36]), and some late remarks are extremely suggestive in this regard.

Kant's regulative Idea always involves an "as if" that entails thinking by analogy. We judge the world *as if* it were the product of an intelligent cause, and in so doing invoke an analogy between, for example, natural organisms and the products of our own technical activities. This merely analogical appeal prevents us from falling into dogmatic metaphysics and alerts us to the danger of the transcendental illusion. When Kant explicitly characterizes analogy, he indeed takes examples of the strict four-term kind we saw in Aristotle's description of metaphor. What is striking in Kant's descriptions, however, is that what analogy brings out is less the *similarity* between the pairs of terms concerned (and the kind of knowledge supposed to flow from that perception) than the *heterogeneity* between them. What the "as if" brings me to when I think of God as an intelligent artificer of the universe is not the comforting thought that God works just like a human technician or artisan, but that there is really *no comparison at the very point of comparison*.¹²

It is this possibility within Kant's "as if" that Derrida appears to be developing. Just as in the reading of Aristotle he developed resources that are demonstrably "in" Aristotle's text to lead to a point beyond Aristotle's manifest intentions (the more so once we clarify further the issue of the "analogy of being"), so Derrida pursues and radicalizes Kant's "as if" by pursuing this potential of heterogeneity in Kant's account of analogy. The most explicit attempt to do this on Derrida's part comes in the important late text "The University without Condition," which plays throughout on the "as if" idiom. Derrida notes that:

In Kantian discourse, the gravity, seriousness, and irreducible necessity of the "as if" points to nothing less than the finality [i.e., the purposiveness] of nature, that is, a finality whose concept, Kant tells us, is among the most unusual and difficult to pin down. For, he says, it is neither a *concept of nature* nor a *concept of freedom*. Therefore, although Kant does not say as much in this context, and for good reason, this "as if" would itself be a sort of agent of deconstructive ferment, since it exceeds as it were and comes close to disqualifying the two orders that are so often distinguished and opposed, the order of nature and the order of freedom. (WA, 211; a little later Derrida is a little more reserved about Kant's "as if" between nature and art, but the logic is essentially the same.)

This deconstructive potential of the "as if" of analogy is pursued, first in an apparent endorsement of a performative use (something like an affirmation of fiction and literature), and then into a doubt about that very performative use. As often in Derrida's very late work, the suggestion is that a thinking of the event cannot quite be

held within a logic of the performative, insofar as in the befalling of an event (“worthy of the name”), something radically exceeds any order of ability or power that I seem still to be claiming via the performative with its implicit “I can.” Thinking the event means thinking a radical “perhaps” that Derrida suggests has a relation to the “if” of the “as if,” without being masterable by the *as if* itself. The deconstructive “ferment” that Derrida both credits Kant with opening up and also suggests he closes down is here formally identical (though in not nearly so detailed a way) to the reading of Aristotle we rehearsed earlier.

3. Conclusion: The “Eve” of Philosophy

This point of Derrida’s thinking (which he claims exceeds the resources of any philosophy of the subject or of “ipseity” more generally) must also be thought beyond the reach of any ontology and of any “thinking of being,” to which the early remarks on metaphor might seem to be leading us, but which the thought of dissemination always resists. We might of course suspect in conclusion that this movement beyond the reach of ontology was already happening in the Aristotle who did *not* in fact propose a thinking of the “analogy of Being,” and who allowed the famous observation that being is said in many ways (*pollachōs legomenon*) to guide towards a “metaphysics” that never in fact claimed the status of ontology and that, at least on Aubenque’s reading, entertained an open-ended plurality of thinking that will always resist the temptation to return to the One. This suspicion (the principle of which could be repeated with respect to Kant and Heidegger themselves) leads to the thought that “deconstruction” is not something Derrida or anyone else needs to *do* to philosophy, but that deconstruction has been happening from the beginning. As the same Pierre Aubenque who showed that Aristotle did not in fact have a doctrine of the analogy of being asks in the title of some late lectures, “Faut-il déconstruire la métaphysique?”: must we deconstruct metaphysics, or is it not rather that metaphysics has already been deconstructing itself from the start? Of course Derrida would not dissent from that view: if “originary metaphoricity” (or indeed any other of the “quasi-transcendental” terms that Derrida has variously, and always provisionally, read out of the texts of the tradition) indeed refers us to an “eve” of philosophy, then philosophy has always been *in* deconstruction from the start, as the milieu in and out of which it has twisted and turned in its various tropes. “Metaphor” and “analogy” are, among many others, means of access to thinking that situation.

Notes

- 1 This rather surprising reference perhaps comes to Derrida via Levinas, who quotes this text in a 1964 essay “La signification et le sens,” reprinted in Levinas (1978).

- 2 See, e.g., Cooper (1986, esp. 23–27), who finds (showing his own propensity to indulge in metaphor) that despite “the sharp continental tang of his prose” or his “thick French accent,” Derrida is not so very far from Ryle, Wittgenstein, and Quine. See also interesting discussions in Morris (2000) and Wheeler (2000).
- 3 Gasché’s remarkably accurate and insightful account of the question of metaphoricity and analogy is the culminating point of *The Tain of the Mirror* (Gasché 1986), and it is in this context that he first introduces the notion of the quasi-transcendental. My account of the question of metaphor and analogy in Derrida, and indeed my own elaborations of the question of the “quasi-transcendental,” are deeply indebted to Gasché’s pathbreaking work. The burden (if not perhaps the tone) of some of my earlier reservations about Gasché’s reading of Derrida, which essentially come down to the thought that Gasché proposes a *philosophy* of deconstruction, and in so doing inevitably *re-transcendentalizes the quasi-transcendental*, is however maintained here. See my “Deconstruction and the Philosophers: The Very Idea” (Bennington 1996, 11–60) and “Genuine Gasché (Perhaps)” (Bennington 2000a, 155–161). The final section of Gasché’s book, of which the discussion of metaphor is the concluding part, is entitled “Literature or Philosophy?” and there is never any doubt as to which side Gasché comes down on.
- 4 Aubenque (1962, esp. 198–206). See also the later articles “Ambiguïté ou analogie de l’être?,” “Les origines de la doctrine de l’analogie de l’être: Sur l’histoire d’un contresens,” “Sur la naissance de la doctrine pseudo-aristotélicienne de l’analogie de l’être,” and “Néoplatonisme et analogie de l’être,” all reprinted in Aubenque (2009). See also the discussion in several articles gathered in Courtine (2003, 2005).
- 5 Heidegger (1995, 38). Discussed by Courtine (2003, 2005) and in English by Tonner (2010), which rather surprisingly does not seem to be aware of Aubenque’s work and is much more accommodating to the idea of the analogy of being in Aristotle than is Aubenque. For a reading of Derrida that focuses on the question of analogy, see Saghafi (2010, esp. 155 n. 42), which does not however mention Aubenque.
- 6 See further references to Aubenque, none of them negative, in MP, 51 n. 31; 52 n. 32; 183 n. 11; 187; 194 n. 25; and in OGC, 324 n. 5. That Pierre Aubenque was Derrida’s friend as well as contemporary at the École Normale, and that he had a part to play in Derrida’s biographical relation to Heidegger, is clear from Peeters (2013, 184–185).
- 7 Heidegger’s suggestion, from which Derrida takes his distance, is that the concept of metaphor is intrinsically metaphysical because it essentially buys into the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible: Ricoeur assumes that Derrida is simply extending Heidegger, whereas, as we shall see, Derrida’s position is much more complicated. On the Derrida–Ricoeur exchange see also Derrida’s piece written after Ricoeur’s death, “La parole: Donner, nommer, appeler,” *Les Cahiers de l’Herne*, 81 (2004): 19–24, translated by Eftichis Pirovolakis as an appendix to Pirovolakis (2010). For an earlier analysis of the Ricoeur–Derrida debate on metaphor, see also Lawlor (1992).
- 8 Cf. J.-F. Courtine, “Différence ontologique et analogie de l’être,” and “La critique heideggérienne de l’analogia entis,” in Courtine (2003).
- 9 “Henceforth the entire teleology of meaning, which constructs the philosophical concept of metaphor, coordinates metaphor with the manifestation of truth, with the production of truth as presence without veil, with the reappropriation of a full language without syntax, with the vocation of a pure nomination: without syntactic differential,

or in any case without any properly unnamable articulation that would be irreducible to semantic sublation or to dialectical interiorization” (MP, 270).

- 10 See my brief piece “Beginnings and Ends,” in Bennington (2010).
- 11 Kant’s concept of hypotyposis is mentioned briefly in a footnote to “White Mythology” (MP, 224n.).
- 12 Kant’s most explicit discussions of analogy are to be found in the *Prolegomena* (§58) and in the *Critique of Judgment* (especially in a long note to §90). I discuss these passages in some detail in Bennington (2000b, esp. 289).

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The “Slow and Differentiated” Machinations of Deconstructive Ethics

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The ethics of deconstruction has been a central issue in Contemporary Continental thought since Derrida’s early work in *Of Grammatology* so forcefully interjected a technological supplement into the heart of the notion of natural origin that permeates modern philosophies of language and culture. There, among so many other places, he exposes the operations of difference covered over by what he calls the “metaphysics of presence.” Metaphysics of presence are philosophies that maintain that we have direct access to the world, the meaning of words, and the truth about existence. We could call these philosophies of Revelation, Truth, and Certainty. But, as Derrida’s corpus continues to show, even posthumously, the operations of difference that both install and defer the meaning of our words, and thereby the meaning of our world, are impossible to think; they are at “best” between “the aleatory and the calculable . . . chance and necessity,” and at “worst” a matter of what he comes to call a “secret” (CIR, 35).

This “best” and “worst” may seem to be a matter of taste, and to say so may resonate with some articulations of deconstructive ethics. Yet, as Derrida insists in the interview “Eating Well,” our tastes, including his own taste for secrets and taste for purity, and our taste for ethics itself, is always more than a matter of tastes (cf. MLO, 47–48; see also Oliver 2007). Derrida’s “counter command” to classical and modern notions of moralities of good and evil could be articulated as: it is necessary to attempt the impossible; or, to put it more radically, it is necessary to do the impossible, to do what cannot be done. The imperatives of deconstructive ethics are hyperbolic, as Derrida says in his discussions of forgiveness and hospitality (OHO, CF). He

counterposes what he calls “unconditional hospitality” to the conditioned forms of hospitality of everyday life. Indeed, he says that there is no concept of hospitality without this notion of pure hospitality, even if all instances of that concept are corrupted (e.g., FWT, 60). He maintains that pure unconditional forgiveness or pure unconditional hospitality, those that are “worthy of their names,” are always contaminated with auto-affection, concern for self, and projections onto others. Yet, this distinction between self and other becomes one of the most profound oppositions subjected to Derrida’s deconstruction, or to deconstructive ethics.

Discussing the tense, but necessary, relationship between unconditional and conditioned hospitality, Derrida says, “it is the pure and hyperbolic hospitality in whose name we must always invent the best dispositions, the least bad conditions. . . . Calculate the risks, yes, but don’t shut the door on what cannot be calculated, meaning the future of the foreigner” (PM, 67). Perhaps in order to “avoid the worst,” as Derrida sometimes says, we need to embrace what remains a secret, what cannot be calculated or even anticipated, and thereby prevents us from ever thinking, or understanding, or knowing once and for all, the meanings of hospitality, justice, or ethics. To think the secret is to think the impossibility of knowing, the impossibility of articulating, and perhaps even the impossibility of ethics itself. And yet, this attempt to think the impossible, to articulate the impossible, may be the very condition of possibility for ethics.

Deconstructive ethics’s hyperbolic command is to take one more step toward this aporia of impossibility, even if to do so is to risk living on unstable ground when it comes to answering any of the perennial questions of philosophy, the questions that Kant formulated as: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? (Kant 1999 [1787], A805/B833). These questions revolve around concerns for ethical life and perhaps an implicit acknowledgment that we cannot separate epistemology (what we know) or metaphysics (what is real) from ethics (what we ought to do), as philosophers are so fond of doing. A question that continues to plague ethical thought since Nietzsche’s proclamation that “God is dead” (and so then are all foundational principles), is how to formulate any sort of normative ethics, that is to say, an ethics that can distinguish right from wrong, after the deconstruction of oppositions between good and evil, right and wrong, subject and other, life and death, and so on (Nietzsche 1974 [1882], §125). Throughout his writings, Derrida aims his deconstructive strategy – his deconstructive machine – toward these types of oppositions, starting with oppositions between speech and writing, presence and absence, positive and negative, Nature and Culture, interior and exterior, and ending with oppositions between mind and body, response and reaction, Man and Animal, Man and God, among many others along the way.

In his first posthumously published book, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida describes his approach as a “philosophy of limits.” There, he says that he is not trying to abolish the limits between these various oppositions; rather he is attempting to multiply limits and thereby acknowledges more differences. In other words, deconstruction is

not about showing how good and evil, mind and body, or man and animal are the same. Rather, Derrida argues that it is about showing how these oppositions are too simplistic and cover up complicated and fluid differences within the categories. For example, there is not just one type of Man (think of women, the history of humankind, cultural differences, etc.) and there is not just one type of Animal. Perhaps this is Derrida's most poignant example; for once we think about it, it is obvious that the category "animal" covers vast, nearly infinite, differences between species and individuals.

Throughout his writings, Derrida has invoked various liminal, threshold, and Janus-faced concepts to jam the machinery of binary oppositions so prominent in traditional metaphysics and philosophy more generally. In *Of Grammatology*, he calls these "nicknames" for the "unnamable movement of difference itself," the operation by which all sameness and "nameness" takes place. Some of his nicknames for this silent operation that he discerns in so many texts of literature, psychoanalysis, and philosophy are *trace*, *reserve*, *différance*, *supplement*, *dissemination*, *pharmakon*, *parergon*, *hymen*, *aporia*, *hospitality*, *autoimmunity*, *bêtise*, among many others. Perhaps even *animal* and *machine* become such figures. Derrida chooses these figures because they have multiple meanings usually at odds with each other. They are figures that "deconstruct" under his careful analysis. Indeed, the strategy of deconstruction (he refuses to call it a method) is one of close interpretation of a text or discourse in order to show how its style, metaphors, rhetoric, performance, and history work against its content or explicitly stated theses. In this way, Derrida uses the logic of metaphysics against itself. He describes the process as an attempt to designate within the language of philosophy (or we might as well just say within language, period) the impossibility of its own operations that always escape it. In *Of Grammatology* he says: "Of course the designation of that impossibility escapes the language of metaphysics only by a hairsbreadth. For the rest, it must borrow its resources from the logic it deconstructs. And by doing so, find its very foothold there" (OG, 314). In his later work even that foothold becomes unstable such that the ground is constantly shifting beneath our feet. In one of his last seminars, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida echoes Gilles Deleuze's formulation that the ground is no more than the dirt stuck to our soles/souls (BS1, 151–152).

My goal in this chapter is twofold. I track the ethics of deconstruction as it moves through *The Beast and the Sovereign*, to see where it leads us and where it leaves us; and I examine the role of the machine in Derrida's deconstructive project, particularly as it operates in this seminar. I show how *machine* is another nickname for the operation of difference insofar as it is an undecidable figure or concept that both works for and against the binary oppositions and dichotomies so popular in our culture, most especially Nature and Culture, Mind and Body, and Man and Animal. Derrida's invocation of the machine has powerful implications for thinking about ethics and what I call the distinction between morality and ethics, a distinction that ultimately cannot be maintained but is nevertheless necessary to make, for the sake

of thinking through ethics itself and for the hope of ethical thinking (see Oliver 2007).

1. Derrida's Machines

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida suggests that his concern with animals runs throughout his work; he mentions several texts wherein different animals play central roles, texts he claims he signs in the names of various animals, including hedgehogs and silkworms. Another figure that runs throughout his texts is the machine. Indeed, in some ways, it is the difference between those various animals running through and away from his texts and the different machines also running there that preoccupies him. Animals run and so do machines. And in his first posthumously published work, Derrida turns his deconstructive machine back on the question: Are animals machines? Derrida, the philosophical animal par excellence, uses the resources of his deconstructive project to jam what Giorgio Agamben calls the "anthropological machine" in various ways, including setting the animals free from the philosophical confines, that is to say the ways in which philosophers have traditionally described them as like machines, making humans and man in particular grist for that very same mill that has churned out the absolute fixed and universal division between Man and Animal. One way he does so is by introducing the machine on both sides of the Man–Animal divide in the hopes of challenging or surprising that other machination (that of the anthropological machine) with the machinations of deconstruction (cf. Agamben 2004).

Just as animals are not strangers to Derrida's corpus, neither are machines. Just as animals are running all over throughout his work, so are machines. There are typewriter ribbons, paper machines, computers, the World Wide Web, word processors, prosthetic memories, and archiving machines of all sorts, indeed prostheses of all sorts, including wooden legs, marionettes, artificial reproduction technologies, and technologies of reproduction of all sorts, writing machines and writing as a machine, televisions, cameras, printing presses, ink made from the blood of animals, and all varieties of representing machines (e.g., BS1, PM, WA). There are too many machines to list them all here. And then there are machinations of all of these machines, most especially the machinations of representation, especially texts (no text without grammar, no grammar without machine, as he says in an essay on Paul de Man's typewriter ribbon), but also the machinations of deconstruction, what he calls "slow and differentiated deconstruction" (BS1, 75–76).

What is "slow and differentiated deconstruction"? How do its machinations work against those "other machinations" that churn out binary oppositions with which we – too often mindlessly – divide the world into Us versus Them, Good versus Evil, Friend versus Enemy? What kind of counter-command might slow and differentiated deconstruction produce or make possible. How could it open rather than shut the

doors to others who aren't like us, to foreigners, to animals, perhaps even to machines, who knows? Once we take seriously this question – who knows? – on what ground can we endorse an ethical project and on what basis can we hope for a political future that is better for everyone? If we don't know, and more to the point, if we can't know, then where should we go? These sorts of questions are the motor that drives deconstructive ethics, which is necessarily slow (at times laborious, even exasperating) and differentiated (at times to the point of head-spinning dizziness at all of the possibilities for interpretation and word-play).

2. Command Counter-Command

From his early work, Derrida was concerned to challenge the opposition between Nature and Culture and philosophies that ground civil law in natural law. He maintains that there is always already a supplement where we take the origin to be. In other words, the reproduction (the supplement) produces the origin or original. This becomes clear in Derrida's engagement with Rousseau's discussion of the importance of the role of the mother or mother earth as natural origin even when Rousseau repeatedly uses surrogate or substitute mothers to make his point. A subtext throughout Derrida's work is the way that the Nature–Culture divide has played a crucial role in sexism, slavery, genocide, and animal slaughter, among other social concerns that we now consider unjust or wrong. Women, people of color, other religions and cultures, and animals have been relegated to the Nature side of this divide and variously described as subhuman or barbaric and therefore in need of elimination, discipline, or at least civilizing.

Fed into the deconstructive machine, the Nature–Culture dichotomy is torn apart and disarticulated. Commonly accepted binaries and concepts are subjected to the machinations of deconstruction in the hopes of stemming the injustices committed in their names. Most recently, Derrida takes on the concepts of Democracy, Freedom, and Security in whose names the United States has engaged in wars against rogue states and terrorism (ROG). In the name of Freedom and Security, the US government has curtailed freedoms and used extreme forms of torture and deadly violence. Are there ways of thinking about democracy, freedom, and even security that don't lead to deadly violence? Derrida's answer to this question, if he gives one, is not easy. It is not a quick fix. It does not provide a moral code or blueprint that we can follow to get it right. On the contrary, he suggests that we have to risk stepping into the abyss, into a place where we are uncomfortable, where we don't know the difference between right and wrong, a place where we don't even know who we are. And, only from that place can “we” hope to approach ethical thinking and thinking through what it means to be ethical. We have to be ready to revise our principles and our decisions based on those principles. In the name of those very principles, what may have been considered appropriate or just must be called into question; for example,

the way that apartheid was in South Africa or slavery was in the United States. Those forms of oppression were once considered a normal part of life by most of the white population; but now they are considered immoral, unjust, and abominable. In our culture, considering women and children as property was once the norm; but now it is considered unacceptable. And, more people are starting to think of animals as more than just things or property used for our purposes.

These kinds of changes are possible only when what was once considered normal, right, or just is challenged to the point that eventually, slowly, it may be possible that our world changes such that they are now considered abnormal, wrong, or unjust. This happens when others demand to be treated differently. And when that demand is, or can be, heard, Derrida is concerned, even obsessed, with listening to the other. This does not mean assimilating the other or others into our way of doing things, but rather it means opening up to their way, to their rhythms, to their time. But, what does this mean, to be open to others? Is it possible? Again, this is where deconstructive ethics demands the impossible. Listening to the other is not about putting ourselves in someone else's shoes. Although trying that might be a useful exercise, it is only pretending to be someone else; it is only imaging their shoes while retaining our own, so to speak. Here, the case of animals is poignant. What would it mean to try on the "shoes" of an animal?

But, giving the other time or letting the other speak is not doing nothing; neither is it doing something in particular. In other words, all of our moral codes or grammars or ways of doing and speaking may be not only irrelevant to understanding or engaging with others, but also and moreover may actually impede doing so. Now, we are beginning to see why deconstructive ethics puts us in a bind, not to mention why it is necessarily slow and differentiated rather than a quick fix. Indeed, it may be a counterbalance to our cultural craving for instant gratification and a quick solution to every problem; we seem to want rules and regimens for everything from losing weight to finding a soul mate, and of course making money. Deconstructive thinking forces us to slow down and think about the customs and rules that we commonly accept.

In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida sets out only one rule:

The only rule for the moment I believe we should give ourselves in this seminar is no more to rely on commonly accredited oppositional limits between what is called nature and culture, nature/law, physis/nomos, God, man, and animal or concerning what is "proper to man" [no more to rely on commonly accredited oppositional limits] than to muddle everything and rush, by analogism, toward resemblances and identities. Every time one puts an oppositional limit in question, far from concluding that there is identity, we must on the contrary multiply attention to differences, refine the analysis in a restructured field. (BS1, 15–16)

This rule is a rule against rules. It is a rule to question all rules; and furthermore, not to rely on commonly accepted rules, truths, or facts, especially about others that

we consider Them rather than Us, or Enemies rather than Friends, or even food rather than intelligent beings. This doesn't mean, however, that we assimilate them and rush to embrace them as really like us after all. Deconstructive ethics, then, is not an ethics of empathy (contrast this to Husserl's analysis of analogical transfer to the place of others through which we know they exist and through which we can empathize with them). Nor is it a moral code or set of moral rules, unless you count the counter-command to question all rules. Does deconstructive ethics make us doubt everything? And if so, then how do we have ethical obligations to others and on what basis can we fight for justice?

Derrida is clear that we still have ethical obligations and we still must fight for justice. But, justice is not a matter of rules or laws. As history has shown, we can have rules and laws that are unjust. Derrida goes further to indicate that justice, or a justice worthy of its name, the concept of justice, is not a matter of calculation. The concept has a history, a past, a present, and perhaps most importantly a future, the justice to come. The time of the other does not operate according to clock time or linear time. The time of the other, or the time of deconstruction itself, is reversible and fluid. Even the past is not fixed. And, the hope for a better future may require changing the past by reinterpreting it. It may require the future anterior tense: it will have been. While I don't have the time to elaborate this point here, for now, suffice it to say that the time of the other, whatever it may be, is not about democratic vote counting. It is not a matter of taking a survey or a poll or giving the minority a voice, or even rights, in democratic debates. As Derrida says:

It is not a matter of democratic debate, during which one leaves the other his speaking time, timed by one of those clocks . . . It is the time that one must let speak, the time of the other, rather than leaving the other speaking time. (BS1, 234)

Think of animals again, what would it mean to leave time for them in a democratic debate? Or, more familiar questions: What would it mean to leave time for those who speak another language or at a different speed or have been socialized not to speak? What if the other doesn't want to, or can't, speak? Or, by their very speaking in this context they betray their own principles or their own cultural values? What if what they have to say cannot fit into the time allotted? Indeed, what if it takes a lifetime to try to understand, to translate, and to truly encounter the other in its otherness in its own time? What if it is impossible? Or, a secret? This may all sound very mysterious. It is no accident that philosophers have spent centuries wondering how we can know what is going on in our own minds let alone other peoples' minds . . . or more recently, the minds of animals. Although deconstructive ethics asks how can we know for certain, the ethical question is what do we do in spite of not knowing for sure. Furthermore, could not knowing for sure – or more precisely, *not* being able to know for sure – obligate us even more, require even more vigilance than if we did, or could know and understand ourselves, others, and life itself once and for all?

Certainly, learning and following rules is easier than having to decide each and every time about what is right and what is wrong. And, while we need rules (like the rules of the road and civil laws), following them easily becomes a matter of training or even habit. It is not usually a difficult ethical decision whether or not to stop at a red light, say hello to an acquaintance on the street, or not to steal from, accost, or kill other people. Usually, we merely react to laws and customs without thinking about them, without really responding. Or, as Derrida argues, it becomes impossible to be certain that we are responding rather than merely reacting, like we assume trained animals do. But unlike moral codes, rules, or civil laws, the difficult ethical choices of our lives are not, and cannot be, so straightforward. They require time, slow and differentiated deliberations, quandaries, even paradoxes, that force us to take our chances, to risk everything we commonly believe or what is commonly accredited, in order to listen to others in their own time, in their otherness from us, and many times to listen to the otherness within us, that is to say the ways in which we may not want to conform to the social norms. Would it really be listening, ethical listening, if we heard only ourselves or what we wanted to hear in the voice of the other, forcing them to conform to our standards and our sense of time, the rhythms of our speech, or the customs of our culture?

3. Derrida the Wolf

In his later work, Derrida repeatedly says that he will not approach his subject “frontally,” suggesting that even if it were possible to do so, when talking about the most important issues before us, we should not rush in on them but rather hope to catch a glimpse of what is ethical, which sometimes may even require averting our eyes. Speaking of a text by Paul Celan, Derrida says that he is “creeping up on [it] like a wolf, slowly, discreetly” (BS1, 223). This slow discreet movement seems intended to bring out what is uncanny in the text. And, bringing out the uncanny, the strange, the otherness, speaks to Derrida’s strategy more generally. When exploring difficult questions, especially those involving how to approach the otherness of the other (whether another person, another language, or the otherness of art, or poetry) or differences (whether for the sake of law, forgiveness, hospitality, justice, or democracy), he prefers to go slowly, to make us wait.

In the context of this chapter, it is not only impossible to rehearse his every move, but also beside the point. Rather than make you wait, and for better or worse, risking dispensing with many of the subtleties of Derrida’s thought, I want to highlight the ethical moments in one of his last seminars in the hopes that these touchstones may lead us through some of the thickets of the ethics of deconstruction. Here is what we have discerned so far: there is a need to go slowly, not to rush, to doubt common distinctions, and to listen to the other not by giving it/her time to speak but by giving oneself over to its or her own time or terms. In general, we have discerned that for

Derrida ethics is a matter of otherness, of differences, particularly as that otherness or those differences have been hidden or covered over by common oppositions. Like the wolf, he wants to dig up what is buried beneath our common opinions and accepted moral codes and customs.

In his critical engagement with psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Derrida claims:

A principle of ethics or more radically of justice, in the most difficult sense, which I have attempted to oppose to right, to distinguish from right, is perhaps the obligation that engages my responsibility with respect to the most dissimilar [*le plus dissemblable*, the least “fellow-like”], the entirely other, precisely, the monstrously other, the unrecognizable other. The “unrecognizable”, I shall say in a somewhat elliptical way, is the beginning of ethics . . . (BS1, 108)

It seems obvious that it is more difficult to respect the entirely other, especially what we take to be monstrous, than it is to respect our friends and neighbors. Yet, for Derrida, ethics begins with respect for those who are not necessarily our fellows, for those who are not necessarily like us, for those whom we may not even recognize. But, how can we have obligations to those whom we do not recognize? Doesn't this amount to saying that we have obligations that we cannot recognize? The answer is yes. We are no less responsible because we do not recognize our responsibility. As Derrida points out, “one is never *bête* on one's own, that is how it is, even if this excuses or exonerates nobody” (BS1, 158). So, even if slavery, holocaust, genocide, and war are not institutions that one perpetrates on one's own, nobody is excused or exonerated, neither by ignorance nor by being part of a group. This hyperbolic responsibility is essential to deconstructive ethics. We have obligations in spite of the fact that we cannot know for certain who someone is or what is the right response to give to them. We are obligated to what we may not recognize, which is why merely giving time in debate or extending rights does not insure justice. Justice requires not only that we act otherwise and open ourselves to others, but also that we imagine otherwise and moreover that we continually revise and reconsider what we think we know for sure.

If we cannot be sure that we know right from wrong, if we cannot be sure that the conventions of our society are just, then we have a radical responsibility to always be on the lookout for injustice, most particularly in those moments or places where we feel most sure of ourselves. Derrida goes so far as asking whether we have an ethical obligation to welcome even those who threaten us (BS1, 240). And his analysis suggests that perhaps ethics begins only when we welcome even the most dangerous other. Only when we are willing to risk everything, only then justice may be possible. We have to take our chances, which is not to say we can simply throw the dice or flip a coin in order to decide how to act. Far from it. The chance and risk that Derrida insists are integral to ethics involve the slow and differentiated movements of painstaking critical thinking, of facing the abyss, and only then taking the

leap, never once and for all, but over and over again, and never on level ground or with sure footing.

4. Derrida the Gambler

There is an interesting tension in Derrida's writings between chance and necessity. Like other oppositions, this one is subjected to the deconstructive machine. Arguably, it occupies a special place in thinking through deconstructive ethics. In his work on animals, Derrida deconstructs the opposition between animal reaction and human response (A, BS1). He suggests that there may be no such thing as a pure response that is not also contaminated with reaction; or at least, we cannot be sure that we can tell the difference between one and the other. This distinction that has been definitive of the divide between man and animal brings us back to the figure of the machine. For, as Descartes made clear, to be an animal that reacts rather than a human who responds is to be like a machine, to be a that, a thing, rather than a who. To be on the side of Nature rather than on the side of Culture is to operate according to predetermined laws like a machine. Once we wedge the machine in between the binaries animal–human and Nature–Culture, however, their oppositional stance grinds down, if not completely to a halt.

In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida argues that there are mechanistic operations on both sides of the Nature–Animal and Culture–Human divide. It is not just that humans are animals too and our bodies are subject to natural laws, or as scientists may say, our brains are hard wired. It is not just that there are many ways in which we are like animals in our responses to things, or even perhaps entirely determined by our DNA or chemical make-up. Rather, Derrida suggests that culture also operates like a machine that can determine our actions and make what we take to be responses seem more like reactions. For example, everyday greetings like “hello,” “how are you?” are “programmed” into our behavior. When we think about it, how many of the things that we do are “programmed” by our society and our cultural customs? Even if we believe that at least some of our actions are thoughtful, individual, or unique, how can we be sure where to draw the line between those that are responses and those that are mere reactions? Derrida is not arguing that response and reaction amount to the same thing, or that animals are people too, or that culture operates according to something like natural laws. To the contrary, he is asking us to critically reflect on our commonly held beliefs, especially our commonly held assumptions about our own abilities and the lack of those same abilities in others, including animals. In this way, deconstructive ethics multiplies differences and fractures traditional boundaries.

Again, we might suppose that challenging our customary ways of thinking about binary oppositions means throwing everything to the wind, including ethics and

ethical responsibility for others. But, to the contrary, Derrida insists that deconstructive ethics calls for

a great vigilance as to our irrepressible desire for the threshold, a threshold that is a threshold, a single and solid threshold. Perhaps there never is a threshold, any such threshold. Which is perhaps why we remain on it and risk staying on the threshold for ever. (BS1, 333–334)

In other words, first we must be attentive to our desire for limits, categories, and fixed boundaries between Nature and Culture, Man and Animal, Good and Evil. For example, we need to be vigilant about when this shows up as a defensive or offensive strategy. Second, we must risk staying on the threshold of undecidability forever; which is to say, never deciding *once and for all* what/who something is and how we should respond to it/her. Rather, we need to decide each time with slow and differentiated deliberations.

This is why Derrida relentlessly aims his deconstructive approach at some of our most cherished concepts and beliefs. He doesn't do so in order to destroy them; but rather, in a sense, to protect them. He applies his deconstructive machinery against the machinations of oppositional and categorical thinking that leads to violence, war, and genocide in the hopes of preventing the worst of it. Yet, the movements of this machine are always precarious and risky because even as the deconstructive machinery is aimed at concepts such as justice, liberty, and democracy, it is also aimed at itself. Derrida articulates this risk as a double bind, the twisting, raveling, and unraveling machinery of deconstruction:

Liberty and sovereignty are, in many respects, indissociable concepts. And we can't take on the concept of sovereignty without also threatening the value of liberty . . . The double bind is that we should deconstruct, both theoretically and practically, a *certain* political ontotheology of sovereignty without calling into question a certain thinking of liberty in the name of which we put this deconstruction to work. (BS1, 301; Derrida says a "certain" to indicate that there are various forms)

To make it more concrete, Derrida gives the example of mental asylums and zoos. We want to challenge those institutions in the name of liberty for all and yet not to the point that we have no limits, no walls, no fences, an absolute freedom of movement for everyone; in other words, a world without laws. We want to argue for liberty, but always within limits. No one wants to give up the safe haven of his or her own home, if one is fortunate enough to have one.

Derrida is not proposing more lock-ups or no lock-ups, more fences or no fences, more laws or no laws, but rather a hyperbolic vigilance in analyzing how these lock-ups, fences, and laws do violence that we disavow, or that we don't want to see, or

that we don't see, or perhaps can't even see. The answer, then, is not kinder, gentler lock-ups. Deconstruction is not liberalism. On the contrary, deconstruction challenges liberal discourses of justice, liberty, and democracy to vigilantly attempt to see their own blind spots. This hyperbolic ethics subjects liberal values to the deconstructive machine, not in order to produce alternative moral codes or values, but rather to continually feed codes and values into it in the hopes "that the event might challenge or surprise the other machination," the machinations of exclusionary logics that always include some as Us or Friend and exclude others as Them or Enemy. It sets us the urgent, but impossible, task of inventing limits that are not lock-ups.

5. Upping the Ante

Throughout *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida plays with the phrase "upping the ante" and other such betting or gambling metaphors. Reading various texts from Western intellectual history, he continually ups the ante or raises the stakes by taking them to their logical conclusions while at the same time attempting to twist them free from binary logics toward more openness to otherness, toward hyperbolic ethics and hyperbolic politics, with their obligations to welcome differences, even those we cannot recognize. This upping the ante involves a double movement. The first is taking the text at its word, so to speak, and seeing how that leads to uncanny moments and surprising conclusions. This first move is what we might call the classical deconstructive move of showing how tensions in the text make it say more than it means or something other than it seems. The second move, re-upping the ante, is placing the text in the context of the larger framework of deconstructing a concept at play there. For example, in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida is deconstructing the concept, or a *certain* concept, of sovereignty, and more generally the opposition between human (sovereign) and animal (beast). An eclectic group of texts are one at a time and very carefully subjected to this double movement in order to raise the stakes in the ways that we think about ethics and politics. These higher stakes include ethical obligations to others who are not like us in the hope of creating an ethos of hospitality; and public policies that are flexible enough to constantly overturn themselves when necessary to include others, even those previously unrecognized as worthy of inclusion, in a polis that values the well-being of all. The stakes are pretty high, even impossibly high. Who can call this a bet? Who is up to the task of answering this challenge?

Focusing on a narrower text-driven question may help us answer these broader ones. A question raised by Derrida's discussion of sovereignty is, how does this hyperbolic move, this upping and re-upping the ante, differ from the certain kind of sovereignty that Derrida dares to challenge? Before answering this question, it is important to note that Derrida acknowledges that there is no escaping the logic of sovereignty (just as he acknowledges that there is no escaping the metaphysics of

presence – the assertion that something *is* so and so). Every time one asserts oneself as a self, as an agent, as someone who can do something, or anything, one is asserting one's sovereignty. This limitation is related to a minor tension in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (that also appears in some of his other texts) between moments in which Derrida criticizes other thinkers for claiming to be the first, the best, the most, and so on, and moments when Derrida himself claims that never before has anyone done what he is doing. His criticism of the rhetoric of the first is perhaps nowhere as forceful as in his engagement with Agamben; and perhaps this is because it is a seminar he taught and not a work that he published (see, e.g., BS1, 92, 94, 324, 327). But in this same seminar, there are places where Derrida claims that never before has anyone interpreted a text in the way he has, or noticed what he has noticed (e.g., BS1, 263; cf. A, 62). I point this out to show that even on the level of style, it is impossible to escape the logic of sovereignty, of the "I can."

The question of how the hyperbolic move of hyperbolic ethics differs from the hyperbolic move of sovereignty is not motivated by this kind of "aha he is doing it too," but rather it arises in relation to a particular passage in the seminar in which Derrida describes the *certain* sovereignty that he has in his sights as one of hyperbole (BS1, 257). Toward the end of the seminar, Derrida takes aim at a certain kind of sovereignty that claims to be the *more than, the most*:

What is essential and proper to sovereignty is thus not grandeur or height as geometrically measurable, sensible, or intelligible, but excess, hyperbole, an excess insatiable for the passing of every determinable limit: higher than height, grander than grandeur, etc. (BS1, 257)

At first blush, this sounds a lot like the hyperbolic ethics of deconstruction: it is excessive, hyperbole, insatiable, passing every limit. So, what is the difference between the hyperbolic move of sovereignty and the hyperbolic move of deconstructive ethics? The passage continues: "It [sovereignty] is the *more*, the *more than* that counts, the absolutely more, the absolute supplement that exceeds any comparative toward an absolute superlative" (BS1, 257).

What distinguishes the hyperbolic move of sovereignty from the hyperbolic move of deconstructive ethics is that the former leaves no remainder, no excess. Hyperbolic sovereignty claims to be the best, the most, indivisible, self-sustaining, and self-sufficient. Hyperbolic ethics, on the other hand, maintains that there is always remainder, always excess, always another response to give, always another obligation to consider, always an other and otherness upon whom we prop ourselves up. In a certain way, if absolute sovereignty ups the ante in order to win at all costs, hyperbolic ethics ups the ante in order to lose no matter what. The role of hyperbole in deconstructive ethics is to continually subject the ideal to the double movement and thereby up the ante. The ideal itself must come under scrutiny for the ways in which it works against itself to create the very thing it claims to prevent. The ideal

is a moving target precisely because there is no ideal in itself, but rather concepts that have histories and contexts. Justice, liberty, and democracy are such concepts, concepts in whose name we perpetrate the greatest violence, torture, and war. The deconstructive gamble is not a game of chance that can be won but rather one that we must play even if we are bound to lose, even if, in a certain sense, losing is necessary for the sake of justice to come.

6. The Deconstructive Dose

The deconstructive machine is one that necessarily turns back on itself. Or, more precisely, it is the operation of turning the machinery of liberal democracy and Western intellectual history back on themselves. Deconstructive ethics operates according to the logic of “one nail takes out the other,” a machine with which to challenge and surprise the other machination, the machination of violence. This deconstructive turning back is a homeopathic operation. For example, take the concept of purity itself. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida probes the limit set up between various binary oppositions, including Nature and Culture, in order to challenge the “mythic purity” of concepts (Good or Evil) on either side of the divide:

Man calls himself man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementary; the *purity* of nature, of animality, primitivism, childhood, madness, divinity. The approach to these limits is at once feared as a threat of death, and desired as access to a life without difference. (OGC, 244, my emphasis; cf. OGC, 235, 290)

Derrida’s deconstructive project challenges our investment in the purity of concepts that drives the history of philosophy. Yet, in his later work on forgiveness and hospitality, Derrida insists on the purity of these concepts. In order to explain this apparent shift, we could say that Derrida employs a concept of purity *homeopathically* in these later writings. The concept of *purity* – or we could say the purity of concepts – that he employs in his later work seems intended to counteract the history of philosophy’s adherence to a notion of pure Nature as distinct from impure or corrupt culture.

Derrida’s “On Forgiveness” uses a notion of pure forgiveness to interrupt discourses of racial and ethnic purity as manifest in the Holocaust and Apartheid (CF, cf. Oliver 2007). On the one hand, Derrida challenges the possibility of forgiveness as it operates in contemporary discussions of “crimes against humanity.” On the other, he “measures” them against the immeasurable, or as he says, incalculable, concept of pure forgiveness. He suggests that only by comparing our everyday forms of forgiveness that operate within economies of exchange and reciprocity to the concept of pure forgiveness can we continue to challenge ourselves or open ourselves to the most radically other, whom we may not even recognize let alone be able to forgive. Indeed, pure forgiveness is not a matter of one’s ability; it is not something

that one gives or takes away, at least not if it is forgiveness “worthy of its name,” which is to say worthy of the concept of forgiveness itself.

In this way, Derrida’s notion of pure forgiveness serves as a *homeopathic* remedy for genocidal discourses of racial and ethnic purity. The homeopathic remedy, if never a cure, requires taking a dose of the very poison we seek to neutralize: we need a dose of one kind of purity – pure or natural purity – as an antidote to another kind of purity: one ideal of purity takes out the other. Unlike the discourses of purity that feed racial cleansing and genocide, Derrida’s is a conceptual purity, or better yet the concept of purity or the pure concept with which he contrasts all corrupted forms. He is not holding out an impossible ideal so that we may always feel inferior or ashamed, but rather so that we will also be open to reconsidering what we take to be hospitality, forgiveness, democracy, or justice. His deconstructive dose of purity uses reason against itself in this homeopathic way as an antidote to all of the reasons human beings have given to justify enslaving each other and other living creatures. Even from his earliest work, deconstruction has been a homeopathic methodology insofar as it has always used the text, the concepts, the history of philosophy against itself in order to begin to imagine an ethics, “worthy of its name.”

Derrida’s addition of the phrase “worthy of its name” (*digne de ce nom*) to his invocations of the pure concepts of forgiveness and hospitality suggests that we consider what is proper to the concept or the name. Here again, however, Derrida uses one economy of property or propriety against another. Pure forgiveness worthy of its name is forgiveness that is proper or fitting to the concept of forgiveness, to the name forgiveness, as it has evolved in Western thought. *Pure forgiveness worthy of its name*, then, doubly emphasizes the value of the pure concept or name to which we aspire and to which we must remain vigilant. This is to say, we can never rest content that we have achieved our goals of hospitality, forgiveness, or justice. This is why Derrida also insists on the unconditional (a word that he also repeatedly uses) form of these concepts, if there is such a thing (a phrase he also sometimes uses).

Derrida’s discourse of pure concepts interrupts one discourse of property, purity, and rigor with another. He uses the notion of pure concepts as an antidote to any self-satisfied everyday practices of forgiveness, including political practices like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. On the one hand, the purity of concepts of hospitality, forgiveness, and justice require unconditionality in that they are impossible to put into practice. On the other hand, all instances of hospitality, forgiveness, and justice have meaning only in relation to their pure or unconditional concepts: “Only an unconditional hospitality can give meaning and practical rationality to a concept of hospitality. Unconditional hospitality exceeds juridical, political, or economic calculation. But no thing and no one happens or arrives without it” (ROG, 149).

As it plays in Derrida’s work, this dynamic of purity and contamination issues from the impossible relationship between the unconditional and the conditioned. How can we inscribe the unconditional or infinite within the conditioned and finite?

This is the ethical question par excellence. We must at once acknowledge the impossibility of this task and recognize that all of our attempts are contaminated. Yet, as Derrida repeatedly reminds us, this paradoxical situation exonerates no one. To the contrary, it is the heart of ethical responsibility. The acknowledgment of impossibility or contamination should not lead to quietude or despair. Rather, it should lead to vigilance and to a renewed commitment to hyperbolic ethics, to recognizing that our ethical obligations may be to others whom we do not yet or even cannot recognize.

And now, in conclusion, it is about time for us to take such a homeopathic dose, as unsettling as it might be. For, if nothing else, deconstructive ethics demands that we ask: Who is this *we*? Who is this *we* that does or does not recognize others? Who is the “we” that has been invoked throughout this chapter? In *On the Name*, Derrida asks “critique of self, but critique of whom exactly? To whom would the reflexive be returned?” (ON, 13). If deconstructive ethics is a vigilant self-critique of our own most cherished values and of our limitations, then we also have to apply it to the notions of “our own,” “ours,” “us,” and “we.” For, aren’t those categories precisely the ones at stake in Derrida’s upping the ante? Us or Them, Friend or Enemy, Good or Evil? How can *we* be so sure *we* can tell the difference? Moreover, who is this “we”? These are some of the most difficult and dizzying questions of slow and differentiated deconstruction. But they are also the questions that raise the stakes of ethical and political life. And, if “we” are willing to take the risk, to subject ourselves to the deconstructive machine, following its circuitous and difficult rhythms may “pay off” in unexpected ways.

Derrida describes slow and differentiated deconstruction:

When I say “slow and differentiated deconstruction,” what do I mean by that? First, that the rhythm of this deconstruction cannot be that of a seminar or a discourse ex cathedra. This rhythm is first of all the rhythm of what is happening in the world ... through crises, wars, phenomena of so-called national and international terrorism, massacres that are declared or not, the transformation of the global market and of international law ... On the other hand ... and this is why I say “slow” but especially “differentiated,” it cannot be a matter, under the pretext of deconstruction, of purely and simply, frontally, opposing sovereignty. There is not SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SOVEREIGN. There is not THE beast and THE sovereign. There are different and sometimes antagonistic forms of sovereignty, and it is always in the name of one that one attacks another: for example (we were alluding to this earlier) it is in the name of a sovereignty of man, or even of the personal subject, of his autonomy (for autonomy and liberty are also sovereignty, and one cannot without warning and without threatening by the same token all liberty, purely and simply attack the motifs or the rallying cries of independence, autonomy, and even nation-state sovereignty, in the name of which some weak peoples are struggling against the colonial and imperial hegemony of more powerful states). (BS1, 76)

In a sense, Derrida's deconstructive ethics provides a kind of corrective for morality. Moral imperatives made and followed by the sovereign "I am" or "I can" are at odds with ethics. Moral codes may give us a clear sense of our duties, but they do so by turning response into mindless reactions that avoid the difficulty of ethical decision making, including the existential ambiguity of ethics discussed by Beauvoir, the insomnia of ethical responsibility suggested by Levinas, the ambiguity and ambivalence of Kristeva's notion of abjection as the flip side of morality, and the crucial process of Derridean undecidability out of which decisions emerge. If morality divides the world into Good and Evil, or Natural and Perverse, then hyperbolic ethics demands that we constantly question those binary oppositions and our own investments in them. Do we make such distinctions in order to foster nourishing and healthful relationships or do we divide the world in order to conquer it and take others as trophies (cf. Oliver 2007)? In terms more familiar to recent discussions in ethics we might ask: Do we circumscribe differences to justify hierarchies and domination or to respect them and acknowledge their value? More Derridean questions are: How can we tell the difference? And, who is this we anyhow?

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Deconstruction

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The term “deconstruction” decisively enters philosophical discourse in 1967, with the publication of three books by Jacques Derrida: *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Voice and Phenomenon*. Indeed, “deconstruction” is virtually synonymous with Derrida’s name. Nevertheless, the event of Derridean deconstruction developed out of the phenomenological tradition. On the one hand, as is often noted, Derrida appropriated the term from Heidegger’s idea, in *Being and Time*, of a “destruction” of the history of Western ontology (Heidegger 2010, 19–25 [§6]), that is, a dismantling of the historical concepts of being in order to lay bare the fundamental experience from which these concepts originated (PSY2, 2). On the other, and less often noted, Derrida took constant inspiration from Husserl’s idea of the epoché (Husserl 2012, 59–60 [§32]), that is, from the universal suspension of the belief in a world having existence independent from experience (see, e.g., SM, 59). Both Heidegger’s historical destruction and Husserl’s universal suspension amounted to critical practices in regard to accepted beliefs and sedimented concepts. Likewise, Derridean deconstruction criticizes structures, concepts, and beliefs that seem self-evident. In this regard, deconstructive critique is classical (or traditional, Kantian), aiming to demonstrate the limited validity of concepts and beliefs, even their falsity, aiming, in other words, to dispel the illusions they have generated. In general, deconstructive critique targets the illusion of presence, that is, the idea that being is simply present and available before our eyes. For Derrida, the idea of presence implies self-givenness, simplicity, purity, identity, and stasis. Therefore, deconstruction aims to demonstrate that presence is never given as such, never simple, never pure, never self-identical, and never static; it is always given as something other, complex, impure, differentiated, and generated.

Deconstruction, however, is more than a critical endeavor. It aims at positive effects, as we shall see. Although the effects it wants to bring about take a variety of forms, most basically, deconstruction aims to lead us to an experience. Again, resembling Husserl's epoché and Heidegger's destruction, Derrida's deconstruction leads us to the experience of time. Or, more precisely, it aims for an experience of what lies prior to the division of time and space. What lies prior to the division of time and space is also prior to presence. Indeed, deconstruction aims at an experience of what generates presence. Since it generates presence, what this experience tries to reach cannot itself be present; it must be – necessarily, structurally, and not accidentally – non-present. The non-present source of presence, for Derrida, is a process of differentiation that never either completely separates or finally unifies phases of time or dimensions of space. Early in his career, Derrida coined the word “différance” to refer to this “ultra-transcendental” experience of differentiation (VP, 13 and 58). The ending, spelt with an “a,” gives “difference” (a word used to refer to actual differences already generated) an active sense of differing that never stops and therefore always delays the achievement of identity. Although “différance” is probably the most famous of all Derrida's invented terms, later, based on the context into which his deconstruction intervened, he invents or gives new senses to words like “undecidability”; “pharmakon”; “khōra”; “specter”; “justice”; “democracy”; “hospitality”; and, most importantly, “anachronism.” Below, we shall present in particular the experience of anachronism. No matter what the context however, all of these words refer to the experience of life, and, if, thanks to deconstruction, we reach this experience, we undergo a change in the way we live. Therefore – this was Derrida's constant hope – deconstruction should always have an ethical or political effect on us.

1. Three Definitions of Deconstruction

First Definition: In 1967, when Derrida introduced the term “deconstruction,” he did not define it in a formal way. However, as his career developed, he presented three precise definitions. The first definition appears in the interview “Positions.” At the time of this interview, 1971, Derrida's deconstructions seemed always to target texts and ideas found in the Western metaphysical tradition, which Derrida (somewhat infamously) had dubbed “the metaphysics of presence” (VP, 53). In “Positions,” Derrida states that the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence consists in two phases. The first phase, which is critical, attacks the classical oppositions that structure metaphysics, oppositions such as inside and outside, same and other, and identity and difference. These oppositions, Derrida states, are subordinating; they are violent hierarchies. The first phase of deconstruction “reverses” the hierarchies. In order to reverse, Derrida focuses on the presuppositions of the superior term's authority. Under scrutiny, it turns out that the superior term presupposes traits found in the subordinate term. At this point in his career, Derrida targets primarily the

metaphysical conception of language. In general, in its conception of language, metaphysics privileges speech (as we see, for example, in Plato's *Phaedrus*). Metaphysics privileges speech because communication seems to function better when the speaker is present animating his or her words. Written language (books, texts, scripts, or diagrams and traces) seems then to be derivative from spoken language since written language repeats spoken language and consequently, as a repetition, writing does not communicate as well as speech. In fact, metaphysics believes that the primary trait of speech is spontaneity, while that of writing is repeatability. Yet, as Derrida has demonstrated several times, both speech and writing, in order to function, in order to communicate at all (either well or badly), must make use of formal characteristics or traits, either phonic forms and orthographic forms, forms that must be repeatable. Therefore, language must be conceived fundamentally in terms of repeatability, the very characteristic that seemed to define writing alone. In other words, both speech and writing share the trait of repeatability.

The sharing of traits points to a necessary structure, more precisely, to a process at the base of the hierarchy itself. So, deconstruction, in this first definition, has a second phase that aims at marking the basic process that made the hierarchical opposition possible in the first place. The basic process is what we just called "repeatability," but it is also what we called at the beginning "differentiation." That we already have two contradictory names for the basic process indicates that the process is paradoxical or aporetic. It produces the oppositions and hierarchies with which metaphysics works, but, being their source, it cannot be named by the terms of these oppositions and hierarchies. Indeed, the process is so basic, so fundamental – again it is "ultra-transcendental" – that it cannot be named properly or adequately; all names selected to designate it will have been determined by the very oppositions and hierarchies that the structure conditioned or generated. Nevertheless, we must speak of it. To do that, we must make use of what Derrida calls "paleonyms," that is, old names inherited from these oppositions and hierarchies (POS, 95). In his reuse of these names, Derrida aims "at the emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that no longer lets itself, and has never let itself be included in the previous regime" (POS, 42). As we noted above, early in his career, the 1960s, we find Derrida's famous concept of *différance*; in the same period of this thinking, however, in his engagement with the problem of language, he also coins "supplementarity," "writing," and "trace." All of these new concepts are defined in terms of an irreducible relation that is contradictory, a contradiction, Derrida argues, that cannot be resolved. Irresolvable, these new concepts are undecidable – undecidable, as we just mentioned and as we shall develop more fully in the next section, between repetition and event, between universality and singularity. If we can experience the undecidability, then we are on the verge of exiting the terrain of metaphysics.

Second Definition: The first definition of deconstruction as two phases gives way to the refinement we find in the "Force of Law" almost 20 years later (1989–1990). While the first definition suggests a sort of political endeavor – a transformative

experience that makes us escape from a regime of thinking – the second definition is explicitly ethical or political. In “Force of Law,” Derrida says that deconstruction is practiced in two styles. These “two styles” do not correspond to the “two phases” in the earlier definition of deconstruction. On the one hand, there is the genealogical style of deconstruction, which recalls the history of a concept or a theme. Earlier in his career, Derrida had laid out, for example, the history of the concept of writing. But now, later in his career, he is more interested in the history of justice, democracy, and hospitality. On the other hand, there is the more formalistic or structural style of deconstruction, which examines ahistorical paradoxes or aporias. In “Force of Law,” Derrida lays out three aporias, although they all seem to be variants of one, an aporia concerning the unstable relation between law (the French term is “*droit*,” which also means “right”) and justice. Let us examine the three aporias presented in “Force of Law.”

Derrida calls the first aporia, “the epoché of the rule” (FL, 22–23). Here we see, quite explicitly, Husserl’s influence on Derrida. The aporia consists of the following contradiction. In order to be just, a judge must follow a rule; otherwise, everyone would say that his or her judgment is arbitrary. Yet, if a judge merely follows a rule, everyone would also say that his or her decision was merely right (*droit*) and not really just. In other words, for a decision to be just, not only must a judge follow a rule but also he or she must “re-institute” it in a new judgment. Thus a decision aiming at justice is both regulated and unregulated. The law must be both conserved and destroyed (or suspended). Each case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation which no existing coded rule can or ought to guarantee. If a judge programmatically follows a code, he or she is a “calculating machine.” Strict calculation or strict arbitrariness, one or the other is unjust, but they are both involved; thus, in the present, we cannot say that a judgment, a decision is just, purely just. For Derrida, the “re-institution” of the law in a unique decision is a kind of violence since it does not conform perfectly to the instituted codes; the law is always, according to Derrida, founded in violence. This violent decision brings us to the second aporia.

Derrida calls the second “the ghost of the undecidable” (FL, 24–26). A decision begins with the initiative to read, to interpret, and even to calculate. But, to make such a decision, one must first of all experience undecidability. Indeed, in “Force of Law,” Derrida makes the concept of undecidability more precise than he had in the first definition of deconstruction. The undecidable, for Derrida, is not the mere oscillation between two contradictory significations. Instead, one must experience that the case, being unique and singular, does not fit the established codes and therefore a decision about it seems to be impossible. It is the experience of what, although foreign to the calculable and the rules, is still obligated. We are obligated – this is a duty – to give ourselves up to the impossible decision, while taking account of rules and law. As Derrida says, “A decision that did not go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application

or unfolding of a calculable process” (FL, 24). And once the ordeal is past, “if this ever happens,” as Derrida says (FL, 24), then the decision has again followed or given itself a rule and is no longer presently just. Justice therefore is always to come in the future, it is never present. There is apparently no moment during which a decision could be called presently and fully just. Either it has not followed a rule, and hence it is unjust; or if it did follow a rule, it was calculated and again unjust since it did not respect the singularity of the case. This relentless injustice is why the ordeal of the undecidable is never past. It keeps coming back like a “phantom,” which “deconstructs from the inside every assurance of presence, and thus every criteriology that would assure us of the justice of the decision” (FL, 24–25). Even though justice is impossible and therefore always to come in or from the future, justice is not, for Derrida, a Kantian ideal, which brings us to the third aporia.

The third is called “the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge” (FL, 26–28). Derrida stresses the Greek etymology of the word “horizon”: “As its Greek name suggests, a horizon is both the opening and limit that defines an infinite progress or a period of waiting.” Justice, however, even though it is un-presentable, does not wait. A just decision is always required immediately. It cannot furnish itself with unlimited knowledge. The moment of decision itself remains a finite moment of urgency and precipitation. The instant of decision is then the moment of madness, acting in the night of non-knowledge and non-rule. Once again we have a moment of irruptive violence. This urgency is why justice has no horizon of expectation (either regulative or messianic). Justice remains an event yet to come. Perhaps one must always say “can-be” (the French word for “perhaps” is “peut-être,” which literally means “can be”) for justice. This ability for justice aims however towards what is impossible, which brings us to the third definition of deconstruction.

Third Definition: The third definition can be found in an essay from 2000 called “Et Cetera.” Here Derrida in fact presents the most general definition of deconstruction:

Each time that I say “deconstruction and X (regardless of the concept or the theme),” this is the prelude to a very singular division that turns this X into, or rather makes appear in this X, *an impossibility* that becomes its proper and sole possibility, with the result that between the X as possible and the “same” X as impossible, there is nothing but a relation of homonymy, a relation for which we have to provide an account. . . . For example, here referring myself to demonstrations I have already attempted . . . gift, hospitality, death itself (and therefore so many other things) can be possible only *as impossible*, as the im-possible, that is, unconditionally. (EC, 300, my emphasis)

As we stated at the beginning, deconstruction aims to show that presence is never given as such, never simple, never pure, never self-identical, and never static. Now we can see that the “never” in this formula in fact refers to a kind of powerlessness. It is impossible for me to make presence ever be completely and finally present. More importantly, thanks to deconstruction, I experience that justice, democracy,

hospitality – all of these so-called “values” – cannot be achieved. If I have truly entered into the experience, then I do not undergo paralysis. I experience an obligation – always divided, contradictory, impossible – that I must attempt to fulfill, that I must follow. Let us look at this obligatory experience more closely.

2. Anachronism: Life as Powerlessness and Power

From the beginning of his career to the end, Derrida always states that what he is most interested in is life (VP, 9; A, 49). For Derrida, life must be studied, not from the side of the living being, but from the side of experience, the experience of being alive. Fundamentally, the experience of being alive is what Derrida calls “auto-affection” (VP, 60–74). Auto-affection refers to self-experience, but it is not the experience opened up by a deliberate act of reflection through which an object called the self is given in a representation. Below reflection and as its origin is the basic experience of my own body, of my own thoughts. Derrida is especially interested in the experience of thinking, which, since Plato in the *Theaetetus* (189e–190a), has been defined as interior monologue. The experience we are now going to examine is the experience of interior monologue. In Derrida, interior monologue is always the object of a deconstruction.

When I engage in interior monologue, when, in short, I think – it seems as though I hear myself speak at the very moment I speak. It seems as though my interior voice is not required to pass outside of myself, as though it is not required to traverse any space, not even the space of my body. So, my interior monologue seems to be immediate, immediately present, and not to involve anyone else. Interior monologue seems therefore to be different from the experience of me speaking to another and different from the experience of me looking at myself in the mirror, where my vision has to pass through, at the least, the portals of my eyes. It is important to hear the “seems” in the preceding sentences. We are now going to deconstruct the appearances in order to expose the essential structure, or, more precisely, the essential process below what is apparent or believed. So, the problem with the belief that interior monologue (in a word, thought) is different from other experiences of auto-affection is twofold. On the one hand, the experience of hearing oneself speak is temporal (like all experience). The “timing” of interior monologue means that the present moment involves a past moment, which has elapsed and which has been retained. It is an irreducible or essential necessity that the present moment comes after, a little later; it is always involved in a process of mediation. The problem therefore with the belief that interior monologue happens immediately (as if there were no mediation involved) is that the hearing of myself is never immediately present in the moment when I speak. The speaking fades into the past, time passes between the speaking and the hearing so that the hearing of myself in the present comes a moment later. There is a delay between the hearing and the speaking. This conclusion means that my interior

monologue, in fact, resembles my experience of the mirror image in which my vision must traverse a distance that differentiates me into seer and seen. This distance and delay are the truth of the experience. Due to this delay and distance – we are in an experience that is prior to the division of time and space – it is impossible for me to hear myself immediately.

But there is a further implication. The distance or delay in time turns my speaking in the present moment into something coming second. Temporalization implies that the present is not an origin all alone; it is compounded with a past so that my speaking in the present moment is no longer *sui generis*. Therefore it must be seen as a kind of response to the past. The fact that my speaking is a response to the past leads to the other problem with the belief that interior monologue is my own. Beside the irreducible delay involved in the experience of auto-affection, there is the problem of the voice. In order to hear myself speak at this very moment, I must make use of the same phonemes as I use in communication (even if this monologue is not vocalized externally through my mouth). It is an irreducible or essential necessity that the silent words I form contain repeatable traits (as we mentioned above in the first definition of deconstruction). This irreducible necessity means that, when I speak to myself, I speak with the sounds of others. In other words, it means that I find in myself other voices, which come from the past: the many voices are in me. I cannot – here we must speak of powerlessness – hear myself speak all alone. Others' voices contaminate the hearing of myself speaking. Just as my present moment is never immediate, my interior monologue is never simply my own.

The experience that we have just described is what Derrida calls “anachronism” (AP, 81). The term “anachronism” means that things never happen at the right time, never come on time; in short, time is “out of joint,” as Derrida quotes Hamlet (SM, 17–19). The description above disclosed a formal structure at work in the process, a structure consisting of two “out of joint” or irreconcilable elements. On the one hand, there is always a present moment, a kind of event, a singularization. Each thought I have, as I speak it, has a kind of novelty to it. On the other, however, the singularity of the thought is connected back to some other thoughts in the past. As the description shows, each thought is necessarily composed of traits already used in the past. These two elements of repetition (or universality) and singularity (or difference) are irreducibly connected to one another but without unification. The necessary inseparable disunity of event and repetition implies that there is no simple beginning of time, no origin; no matter how far we go back into the past, what appears as an origin is always the repetition of something prior. Likewise, the necessary inseparability of event and repetition implies that there can be no simple end of time, no apocalypse; no matter how far we go out into the future, what appears as an end is always the anticipation of something later. As Derrida says, the origin is always “origin-heterogeneous” (OS, 107–108). Although he never says this explicitly, we must add that for Derrida, the end, likewise, is always “end-heterogeneous.” It is perhaps harder to understand the idea of “end-heterogeneous” than the idea of

“origin-heterogeneous.” It seems easier for us to imagine the past extending indefinitely, while it seems difficult for us to imagine the world continuing without end. Yet, contesting the image of a complete apocalypse, Derrida in fact seems to assert that the world – or something – will continue indefinitely. This is what he seems to have in mind. Let us imagine an end of the world. Let us even say the obliteration of the world. However we would think of that devastation, as an explosion, extinction, or cataclysm, no matter how destructive or catastrophic, it would leave behind something residual. We cannot imagine destruction without something left over. Whatever this leftover might be, however we would think of this residual something, as energy, micro-particles, dense matter, space, gases, light, micro-organisms, it would necessarily continue. It would necessarily continue to have some sort of effects, and thus it would continue to have a future, something coming. “End-heterogeneous” means that it is necessarily the case that something else or other is always still to come from or in the future. This claim about the necessity of a “to come” (the French word for “future” is literally “to come”: “a-venir”) is the foundation for all of Derrida’s discussions of messianism late in his career. For Derrida however, unlike the well-known messianisms, the messiah or event that is always to come is not necessarily good or evil. Strictly, we do not and cannot know what event is coming since the future remains ultimately hidden, just as we are unable strictly to experience our own death (since if we did, we would not be dead). With this impossibility (recall the third definition of deconstruction), we have returned to the powerlessness indicated by the auto-affection of hearing oneself speak.

Probably influenced by Heidegger’s lectures on Nietzsche (Heidegger 1991), Derrida has always attempted to lead us back to the experience that shows us that we do not have the power that we think we have. In the auto-affection of hearing oneself speak, we encountered this powerlessness when we recognized that other voices always contaminate my own voice. The contamination of voices means, on the one hand, that I am powerless to stop my voice from being a copy, from being repetitious, the same (by means of the fact that I must speak with the traits or phonemes of a language, which in order to function must have some sort of formal universality); on the other hand, even though there is a repetition, I am powerless to stop my voice from being something new, different, other (by means of the fact that when I speak with the same traits of a language, my own voice comes in, as an event, as a singularity). In the experience therefore, I encounter a double powerlessness: I cannot stop repetition; I cannot stop singularization. The double powerlessness is a double necessity, as if in the experience of hearing myself speak, I experience a commandment, a law – a law that, being inseparably divided, I cannot fulfill. I must repeat, and yet I must singularize. However, with this divided law (recall the aporia of undecidability in the second definition of deconstruction), something becomes possible. From powerlessness, we pass to a kind of power. This is life: I am powerless to stop change, alterity, and ultimately the future from coming, but I have the power to let change happen; I am powerless to stop continuity, sameness, and

ultimately the past from coming back, but I have the power to let continuity happen. In other words, if I cannot stop my voice from repeating, from being the same as other voices, then I have the power to let that repetition happen, I can obey the law of repetition; if I cannot stop my voice from singularizing itself, from being my own voice, then I have the power to let that singularization happen, I can obey the law of singularization. The inability to stop, which in fact is the ability to let happen, has one further implication. It implies that I cannot close the borders of my self-experience, so that I am unable to stop myself – unable to stop my country, my democracy, my people – from being hospitable not only to what is the same but also to what is foreign, migrating, vagrant, homeless, and even beastly. This inability means that I am able to let enter, to welcome in, not only all those who are the same as me, but also all those that are other from me. Yes, since I can't stop them, let them come in. Through the discourse of power, we see that deconstruction, regardless of which one of the three definitions we take up, contains essentially an ethical or political aim.

3. Conclusion: “Who, We?”

Having an essentially ethical or political aim means that deconstruction always criticizes instituted structures (such as the structures of democracy and law in place today). Its criticisms, however, are never done in the name of explicit policies or laws (such as an actual democratic constitution or an actual law). As Derrida says late in his career, “No politics, no ethics, and no law can be, as it were, deduced from this thought [i.e., from deconstructive thought]. To be sure, nothing can be done with it” (ROG, xv). But the lack of deductive politics does not mean that deconstruction has no effect on the way we live and behave. Instead, the aim of deconstruction is essentially political and ethical in the sense of making us question who we are. In one of the first of many engagements with Heidegger, Derrida asked this simple question: “But who, we?” (MP, 136). This “who are we?” is still the primary deconstructive question. No final answer to this question can be found since we cannot stop the sameness of the others and the otherness of the same from crossing our borders. The question remaining unanswerable, remaining necessarily open implies that we ourselves must become other than the enclosed community of man. The question remaining open makes us search for, even desire, a conception of us that is faithful. We must be faithful to the fact that we never know ourselves in presence. We must be faithful to the fact that the border of us is always porous. We must be faithful to all the others – are they friends or enemies? – who dwell within us, who have already gone away and who are still to come. Yet Derrida has shown us we can never be this faithful. This insufficiency is not a cause for pessimism. It shows us that deconstruction remains necessary. There is always a need for deconstruction.

Note

- 1 Reprinted with permission from *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard, pp. 508–517. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

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The Transcendental Claim of Deconstruction

MAXIME DOYON

1. On the Necessity of Asking Transcendental Questions

Most twentieth-century European philosophers have attempted in one way or another to think anew the Kantian question about the necessary conditions of experience. A rapid survey of last century's European philosophy would easily show that in spite of the various criticisms formulated against the very project of transcendental foundationalism, the vast majority of the philosophers in the so-called Continental tradition have *not* abandoned the project of formulating transcendental arguments altogether. Rather than simply and naïvely dismissing the transcendental perspective in favor of, say, language or naturalism, the scope of the transcendental question has rather been *inflected* in the most various and productive ways.

Whereas Kant's inquiry opened onto a transcendental theory of knowledge of objects of experience "in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*" (2007, A11–12/B25), last century's European tradition has been the stage of numerous attempts at *enlarging* the scope of Kant's transcendental investigation. The question about the conditions of possibility of experience has been taken up by nearly every phenomenologist, who all attempted in one way or other to identify the conditions of possibility of phenomenality and manifestation. The transcendental motif of "conditions of possibility" also had an important impact on the works of the Frankfurt School theorists, whose reflections on the historical and material conditions of rationality led to a radicalization of the movement of historicization of classical transcendentalism inaugurated by Hegel.

Transcendental arguments are even present where we would least expect them, namely in the thinking of the so-called "French poststructuralist" philosophers such

as Foucault, Deleuze, Irigaray, and Derrida. In fact, of all the philosophers of the post-Husserlian era, it is perhaps Jacques Derrida who has engaged most self-consciously with the transcendental tradition. Despite the severe criticism of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology in his first publications, Derrida repeatedly insists on the relevance and legitimacy of the transcendental approach to philosophical problems. Reasserting in all clarity what some hasty readers might have missed in the early works, Derrida affirms in *Paper Machine* that "nothing can discredit the right to the transcendental or ontological question" (PM, 92), not even deconstruction. According to Derrida, the transcendental method or attitude is not only a perfectly legitimate philosophical standpoint, but it is even a *necessary condition* for the practice of philosophy. The inevitability of the transcendental question is one of the many indelible traces that Husserl's phenomenology is said to have left on his work (cf. DP, 81).

But what is it that makes up the specificity of the transcendental project? What does a "transcendental question" amount to, exactly? In Kant's critical project, the term "transcendental" refers, as is well known, to a certain mode of knowledge guided by the possibility of experience. (2007, A783/B811) A transcendental inquiry concerns, more specifically, "the *a priori* possibility of knowledge, or its *a priori* employment" (2007, A56/B80) insofar as it functions as a condition of possibility of experience or of objects of experience. According to Kant, there are specific conditions that must be met by the subject in order for there to be an epistemic relation to an object, and the central task of the Analytic in the *Critique of Pure Reason* consists in identifying what these subjective conditions are.

The term "transcendental" bears a wider, but at the same time similar signification in Husserl's phenomenology. Although it is not until the 1920s that Husserl came to fully acknowledge the affinity of Kant's critical project with his own transcendental endeavor, Husserl was already echoing Kant's characterization of transcendental philosophy in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* when he affirms that he is chiefly "concerned with a quite necessary generalization of the question as to the 'conditions of the possibility of experience'" (2001a, 149). This was a prelude to the full-blown transcendental orientation of phenomenology after the discovery of the reduction and the epoché during the summer of 1905. In the phenomenological attitude, to which the reduction leads, phenomenological philosophy finds all sense constituted by transcendental subjectivity. The "being and sense" of the world is construed as an accomplishment or achievement (*Erkenntnisleistung*) of the sense-bestowing activity of the transcendental ego.

If the later Husserl did not hesitate to range his own phenomenology within the Kantian tradition of transcendental philosophy (cf. Husserl 1977, 148f.), it is because Husserl recognized that for him, too, the question about the "conditions of 'possibility of experience' are the first" of his philosophical concerns (1997, 119). Notwithstanding his essential critical remarks about the limits and shortcomings of Kant's transcendental framework, Husserl unambiguously sides with Kant on the question

of the relevance of the idea of transcendental foundation, to whose transformation he made a profound contribution.

Even if there is no place in Derrida's philosophy for a true transcendental program centered around a transcendental subject, as in Kant or Husserl, Derrida still considers himself to have retained something essential from the transcendental tradition. As he once confessed, the transcendental "demand for the conditions of possibility" (PM, 84) has always driven deconstruction, even if Derrida's own reflection always led him in the end to put into question the very idea of transcendental foundations. In spite of Derrida's well-known reservations about all origin-seeking philosophies, deconstruction has indeed nearly always pursued transcendental types of questions, be it about truth, presence, signification, the relationship to the other, or language, to name just a few commonplaces. These transcendental inquiries into the conditions of possibility of all these phenomena are certainly more immediately visible in the early works, especially those on Husserl, but a patient reading would show that they are still very much present in the later writings as well. Derrida's increasing attention to ethics, religion, and politics in the works of the 1980s onward should not be taken as a sign of departure from his early transcendental concerns, *pace* Richard Rorty (cf. Rorty 1991b). These reflections rather constitute, as will be clear in what follows, an integral part of a more comprehensive philosophical strategy aiming at a still more open and differentiated understanding of the transcendental motif of "conditions of possibility."

However, if the transcendental inquiry into the "conditions of possibility" of various phenomena undeniably forms an essential part of deconstruction's philosophical strategy, it is also only a moment within a broader philosophical strategy. Retaining the impetus of the transcendental question, as that which sets thinking into motion, deconstruction also puts into question the basic tenets of transcendental reflection by pointing out the "original historicity" of the transcendental motif in all its historical incarnations: "medieval onto-theology, criticism, or phenomenology" (PM, 92). In a sense, one of the basic operations of deconstruction is to carry out a kind of archaeological investigation of the concept "transcendental" in these three historical forms. As we will see, this archaeology takes a paradoxical form though, for it aims at critically assessing the limits of transcendental inquiry by identifying the conditions of possibility of the transcendental motif itself in a kind of *ultra-transcendental* reflection that is so radical that it dissolves itself, as it were, opening onto a series of concepts that Derrida conceived of as *quasi-transcendental* (such as trace, *différance*, supplement, etc.). The transcendental claim of deconstruction is encapsulated in this paradox.

For this reason, the contradiction at the heart of the deconstruction of the concept of the transcendental will serve as the guiding thread of this paper. Specifically, it will be shown that deconstruction is driven by a double movement of *criticism* and *appropriation* of the transcendental motif of "conditions of possibility" that is clearly visible in the categories "ultra-" and "quasi-transcendental" that the late

Derrida sometimes uses to characterize his own philosophical trajectory. In *Paper Machine*, Derrida admits that “this word ‘transcendental’ is not one example among others. The category of the ‘quasi-transcendental’ has played a role that is deliberately equivocal but also determinant in many of [his] essays” (PM, 83; also AD, 107). In light of this, we will try to understand exactly why Derrida should be considered a transcendental philosopher of sorts, even if he has significantly moved away from the kind of transcendentalism endorsed by its most famous representatives, namely Husserl and Kant. Our attempt at measuring the scope of Derrida’s redefinition of the transcendental will lead us (in section 5) to highlight Derrida’s specific contribution to the transcendental tradition and by the same token to critically assess the originality of his position in the context of twentieth-century philosophy.

2. Conditions of Possibility as Conditions of Impossibility

Derrida’s renewal of the transcendental problematic is most clearly marked by the concepts “ultra-” and “quasi-transcendental,” introduced in *Of Grammatology* in 1965 and in *Glas* in 1974 respectively. While Derrida will nearly stop using the term “ultra-transcendental” after *Voice and Phenomenon* in 1967, his use of the term “quasi-transcendental” will rapidly increase, to the point of becoming a central concept in the writings of the 1990s. The change in Derrida’s terminology is welcome, for the notion of “quasi-transcendentality” has the advantage of making more readily visible what deconstruction was always aiming at, namely, to show *the precariousness of all foundations* (be they transcendental or not). Roughly and readily, the adverb “quasi” indicates that the work of deconstruction is not so much about seeking a *deeper* transcendental origin (what the prefix “ultra” undeniably suggests, as Habermas shows, cf. Habermas 1987, 161f.), but rather to show that the transcendental principle of a given system or structure is not immune to its other (the empirical, the historical, the mundane, the contingent, etc.). Indeed, if the concepts of *différance*, trace, and writing are all constitutive elements of Derrida’s ultra-transcendental logic, insofar as they function as conditions of possibility of the transcendental *arche* of any given system, they are *at the same time* that which makes the very idea of transcendental foundation ultimately impossible – they are *quasi-transcendental* in that sense.

More specifically, what the concepts “ultra-” and “quasi-transcendental” indicate, beyond a certain suspicion about the univocity and simplicity of the opposition between the empirical and the transcendental, is that the set of “conditions of possibility” of any given structure or system is always and unavoidably contaminated by the threat of its own impossibility or of its own failure. Conditions of possibility *as* conditions of impossibility – this is the axiomatic statement of deconstruction’s transcendental claim:

I have been regularly lead [sic] back over the past thirty years, and in relation to quite different problems, to the necessity of defining the transcendental condition of possibility as also being a condition of impossibility. This is something I am not able to annul. Clearly, to define a function of possibility as function of impossibility, that is, to define a possibility as its impossibility, is highly unorthodox from a traditional transcendental perspective, and yet, this is what reappears all the time, when I come back to the question of the fatality of aporia. (DP, 82)

The “fatality of aporia” mentioned here refers to the aporetic conclusions Derrida is regularly led to in the works of the 1990s regarding political, religious, and ethical experiences. We will return to this later in the chapter. Suffice it to note for the moment that the formal law of Derrida’s transcendental claim alluded to in this passage – conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility – has a much longer history. Although it has been identified *as such* only after Rodolphe Gasché first formulated it in *The Tain of the Mirror*, thereby launching an influential debate on the transcendental or quasi-transcendental status of deconstruction in the English-speaking world, this law has been silently operative in Derrida’s works from the beginning.

One of its best exemplifications is to be found in *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, where writing enjoys a kind of quasi-transcendental status. Indeed, the whole point of Derrida’s argument in the *Introduction* is that Husserl’s demonstration of the transcendental role of writing in the constitution of ideal objects is valid only if one conceives of writing as an empirical practice, a practice that is *as such* always and necessarily threatened by the possibility of non-fulfillment. In other words, writing is a condition of possibility of ideal objects only inasmuch as it *can* fail to meet that demand (due to contingent or empirical reasons). We explain this in more detail in section 3, but the point is that writing functions as a condition of possibility and impossibility *at the same time*, and that is why we can affirm that it enjoys a *quasi-transcendental* status.

In the later works, Derrida’s transcendental concerns are admittedly more implicit, but they are nevertheless still present. Derrida’s later reflections revolve around the notion of the event, as he begins to be more overtly concerned with the *performative dimension* of the transcendental motif of “conditions of possibility.” In *Paper Machine*, Derrida is very explicit about this when he asserts that his renewed “discourse on conditions of possibility . . . should extend to all the places where some performative force occurs” (PM, 88). Seen in that light, “the interminable list of all the so-called undecidable quasi-concepts” connected to his theory of the event (hospitality, justice, forgiveness, etc.) now appear to be “so many aporetic places or dislocation” of the transcendental problematic (FTA, 15).

Against this background, it will be argued in section 4 that most, if not all of the concepts at work in Derrida’s later philosophy are in a very special sense *quasi-transcendental*, for the kinds of conditions of possibility they bring into play are

enacted, or *performed*, albeit only passively (that is, before or outside experience, in the onto-phenomenological sense of that word). This admittedly unconventional approach of the transcendental shows how broad and encompassing Derrida's concept of the quasi-transcendental has become. The kind of "conditions of possibility" Derrida is interested in in the later works are neither formal conditions (like, say, Kant's categories), nor dynamic infrastructures (like those at work in the early works), they are rather "achieved" or "suffered" passively in aporetic experiences that Derrida calls "events."

3. The Quasi-Transcendental in Derrida's Early Works: On the Role of Writing in the *Introduction* to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*

In his reading of Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, Derrida draws our attention to the strange role that Husserl grants to writing in the constitution of ideal meanings. After holding for almost 30 years that the truth-value and validity of idealities were completely detached from the possibility of their expression, writing has become, in Husserl's works of the 1930s, the "highest possibility of all 'constitution'" (IOG, 89), up to and including the so-called free ideal objects of geometry. In a nutshell, Husserl's argument is that writing completes the process of constitution in that it makes transmission and reactivation possible beyond its connection to person, time, and place. Once fixed in written form, scientific objectivities can be transmitted from generation to generation and incorporated into a collective body of knowledge, which every new generation of scientists can revise, perfect, and expand upon. According to Husserl, writing plays a transcendental role in this process of constitution, for by serving as a kind of universal memory and reservoir of knowledge, writing allows for an indefinite number of reactivations.

If Derrida was so keen on Husserl's little essay on geometry, it is because it shows in an unprecedented manner how scientific theories *gradually* arise out of practical life. What interests Derrida is how Husserl explains the *passage* between empirical praxis and pure scientific objectivity. Husserl's investigation begins by noting that every series of primal institutions (*Urstiftungen*) that generate new types of objects, such as geometrical idealities, have an historical origin, by virtue of which they were constituted for the first time. Someone somewhere in the historical chain of events is responsible for the primal constitution of every scientific truth or theorem. Husserl's *Rückfrage* ("return inquiry") aims at recovering the intentional origin of this initial experience, whose meaning has been forgotten.

However, Husserl's inquiry into the origin of theoretical scientific objectivity should not be understood as an attempt to reduce scientific idealities to empirical and factual states of affairs. Husserl is not trying to ground the validity of ideal objects in factual circumstances, or else to identify the actual discoverer of geometry. Husserl's motivation is rather to measure the scientific and philosophical implications of

the fact that objective knowledge always arises in a certain historical time and context, and that it has been developed and handed down over generations and generations. Fundamentally, Husserl's point is that scientific rationality has a *genesis* and has developed over time. Contrary to what Kant thought about it, science is not a static body of knowledge, it is rather a tradition, a cultural institution that has been gradually established and developed by a historical community of transcendental subjects.

In his *Introduction*, Derrida lays great emphasis on the essential connection between Husserl's remarks on the role of history in the constitution of ideal objects, and the act of writing implied by it. For if Derrida agrees by and large with Husserl's diagnosis, he also thinks that Husserl neglected the properly *empirical* dimension of the act of writing in the process of constitution. It is true that writing, in Husserl's analysis, functions as a condition of possibility of idealities, but only to the extent that it establishes a pure relation to a transcendental consciousness. Writing's constitutive role is subordinated to the living intentionality which animates it. As such, the objectifying function of writing has nothing to do with the graphic body itself. As Derrida explains, "when considering the *de jure* purity of intentional animation, Husserl always says that the linguistic body is a flesh, a proper body [*Leib*], or a spiritual corporeality [*geistige Leiblichkeit*]" (IOG, 88), and precisely not a graphic body [*Körper*]. In other words, the virtual potentiality of writing depends for Husserl on the possibility of a universal transcendental "we" and the transcendental language it grounds, not on the facticity of the empirical act of inscription itself, which, for Husserl, is devoid of any constituting significance. This is something Derrida cannot agree with:

As the process of that essential and constitutive capacity for embodiment, language is *also* where every ideal object (i.e., where truth) is *factually* and *contingently* embodied. Conversely, truth has its origin in a pure and simple right to speech and writing, but once constituted, it conditions expression, in its turn, as an *empirical fact*. (IOG, 92)

What Derrida stresses here is the non-separability of the transcendental and empirical functions of writing in the process of constitution:

Writing is not only the worldly and mnemotechnical aid to a truth whose own being-sense would dispense with all writing-down. The possibility or necessity of being incarnated in a graphic sign is no longer simply extrinsic and factual in comparison with ideal Objectivity: it is the *sine qua non* condition of Objectivity's internal completion. As long as ideal Objectivity is not, or rather, *can* not be engraved in the world ... then ideal Objectivity is not fully constituted. (IOG, 89)

In other words, it is only contingent, historical practices of reactivation that make free, self-identical idealities *possible in general*, and not simply writing's virtual potentiality.

However – and here is the paradox upon which Derrida insists on so much – that which establishes writing as the innermost possibility of ideality also opens it up to the contingency of history and the threat of catastrophic loss. For if the “sensible opacity” (IOG, 88) of the written mark does indeed liberate sense from the contingent, private intentionality of the individual subject, it also makes it susceptible to corruption, failure, and even irremediable loss. What Derrida calls (somewhat provocatively) the “transcendental sense of death” (IOG, 88) refers to the inherent fragility that constantly threatens the perfect transmission of ideal sense.

The whole point of Derrida’s analysis is thus the following: being historically determined and conditioned, ideal objects – or universal truths – are in an imminent sense *vulnerable* and *precarious*. They are vulnerable and precarious, not because they are not truly universal, but because the very opening of the universal sphere can only be accomplished in history through specific contingent practices like writing. Because of this ineliminable contingency, the opening constantly threatens to close itself off, the possible constantly threatens to turn into its opposite, the impossible, and the validity of the universal threatens to fall into forgetfulness. However – and this is the crucial point here – this threat is not something “negative,” but it is, as Derrida often says, a chance (cf. PM, 88). It is a chance, for without this possibility, we would be outside history and as such – Husserl was right here – no such knowledge would ever be possible.

It is in virtue of this paradoxical constitutive power that writing must be considered as quasi-transcendental. Writing has a *quasi-transcendental* power in that it completes the process of the constitution of ideal objects, but only inasmuch as that process remains open to the dangers of history (such as accidental loss and contingency more generally). Admittedly, the category “quasi-transcendental” was not yet identified in the *Introduction*, but it was manifestly already operative. Without naming it as such, Derrida expresses the paradoxical structure of quasi-transcendentality when he points out the ambiguity attached to writing’s virtual potentiality: “that virtuality,” he writes, “is an ambiguous value.” If it achieves the constitution idealities, “it simultaneously makes passivity, forgetfulness, and all the phenomena of crisis possible” (IOG, 87). In brief, writing operates as a condition of possibility and impossibility at the same time.

A slightly different, but not altogether dissimilar strategy is at work in *Voice and Phenomenon*. In that text, Derrida uses (only for the second time) the concept “ultra-transcendental” to characterize the Husserlian concept of life (VP, 13). Briefly stated, the phenomenological concept of life is “ultra-transcendental” because the very distinction between the transcendental and empirical (or mundane) life of the ego – which Husserl sees as “parallels” – presupposes as its *a priori* conditions the deeper temporal synthesis of the living present (what Husserl calls the *lebendige Gegenwart*). The living present – or simply “life” – is therefore, Derrida suggests, in an ultra-transcendental position with regard to the transcendental-empirical distinction commanding Husserl’s discourse.

However, Derrida's analysis does not stop there, for he also wants to pin down the "transcendental" conditions of that transcendental life or origin. To that end, Derrida develops a series of arguments aiming to show that the trace, *différance*, repetition, and the supplement, far from being derived from presence, are that which makes the presence of the living present possible in the first place. Insofar as they function – in Derrida's analysis at least – as conditions of possibility of the originary structure of temporalization of consciousness, these concepts are said to be "more originary than the phenomenological originarity itself" (VP, 58). In that sense, they are *ultra-transcendental*, that is to say, they figure as the conditions of possibility of transcendental consciousness, which Husserl conceives as the absolute origin of sense and manifestation. However – and here we rediscover the paradox that interests Derrida so much – since this series of concepts generate *at the same time* one thing and its contrary (repetition, the trace, the supplement, and *différance* generate presence *and* absence at the same time or in the same operation), these concepts must in the final analysis be regarded as *quasi-transcendental* concepts. In other words, the apparent transcendental privilege of these concepts or quasi-concepts cannot be maintained, for they constitute the transcendental origin by denying the possibility of a *pure* origin. These admittedly very cursory remarks should suffice to convey the idea that Derrida's transcendental axiom – conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility – was powerfully at work in *Voice and Phenomenon* as well.

4. The Quasi-Transcendental in Derrida's Later Writings

In order to situate the question of the transcendental in Derrida's later philosophy, it is important to note a paradigm shift in Derrida's mature interpretation of the history of philosophy. Whereas Derrida reads the history of philosophy in the early writings largely through a Heideggerian lens as the history of *metaphysics of presence*, the vast majority of Derrida's later texts are set against the background of the Aristotelian concept of *dynamis* (usually translated as power or potentiality, depending on context). In the latter vein, in the 2001 lecture "Deconstructions: The Im-possible," Derrida asserts that the elaboration of the category of the impossible at the heart of his thinking of the event stems from a reflection on what the word "possible" means, and the central role it has played in the history of metaphysics:

[What I call] the im-possible . . . calls for a reflection on what possible, power, potentiality, dynamic, *dynamis*, "I can," "I can be" and "maybe" all mean. And the entire business of deconstruction seems to me more and more concerned precisely with deconstructing, with all its consequences, this semantic of the possible inherited from Greco-Christian, indeed biblical, thinking: the possible opposed to the impossible, the possible as virtual as opposed to the actual or the act, the possible versus the real, *dynamis* opposed to *energeia*, and so on. (FTA, 18)

If the task of deconstructing this metaphysical thinking of the possible is relevant to the question pursued here, it is because Derrida considers that transcendental philosophy and its central motif of “conditions of possibility” essentially belongs to this Aristotelian tradition. The transcendental reflection – especially in the idealistic form it takes in Husserl’s phenomenology – reaffirms with unequaled subtlety the founding opposition of metaphysics between actuality and possibility (cf. VP, 53). For this reason and despite all appearances to the contrary, transcendental philosophy stands as one of the privileged targets of Derrida’s later thinking. But more generally, Derrida’s reflection on the experience of the impossible event seeks to affect – and that means to transform or reorganize, not simply overturn – what the words “possible” and “impossible” have traditionally meant. Here is how Derrida characterizes the scope of his own endeavor:

the whole question of this value of *possibility* . . . marks our Western philosophical tradition. The history of philosophy is the history of reflections on the meaning of the *possible*, on the meaning of *being* or *being possible*. This great tradition of the *dynamis*, of potentiality, from Aristotle to Bergson, these reflections in transcendental philosophy on the conditions of possibility, are affected by the experience of the event insofar as it upsets the distinction between the possible and the impossible, the opposition between the possible and the impossible. We should speak here of the im-possible event, an im-possible that is not merely impossible, that is not merely the opposite of possible, that is also the condition or chance of the possible. An im-possible that is the very experience of the possible. This means transforming the conception, or the experience, or the saying of the experience of the possible and the impossible. (LD, 236)

As this passage suggests, the conception of the event at work in Derrida’s mature thinking is set up against a tradition which has failed to think what Derrida calls “the im-possible.” The series of “impossible events” or “figures,” which the later Derrida works out in connection with his meditations on political, ethical, and religious experiences, are all destined to transform not only our conception, but also our experience of the possible. In this reflection, the axiomatic principle of Derrida’s transcendental thinking – impossibility as possibility – returns, but it does so under slightly different guises. This time, the impossible is explicitly related to the *performative force* of events. Let me illustrate this by means of an example.

In a now famous footnote in *Of Spirit*, Derrida argues for the necessity of recognizing “a sort of pre-originary pledge [*gage*] that precedes any other engagement in language or action” (OS, 129 n. 5) and that he names the “yes.” The “yes” translates (albeit only obliquely) what Heidegger names the *Zusage*, and it refers to a kind of tacit “commitment of language towards language” (OS, 129 n. 5), “a sort of pre-engagement presupposed by every language and by every speech (*Sprache*)” (PSY2, 237). Both Derrida and (the later) Heidegger see in the “yes” or the *Zusage* the most originary dimension of language and thought, below or above the dignity traditionally granted

to the questioning form of thought. The “yes” is “archi-originary,” asserts Derrida, as it “engages, promises and acquiesces before all else” (PSY2, 239).

What Derrida means here is that the posited discreteness of the things (or persons) we refer to when we speak or write ineluctably implies a pledge, or a promise, since no positing or objectivating act can *on its own* guarantee the presence (or integrity) of the thing itself. Presence is always deferred, as Derrida famously holds, but that just means, as Derrida explains at length in “Ulysses Gramophone,” that speaking about something (anything) is nothing but a *putting-into-presence* of an object whose presence can never simply be given once and for all. Presence always awaits its own confirmation or reaffirmation in a language that is yet to come. Derrida’s “yes,” just as Heidegger’s *Zusage*, refers to this primordial dimension of language that opens up the world and our relation to what is in general (being). Briefly put, these are the reasons Derrida asserts that the “yes” constitutes a “messianic a priori” (DP, 82).

In Derrida’s argument, the archi-originary “yes” clearly functions as a transcendental operator, for “any ontological or transcendental statement presupposes” (PSY2, 239) it as its necessary condition. “Implicated by all the other words whose source it figures,” the “yes” enjoys a necessary and universal status: “it is the ‘silent accompanist’” of every discourse and every speech, “a little like the ‘I think’ in Kant that ‘accompanies’ all our representations” (PSY2, 235). The reference to Kant is very revealing here: in much the same way as Kant’s apperceptive “I,” the “yes” takes a transcendental function in Derrida’s argument, since the promise it constitutes structures *a priori* all my words and all my thoughts about anything. As such, it figures as a transcendental condition of possibility of language and of my being-in-the-world. And yet, since the said condition of possibility is set up by means of some silent performative force that is “more passive than passivity,” the archi-originary “yes” enjoys, in a transcendental perspective, an unheard status: the “yes” is for that reason *quasi*-transcendental or *quasi*-ontological.

In the essay “A Number of Yes,” Derrida deepens just this thought and proposes to sketch out “a kind of quasi-transcendental or ontological analytic of [the] yes” (PSY2, 232). Despite its elliptical nature, this text is particularly interesting, since it insists on two fundamental features of the “yes,” by means of which Derrida explicitly justifies its quasi-transcendental status. First, Derrida affirms that “the quasi” does not refer “to the abstract structure of some ontological or transcendental condition of possibility,” like Kant’s categories, for instance; “quasi” rather seeks to “harmonize [*accorderait*] the originary eventness of the event with the fabulous narrative inscribed in the ‘yes’ as the origin of all speech” (PSY2, 234–235). In this passage, it is the *performative dimension* of the “yes” that comes to the fore. The archi-originary “yes” is a nearly imperceptible event, some kind of silent promise or consent at the origin of language. However, as passive as it is, the “yes” still has performative force: as it affirms language, the “yes” opens up the possibility of saying something meaningful at all. The specifically *transcendental* function of the “yes” of course refers to this inaugural or foundational moment of the pledge.

And yet, the “yes” is not a performative like any other. “The archi-originary ‘yes’ resembles an absolute performative” (PSY2, 238), writes Derrida, but it is not a performative in any straightforward sense. If the “yes” only mimics the kind of performativity involved in speech acts, it is above else because it “is not, strictly speaking, an act” (PSY2, 238). Why so? This is first and foremost because the “yes” is “not assignable to any subject or to any object” (PSY2, 238). Far from proceeding from the stable position of the subject, the archi-originary “yes” rather initiates the process of constitution of the subject (cf. PTS, 255ff.). As it opens up language, the “yes” allows for the possibility to speak and in the same movement it grounds the possibility of constituting something like the subject (which is essentially, for Derrida, *the one who speaks*). It is exactly because the “yes” proceeds from a place below or beneath the very distinction between objectivity and subjectivity – where transcendental philosophy of the Middle Ages and, subsequently, its Kantian-Husserlian transformation respectively located the transcendental – that Derrida asserts that the “yes” is *quasi-transcendental*.

Furthermore, if the “quasi-transcendental or ontological structure of the yes” should not be assimilated to an “absolute performative” (PSY2, 234), it is also – and here is the second reason for labeling it *quasi-transcendental* – because it prescribes its own repetition. *Repetition belongs essentially to the destiny of the yes*. Derrida’s basic thought on this role of repetition is encapsulated in the following passage:

as engagement or promise, [the yes] must *at least* and in advance be tied to a confirmation in another “yes”. . . . This “second” yes is a priori enveloped in the “first”. The “first” would not take place without the project, the wager [*la mise*] or the promise, the mission or emission, the send-off [*envoi*] of the second that is already there in it. This last, the first, is doubled in advance: *yes, yes*, assigned in advance to its repetition. Since the second yes inhabits the first, the repetition augments and divides, splits in advance the archi-originary yes. (PSY2, 239f.)

Inasmuch as the “yes” simultaneously institutes and opens up language, it marks at the same time the promise of a language that is yet to come, and the promise to come to language in a given language. It is at once transcendent and immanent to language: the “yes” calls for its own repetition and its own confirmation on both sides of the border. And it does so *ad infinitum*: the “yes” is not pronounced only once, once and for all, as if the universal laws it prescribes could be extended or generalized from any *one* place. No, the “yes” always calls on the next context, it calls on the next speaker or next reader to confirm it and confirm it again. Each time we speak, we reiterate the pledge of alliance with language, we say “yes” to language one more time. It is essentially for this reason that Derrida often asserted in his later writings that language has the structure of a countersignature, of a promise of repetition. Language is what it is only by calling for its reaffirmation by the future.

If space permitted, I would show that, at a certain level of generalization, what holds for the “yes” is true of *all* the impossible concepts at work in deconstruction (such as the gift, justice, democracy, forgiveness, or the aporia of decision, etc.). All these im-possible concepts are quasi-transcendental concepts as well. In “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida discusses explicitly the quasi-transcendental nature of the experience of bearing witness (FK, 63), whereas in *Adieu*, it is hospitality that is described in quasi-transcendental terms (AEL, 25). These are just two examples, but the list is by definition open-ended and it extends to all the places where some event or performative force occurs.

Briefly put, if all these impossible events must also be regarded as quasi-transcendental, it is because the event – which is ineluctably empirical – is in all these cases placed in a transcendental position with regard to what it constitutes. The im-possible event indeed stands as a condition of possibility of the possible, for in its very happening, the event provokes a reconfiguration of the possible, that is, of what we take to be possible or thinkable. The “yes,” for instance, opens up the possibility of language, it grounds and conditions the (empirical) possibility of (real) linguistic practices. However, and this is the main point, the transcendental structure is not separate or detached from what it conditions, on the contrary. The event is both the (transcendental) condition and the (empirically) conditioned: the “yes” is both within language and outside of it, both immanent and transcendent. It is quasi-transcendental in that sense.

5. The Originality of Derrida’s Contribution in the Context of Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy

The arguments developed above in sections 3 and 4 provide clear evidence that Derrida was right to consider himself as a quasi- or ultra-transcendental philosopher. Throughout his work, Derrida sought to identify the conditions of possibility of the most diverse of phenomena, such as presence, truth, language, justice, and countless others. However, the sort of transcendental investigation he carried out changed over time. Whereas the early Derrida identified such transcendental conditions with the operations of quasi-concepts such as *différance*, trace, and *archi-writing*, the conditions of possibility he was interested in in the later works are brought into play or enacted by means of some passive force (like the *archi-originary* “yes,” for instance).

Yet there is a deep continuity in Derrida’s transcendental strategy, a thread linking both ends of his philosophical trajectory. Common to both the infrastructures and the later events is the aporetic structure of all the quasi-transcendentals. As Derrida himself explains: “All quasi-concepts or quasi-transcendentals at work in deconstruction are inconceivable impossibilities, inconceivable concepts of neither/nor: the trace is neither present nor absent, the specter (which appears much earlier than

Specters of Marx) is what is neither living nor dead, the parergon that is neither sensible nor intelligible, neither/nor, et cetera" (FTA, 21). What is inconceivable in the Aristotelian tradition is Derrida's attempted reconfiguration of the possible/impossible distinction. For the kind of impossibility Derrida has in view does not stand as the straight opposite of the possible, it is rather – this is well known – the condition or chance of the possible. Derrida aims at an impossible that is at the heart of the possible, he describes an experience of the impossible that conditions and enables the possible. Although this became an explicit theme and acquired a more obvious "performative" dimension in Derrida's later investigations, it was manifestly already at work in the early stage when Derrida saw in non-identity and non-presence the conditions of possibility of identity and presence, to take two well-known examples. In these arguments, the transcendental axiom of deconstruction – conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility – was obviously already present, for it is only *as impossible* (i.e., for Derrida, *impure*) that presence and identity could manifest themselves.

It is only to the extent that one stresses this paradoxical structure of possibility and impossibility that the specificity of Derrida's concept of the transcendental can be appreciated within the larger context of twentieth-century European philosophy. To be sure, this axiomatic statement is the radical consequence Derrida draws from his "archeological investigation" of the historical transformations of the concept "transcendental." Yet this claim should not be reduced to a mere historical claim either, for *it is the very logic of the quasi-transcendentals that implies both possibility and impossibility*. For reasons explained throughout this essay, all the quasi-concepts are aporetic or inconceivable concepts. They are all *a priori* structured that way. If Derrida's concerns for history certainly play a fundamental role in his reflection, we would entirely miss Derrida's point if we were reducing his claim to a kind of historicization of the transcendental. Such historical inflection of the transcendental problematic – which we find in Derrida too – is not what is most essential in his deconstructive strategy. It is by no means unique to deconstruction either. In fact, a good deal of twentieth-century European philosophy can be read in this way.

For example, in the wake of Hegel, the transcendental motif of "conditions of possibility" has been thoroughly "historicized" in the works of the Frankfurt School theorists, Adorno in particular. The passage (*Übergang*) from metaphysics to materialism that Adorno calls for in *Negative Dialectics* opens onto the elaboration of a materialism with "quasi-transcendental" (Adorno 2004, 54) features inasmuch as it is said to take greater heed of the role played by tradition and history in the unfolding of rationality. In fact, it was very likely Adorno who used the term "quasi-transcendental" for the first time, almost certainly unbeknownst to Derrida.

Similar quasi-transcendental arguments or strategies can be found in the work of poststructuralist philosophers such as Deleuze and Foucault. Deleuze sometimes refers to his own philosophical inquiry into the conditions of experience as a "transcendental empiricism" (1994, 56) because, for him too, these conditions are never

a priori and general, but rather real and contextual – empirical in that sense. For his part, Foucault’s project was largely determined by his lifelong search for the “historical *a priori*” (1972, 142) that underlies “the implicit but unavoidable unity of knowledge” (1972, 41) in the human sciences. The historical *a priori* came to have many names in his works – fundamental codes, epistemes, discourses, regimes of truth, games of truth – but Foucault was remarkably consistent in his aim at a transformation of Kant’s *a priori* into a historically situated and empirically assessable phenomenon. In that sense, Foucault conceives of “Life, Labour and Language” as “quasi-transcendentals” (2001, 272).

In the phenomenological tradition, the rejection of the Kantian transcendental/empirical distinction was even more decisive. Even if none of the great phenomenologists ever embraced transcendentalism as explicitly as Husserl did, the latter’s thought nevertheless paved the way for its radical reformation. As Merleau-Ponty asserts in *Signs*, the historicization of the transcendental accomplished by Husserl’s later genetic phenomenology leaves the borders between the transcendental and the empirical on the verge of “becoming indistinct” (1964, 107), thus opening the way for the novel notion of chiasm at the heart of Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty asserts, for example, that the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical, or between the ontological and the ontic is still meaningful, but is no longer fundamental (1968, 266). Heidegger’s notion of Being, too, clearly functions as a kind of transcendental condition of possibility for manifestation and intelligibility in general, but it is one that changes historically (epochally) according to “Being’s fateful sendings [*Seinsgeschick*]” (1993, 326, 332f.) to which Dasein has to respond.

This rapid overview of some of the key figures of twentieth-century European philosophy should suffice to show that the particularity of Derrida’s position with regard to transcendentalism cannot lie solely in the historicization of the transcendental. This has been one of the dominant trends of twentieth-century European philosophy in which deconstruction only took one part. Even if, as Derrida himself confessed on certain occasions, his reflection on the transcendental has often been initiated or motivated by a certain concern about the historical determinations of the transcendental (cf. PM, 83), Derrida went much further in his reflection, by paying heed, among other things, to the *performative* nature of transcendental arguments and by stressing the aporetic nature of the concepts they put into play. In short, in spite of Derrida’s acute attention to history, it is important to bear in mind that Derrida never sought (as some of his contemporaries did) to “weaken” the transcendental by paying greater heed to history. To the contrary, Derrida’s quasi-transcendental claim is the result of a radicalization of the transcendental move.

As it has been argued throughout this essay, the overcoming of classical transcendentalism at work in deconstruction is indeed the outcome of an ultra-transcendental strategy. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida exposes this ultra-transcendental logic for the first time when he famously claims that a “pathway” through the transcendental is

necessary (OGC, 61). In order to avoid the traps of empiricism and relativism, it is endlessly necessary to return the transcendental apparatus against itself and seek for the transcendental conditions of possibility of the transcendental. In *Resistances*, Derrida returns to this *topos* and makes a very similar point by insisting on the impossibility of ever stopping the transcendental reflection.

For in order to prevent the critique of originarism in its transcendental or ontological, analytic or dialectical form from yielding, according to the law that we well know, to empiricism or positivism, it was necessary to accede, in a still more radical, more analytic fashion, to the traditional demand, to the very law of that which had just been deconstructed: whence the impossible concepts, the quasi-concepts, the concepts that I called quasi-transcendentals, such as arche-trace or arche-writing, the arche-originary that is more “ancient” than the origin – and, above all, a donating affirmation that remains the ultimate unknown for the analysis that it nevertheless puts in motion. (RPS, 29)

It thus appears that Derrida thought that “classical” transcendental philosophers like Kant or Husserl were not radical enough, not transcendental enough, as it were, and that it was therefore necessary to pursue their heritage and take over where they left off. The need to elaborate an *ultra-transcendental* perspective comes from something like a lack of fidelity to the true spirit of transcendentalism. However – and this is the paradox at the heart of Derrida’s transcendental claim – if you think the transcendental move consequently, you see it dissolving itself, that is to say, you realize the impossibility of reaching *the* transcendental origin and you end up with a series of *quasi-transcendental* categories like the trace or *différance*. The basic axiom of Derrida’s transcendental claim – conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility – aims to capture just this in the most economic fashion.

The lesson to draw from all of this is that Derrida’s repeated distrust about classical transcendentalism did not prevent him from defending a transcendental position, although it is one of a fundamentally new kind. Derrida’s “quasi-transcendental” is a hybrid concept, one that integrates what has traditionally been excluded from classical forms of transcendentalism (contingency, history, mundaneity, etc.). Yet it is precisely because Derrida never renounced that which he considers to be an unsurpassable heritage that Richard Rorty’s (otherwise brilliant and inventive) interpretation of Derrida’s work must be rejected on this issue. As is well known, Rorty’s objections to Derrida (and to Gasché’s interpretation of Derrida) are pragmatic, and cast doubt not only on the possibility, but also on the very relevance of founding or justifying “transcendental” arguments of whatever kind, in that, in his opinion, no criteria exist that would allow to determine with certainty whether the advanced conditions of possibilities are in fact the right ones (cf. Rorty 1991a, 125).

Yet, much as Rorty’s general skepticism about “transcendental” conditions of possibility (and that means for him: non-causal, non-empirical, and non-historical

conditions) are certainly justified, his reading of Derrida overlooks Derrida's explicit (and repeated) attempts at paying heed to *precisely these concerns* in his re-elaboration of the concept "transcendental." The quasi-transcendental at work in deconstruction aims *specifically* at avoiding the kind of traps Rorty wants to avoid and that Derrida saw Kant (and to a certain extent Husserl) falling into. And yet – to the great dismay of Rorty – much as Derrida's worries regarding Kant's and Husserl's characterization of the transcendental are real and (to a certain extent) warranted, Derrida always reaffirmed with great enthusiasm his transcendental filiation, insisting throughout his philosophical itinerary on the relevance of posing transcendental questions.

To be sure, if Derrida still deems it necessary to ask transcendental questions, and to do so endlessly, it is because he considers that it is the *only way* to avoid the dangers of empiricism, relativism, skepticism, historicism, positivism, psychologism, and objectivism, which are so many forms of the same philosophical nihilism he fought against from the start (cf. DP, 81; OGC, 61; PM, 92; RPS, 29; AA, 83; LI, 137). In more positive terms, the necessity comes from the fact that Derrida thinks that the transcendental method or attitude is the *only* mode of access to universals. And there should be no doubt about it now: Derrida does believe that there are universal truths (such as ideal objects), but – and this is the whole point of the discussion – these are conditioned and instituted by concepts that constantly threaten their sense. As we've seen, Derrida grants to all these quasi-concepts an unlimited reach and a universal status. When Derrida asserts, for instance, that "différance is older than being" (MP, 26), he means that différance is *a priori* implied by *any* discourse on being, or, more generally still, that différance is *a priori* operative in *any* manifestation of being whatsoever. As such, the reach of différance truly is universal. And the same holds of course for all the other basic philosophemes Derrida works with, like trace, archi-writing, and iterability, etc. However, given the irreducible trace of contingency in all such concepts or quasi-concepts, we must acknowledge that, for Derrida, universals are just not exactly what the philosophical tradition thought they were. Inasmuch as their institution depends on the operation quasi-transcendental concepts, universal truths are *vulnerable* and *precarious*. This does not mean that they are not truly universal; it just means that the very possibility of making universal claims can only be secured against the background of their possible failure. And now we know that this is not just a methodological point, since the very being of such universals depends entirely on the possibility of the trace and the operations of différance and repetition any such trace implies.

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Writing the Violence of Time: Derrida Beyond the Deconstruction of Metaphysics

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1. Introduction

It has become commonplace to subsume Derrida's thinking under the general heading of "a critique of the metaphysics of presence," relating his theoretical endeavors to Heidegger's *Destruktion* and Husserl's *Abbau*, not to mention Nietzsche's call for a re-evaluation of all values. Deconstruction, then, understood as the most appropriate label for the entirety of Derrida's work, becomes a natural extension of the more or less radical project envisaged and undertaken by these earlier thinkers, on whose shoulders Derrida is seen to stand. Needless to say, it is quite legitimate and necessary to trace Derrida's intellectual genealogy, for, after all, his way of practicing philosophy always involved a careful attention to tradition old and new, mainstream and marginal. Nevertheless, we should also persist, as time passes and memories fade, in the conviction that Derrida's thinking essentially has something *more* to offer than a simple repetition of the tradition, that his writings remain a constructive and potentially radical *re-inscription*, *re-invention*, and *re-invigoration* of ideas and issues. Perhaps the time has come to start asking ourselves anew about the *specific* lessons we should draw from Derrida, not least with regard to some of the questions with which his above-named predecessors were so preoccupied: questions of foundation. This, then, would imply our grappling with very classical and age-old philosophical problems which, to some Derrida scholars, may seem utterly unorthodox or even inappropriate – questions such as the following: What, ultimately, is the nature of reality according to Derrida? What, in his scheme of things, is being, what is time? What is consciousness and how should we conceive of the relation between self and

other? What sort of *metaphysics*, or, more specifically, what sort of *ontology* – if any – can Derrida justifiably be said to adhere to?

The aim of this essay is to address these questions in a way that will not be entirely disloyal, or, rather, will be as loyal as possible, to Derrida's legacy. Needless to say, however, this account will only be a limited and partial one, departing from and revolving around Derrida's famous reading of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy. It should be stressed, in any case, that the objective will not be to pass judgment on that reading as such; rather, Derrida's critical engagement with Levinas (especially its first phase, as the reader will soon discover) will merely serve as a prism through which we will try and extract Derrida's *own* stance on issues such as the relation between self and other, or between ontology and metaphysics, between metaphysics and ethics, and, finally, between ethics and politics. Even if the main emphasis here will be on the first two of these conceptual couples, some attention will also – inevitably, as we shall see – be given to the latter two. For it will prove of capital importance to realize how Derrida's conception of *différance*, and of archi-writing, and of the plethora of (non-traditional) concepts that follow, turns out to be an attempt to account *justly* for the reality into which we have been introduced and which we share – the reality that Derrida, at one point, describes as a *general context* that he also describes by “the strange and trivial formula, ‘real-history-of-the-world’” (LI, 137).

2. Ontology and Metaphysics

As is well known, in his major work *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas lends precise and novel meanings to the traditional philosophical notions of “metaphysics” and “ontology.” Indeed, what is at stake in this regard, for Levinas, is nothing less than a re-evaluation of the entirety of the Western philosophical tradition, characterized as it has been by the constant prevalence of the same over the other, of the epistemological relation over the ethical relation, of ontology over ethics. Thus, early on in his book, we find him affirming that “Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being” (Levinas 1969, 43). Indeed, for Levinas, reduction is the essence of comprehension: to comprehend something means being able to claim that X is (nothing but, or at least essentially) Y, for example that water is H₂O, that lightning is an electrical discharge, that pain is (nothing but) a cerebral process, or that you are (nothing but) a middle-aged male of Icelandic nationality. As such, the process of comprehension is essentially a totalizing endeavor, ultimately striving towards an absolute and all-encompassing account of everything. For Levinas, however, this type of absolutist undertaking is profoundly misguided, even if the mere realization of this fact in no way suffices to throw it off its rails in its relentless desire to bring every otherness, everything foreign and incomprehensible into the realm of the same or the known. This process is misguided due

to the simple fact that something always escapes the merciless searchlight of the knowledge seeker: namely, the existence and experience of the Other (*autrui*), of the other person facing you.¹ That is where totality meets infinity, where the totalizing endeavor runs aground in the infinite realm of what Levinas, in another inventive turn of phrase, calls the *exteriority* of the Other. The very fact that I cannot experience what the other experiences *in precisely the same way that she does* – I cannot get inside her head and look out, so to speak – remains utterly insurmountable and, for Levinas, turns out to be absolutely *primordial* with regard to any effort of knowing. In her very alterity and transcendence, the other person harbors an infinite dimension, or rather infinity itself, that forever thwarts my comprehension, my freedom (to know), my spontaneity. This implies that the encounter with the Other necessarily leads to the moment of *critique*, a *crisis* which constantly haunts the ontological or epistemological enterprise in its predilection for selfsameness and egoistic certitudes. Or, as Levinas explains:

A calling into question of the same – which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same – is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. (Levinas 1969, 43)

Now, as can be gathered from the above, this calling into question effectuated by the other is, according to Levinas, *primary* in relation to any type of knowledge-seeking or ontological theorizing. In other words, this implies that ethics is to be seen as the true *prima philosophia*, as metaphysics. Or, to quote Levinas directly:

Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge. And as critique precedes dogmatism, metaphysics precedes ontology. (Levinas 1969, 43)

Thus, to repeat, ethics and metaphysics should, according to Levinas, be seen as identical: ethics is (the true) metaphysics. Against this realization, however, ontology constantly rises ever since the dawn of Western philosophy, trying forever to get beyond the primal relation to the other, subsuming everything under the same, reducing everything other to *me*, to *myself*, thereby challenging ethics and claiming primacy in regard to it. As such, quite apparently, ontology is violence – and, for Levinas, the same reproach should be made against phenomenology, which, in fact, is seen by him as more or less analogous with ontology. Both practice the reductive gaze that seeks to extract from whatever it encounters, the beings in the world, the neutral middle term that all these beings have in common, namely Being or essence, seen as their truth.² This quite evidently comprises a violation of the uniqueness of the individual being. Or, as Derrida succinctly puts it:

Incapable of respecting the other in its being and in its meaning [*l'autre dans son être et dans son sens*], phenomenology and ontology would be philosophies of violence. Through them, the entire philosophical tradition, in its meaning and at bottom, would make common cause with oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same. (WD, 91, translation modified)

Now this oppressive and totalitarian regime (of ontology and/or of phenomenology) takes on slightly different forms depending on the *type* of other that it encounters. For, according to Levinas, there is a distinction that comes into play here, namely the very mundane and classical difference between things and persons: “As far as the things are concerned,” he writes, “a surrender is carried out in their conceptualization. As for man, it can be obtained by the terror that brings a free man under the domination of another” (Levinas 1969, 44). Ontological violence is carried out through conceptualization when things are concerned, but when the object is a human being (or “man,” as Levinas and Lingis somewhat archaically have it) the method used is quite simply called terror. Thus, the epistemological and the political are at once related and separated. In both realms, the same type of (ontological) violence is performed, albeit in different ways. The objective, in both cases, is to dominate and subjugate the other, making it surrender its otherness through an exercise of knowing which seeks to uphold and maintain *my* freedom as opposed to that of the other:

The relation with Being that is enacted in ontology consists in neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it. It is hence not a relation with the other as such but the reduction of the other to the same. Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other to ensure the autarchy of an I. Thematization and conceptualization, which moreover are inseparable, are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other. For possession affirms the other, but within a negation of its independence. “I think” comes down to “I can” – to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality. Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power. (Levinas 1969, 45–46)

Against this oppressive power, Levinas’s thinking rises up. “The terms must be reversed,” as he categorically proclaims (Levinas 1969, 47), implying, of course, an injunction in the very name of ethics, *the* ethical injunction if there ever was one, a call for freeing ethics from the grips of ontology, or, as Derrida puts it, for “opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics” (WD, 83). Through such an opening, we, the human beings that are each an other, could and should hope for a reversal of the terms, the dawn of a new regime where ethics would finally and *effectively* assume its legitimate position as first philosophy. However, as Derrida is careful to point out, it is crucial for Levinas that the opening in question be not only understood in merely eschatological terms in a religious sense, for the opening is already upon us, all around, every time we *truly* encounter an other, that is, the

Other. What is at stake here is “[e]xperience itself and that which is most irreducible within experience: the passage and departure toward the other; the other itself as what is most irreducibly other within it: the Other [*autrui*]” (WD, 83, translation modified). Thus, the opening implied by the encounter with the Other is “not an opening among others” as Derrida remarks and goes on to explain: “It is opening itself, the opening of opening, that which can be enclosed within no category or totality, that is, everything within experience which can no longer be described by traditional concepts, and which resists every philosopheme” (WD, 83). Quite evidently, what is being circumscribed here is something primordial and profound. Still, there can be no question, in this context, of referring to it as *ontologically* primary. All the same, the opening of the Other must be seen as the very condition of not only history but also temporality. Indeed, one of the ways in which ontology and phenomenology remain reductive and misguided, according to Levinas, consists in their neglecting this profound relation of otherness and temporality; or, as Derrida explains:

Because they [i.e., ontology and phenomenology] do not think the other, they do not have time. Without time, they do not have history. The absolute alterity of each instant, without which there would be no time, cannot be produced – constituted – within the identity of the subject or the existent. It comes into time through the Other. (WD, 91)

In their efforts to think through time, ontology and phenomenology act as if there was no Other – or, which comes down to the same thing, as if the Other is ultimately reducible. The effort is directed towards capturing the essence of time. But time, being coextensive with alterity and constantly given by the Other, has no essence. Or, more specifically, we might say that the essence of time is the Other – however, the Other has no essence, for it is infinity itself, transcendence beyond any totality and closure. In this sense, then, time is what constantly reaffirms the primacy of otherness in the face of whichever triumphs ontology and phenomenology may claim, within history, in their struggle to get beyond history. Triumphs that forever turn out to be Pyrrhic – as long as there is otherness and/or time.

3. Writing and Closure

As can be gathered from the preceding discussion, the *status* of ontology and ethics in Levinas’s scheme of things remains ambiguous, even if his *definition* of these terms leaves little to be desired in terms of clarity. The ambiguity clearly manifests itself, for example, in Levinas’s call for a reversal of the terms. Ethics should, *by right*, be primary, but historically, ontology has imposed itself (Levinas 1969, 45–47). Or, as Derrida puts it: “Although in fact it is secondary, metaphysics as the critique of ontology is rightfully and philosophically primary” (WD, 96). Why is this so? Why has the

relation to the Other, the very opening of time and history, been suppressed throughout history? And how could that occur, what type of unnatural or distorted forces had to be applied, or apply themselves, in order to rob ethics of its rightful place? Why did the course of history take the wrong turn? Doubtless one of the reasons, if not *the* reason, for this unfortunate development is to be sought in the simple and fundamental fact, mentioned earlier, that the realm of the truly ethical resists conceptualization – indeed, in a very definite sense, the ethical *is* resistance to conceptualization, as we have also seen. This, in turn, clearly entails that any discourse that seeks to be called theoretical or rational necessarily betrays the opening towards the Other – for all its possible good intentions and sincere efforts to respect the ethical relation and render it faithfully. Thus, the ethical relation, for all its ubiquity and intuitive evidence, seems inescapably predestined to be constantly buried anew under sediments of discourse. Tragically, loyalty spells betrayal – any exploration of the possibility of loyalty ends up as yet another proof of its impossibility. Still, facing this overwhelming impossibility, there remains for Levinas – and, in fact, for methodological reasons, *there must remain* – the possibility of a faithful discourse that escapes the confines of ontology and pierces through to its beyond, to the very ethical realm that resists the concept. The point here is not merely that Levinas considers a certain type of “veritable” discourse to be part and parcel of the experience of the Other *qua* Other (cf. Levinas 1969, 70–71), but also that for Levinas to be able to write a book such as *Totality and Infinity* in the first place, it must be possible to convey, through words, the *de jure* primacy of the ethical relation and the corresponding injunction. What is more, for such a non-traditional discourse to be comprehensible, for it to be able to convey anything at all, it must, partly at least, and no doubt strategically and methodologically, rely on recognizable concepts, philosophical or other, deployed in senses that must only be *reasonably* far removed from their traditional usage. What is at stake here is, of course, the problem of going beyond philosophy within philosophy that Derrida dealt with extensively in the first decade of his publishing career (and way beyond).³ In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida turns his gaze towards Levinas’s struggle with the same problem, offering some piercing remarks:

. . . if you will, the attempt to achieve an opening toward the beyond of philosophical discourse, by means of philosophical discourse, which can never be shaken off completely, cannot possibly succeed *within language* – and Levinas recognizes that there is no thought before language and outside of it – except by *formally* and *thematically* posing *the question of the relations between belonging and the opening, the question of closure*. (WD, 110)

In other words, what is at stake here, again, is nothing less than the possibility of thinking beyond the boundaries of thinking, of miming philosophical discourse in order to convey what seems to resist any type of (traditional) philosophical discourse understood as the attempt to formalize, thematize, and conceptualize. However, this

attempt at an opening into the beyond, as Derrida claims, cannot succeed without a formal, thematic, and conceptual engagement with the question of the interplay between the hither and the thither, the inside and the outside, belonging and transgressing – the question of closure. Such an account is precisely what Levinas fails to undertake in *Totality and Infinity*.⁴ Derrida, however, does not stop there, and proceeds to offer a glimpse of the type of philosophy without or beyond philosophy that is called for in order to prepare for or achieve the opening; an undertaking that, as we just saw, should strive to proceed *formally* in its grappling with the question of closure:

Formally – that is by posing it in the most effective and most formal, the most formalized, way possible: not in a *logic*, in other words in a philosophy, but in an inscribed description, in an inscription of the relation between the philosophical and the non-philosophical, in a kind of unheard of *graphics*, within which philosophical conceptual-ity would be no more than a *function*. (WD, 110–111)

Now, of course, this “unheard of graphics” should no doubt be strongly linked to, or even identified with, the (untraditional) concept of writing that Derrida went on to describe, endorse, and perform in such major works as *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), and *Glas* (1974). Thus, in *Margins*, we find him outlining a displacement of philosophy which would proceed “by means of rigorous, philosophically *intransigent* analyses, and by means of the inscription of marks which no longer belong to philosophical space, not even to the neighborhood of its other.” Or, to put it succinctly, the injunction here is the following: “To write otherwise” (MP, xxiv). Derrida’s complaint against Levinas here comes down to the charge that the latter neglected to *explicitly* and *rigorously* address the stubbornly methodological problem of writing in view of or for the sake of the other, thus falling prey to the very tradition that he sought to overcome. To prove his point, Derrida specifically turns his regard, in “Violence and Metaphysics,” towards Levinas’s concept of *exteriority*, subjecting it to a patient analysis that no doubt can serve as a textbook example of deconstruction. The argument runs as follows: A traditional philosophical term such as exteriority is bound to appear ambiguous even when a creative type of thinking attempts to wrestle it from tradition and rediscover its potential. Thus, as Derrida points out, when Levinas “intends to show that *true* exteriority is not spatial, that there is an absolute, infinite exteriority – that of the Other – which is not spatial, for space is the Site of the Same” (WD, 112, translation modified),⁵ the question quite simply arises as to why he judges it necessary to deploy that very term, given all its traditional implications with spatiality, in order to signify something non-spatial. Of course, Derrida’s complaint is not, or not simply, that Levinas would have done better to choose a different term, but rather that it would have been advisable to *explicitly thematize*, in a formal and rigorous way, the very difficulty of re-inscribing such a term for the intended purpose. Or, to quote Derrida once more:

Philosophical language belongs to a system of language(s). Thereby, its nonspeculative ancestry always brings a certain equivocality into speculation. Since this equivocality is original and irreducible, perhaps philosophy must adopt it, think it and be thought in it, must accommodate duplicity and difference within speculation, within the very purity of philosophical meaning. (WD, 113)

The stain, so to speak, of philosophical language, in all its striving for purity, cannot be washed away. Equivocality – and this is crucial – is *original* and *irreducible*. And this primordial fact is what philosophy must adopt and adapt to, think and be thought in. The moment of univocality, of the single voice of pure truth in its unadulterated presence, is not to be found at the source (“there is a *supplement at the source*,” as Derrida famously put it in *Of Grammatology* [OG, 304]), nor is it what is to come once the reduction of equivocality has been achieved. Such, according to Derrida, is the realm in which we find ourselves, or are subject to searching for ourselves: the realm of archi-writing conceived as nothing less than an “irreducible arche-synthesis, opening in one and the same possibility, temporalization as well as relationship with the other and language” (OG, 60). Thus we behold the opening of the playground where temporality and alterity are conjoined – where writing in a multiple sense reigns and self and other meet and mingle, or, rather, where many others convene and communicate, exchanging signs that never fully, and by definition, render explicit what they mean to say – a playground which, as we shall see, is also, irreducibly and at once tragically and joyfully, a battlefield (cf. WD, 292–293).

4. Violence and Writing

Let us now retrace our steps a little and reinvoke the Levinasian notion of violence and its relation to his conceptions of war and peace. Violence, for Levinas, consists primarily in the attempt to subsume the other under the same, which, by definition, is precisely what traditional ontology tries to achieve in its thirst for thematization and conceptualization. The same would apply, as it turns out, to phenomenology and to philosophy broadly speaking. It comes as no surprise, then, that these (traditional) disciplines, characterized as they are by thinking *qua* appropriating and dominating, by the exercise of the freedom of the “I think” that reaches its consummation in the “I can,” are conjointly related by Levinas, already in the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*, to war. Against this “ontology of war” arises, again, the notion of an “eschatology of messianic peace” (Levinas 1969, 22) that involves the overturning of the historical dominance of ethics by ontology. Levinas is quick to specify that the eschatology he has in mind should not be seen as teleological in any ordinary sense of that word, that is, in the sense that its goal lies somewhere beyond the horizon. Rather, we need to realize that the eschatological is equally imminent as the ethical relation itself, being in its essence a “relationship with a *surplus always exterior to the totality*”

(Levinas 1969, 22), that is, with the infinity harbored by the Other. As such, peace is already upon us, much in the same way as the shortcomings of ontological dominance are evident all around us – if we only open our eyes to witness what is already there, facing us.

Now it is crucial to realize in what way, and on which premises, Derrida begs to differ with Levinas in this regard. As already explained, for the former, the equivocal-ity or interlacing that goes by the name of (archi-)writing should be seen as original and irreducible. This, in turn, entails that violence is unavoidable, at least to a certain extent, and that the notions of war and peace are also irrevocably conjoined:

Violence, certainly, appears within the horizon of an idea of the infinite. But this horizon is not the horizon of the infinitely other, but of a reign in which the difference between the same and the other, *différance*, would no longer be valid, that is, of a reign in which peace itself would no longer have meaning. And first of all because there would be no more phenomenality or meaning in general. The infinitely other and the infinitely same, if these words have meaning for a finite being, is the same. (WD, 129)

In other words, as long as the infinitely other – or, for it comes down to the same thing, the infinitely same – has not come to reign supreme, as long as peace has not become absolute (thus losing its meaning, becoming indistinguishable from total war), *différance* reigns. And that entails that the difference between the same and the other is still in play and at work, giving rise to nothing less than phenomenality and meaning generally speaking. In this context, we should recall that one of the three senses of *la différence*, as spelled out in Derrida's lecture of the same name, has to do with polemics (and the Greek word *polemos*: war, battle, fight), with differing in the sense of discord, that is, differences implying conflicting opinions or perspectives (cf. MP, 8). *Différance*, which as we know is to be seen as quasi-synonymous with archi-writing, thus, *qua* the very opening of phenomenality and meaning, relates closely to war; indeed, as Derrida points out: "War ... is congenital to phenomenality, [it] is the very emergence of speech and of appearing" (WD, 129). As long as there is phenomenality, there is *différance*, and *différance* involves, as explained by Derrida, the intermingling of space and time (the spatiality of space and the temporality of time) as well as discord, or, in other words, the *ongoing* mixture of the same and the other, of identity and difference, of finitude and infinity.⁶ As long as there is *différance*, therefore, there can be no *purity* of the same or of the other, no *infinity* of the same or of the other. *Différance* and/or writing is thus to be conceived as implying "an irreducible zone of factuality, an original, transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice, even supposed by ethical nonviolence" which "would be embedded in the root of meaning and logos" (WD, 125). Indeed, and to push the point further:

It is difficult to see how the notion of violence (for example, as the dissimulation or oppression of the other by the same ...) could be determined rigorously on a purely

ethical level, without prior eidetic-transcendental analysis of the relations between ego and alter-ego in general, between several origins of the world in general. That the other appears as such only in its relationship to the same, is a self-evidence . . . ; and, it is violence as the origin of meaning and of discourse in the reign of finitude. (WD, 129)

The reign of *différance* is the reign of finitude, defined, as Derrida puts it here, by the fact that the other can only appear – *as such* – in relation to the same. However, under this reign, finitude cannot be pure, it cannot be absolute and complete – for then it would cease to be finitude and become *the same as (pure) infinity*. No finitude without infinity, no same without the other – or, as Derrida explains in a somewhat vertiginous but also quite manifestly philosophical elucidation, “*either there is only the same, which can no longer even appear and be said, nor even exercise violence (pure infinity or finitude); or indeed there is the same and the other, and then the other cannot be the other – of the same – except by being the same (as itself: ego), and the same cannot be the same (as itself: ego) except by being the other’s other: alter ego*” (WD, 128). In other words, the other simply cannot be *infinitely* other for Derrida, it is always already contaminated by the same, and, as such, compromised in its otherness. The other never appears as such, it is always already intermingled with, and implicated in, the sameness. *For there to be appearance in the first place, there has to be intermingling*. Thus, what manifests itself in appearance is, again, never the other as such, in the plenitude of its presence, but only the other as *trace*, that is, an implication of presence and absence.⁷ And this implication, of course, also applies to the same or, by extension, to Being – entailing, inescapably,

that Being is history, that Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence, and originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear. A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent [*l’étant*]: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurrence; nonphenomenality. (WD, 147)

Such, then, is the reign of *la différence* and/or of the trace, subject as it is to what we might call, following Derrida writing in 1990 on the occasion of the publication of his *mémoire de maîtrise*, a “law of differential contamination” (PG, xv).⁸ The playground, the world as becoming (time/space) is also a field of battle: such is the meaning, and the lesson, of writing and/or of *différance*. “One never escapes the *economy of war*” (WD, 148), at least as long as there is history, or phenomenality – or, in other words, as long as there is anything at all.

5. Hauntology and Being-With

As is well known, Levinas applies the notion of the *face* (*visage* in the French) to the expression of infinity in the encounter with the Other (cf. Levinas 1969, 50–52). In

“Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida subjects this term to a relentless deconstruction, showing it to be a classical example of a philosophical concept adhering to a metaphysics of presence. Now, in keeping with the general aim of this essay as stated at the outset, it will not be our task here to retrace the details of Derrida’s deconstruction of Levinas’s conception of the face, nor will we follow the ensuing interchange between the two thinkers. Rather, as before, we will concentrate on exploring the implications that Derrida’s critique of Levinas has for Derrida’s own philosophical stance.

For Levinas, as Derrida pointedly remarks, “[t]he face is presence, *ousia*” (WD, 101). The fullness of this presence, in its infinity, essentially lies beyond, or rather over and above, signification: “The face does not signify, does not present itself as a sign, but *expresses itself*, offering itself *in person*, in itself, *kath’auto*: ‘the thing in itself expresses itself’” (WD, 101). Still, paradoxically, the face is precisely *not* the full presence of a *phenomenon*, for what shows itself in the face, as we have seen, is infinity itself, defined as what resists phenomenality. As such, the face is also what *provokes* conceptualization and all the negative aspects linked to such an endeavor by Levinas. Or, to take this point further, and going as far as to implicate God, defined by Levinas as the absolute(ly) Other:

. . . war – *for war there is* – is the difference between the face and the finite world without a face. But is not this difference that which has always been called the world, in which the absence-presence of God *plays*? Only the play of the world permits us *to think the essence* of God. In a sense that our language – and Levinas’s also – accommodates poorly, the play of the world precedes God. (WD, 107)

In other words, God, as Derrida suggests, can be seen as nothing more (nor less) than “an *effect of the trace*” (WD, 108), preceded by the “play of the world” which can also be called, as we have already learned, “play of the trace” (MP, 22). The absolutely other is preceded by the intermingling of self and other, and, as such, always already compromised in its very absoluteness. This also implies that, as Derrida puts it, “*différance*, in a certain and very strange way, (is) ‘older’ than the ontological difference or than the truth of Being” (MP, 22). The difference between Being and beings, the way in which Being appears in its multiple forms, and the very truth of Being itself are thus found to presuppose the play of self and other that is named trace or *différance*. Consequently, the temptation to associate, or even equate, the element at stake here with the notion of source, origin, or ground becomes almost irresistible. In a way which Derrida would doubtless have found all too metaphysical, *différance* seems to name a *fundamental structure of reality* – but the catch is that this structure is *not* fixed and immutable, but rather a *structure-in-movement* (cf. POS, 27), constantly differing from itself. *Différance* is not exempt from the effects of *différance*. And, to reiterate and recapitulate, this structure-in-movement is the premise of otherness as well as sameness, of absence as well as presence; it names the very opening that

is the precondition for any type of meaning to appear, for any subjectivity and thus also for any objectivity in the traditional sense of the term. If there were no *différance*, there would be *only* plenitude – of meaning, of being, and of presence; the light of being, or of reason, or of phenomenality, would be so bright as to preclude any discernment – thus, there would be no experience, be it of the other or of the same.

With regard to Levinas's conception of the face, Derrida's point comes down to the observation that for the face to appear in the first place, for infinity to be able to disrupt the ontological effort in general, the face must be(come) corporeal and therefore finite – infinity must, so to speak, descend into the finite realm. In so doing, the face also irrevocably lowers itself onto the playground of signification. Thereby, it loses its plenitude and succumbs, like anything else, to the interplay of light and shadows which takes place in and according to the space/time/discord of *différance*. One very important reason why Derrida cannot subscribe to the Levinasian hypothesis of the face has to do with its inescapably *dualistic* tendencies:

If the face of the other was not *also, irreducibly*, spatial exteriority, we would . . . have to distinguish between soul and body, thought and speech; or better, between a true, non-spatial face, and its mask or metaphor, its spatial figure. (WD, 169)

In other words, exteriority in the traditional sense, “old-fashioned” spatial exteriority, necessarily comes into play in the encounter with the Other, that is, with exteriority in its novel, Levinasian sense. But this concession already invites, or unleashes, the play of differences, contesting opinions, conceptualization, and polemics that Levinas subsumes under the heading of violence. This realization, in turn, evidently has dire consequences for Levinas's whole enterprise, contaminating the purity and the plenitude of the face; in fact, if one assumes the accuracy and justness of this account, then “[t]he entire Metaphysics of the Face would collapse” (WD, 169), as Derrida pointedly remarks. The stubborn exteriority of the body descends upon the face to lend it an irrevocably mundane character, robbing it of its (relation to) absolute infinity, subjecting it (instead) to finitude and mortality. As such, this bodily being is necessarily *inscribed* in a particular situation, carrying with it a particular history, marked by traces of bygone events but also oriented towards what is yet to come. And, as pointed out by Derrida in the passage cited above, Levinas's only recourse, in the face of the necessity of contamination, would be to flee into an inflexible and extremely classical, not to say archaic, metaphysical dualism of body and soul as the truth of the self-other distinction: the face becomes a metaphor for the soul, exteriority a metaphor for (pure) interiority, and so on.

In light of these remarks, we should realize that Derrida's critique of Levinas irrevocably points beyond the latter's depiction of what we will venture to call the world itself, towards a *more inclusive*, and doubtless more complex, tableau of being and time, of beings in time – a thinking that, in the end, seeks to do justice to difference, to the realm of *différance* as one in which justice forever takes hold and compels

us, the limited beings that we are, to keep opening up for the other (in a very general sense), welcoming the other, whatever it is, regardless of traditional distinctions between human and animal, living beings and things, dead and undead, bygone and to come, present and absent, speechless and verbal, rich and poor, faceless and facial – thus striving, after all, to combat the violence and injustice that, admittedly, is part and parcel of the realm of *différance*. Accordingly, as already indicated, we need to understand that for Derrida, the crisis of the metaphysics of the face also entails that the very distinction between the Other on the one hand and objects generally speaking on the other hand – between the Other as *autrui* and the other as *autre* – becomes problematic. With reference to Levinas's relation to Husserl, Derrida makes the following observation:

Bodies, transcendent and natural things, are others in general for my consciousness. They are outside, and their transcendence is the sign of an already irreducible alterity. Levinas does not think so; Husserl does, and thinks that "other" already means something when things are in question. Which is to take seriously the reality of the external world. (WD, 124)

The alterity in question, which is shared by *every other* in this general sense, implies that something is hidden, the other does not render itself fully in experience. To recur to a familiar Husserlian term, what is experienced is never the thing in itself but always its adumbrations (*Abschattungen*). Derrida, of course, subscribes to this fundamental lesson of phenomenology – the classic lesson of phenomenology if there ever was one – without reserve, as his dictum from *Voice and Phenomenon* testifies to: "the thing itself always escapes" (SP, 104). This, as the words quoted above betray, amounts to nothing less than "taking seriously the reality of the external world" – a task that, as we saw, Derrida quite directly accuses Levinas of having neglected.

But what would such a serious encounter with the external world and its reality amount to according to Derrida? What type of thinking should replace the Levinasian metaphysics of the face? What, in the end, would be Derrida's *own* stance towards the concept and endeavor of ontology? In *Specters of Marx*, written almost 30 years later than "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida famously invokes and sketches what he calls *hauntology*, namely, a "logic of haunting" understood as a discourse and practice that would transcend "the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life." Now, of course, the name given by Derrida to this realm beyond the familiar oppositions is *the spectral*, and the new discipline of hauntology is intended to assume as its task "thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility" (SM, 12). And, as Derrida proclaims, hauntology will prove to be "larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being" (SM, 10). These words merit our attention. First, hauntology would be *larger* than (traditional) ontology because of its attention to the absent, or, perhaps more correctly, to what is present in its very absence, as a trace. Second, hauntology

would be *more powerful* than tradition inasmuch as it would – and this is of capital importance – be a more just depiction of reality, (properly) understood as the realm of *différance* and/or of writing, and thus it would serve justice and prove more able to combat the injustices brought upon us by intransigent and ill-conceived attempts at totalizing and excluding the arrival of the other in a general sense. A more just depiction entails a more just being together, enabling us to learn to live more justly:

The time of the “learning to live” . . . would amount to this . . . to learn to live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But *with them*. No *being-with* the other, no *socius* without this *with* that makes *being-with* in general more enigmatic than ever for us. And this being-with spectators would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations. (SM, xviii–xix)

Thus, what emerges from Derrida’s thinking is an inclusive – and admittedly enigmatic – thinking of being, of being as and in *différance*, which forever resists oppositions and dualisms to remain firmly committed, as much as possible, to the respect for difference. This inclusive thinking of being, however, also necessarily implies a certain realization of the fact that violence (also) remains, that the task of justice is still upon us, *precisely because of* the intermingling of self and other. Within history, within appearance, our task is to be together; and this being-together not only involves those who can stake their claim on us through the face, but all beings in a very general sense. As such, then, this type of thinking of being comes “as close as possible to nonviolence” (WD, 146).

6. Closing: And So On

In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida makes the following observation:

In the last analysis, if one wishes to determine violence as the necessity that the other not appear as what it is, that it not be respected except in, for, and by the same, that it be dissimulated by the same in the very freeing of its phenomenon, then time is violence. (WD, 133)

Time is violence: hence, we write. The interlacing of being and time means that there is *différance*, implying polemics: differing perspectives, more than one and more than two. Responding to archi-writing, in a responsible way, entails writing as justly as possible, as non-violently as possible. There is violence, *an economy of violence*: that is what we have to get used to, that is what uses us up – for the realm of *différance* is also the open space into which beings arrive and, while arriving, already start to

leave.⁹ Marked as they are by *différance*, contaminated by finitude which also implies that they are the bearers of traces, that theirs is matter on which marks can be written – scars, wrinkles, lesions, traumas, memories – they come into being and pass away, and, in so doing, they encounter each other, other beings in a wide sense, facial or otherwise, masked or not. Thus arises the possibility of justice, of being-with as accord, as a letting-be of each other while we sojourn. In that way we entertain, and maintain, the possibility of non-violence. But a risk is coextensive with this fragile possibility, the possibility of the worst injustice. “This is necessary, this possible hospitality to the worst is necessary so that good hospitality can have a chance, the chance of letting the other come, the *yes* of the other no less than the *yes* to the other” (AEL, 35). And so we carry on: *Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen*.

Notes

- 1 The French term *autrui* signifies another person, thus distinguishing itself from *l'autre* which carries the more general meaning of everything that is other, be it things or persons or any other being. We will readdress these conceptual issues and distinctions, and their metaphysical ramifications, below. The English translator of *Totality and Infinity*, Alphonso Lingis, resorts to capitalization in order to distinguish between these two terms, rendering *autrui* as “the Other” and (*l'*)*autre* as “(the) other.”
- 2 For this equivalence of phenomenology and ontology (Heideggerian or otherwise), cf. the following formulations made by Levinas: “Phenomenological mediation follows another route, where the ‘ontological imperialism’ is yet more visible. It is the Being of existents [*être de l'étant*] that is the *medium* of truth; truth regarding an existent presupposes the prior openness of Being” (Levinas 1969, 44).
- 3 For the *locus classicus* in this regard, see OG, 14. Simon Critchley (1992) developed the notion of *clôtural reading* to describe this strategy.
- 4 Mention must be made, at least in passing, of the fact that Levinas did not neglect to respond to this critique; indeed, as has become famous, his second major work, *Otherwise than Being* (Levinas 1981), can be conceived as a concerted effort to deal with the question of closure as well as formulating a discourse that would withstand the contradictions here at stake – a discourse that would not betray the Other, a discourse at once *for* and *of* the Other. However, as explained at the outset, it is not our task here to pursue these issues. For a clear and concise account of Derrida’s complex relation to Levinas, see Perpich (1998).
- 5 The words “qu’il y a une extériorité absolue, infinie – celle de l’Autre – qui n’est pas spatiale” have been inadvertently omitted in the English translation.
- 6 Cf. WD, 126–127: “How could there be a ‘play of the Same’ if alterity itself was not already *in* the Same, with a meaning of inclusion doubtless betrayed by the word *in*? Without alterity *in* the same, how could the ‘play of the Same’ occur, in the sense of playful activity, or of dislocation, in a machine or organic totality which *plays* or *works*?”
- 7 Geoffrey Bennington (1993, 75–76) has succinctly formulated the issue at stake here: “Every trace is the trace of a trace. No element is anywhere present (nor simply absent),

there are only traces. . . . ‘Trace’ attempts to name this entwinement of the other-in-the-same which is the condition of the same itself [*le même même*] . . .” Cf. also POS, 26.

- 8 Elsewhere, Derrida speaks of the “law of undecidable contamination” (LI, 59) in a similar sense.
- 9 This formulation, and this final section of the article in general, is inspired by Heidegger’s depiction of being as presencing (*Anwesen*) as described in his essay “Anaximander’s Saying” (Heidegger 2002). It can be argued that this essay profoundly influenced Derrida from the beginning of his publishing career. cf., e.g., Dastur 2000, Thorsteinsson 2007, 367–414.

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Derrida's Radical Atheism

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In paragraph 24 of his main essay on religion, “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida provides a remarkable outline of the relation between his thinking of the spacing of time (*espacement*) and his thinking of religion. While Derrida insists throughout his work that the spacing of time is a constitutive condition of experience, the paragraph from “Faith and Knowledge” makes the point emphatically and dissociates his thinking from any form of religion. According to Derrida, the spacing of time is “without age, without history, and more ‘ancient’ than all oppositions” but it “will never have entered religion and will never permit itself to be sacralized, sanctified, humanized, theologized, cultivated, historicized. Radically heterogeneous to the safe and sound, to the holy and the sacred, it never admits of any *indemnification*” and is “neither Being, nor the Good, nor God” (FK, 20–21).¹ Yet, while Derrida emphasizes that the spacing of time will never have entered religion, he nonetheless maintains that spacing will always have resisted religion “*from within* or as though from an exteriority that works and resists inside” (FK, 58, emphasis added). The spacing of time that Derrida articulates would thereby not only be incompatible with religious thinking but also undermine and transform it from within. This operation is at the core of what I propose to call Derrida’s radical atheism (cf. Hägglund 2008). Radical atheism does not pursue an external critique of religious concepts, but rather seeks to read these concepts *against themselves*, thereby unearthing their atheological and irreligious condition of possibility.

Radical atheism thus provides a new framework for understanding Derrida’s engagement with religious concepts and challenges the numerous theological accounts of deconstruction. The proliferation in Derrida’s late works of apparently religious terms, which I will here examine through the triad of *faith*, *the unconditional*,

and *the messianic*, has given rise to a widespread notion that there was a “religious turn” in his thinking. In contrast, I argue that Derrida reads religious concepts in accordance with the logic of radical atheism. To understand this operation one must first clarify what Derrida means by religion. Derrida defines religion as premised on the idea of “the unscathed” (*l'indemne*), which he glosses as the pure and the untouched, the sacred and the holy, the safe and sound. The common denominator for religions is thus that they promote a notion of the unscathed, regardless of whether the unscathed is posited as transcendent or immanent and regardless of whether it is called God or something else. As Derrida puts it, “every religion” holds out a “horizon of redemption, of the restoration of the unscathed, of indemnification” (FK, 74–75). Accordingly, the religious promise of the good would be the promise of something that is unscathed by evil. The good may be threatened from the outside – by corruption, idolatry, misunderstanding, and so on – but in itself it is exempt from evil.

Deconstructing the religious conception of the good, Derrida develops a notion of “radical evil.” The term is taken from Kant’s treatise *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, but it receives a quite different meaning in Derrida’s work. Schematically, the notion of radical evil can be seen as an intervention in one of the most fundamental theological debates, which concerns the origin of evil. The classic theological problem is how the omnipotence of God can be compatible with the existence of evil. If God created evil he is not absolutely good, but if he did not create evil he is not almighty. Augustine formulated the most influential solution to the problem by arguing that evil does not belong to being as such. Only the good has being and evil is nothing but the privation of goodness; a corruption that supervenes from the outside and does not affect the supreme good of being in itself. Thus, God can be the creator of everything that is (since all that has being is good) without being responsible for evil. The source of evil rather resides in the free will of human beings, which makes them liable to turn away from the good.

While prudently avoiding the theological assertions of Augustine, Kant pursues a formally similar argument by treating evil as an effect of the free will, which may lead one to follow the incentives of one’s sensuous nature rather than the moral law. Evil is thus “radical” in the sense that the possibility of evil is at the root of our human nature and cannot be finally eliminated from the way we are constituted. For Kant, however, the ever-present possibility of evil does not call into question the Idea of a good that is exempt from evil. Even though we as finite beings can never attain something that is good in itself, we can strive toward it as an ideal that in principle is thinkable and desirable. In contrast, Derrida argues that the possibility of evil is intrinsic to the good that we desire. Evil is thus “radical” in the sense that it is at the root of the good as such; without bearing evil within itself, the good would not be what it is.

While this may seem like an abstract argument, Derrida makes it concrete through his notion of hospitality. Derrida argues that even if I invite a good friend and we have a wonderful time it is an irreducible condition that “the experience might have

been terrible. Not only that it *might* have been terrible, but the threat remains. That this good friend may become the devil, may be perverse. The perversity is not an accident which could once and for all be excluded, the perversity is part of the experience" (PERM, 9). Far from restricting this argument to the sphere of friendship, Derrida generalizes it in accordance with the logic of radical evil. As he puts it: "for an event, even a good event to happen the possibility of radical evil must remain inscribed as a possibility," since "if we exclude the mere possibility of such a radical evil, then there will be no event at all. When we are exposed to what is coming, even in the most generous intention of hospitality, we must not exclude the possibility that the one who is coming is coming to kill us, is a figure of evil" (ibid.). Accordingly, Derrida emphasizes that even the other who is identified as good may always *become* evil and that "this is true even in the most peaceful experiences of joy and happiness" (ibid.). The point is not only that evil is a necessary possibility but also that *nothing would be desirable* without it, since it is intrinsic to the experience of the good itself. Following his example of the friend, Derrida thus maintains that "when I experience something good, the coming of a friend for example, if I am happy with a good surprise, then in this experience of happiness, within it, the memory of or the lateral reference to the possible perversion of it must remain present, in the wings let's say, otherwise I could not enjoy it" (ibid.).

1. Radical Evil and Faith

Derrida highlights the logic of radical evil through the notion of *faith*. Derrida argues that faith – taking in trust – is constitutive of experience in general. In order to do anything, we must have faith in the future and in those on whom we depend, since we cannot *know* what will happen or what others will do to us. Consequently, the faith that sustains us, the trust that allows us to act, is necessarily open to being deceived and the credit granted to the other open to being ruinous. As Derrida argues, "this break with calculable reliability and with the assurance of certainty – in truth, with knowledge – is ordained by the very structure of confidence or of credence as faith" (PE, 16). Whatever we do, then, we place our faith in a future that may shatter our hopes and lay to waste what we desire. This necessity of faith is not due to a cognitive limitation but to the undecidability of the future, which opens both chance and threat at every moment. As Derrida underscores, "this ex-position to the incalculable event" is "the irreducible spacing of the very faith, credit, or belief without which there would be no social bond, no address to the other" (ROG, 153). It follows that one cannot maintain a strict opposition between good and evil, or between sworn faith and perjury. Rather, Derrida argues that "only the infinite possibility of the worst and of perjury can grant the possibility of the Good, of veracity and sworn faith. This possibility remains infinite but as the very possibility of an autoimmune finitude" (ROG, 153).

Accordingly, Derrida insists on a distinction between *faith*, on the one hand, and the religious ideal of *the unscathed* on the other. The two are usually conflated in the notion of religious faith, which is understood as the faith in an absolute good that is immune from the corruption of evil. Drawing on his logic of radical evil, however, Derrida reads the religious ideal of absolute immunity against itself. To have faith in the good is not to have faith in something that can be trusted once and for all. On the contrary, the good is *autoimmune* because evil is inherent in its own constitution. As Derrida emphasizes, there is “nothing immune, safe and sound, *heilig* and holy, nothing unscathed in the most autonomous living present without a risk of autoimmunity” (FK, 82). The argument here is that the very movement of sacralization is contradicted from within by a constitutive autoimmunity. To hold something to be sacred is to seek to immunize it, to protect it from being violated or corrupted. Yet one cannot protect anything without committing it to a future that allows it to live on and by the same token exposes it to loss and destruction. The immunization of the good must therefore “take in trust that radical evil without which good would be for nothing” (FK, 82). This condition of radical evil cannot be removed, Derrida goes on to argue, since removing it would amount to the “annulment of the future” (FK, 83).

Derrida's notion of radical evil thus undermines the religious conception of the good. To recall, Derrida maintains that the common denominator for religions is that they promote the absolute immunity of the unscathed as the supremely desirable. The good may be threatened by corruption from the outside, but in itself it is immune from evil. Derrida's argument is, on the contrary, that the good in itself is not a state of absolute immunity but rather autoimmune. To establish this argument, it is not enough simply to insist on the ever-present *possibility* of evil. Rather, one must show that the good in its *actuality* is already violated by evil, already involved in its own destruction. To be sure, Derrida's formulations often emphasize the *structural possibility* of evil, but in his thinking a structural possibility also entails an *actual necessity*.² As I will seek to demonstrate, the latter argument depends on Derrida's conception of time. Given that the present ceases to be as soon as it comes to be, it attacks its own integrity from the beginning and makes it impossible for anything to be unscathed. This is why Derrida maintains that autoimmunity is located “in the very structure of the present and of life” (ROG, 127). In order to survive even for a moment a life cannot have any integrity as such but is already marked by the alteration of time. Even if all external threats are evaded, the good is therefore compromised from within, since the attack on its integrity is already operative within the good that is defended. The vulnerability of the good is thus *without limit*, since the source of attack is also located within what is defended.

What needs to be clarified, then, is why and how autoimmunity follows from the constitution of time. Derrida's notion of “the trace” here provides the answer. Derrida defines the structure of the trace as the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space, which he abbreviates as spacing (*espacement*). This structure should

not itself be understood as a *temporal* process, where time becomes space and space becomes time, but designates a *logical* co-implication of time and space. For one moment to be succeeded by another it cannot *first* be present in itself and *then* cease to be. Rather, every temporal moment negates itself – it ceases to be as soon as it comes to be – and must therefore be inscribed as a trace in order to be at all. The trace is necessarily spatial, since spatiality is characterized by the ability to persist in spite of temporal succession. The spatiality of the trace is thus the condition for the duration of time, since it enables the past to be retained for the future. The very concept of duration presupposes that something remains across time and only that which is spatial can remain. The spatiality of the trace, however, is itself temporal. Without temporalization it would be impossible for a trace to remain across time and retain the past for the future. Accordingly, the duration of the trace cannot be exempt from the negativity of time. The trace enables the past to survive, but it can do so only through the exposure to a future that gives it both the chance to remain and to be effaced.

The structure of the trace thereby accounts for the autoimmunity of survival. As the condition of possibility for retaining the past, the trace is also the condition of possibility for life to resist death in a movement of survival. The trace can only live on, however, through a process of erasure and thus breaches the integrity of any immune system from the beginning. The tracing of time that makes it *possible* for life to survive at the same time makes it *impossible* for life to be given or protected in itself.

The logic of survival is at the heart of what I call Derrida's radical atheism. In short, radical atheism seeks to demonstrate that the temporal finitude of living on is not a lack of being that it would be desirable to overcome. Rather, temporal finitude is integral to why one cares about life in the first place. Without the exposure to loss, there would be no reason to care for something and no need to sustain a given existence, since there would be no risk that could motivate the act of taking care. Furthermore, the precarious experience of time (of ceasing to be) is not only the negative condition of loss but also the *positive* condition of coming into being and living on. Inversely, an eternal state of being would terminate the possibility of generation, sustenance, and care, since it would eliminate the condition of time.

Accordingly, I distinguish between the desire for *immortality* (an eternal state of being) and the desire for *survival* (a temporal process of living on). To be clear, the desire for survival is *not* reducible to a biological drive for self-preservation. Rather, it includes all “spiritual” and “altruistic” commitments to living on in time. If I give my life for someone else, it is because I value his or her life and want it to continue. Similarly, if I sacrifice my life for a cause or an idea, it is because I believe in its importance and want the cause or the idea to be carried on, to be sustained, in history. The desire for survival is thus the condition not only for concern with one's own existence but also for concern with questions of existence that transcend oneself, such as the question of justice. It is because one is invested in the survival of someone or something that one is compelled to fight for the memory of the past or for a better future.

Indeed, without the desire for survival one would never be engaged or committed, since one would not care about anything that has happened or anything that may happen. The desire for survival, then, is at the root of the care for life and the fear of death.

This desire for the continuation of temporal life is incompatible with the desire for an eternal state of being. If I seek to prolong my life or the life of another, I seek to transcend the limits of a particular time – to live on – but I do not seek to transcend the condition of time altogether. Far from fulfilling the desire to live on, a timeless state of eternity would eliminate the temporal life I want to maintain. Thus, if one is invested in the survival of temporal life, the eternal state of immortality is not only unattainable but also *undesirable*, since it would terminate the possibility for anything to happen and anyone to live on. That is why it is consistent to emphasize (as many religious sages do) that *detachment* from temporal life is the condition for attaining the state of eternity. Only by ultimately detaching oneself from the care for temporal life can one embrace the timelessness of eternity. The radical atheist argument, however, is that such an ideal of detachment dissimulates a preceding *attachment* to temporal life: an attachment that is the source of all care for oneself, for others, and for the world.

2. Radical Evil and the Unconditional

In accordance with the logic of radical atheism, Derrida argues that life is necessarily open to death, good necessarily open to evil, peace necessarily open to violence. Inversely, an absolute life that is immune to death, an absolute goodness that is immune to evil, or an absolute peace that is immune to violence is for Derrida the same as an absolute death, an absolute evil, or an absolute violence.³ This is a radical atheist argument because Derrida calls into question the very *desirability* of the religious ideal of absolute immunity. An absolute immunity would close all openness to alterity, all openness to the unpredictable coming of time, and thereby close the possibility of living on.

The autoimmunity of time is thus *unconditional*, in the sense that it is the condition for anything to happen. As Derrida puts it: “Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen” (ROG, 152). When Derrida analyzes the unconditional in conjunction with highly valorized terms, such as hospitality and justice, he is therefore not invoking an unconditional good or a religious notion of the absolute. On the contrary, he seeks to demonstrate that autoimmunity is inscribed within the conditions for even the most ideal hospitality or justice. Justice and hospitality require conditional laws but at the same time they cannot be reduced to a rule for how the law should be applied. The demand for justice or hospitality is always raised in relation to singular events, for which there is no guarantee that the given laws are adequate, thereby opening the laws to being questioned, transformed, or

eliminated. Derrida can thus claim that conditional laws of hospitality and justice are guided and inspired, as well as given meaning and practical rationality, by the unconditional. The point is that there would be no need for conditional laws without the exposure to unpredictable events. This unconditional exposure is both what gives practical rationality to conditional laws and what inspires one to defend or to challenge them, depending on the situation.

The unconditional, then, is the spacing of time that is the *structure* of the here and now, the structure of what happens, of the event. Derrida describes this unconditionality as a “nonperformative exposure” to what happens, which he distinguishes from the notion of an “imperative injunction (call or performative)” (ROG, 91). To be sure, Derrida also describes the unconditional in terms of a “call.” Yet, what is “called” for by the unconditional is not something unconditional (e.g., unconditional love) but rather acts of engagement and performative commitments that are *conditional* responses to an unconditional exposure. That performative acts are conditional does not mean that they are determined in advance but that they are dependent on a context that is essentially vulnerable to change. This unconditional exposure may always alter or undermine the meaning of the performative act and is therefore not reducible to it.

The relation between performative commitment and nonperformative exposure should thus be understood as *inseparable yet distinguishable*, or “heterogeneous and indissociable” to use a phrase that Derrida often employs. On the one hand, there is no unconditional and nonperformative exposure without a conditional being who is engaged in performative acts of commitment. On the other hand, while one cannot occur without the other, one can nevertheless make a logical distinction between the two. Following Derrida’s emphatic distinction, there is:

on the one hand, a paradoxical experience of the performative of the promise (but also of the threat at the heart of the promise) that organizes every speech act, every other performative, and even every preverbal experience of the relation to the other; and, *on the other hand*, at the point of intersection with this threatening promise, the horizon of awaiting [*attente*] that informs our relationship to time – to the event, to that which happens [*ce qui arrive*], to the one who arrives [*l’arrivant*], and to the other. Involved this time, however, would be a waiting *without* waiting, a waiting whose horizon is, as it were, punctured by the event (which is waited for *without* being awaited). (MS, 250–251)

It is precisely the latter structure of the event – “what comes about in an unforeseeable and singular manner” (WA, 146) – that Derrida describes in terms of a nonperformative exposure. Derrida even provocatively emphasizes that the unconditional exposure to the event “couldn’t care less about the performative” (WA, 146). The unconditional is thus the spacing of time that is not reducible to a performative commitment, since it is the condition for all performative acts, and it cannot be embraced

as something good in itself, since it is the source of every chance *and* every threat. By the same token, the unconditional exposure to time is inseparable from (“calls for”) conditional, performative responses that seek to discriminate between the chance and the threat. As Derrida clearly underlines, the exposure to the event – an “exposure without horizon, and therefore an irreducible amalgamation of desire and anguish, affirmation and fear, promise and threat” – is “the condition of praxis, decision, action and responsibility” (MS, 249).

What is at stake in the distinction between the conditional and the unconditional is thus a distinction that makes explicit what is implicit in reckoning with the temporality of everything to which we are committed. As Derrida emphasizes, it is *because* one is exposed to the incalculable that it is necessary to calculate and it is *because* one is exposed to an undecidable future that it is necessary to make decisions. Inversely, these conditional responses are unconditionally haunted by the relation to the undecidable that remains in and through any decision. It is not only that I cannot calculate what others will do to me; I cannot finally calculate what my own decisions will do to me, since they bind me to a future that exceeds my intentions, and in this sense I am affected by my own decisions as by the decisions of an other. To insist on this condition is not to deny the responsibility for the future, but to elucidate the inherent exigencies of such responsibility. The openness to the future is unconditional in the sense that one is necessarily open to the future, but it is not unconditional in the sense of an axiom which establishes that more openness is always better than less.

The deconstructive analysis of responsibility, then, does not choose between openness and closure. Rather, it analyzes the co-implication of these apparent opposites and the autoimmunity that follows from it. As Derrida argues in *The Gift of Death*, “I cannot respond to the call, the demand, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others” (GD, 68). The violence of exclusion is thus inscribed *in the very act of taking responsibility* and by extension in every act of giving, doing justice, or offering hospitality. Whenever I devote myself to another, I turn away from other others and thus exercise a violent discrimination.

Derrida's argument in *The Gift of Death* thereby allows us to press home the implications of radical evil. The point is not only that what I valorize as good can turn out to be bad or that the deed I hold to be good can turn out to be evil. The point is also that *even when I do good* – even when I devote myself to someone in a loving or generous way – *I necessarily do evil*, since my very act of devotion is an act of exclusion. This notion of radical evil does not seek to justify violence or to reduce all forms of violence to the same. On the contrary, it seeks to elucidate that we are always negotiating violence and that our ideals of justice cannot be immune from contestation and struggle. Every ideal of justice is rather inscribed in what Derrida calls an “economy of violence” (WD, 128–133).

Whatever we do, then, we are inscribed in an economy of violence where matters are urgent precisely because everything we do makes a difference for better or worse.

It is in this economy that Derrida locates the passion for and the struggle to achieve justice. While struggles for justice are often pursued in the name of absolute justice, these claims can always be shown to be incoherent and hypocritical. There is no call for justice that does not call for the exclusion of others, which means that every call for justice can be challenged and criticized. The point of this argument is not to discredit calls for justice, but to recognize that these calls are always already inscribed in an economy of violence.

3. Radical Evil and the Messianic

We can thus finally elucidate what Derrida means by *the messianic*. More than any other term in Derrida's vocabulary, the messianic has invited the misconception that he promotes a hope for religious salvation. Such readings are due to misunderstanding Derrida's distinction between the messianic and every form of "messianism." In Derrida's vocabulary the messianic is another name for the relation to the undecidable future, which opens the chance for what is desired but at the same time threatens it from within, since it is constituted by temporal finitude. In contrast, messianism is the religious or political faith in a future that will come and put an end to time, replacing it with a perpetual peace that nothing can come to disrupt.

Consequently, Derrida emphasizes that what he calls the messianic is without messianism and without religion. Rather, Derrida seeks to unearth an "atheological heritage of the messianic," as he puts it in *Specters of Marx* (SM, 168). The messianic is here linked to the promise of justice, which is directed both toward the past (as a promise to remember victims of injustice) and toward the future (as a promise to bring about justice). This messianic promise of justice does not express a hope for timeless peace. On the contrary, it is animated by a commitment to living on and by the exposure to a perilous future. Without the commitment to living on, one would never be motivated to keep the memory of the past or to seek justice in the future. And without the exposure to a perilous future, there would be nothing to do justice to or take responsibility for, since nothing could happen that would make justice or responsibility a matter of concern.

The commitment to survival is never innocent, however, since one always lives on at the expense of what does *not* live on. To maintain the memory and life of certain others is thus to exclude or violate other others. This necessity of discrimination is what Derrida calls the "law of finitude, law of decision and responsibility for finite existences, the only living-mortals for whom a decision, a choice, a responsibility has meaning and a meaning that will have to pass through the ordeal of the undecidable" (SM, 87). Thus, the resistance to forgetting that is the exercise of justice is also "the place of all violences. Because if it is just to remember the future and the injunction to remember, namely the archontic injunction to guard and to gather the archive, it is no less just to remember the others, the other others and the others in

oneself" (AF, 77). As a consequence, "I shall no doubt be unjust out of a concern for justice" (AF, 63), since the memory of some entails the forgetting of others.

Hence, what Derrida analyzes as the passion for justice cannot be opposed to the violence of exclusion and the autoimmunity that opens the future cannot be opposed to the immunization that is indispensable for the formation of an identity or community. As Derrida puts it in "Faith and Knowledge," "no community is possible that would not cultivate its own autoimmunity, a principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection (that of maintaining its self-integrity intact), and this in view of some sort of invisible and spectral survival" (FK, 51). This spectral survival can inspire both the protection and the violation of a given integrity: an integrity that one may want to defend, transform or undermine depending on the context. In every case, however, the survival of life depends on the sacrifice of what does *not* live on and is thereby haunted (compromised in its very integrity) by what is left behind or killed off so that something else may survive. If one survived wholly intact, unscathed by the alteration of time, one would not be surviving; one would be reposing in absolute presence. Sacrificial self-destruction in view of survival is therefore a structural necessity because it "keeps the autoimmune community alive, which is to say, open to something other and more than itself: the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or the love of the other, the space and time of a spectralizing messianicity beyond all messianism" (FK, 51).

The above notion of the messianic stands in sharp contrast to the "religious" interpretations of Derrida's work. According to John Caputo (the most influential commentator on Derrida and religion), the messianic is "where we touch upon the heart of Derrida's religion," which Caputo describes as a call for "a just one to come, a call for peace" (1997a, xxviii). Caputo even insists that "the meaning of the messianic is, or should be, *shalom, pax*" (1997a, 190). This messianic promise of peace is, according to Caputo, perverted by concrete religions insofar as they confine the messianic promise within the borders of a *people* and thereby excludes others. In contrast, Caputo promotes "a dream of justice for *all* of God's children – that is the religion that emerges from an hour on the couch with deconstruction. That religion is good news, for the oppressed and everybody else" (1997b, 160). For Caputo, Derrida's notion of the messianic thus avoids the violence of determinate religion in favor of the indeterminacy of a messianic promise that opens the kingdom of God to everyone.

Caputo's reading of the messianic is incompatible with Derrida's understanding of the term.⁴ It is true that Derrida describes the messianic as a "universal" structure of experience, but it has nothing to do with welcoming everyone in universal openness. On the contrary, the universal structure of the messianic is the exposure to an undecidable future, which entails that "the other and death – and radical evil – can come as a surprise at any moment" (FK, 17). Accordingly, Derrida maintains that the messianic may be "a fear, an unbearable terror – hence the hatred of what is thus awaited" (PF, 173). Far from promising peace, the messianic is the opening to a

future that is the source of all hope but also of all fear and hatred, since it entails that the desired other can always be or become a menace. As Derrida argues, one cannot desire the coming of the future “without simultaneously fearing it,” since it can “bring nothing but threat and chance at the same time” (PF, 174).

Derrida thus undermines the common denominator for religious notions of the messianic, namely, the idea that someone could come who would be immune from becoming evil. Derrida’s argument is not only that such absolute immunity is impossible to actualize but also that it is not desirable, since it would cancel out the chance of the good in canceling out the threat of evil. Furthermore, without the threat that is intrinsic to the chance one would not care about the chance in the first place. If things were fully present in themselves, if they were not haunted by alteration and loss, there would be no reason to care about them, since nothing could happen to them. The messianic is therefore *not* an endless waiting for something that never comes but *the structure of faith in the here and now*. It is *because* everything we value is threatened from within that we care about it and seek to make it come or to make it stay after it has arrived. It follows that faith is not only predicated on but also animated and sustained by the autoimmunity of survival. In order to care and to commit ourselves, we have to believe in the future not only as a chance but also as a threat.

Derrida’s notion of the messianic thus articulates the logic of radical atheism. A radical atheism does not simply denounce messianic hope as an illusion. Rather, it seeks to show that messianic hope does not stem from a hope for the autoimmunity of salvation but rather from a hope for autoimmune survival. Derrida himself outlined the basic premise for this argument in a talk (“Penser ce qui vient”) that was presented in 1994, following the publication of *Specters of Marx*. Derrida here maintains that he, “like everyone else [*comme tout le monde*],” is “radically atheist [*radicalement athée*].” Such radical atheism is not a matter of “personal convictions, opinions, or ideologies that could be shared by some and not by others”; it is rather a “structural atheism” that “characterizes *a priori* every relation to whoever comes or whatever happens” (PCV, 21). Derrida thus suggests, most provocatively, a research program that runs counter to the post-secular approaches that have dominated the reception of his work on religion. Rather than reading secular concepts and secular experiences as secularized versions of theological origins, the task would be to read theological concepts and theological experiences as theologized versions of an originary and irreducible atheism.

The logic of radical atheism, then, allows not only for a critique of religion but also for a critique of traditional critiques of religion. Rather than *a priori* dismissing political struggles that are fought in the name of religious ideals as deluded, the logic of radical atheism allows us to see that these struggles, too, depend on a faith in and hope for survival. Thus, radical atheism does not simply renounce struggles for health or denounce hopes for safety, even if they are religiously coded. Rather, radical atheism seeks to demonstrate that these struggles and hopes are not concerned with

the absolute immunity that is promoted as the religious ideal. The struggle for health and the hope for safety are not motivated by a commitment to the unscathed but by a commitment to survival.

Given the autoimmunity of survival such commitments may generate all forms of violence, and there are certainly good reasons to analyze the ways in which religious practices are complicit with forms of violence that one may want to transform or seek to eliminate. To assume that a secular struggle is always preferable over one pursued in the name of religion, however, is to adopt a form of paternalism that depoliticizes religion and the question of religion. There are any number of situations where the given structure of a society makes religious discourse the most powerful tool for mobilizing a struggle against injustice. Moreover, if we seek to show the extent to which social struggles are concerned with material injustice rather than with the religious ends to which they may profess allegiance – that is, if we seek to politicize social struggles – we presuppose the radical atheist conception of desire, according to which struggles for justice are animated and sustained by a hope for survival rather than by an aspiration toward the absolute immunity of the unscathed. Whether a given struggle should be supported or resisted is a different question, which cannot be answered through deconstructive analysis and requires concrete political engagement. Indeed, it is precisely by *not* providing an ethical or political principle that deconstruction politicizes our actions and insists on a responsibility from which one cannot be absolved.

Notes

- 1 Derrida is here referring to the Greek notion of “khōra,” but he makes explicit that on his reading it is a name for “spacing” (*espacement*); see FK, 20.
- 2 See for example *Limited Inc*, where Derrida addresses the status of his argument concerning the “necessary possibility of repetition/alteration” (iterability). Derrida first seems to describe such iterability exclusively in terms of a “structural possibility” and thus limits himself to the claim that the possibility of iteration is necessary, whereas something can occur only once without in fact being iterated. However, Derrida goes on to problematize the status of this “in fact” and explicitly emphasizes that it only *seems* as if something can occur “only once”: “I say *seems*, because this one time is in itself divided and multiplied in advance by its structure of repeatability. This obtains *in fact*, at once, from its inception on; and it is here that the graphics of iterability undercuts the classical opposition of fact and principle, the factual and the possible (or the virtual), necessity and possibility. In undercutting these classical oppositions, however, it introduces a more powerful ‘logic’” (LI, 48, original emphasis). As Derrida goes on to specify, this logic of iterability hinges on the fact that any “moment is constituted – i.e., divided – by the very iterability of what produces itself *momentarily*” (LI, 49), thereby requiring a deconstruction of the very concept of presence and hence of actuality.

- 3 See, for example, SM, 175, where the state of eternity that traditional theology holds out as “the best” (“absolute life, fully present life”) is described as “the worst” (“absolute evil”). See also the analysis in Hägglund (2008, 28–30, 140–141).
- 4 For a more detailed critique of Caputo, as well as other major religious/theological interpreters of Derrida, see Hägglund (2008, Introduction and ch. 4).

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Play and Messianicity: The Question of Time and History in Derrida's Deconstruction

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The questions of time and history, which were explicitly at the center of Heidegger's thought since its beginning, have constituted in a more latent and implicit way the kernel of Derrida's deconstruction. The word "deconstruction" appears for the first time in 1967, in *Voice and Phenomenon*. Derrida himself considered this essay, which is an "Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology" as the subtitle states, as coming first since it deals with a decisive point: the question of the privilege given to self-presence in so-called living speech. Within this privilege, it was the difference between signifier and signified, pure presence and representation that was to be "deconstructed." But already in the first part of *Of Grammatology*, a text also published in 1967 but written in 1965, Derrida explained that deconstruction has to be understood not as a "demolition" but as a "de-sedimentation," showing thereby that he was borrowing this word not only from Heidegger but also from Husserl. Heidegger had, of course, announced in 1927 in paragraph 6 of *Being and Time* the project of a "destruction of the history of ontology," while Husserl, in his last book, *Experience and Judgment* (published posthumously in 1939), undertook the task of a genealogy of logic in order to excavate, under the deposits of the logical subjective operations that give to the world its present meaning, the original source on which it is founded, which Husserl calls "pre-predicative experience."

In *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl used the German word "Abbau," which literally means a de-construction, to describe the operation aiming at the dismantling of scientific idealizations in order to return to their original source. The return to pre-predicative experience is the return to the *doxa*, to the common opinion and belief, which finds thus, against the entire philosophical tradition, a new justification – as

the ultimate domain from which scientific knowledge draws its meaning. Heidegger understands in the same way what he names in *Being and Time* “Destruction,” emphasizing that it should not be taken in the *negative* sense of a demolition of the ontological tradition, but as “a loosening of a sclerotic tradition and the dissolving of the concealments produced by it” (Heidegger 1996, 20). Heidegger does not use there the word “Abbau,” but it appears in the course he gave during the same year 1927 on “The Basic Problems of Phenomenology,” which was first published only in 1975. “Abbau” can also be found in texts which Derrida could read during the 1960s, like the famous 1955 lecture Heidegger gave in Cerisy on “What is Philosophy?,” which was published in 1957. Here Heidegger recalls that *Destruction* does not mean to destroy, but to deconstruct (*abbauen*), that is, to excavate and put aside. But it is most probably in *The Question of Being*, Heidegger’s 1956 essay dedicated to Ernst Jünger, that Derrida found the word “Abbau,” which was translated as “déconstruction” by his friend Gérard Granel in the 1968 French publication of this text. This essay was quite important for Derrida, since, as he stressed in *Of Grammatology*, Heidegger crossed out there the word “Being,” an “erasure” considered by Derrida as the last writing of the epoch of ontotheology, the metaphysics of presence, and logocentrism (OG, 23).

Derridean deconstruction however corresponds neither to Husserl’s genealogical project aiming at a rehabilitation of this pre-predicative kind of experience (*doxa*) nor to the definition given by Heidegger to the deconstruction of the history of being, which should allow a return to the original experiences in which the first determinations of Being were grounded. For Derrida, who in this respect breaks in a decisive manner with the phenomenological way of thinking, the historical process is without origin. In *Voice and Phenomenon*, he showed that Husserl’s phenomenology is commanded by the principle of living presence, a presence that phenomenology thinks can be given to an original intuition or perception. This principle explains the phenomenological injunction to go back to the thing itself, instead of remaining on the level of pure verbal significations. But Derrida, relying upon Saussure’s linguistics, in which signs do not signify by themselves but only in their systematic interplay, in which, in other words, signs are pure differences devoid of all positivity, considers that the process of signification has no origin and no end and takes place only, as he says at the end of *Voice and Phenomenon*, because “the thing itself always steals away” (VP, 89). And he breaks in the same manner with Heidegger’s question of Being in so far as it can be understood as an attempt to restore a transcendental signified, Being having been defined in *Being and Time* as “the *transcendens* pure and simple” (Heidegger 1996, 33–34). This break explains why, according to the meaning Derrida gives to the word, deconstruction can neither be defined nor can it be understood as an analysis, that is, as a regression toward an indecomposable origin. Derridean deconstruction is not an operation or an act, but rather an historical process that takes place in itself and which has to do with the destitution of the ontological problematic that has dominated the entire Western philosophical tradition.

Already in this early period, despite the fact that Levinas's name is mentioned only once in *Of Grammatology* (OG, 329 n. 33), Levinas's critique of ontology and his concept of trace have become the determinative horizon of Derrida's thinking. In "Violence and Metaphysics," the long 1964 essay dedicated to Levinas, Derrida already emphasized the fact that Levinas understood experience in a "meta-theological, meta-ontological, meta-phenomenological manner" as "the encounter of the absolute other," an encounter that has the form of a "separation" and not of an intuitive contact (WD, 85). Such an encounter with a "beyond" that is only present as a "trace" defines the "eschatological character of experience" independently from any relation to a belief, a religious or philosophical dogma (WD, 95). Derrida explains here that "the messianic eschatology" from which Levinas draws his inspiration does not refer to a theology, a mysticism, or a religion, but is based on the very nature of experience (WD, 83). We find therefore already in 1964 the matrix of this historical thought of "messianicity without messianism" understood as "thought of the other and of the event to come" and the "universal structure" of experience that Derrida begins to develop, almost 30 years later, in *Specters of Marx* (SM, 59, 65, 100–101). On this basis, it becomes easier to understand Derrida's *Of Grammatology* definition of signifiers as "traces" or even "arche-traces," since they imply the indefinite *differing* of the "thing itself," just as the Saussurean concept of language as a form and not as a substance presupposes the reduction of reference. Such a differing presupposes a conception of time that no longer locates time within the horizon of Being (Heidegger), but that locates it within the "mode of the beyond being," as it is defined by Levinas (Levinas 1987, 30). This conception of time as dia-chrony, as in-adequation and non-coincidence (Levinas 1987, 32) is the basis of Derrida's critique of the Husserlian and Heideggerian thought of time.

1. Derrida and Levinas

In his famous 1967 essay, *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida wanted to emphasize, in his analysis of Husserl's first *Logical Investigation*, the meaning of the difference made by Husserl between expression and indication. Soliloquy, that is, inward speech, is there understood as the realm of pure expression, that is, the realm of immediate proximity to the full presence of the signified, in so far as there is no use of any factual language, as we are required to use in indication and communication with others. Husserl therefore thinks that in soliloquy I do not "speak to myself," which means that I do not need to indicate in an indirect way something to myself, as I have to do with others by means of words uttered out loud, vocally. For Derrida, the fact that, for Husserl, inward communication is not needed comes from the "non-alterity, the non-difference in the identity of presence as self-presence" (VP, 50). But on the other hand, Husserl developed, in his 1905 lectures "On the Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness" (published in 1928), a new conception of time based on the

difference between the “now” and what he calls the “living present” which includes in itself the dimensions of the immediate past and the immediate future. As Derrida explains, the presence of the perceived present is much larger than a punctual “now” since it “is in continuous composition with a non-presence and a non-perception,” that is, with the retention of what has just past and the protention of what is immediately to come (VP, 55). It means therefore that for Husserl himself there is an alterity in the self-identity of the subject, but this original alterity is precisely the condition of presence and presentation, since only a non-instantaneous consciousness can be consciousness of something other. It is possible to agree with Derrida when he says that this relation to non-presence in the living present “destroys every possibility of self-identity in its simplicity” (VP, 56). But this impossibility of simplicity does not mean, as Derrida argues, that there is no difference between retention and representation, primary memory and secondary memory. It does not mean that the representational character of sign and indication can already be found in the self-relation of the subject. If representation were inserted in this way into presence through retention and protention, we would be able to oppose perception to retention and to protention as if retention and protention were different and separate temporal moments, but this opposition would mean, in contrast to what Husserl in fact says, that there is no real continuity between perception and retention-protention.

Derrida declares that he does not want to “reduce the abyss that separates retention and representation.” Instead, he says that he is looking for their common origin in “the possibility of repetition in general,” that is, “the trace in the most universal sense” (VP, 58). But in order to re-present something, consciousness must already be constituted, and this constitution is possible only on the basis of retention and protention. This role of retention and protention implies that retention and protention can be considered as “repetitions” of past and future only if time is understood as discontinuous, as dia-chrony, if in other words this internal and temporal self-alterity which constitutes consciousness is understood, as Levinas did, not as “the achievement of an isolated and lone subject,” but as “the very relation of the subject with the Other” (Levinas 1987, 39). In contrast, for Husserl there are no discrete instants that successively appear on the “line” of time, as his diagram of time seems to imply. There is only a continuous modification of the same original impression, as he explains in paragraph 11 of his 1905 lectures. This continuity, which has to be thought as a process of *self-differentiation*, cannot be explained in terms of “*différance*” or “trace,” since, for Derrida as well as for Levinas, the trace, which is *différance* itself, retains the other as *other* in the same (OG, 62). Whereas for Husserl, retention, perception, and protention are never isolated elements of the temporal flow of experience, which modifies itself continuously, for Derrida, who follows Levinas here, alterity, that is, *exteriority* (Levinas 1969, 290), is precisely what constitutes the dia-chronic structure of experience, which can never be totalized. Phenomenology appears therefore as a metaphysical discourse because it understands

the temporal process as unity and continuity. And, as Derrida points out, it cannot explain the “after-event” of the becoming-conscious of an unconscious content, which is the structure of temporality implied in Freud’s texts (VP, 54). As Derrida explained in his 1968 “Différance” lecture, Freud gave the name of “unconscious” to a radical alterity in relation to all modes of presence so that with the alterity of the unconscious we are dealing with “a past that has never been present” (MP, 21). This “past that has never been present” is an expression explicitly borrowed from Levinas, who in “The Trace of the Other” explains that the face of the other is an “immemorial past,” “an utterly bygone past” (Levinas 1986, 355). This association implies therefore that the radical alterity of the Freudian unconscious is considered as analogous to the alterity of the other subject, as if the self had in itself another self from which it is separated. It seems therefore that in order to deconstruct the “metaphysics of presence” of which phenomenology is the most radical and critical restoration (OG, 49), Derrida has to adopt the metaphysics of exteriority and separation of which Levinas is the promoter.

It has become clear that in *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida placed himself no longer inside phenomenology and philosophy, but in their “margins,” in proximity both to Levinas’s “heterology” and Heidegger’s “destruction” of ontotheology, considering that the privilege given to the present defines the element of philosophical thought (VP, 53). Husserl is accused of participating in “the obstinate desire to save presence” (VP, 43), while trace and *différance* are said to be “older than presence” (VP, 58), self-identity being considered as the “origin,” if this word can still be used, of self-identity. Levinas showed in *Time and the Other* that the relation we can have with death is the relation with something absolutely other, which implies that, in opposition to Heidegger, the solitude of the existent is not confirmed, but broken by death (Levinas 1987, 74). This non-solitude means that the relation with death places the existent on a ground where the relationship with the other becomes possible (Levinas 1987, 76). In the same manner for Derrida the otherness of death and the contingency of factual existence is what remains concealed in the metaphysical belief that presence is the universal form of all experience. It implies, as Derrida emphasizes, that “I am” means originally “I am mortal” (VP, 46–47). As Derrida explains in the Introduction to *Voice and Phenomenon*, Husserl’s phenomenology is a philosophy of life that gives to death only the empirical meaning of a worldly accident and discovers, as does all metaphysics, *within life itself*, the possibility of a duplication between the empirical and the transcendental level of experience. This identity of empirical and transcendental life can be discovered in language itself, which is what seems to “unify life and ideality” (VP, 9). In uttering a word, the subject elevates himself to the level of its ideal content, which can be indefinitely repeated in such a way that speech appears as the medium by which the subject can surmount its own mortality, ideality being thus, as Derrida says, “the preservation or mastery of presence in repetition” (VP, 8).

2. Derrida, Heidegger, and Time

Such a denial of one's own mortality cannot be found in Heidegger. We can find this denial in Derrida, however, precisely because Derrida shares Levinas's conception of death and his criticism of ontology. Consequently, Derrida remained all along in a marked ambivalence towards Heidegger. He could, on one side, see himself as Heidegger's heir when he declared in 1967 that all he has attempted so far would not have been possible without the opening given by the Heideggerian questions (POS, 9). But at the same time he could also suspect Heidegger of confirming the "metaphysics of presence" which constitutes in Derrida's view the core of Western thinking. He thus declared in 1971 that he sometimes had the impression that the Heideggerian problematic was the most profound and powerful defense of what he himself tried to call into question under the rubric of the "thought of presence" (POS, 55). At the end of the first part of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida said again that the metaphysical concept of time cannot be used to describe the structure of the trace, which refers to an absolute past (OG, 66). Indeed, even in Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness, the linearity of time is still presupposed. Derrida acknowledged that such a "linear" concept of time is what Heidegger has named "the vulgar concept of time," showing that it has determined from inside the entire ontology (OG, 66, 86).

It is precisely on this point that Derrida engages his first direct critical debate with Heidegger in the 1968 text entitled "*Ousia and Grammē*." Later collected in *Margins of Philosophy*, this essay was first published in a volume dedicated to Jean Beaufret, to whom Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" was addressed. Derrida's essay deals with the longest footnote of *Being and Time* in paragraph 82, where Heidegger gives a very brief outline of the history of time in Western thinking from Aristotle to Hegel and Bergson. Derrida's commentary on this note aims at dealing with the Heideggerian understanding of presence, but also at showing the relation between the problem of presence and the problem of the written trace, which is the problematic that he develops in the same period in *Of Grammatology* (MP, 34). Derrida questions here the difference made by Heidegger between a "vulgar" concept of time, which is the traditional concept of time governing the entire history of philosophy, and an existential one. In the vulgar concept of time, which comes from the leveling down of original time, time is understood as a sequence, as a flux of "nows" (Heidegger 1996, 386). This understanding of time as a sequence comes from the fact that Dasein is lost in what it takes care of, but this way of being which Heidegger names *Verfallenheit*, fallenness, constitutes nevertheless a *positive* possibility of being in the world (Heidegger 1996, 164). This positive possibility is the reason why Heidegger stresses that "the vulgar representation of time has its natural justification"; it loses this justification only when claiming to be the true concept of time (Heidegger 1996, 390). But Derrida does not believe that there can be something like a "true" concept

of time. And even if he acknowledges that *Being and Time* constitutes a step beyond or before metaphysics (MP, 47), Derrida argues that the distinction between an “authentic” and an “inauthentic” temporality is still connected with the idea of a “fall,” the concept of fallenness being in his view by no means extractible from “its ethico-theological orb” (MP, 45). It seems here that Derrida does not want to take into account Heidegger’s warning not to attribute any negative value to this term, which should not be interpreted as a fall from a purer and higher primordial condition (Heidegger 1996, 164). Derrida goes as far as suspecting that there is “some Platonism” in fallenness (MP, 63), which implies that authenticity and inauthenticity could be understood on the basis of the Platonic difference between sensible world and intelligible world. He even argues that the opposition of the primordial to the derivative and the entire quest for an origin is still metaphysical (MP, 63). However, in Heidegger’s view, fallenness means the mere fact of being absorbed in the tasks of everydayness; it involves something like a forgetfulness of one’s own transcendence, that is, a forgetfulness of one’s own being in the world. It is indeed possible to give an ethical or theological meaning to this difference between two modes of existing, as it was for example the case in Judaism and Christianity with the idea of the original “fall.” But, to be fair, it does not seem that Heidegger in *Being and Time* is only presenting a laicized version of a theological idea. It is in fact rather the opposite: the theological conception of the original fall was possible only on the basis of an existential experience, which is also the basis of the philosophical conception of thought as an experience of “elevation” and “awakening” from a state of immersion in everydayness.

Derrida’s conclusion consists nevertheless in suggesting that, against what Heidegger says, there is no “vulgar” concept of time, because “the concept of time belongs in all its aspects to metaphysics and it names the domination of presence” (MP, 63). This appurtenance of time to metaphysics means that another concept of time cannot be opposed to it. By attempting to produce this other concept, one would have to make use of “other metaphysical and onto-theological concepts” (MP, 63). But at the same time, Derrida insists on the fact that his question remains “internal to Heidegger’s thought.” Indeed, Derrida correctly suggests that, since Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, was still using “the grammar and lexicon of metaphysics,” after *Being and Time* Heidegger was led to “change horizons” (MP, 63). To Jean Beaufret in the “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger himself explained this exact point, when he stressed that the third part of *Being and Time* had to be held back from publication because the demonstration that time is the horizon of Being could not “succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics” (Heidegger 1992, 231). Thereby Derrida discovers “two gestures” in Heidegger, or as he says, “two hands” and “two texts”: one by which Heidegger, remaining *inside* metaphysics, would show how the temporal present of beings comes from a more original thought of Being itself as presence (*Anwesenheit*), and another one by which the determination of Being as presence would become in itself problematic and would define as such the limitation

of the Western way of thinking. The second gesture in particular would open the possibility of going “before or beyond Greece” which for Derrida means that what has to be thought is a “difference older than being itself” (MP, 66). But here, concerning the question of presence, we discover a misunderstanding. The question is not for Heidegger to call into question the privilege given to presence in the Western tradition, which is characterized by Derrida as “the metaphysics of presence.” What is in question is only the privilege given to *permanent* presence, which could be characterized as “the metaphysics of substance,” a metaphysics that understands Being as a presence already accomplished. In opposition to this metaphysics of substance, Heidegger aims at thinking the *event* of coming into presence in order to let the temporal character of Being appear. For Derrida, the dismantling of the metaphysics of presence can only come from the *outside* of the Western tradition (MP, 89) as Levinas’s critique of ontology shows, whereas for Heidegger the deconstruction of the metaphysics of substance implies the internal renewal of the Western thought of Being.

3. The Problem of Genesis

The concept of time, as well as those of past, future, and present, have therefore to be erased. All of them belong to the metaphysics of presence. Following Levinas’s hyperbolic way of thinking, Derrida even goes as far as saying that “time is violence” since it reduces the other to the same and defines, understood in terms of the Husserlian “living present,” egoity as the absolute form of experience (WD, 133). And this erasure is also the case for the concept of history, since this word has always been connected to the linear scheme of the unfolding of presence (OG, 85). The question is therefore to deconstruct the metaphysical concept of history as teleological history which is still widely prevalent (POS, 50) and which implies the concepts of linearity, traditionality, and continuity (POS, 57). But here Derrida insists on the fact that no concept as such is metaphysical, but only in a context, which explains that he still continues to use the word “history” in the context of a new logic of repetition and trace (POS, 58). At the same time however the metaphysical reappropriation of the concept of history is always possible, since the philosophical tradition always amounts to an understanding of history on the basis of an ontological background (POS, 58–59). Derrida explains that in this respect one must elaborate a strategy consisting in borrowing an old word from philosophy and at the same time in producing a new conceptualization of it.

It is therefore not possible to accuse Derrida of rejecting history as such, as the interest he manifested very early for the questions of history and historicity shows. It must be underlined that Derrida’s career began in a climate marked by Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Husserl, which looked for Husserl’s “unthought” in the direction of a rehabilitation of the sensible and of the body. In contrast, Derrida tried

to understand the unity of an apparently contradictory double gesture, which combines in Husserl's thought a strict idealism with a philosophy of history, a transcendental reduction that neutralizes the whole mundane sphere with a transcendental genesis that allows the philosophical understanding of concrete history. Derrida's very first work, written in 1954, but published much later, deals with Husserl's philosophy of genesis. It tried to show that the problem to be solved here arises from the fact that the genetic product of transcendental genesis, that is, ideality, transcends its own genesis and neutralizes it, so that the product of history, in so far as it can be indefinitely repeated, appears as non-historical. It seems that it is necessary to start from the derived product in order to go back to its constitutive source, which implies that the movement of philosophy is an inverse repetition of the genetic movement of life itself (PG, 138). This is what Husserl acknowledged when he finally understood that the philosophical question is truly a *Rückfrage*, a questioning backwards. When Derrida proposed in *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* to translate it into French by "*question en retour*," he stressed that *Rückfrage* is marked by "the postal and epistolary reference or resonance of a communication from a distance" (IOG, 50), which implies that tradition is the opening of a space of a possible repetition.

It seems indeed that in 1962, when Derrida was writing his introduction to Husserl's 1936 short essay "The Origin of Geometry" that has been published as an appendix in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, he sees more clearly the general structure of delay on which the phenomenological project is based, insofar as it is "the 'repetition' of the genetic movement of all philosophy and all history" (PG, 177). As Derrida will explain it more clearly in a later text "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology," Husserl wanted to maintain at the same time the autonomy of ideality with regard to facticity and its dependence regarding subjectivity and therefore rejects in the same gesture both logicist structuralism and psychologistic genetism (WD, 158). But Husserl finally refused to see that "philosophy originates from an existence whose finitude appears to itself" because, despite the immense philosophical revolution he has undertaken, he was still kept captive in the great classical tradition of philosophy which "reduces human finitude to an accident of history" (PG, 177). From there, concluded Derrida in 1954, comes the necessity of undertaking "a radical explanation [with Husserl's phenomenology] which will be a complete conversion" (PG, 5).

Eight years later, the leading question has remained the same but now Derrida seems to see in a better light Husserl's phenomenological idealism. He acknowledges that there is a judicial priority of phenomenology, that is, a priority of transcendentalism, because only phenomenology can "denude the pure materiality of fact" by exhausting itself in the eidetic determination (IOG, 151). That is why in *Of Grammatology* he insists on the fact that the post-philosophical thinking of trace, if it cannot be reduced to transcendental phenomenology, cannot either break with it (OG, 62). What is therefore required is a surmounting of transcendentalism which

does not fall back into a non-philosophical empiricism or into a critique that reduces the privilege attributed to full presence to the *intuitus originarius* but that does not really break with this ideal. The necessary delay of thought has received the traditional name of *intuitus derivativus* when it is opposed to the actuality of an atemporal infinite which can be grasped only in an instantaneous *intuitus originarius*. But, as Derrida strongly stresses, the necessary delay of thought in regard to the showing of a Being which is already there would lead to an understanding of an only empirical finitude of human thought if Being were not through and through History. Derrida says now that an “essential finitude” can be found in phenomenology and remarks in a parenthesis that “the motif of finitude has perhaps more affinity than it first seems with the principle of a phenomenology” (IOG, 138). This essential finitude comes, according to Derrida, from the necessity of the appearing of the absolute foundation of the sense of Being in a region, in the proto-region of consciousness, which means that the foundation conceals itself in the appearance of a domain of beings. In other words, the Absolute takes on the figure of the empirical in order to *appear* as foundation. There is therefore a necessity of the eidetic limitation, and from this limitation, the reduction receives its true meaning as critical humility and prudence. Seen in this light, transcendental idealism appears as required by a philosophy that wants to account for its own genesis. It is required for a philosophy that wants to become aware of its necessary delay in regard to a Being which is in itself history, “*un Être-Histoire*,” “a Being-History,” as Derrida says (IOG, 152).

In the light of such an “essential finitude,” it becomes possible to understand that “delay is the destiny of thought itself as discourse,” and that “only a phenomenology can *say* this” (IOG, 152). For, while the phenomenological reduction means the neutralization of the constituted, at the same time the reduction acknowledges that the constituted offers a necessary starting point. The reduction means not only that it is never possible to begin with the origin (IOG, 38), but also that the original meaning can only be deciphered in the final product, in a retroactive way (IOG, 64). There is, therefore, an “authenticity of the phenomenological delay” and Derrida can legitimately come to the conclusion that “the Reduction is only the pure thinking of this delay, the pure thinking insofar it becomes aware of itself as delay in a philosophy” (IOG, 152), a philosophy that is nothing other than the repetition of the origin *in the discourse*. The very element of reduction is effectively the language itself that operates a *spontaneous* neutralization of all facticity insofar as “speaking is only the practice of an immediate eidetic” (IOG, 67). Derrida shows that it is by a kind of “turnabout” (*vire-volte*) that, in *The Origin of Geometry*, Husserl, after having strongly reaffirmed the independence of the ideal objectivity in regard to its linguistic expression, seems to *redescend* to the opposite assertion that linguistic incarnation is the indispensable medium of constitution of truth itself (IOG, 76). This sudden reversal constitutes the main interest of this short manuscript because it announces another and most “decisive step” (IOG, 87), by which Husserl shows that the constitution of ideality requires in itself the apparition of writing.

The virtue of writing is precisely its power of virtualization, the writing communication being possible in the absence of the actual speaker and being therefore “a communication which has in a way become virtual” (IOG, 87). Writing is indeed the accomplishment of what Derrida calls “transcendental language” (IOG, 77), that is, a language that not only expresses but also constitutes the ideality as an intersubjective object; this language cannot therefore be identical with any factual language. Transcendental language is not only the medium of eidetic reduction, but also “the element of tradition in which alone, beyond *individual* finitude, the retention and the prospection of sense are possible” (IOG, 78). But transcendental language in its completed being, that is, as writing, is liberated from all reference to a factual intersubjectivity. This liberation alone gives to objectivity the perpetual being of an ideality, which is the correlate of an absolutely universal intersubjectivity. Writing confers to ideal objectivities a permanent being and gives them the identity which makes them really objective. Because, however, the perpetual being of ideal objectivities has nothing to do with an actual infinity and since this being is nothing other than the pure form of infinite iteration, of an infinite *Immer wieder*, over and over again (IOG, 135), the opening to infinity which takes place in human history under the form of philosophy is not the opening to an ahistorical realm of eternal entities. On the contrary, it is the opening of history itself. It is not of course the opening of empirical history, which naturally precedes the very recent apparition of philosophy, but the opening of what Derrida calls, by using an expression found in Husserl’s manuscripts, a “transcendental historicity” (IOG, 121), which is nothing other than the paradoxical history of that which remains identical and can be infinitely repeated, the “history of truth” (IOG, 69). This history of truth can be explained neither in a purely genetic manner nor in a purely structural manner. It requires the dialectical “articulation” or the deconstructive “contamination” of structure and genesis.

It is therefore not surprising to see that Derrida, in the following years, which constitute the crucial period of his own thought’s development, continues to show interest in the question of history. In 1954, the young Derrida stressed already that Husserl, despite the fact that there is in his philosophy absolutely no “atemporality” (PG, 84–85), remains nevertheless captive of the classical tradition, which understands temporality “on the background of a possible or actual eternity to which the human being has been able to participate or could be able to do so” (PG, 5). This background of eternity explains that there are “some similarities between Hegel’s and Husserl’s thoughts” (PG, xxiv), Husserl having attempted, like Hegel, to think the becoming of the Absolute in the frame of “the idea of an absolute and completed history or a teleology constituting all the moments of history” (PG, 108). In 1962, Derrida showed that Husserl was therefore led to consider human transcendental consciousness as the bearer of an absolute logos and a teleological reason constituting the ideal pole of its own development. This transcendental consciousness explained the appearance of the idea of a “transcendental deity” which is beyond history, but constitutes nevertheless the pole for itself of the transcendental

historical subjectivity (IOG, 148). For Husserl, the meta-historicity of the divine logos, as well as the meta-historicity of the idealities, which are said in *Experience and Judgment* (paragraph 64c) to be “omnitemporal,” can be revealed only through the movement of history, which is nothing other than “the pure tradition of an original Logos in direction of a polar Telos” (IOG, 149).

This same question of the relation of the Absolute and history was at the center of the courses Derrida gave in the Sorbonne in 1962/3.¹ In the first one, dedicated to “Method and Metaphysics” and to the figures of Parmenides, Plato, Descartes, and Spinoza, Derrida showed that with Hegel method becomes the logos itself, since for him the way leading to truth is neither only human, nor already accomplished in God, which is Himself movement and life. Derrida’s conclusion was again that in this respect there is a deep complicity between Hegel and Husserl, a question which was developed in the second course dedicated to “Phenomenology, Theology and Teleology in Husserl.” Derrida showed there that the thematic of a transcendental deity has to be put in relation with what Husserl called “an Idea in Kantian sense” which is the idea not of an actual infinite but of the opening of the infinite horizon of a history from which God is the telos. He quoted in this respect a manuscript in which Husserl declared that “God would die if all the human beings would die” and Husserl’s last words saying that human life is only a way leading to God and that he had for himself tried to reach the goal without theology. These are words in which Derrida saw a testimony of Husserl’s acknowledgment of the inseparability of method and metaphysics. The question of history was again taken up in 1964, at the center of his first course in the École Normale which was dedicated to the Being-question and history in Heidegger (Derrida 2013).

4. Conclusion: Play and Messianicity

All this was a preparation for a new conception of history as “play” and “writing,” which emerged in the texts published between 1968 and 1972. The theme of repetition has been very early called upon in order to criticize the idea of an originary beginning to which one would like to go back. This critical role of repetition is the reason why Derrida has very early questioned the Heideggerian opposition of the authentic and of the inauthentic, as he does regarding the opposition of original and non-original time in “*Ousia and Grammē*.” The writing of dissemination implies in itself the absence of all originary, as far as the idea of origin presupposes in itself the idea of a unity. As soon as one tries to imagine an original multiplicity or a multiple origin, the difference between the originary and the non-originary disappears; all historical singularities seem to be the mere repetition of another one. If every sign is a mark and therefore a re-mark as far as it is not originary, if there are only derivative marks, it is not only impossible to establish any hierarchy, but also to think

history as a continuous flow of time. The metaphor which can be used here is the spatial metaphor of the labyrinth, which already appears at the end of *Voice and Phenomenon*, in relation to Husserl's description of a Teniers painting seen in the Dresdner Gallery representing paintings which are themselves representations of other paintings, and so on. There is therefore no longer a past or a future, and the very idea of a destination becomes obsolete. We are condemned to a kind of nomadic wandering, a situation that has also been defined by Heidegger as the human being's fundamental situation of errancy in "On the Essence of Truth" (Heidegger 1992, 132).

This nomadic wandering or errancy explains the importance given to the concepts of "game" and "play" in the 1966 lecture Derrida gave in Baltimore, a lecture that marked the beginning of his celebrity status in the United States. This lecture is of course "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" (WD, 278–294). For Derrida, the concept of game thought of as world-game or as the play of the world results from the absence of any transcendental signified, as his own definition of game given in *Of Grammatology* states: "We could name 'jeu' (game or play) the absence of the transcendental signified as non-limitation of the game, that is to say as the undermining of onto-theology and of the metaphysics of presence" (OG, 50). There is a game, that is, unlimited interplay, when and if the signified is lacking, when and if there is a failure of presence, when and if there is something missing, a center, an origin, or an absolute *arché*. Play needs something like an empty space in order to be set free, that is, in order for it to have a field of infinite substitutions, where each signified is able to become in turn a signifier. In this conception of play, nothing forbids or prohibits the permutation of *all* terms. The movement of signification is then what Derrida calls a movement of *supplementarity*: it occurs in addition to the lack of foundation of the signification, it is "superabundant," that is, it is superfluous, because, being without origin or finality, it lacks all forms of necessity. But it is also a *supplement* in the sense of having a vicarious function: it takes the place of the lacking presence and that is why play is said to be "the disruption of presence" (WD, 292). Play is thus always the interplay of presence and absence, because it is what allows the substitution of one term by another one, the supplement of one term through another one. But this alternation of presence and absence is the *effect* of play and not what makes play possible. Presence and absence are *functions* of play, as well as are subject, center, and origin, which, for Derrida, have nothing other than a functional value. We must think being (presence and absence) on the basis of play, not play on the basis of being. Only then will we stop considering history a "nightmare," in Joyce's words (IOG, 103); only then will we stop feeling lost in the Dresdner Gallery labyrinth: the "experience" of the labyrinth is the nostalgic longing for a lost presence, whereas the "joyous affirmation of the play of the world" has nothing to do with a philosophy of disappointment and loss (WD, 292). The failure of presence, instead of being felt as a loss, should be an invitation to

“active” interpretation. In Nietzsche’s terms, we should be able to transform a passive nihilism, which is a negation of life, into an active nihilism, free from nostalgia and hope, indifferent to archaeology as well as to eschatology.

This active nihilism explains Derrida’s hesitation to accept the thought of epochality and the determination of the “epoch” in the Heideggerian history of Being. It can nevertheless be said that, following Heidegger, what characterizes our time is the interpretation of the beings as objects of representation, so that all experience of beings becomes essentially representation. Because the modern meaning of Being as objectivity can appear with Descartes only on the basis of its Greek meaning as presence, we should not emphasize the difference between modernity and antiquity or medieval times. On the contrary, we must relocate the different “epochs” of the history of Being within the great epoch of metaphysics, which could be called the epoch of re-presentation. But re-presentation here means “to render present in general” and not a rendering present of everything for the benefit of the subject, which is the peculiar feature of modernity. That is more or less what Derrida suggested in a lecture entitled “Envoi” from July 1980 (PSY1, 107). And in the same lecture he emphasized the fact that Heidegger does not consider the reign of representation to be at all a calamity, precisely because in the accomplished metaphysics, in what he called *Gestell*, which is the other face of *Ereignis*, the event of appropriation, and as such the announcement of what is no longer “epoch-making,” “the modern world begins to free itself from the space of representation and calculability” (PSY1, 108). But if this is really the Heideggerian thought of epochality in general, if Heidegger understands, as Derrida stresses in “The *Retrait* of Metaphor,” metaphysics as *the* epoche or suspensive withdrawal of Being in the epochality of all the epochs (PSY1, 65), what, then, is problematic for Derrida in the Heideggerian history of Being? Derrida himself speaks in *The Postcard* of the “grand history” of the *Geschick*, of the destination that goes from Socrates to Freud and Heidegger (PC, 13). What is in fact problematic is the *Ge-* of *Geschick* and its gathering value, by which in destination Being still destines *itself* as if it were the unified “subject” of destination. This is why in *De l’esprit* Derrida speaks “for provisional convenience” of “the axiomatics of *Destruktion* and of the epochal scheme in general” (OS, 8). Derrida wanted thus to point out the hidden teleology which is still to be found in the epochal scheme. In *The Postcard*, Derrida had already expressed his suspicion of what he called “the lure” of destination in general: “To coordinate the different epochs, halts, determinations, in a word the entire history of Being with a destination of Being is perhaps the most outlandish postal lure” (PC, 66). Derrida wants to think the multiplicity of the dispensations, of the sendings, *la multiplicité des envois*, as coming from the other and not from Being *itself*, that is, as sendings back, as returns, as *renvois* so that there is no gathering of destination, but an original dissemination or division of destiny: “This, as it were, pre-ontological sending [*envoi*] does not gather itself together. It gathers itself only by dividing itself, by differing/deferring itself. . . . It does not form a unity and does not begin with itself, although nothing present precedes

it; it emits only on the basis of the other, *the other in itself without itself*. Everything begins by referring back [*par le renvoi*], that is to say, does not begin" (PSY1, 127).

One can wonder if the "messianic" conception of history that Derrida develops in his last texts, in a time when Levinas's thought has become for him a capital reference, is compatible with his first critique of the "metaphysical" concepts of time and history. Even if Derrida is careful enough to distinguish between messianicity and messianism and between a teleo-eschatological program and the messianic promise (SM, 75) which opens up, without any horizon of the wait, to what is to come, is not his claim that "the messianic appeal belongs properly to a universal structure, to that irreducible movement of the historical opening to the future" (SM, 167), a return to a linear conception of time? And even if he indeed wants to identify the Abrahamic messianism with what he calls "messianicity," is he not still using this Hebraic name,² giving thereby a pre-eminence to a particular historical conception of time and history? And, the last and most difficult question: how can a deconstructive thinking be finally referring to the indeconstructibility of the idea of a justice which always remains to come (SM, 90)?

Notes

- 1 I am quoting in the following from the notes I took as a student during Derrida's courses of the academic year 1962/3.
- 2 Derrida does not seem to know that the "eschatological" invention of a time oriented towards what is to come has to be ascribed to the Persian Mazdeism and Zoroastrianism, in which we find the first mention of a savior, the *Sasohyant*, who is supposed to restore justice through an entire regeneration of the world and who is the prefiguration of the *Messiah*, a Hebrew word which means "the anointed," as does the Greek *Christos*.

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I See Your Meaning and Raise the Stakes by a Signature: The Invention of Derrida's Work

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If electronic word searching can be relied upon, then the problematic of signature does not arise in Derrida's corpus until after its initial three-part salvo, *Voice and Phenomena*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Of Grammatology*, all published in 1967. That opening volley of texts undoubtedly produced a sufficient effect of institutional legitimacy for their author to risk raising the stakes even further by putting into play the signature now validated by the philosophical institution. This *surenchère* or upping of the ante will have been declared in writing as early as 1968. It happens very near the beginning of "Plato's Pharmacy," the text that most proximately pursues Derrida's grammatological concerns in the three earlier texts.

This short passage declares the departure of Derrida's signature on a new adventure, one which bids to raise the stakes of philosophical discourse:

To a considerable degree, we have already said all we *meant to say*. . . . Since we have already said everything, the reader must bear with us if we continue on awhile. If we extend ourselves by force of play. If we then *write* a bit . . . (DIS, 65)

These lines open the two brief paragraphs set on the essay's most liminal page, lying as it does between an opening prologue and the first chapter of the first part of the essay, "Pharmacia."¹ On this threshold, the writing positions itself to take off. I say "the writing" does that, but the grammar and the syntax of the passage emphatically say (or write) that "we" do it, here, as "we" write that "we" are going to continue writing.

This "we" is altogether remarkable and for a number of reasons. For one thing, it retains the mark of scholarly, philosophical, scientific discourse, the "editorial we"

as it is sometimes called, the “we” that figuratively, rhetorically, assembles a company of scholars. This pronoun both includes and precludes the first person singular, gathers it up into the assembly, drops the singular in order to raise it to the general “we,” who is no one in particular. Of course, this code is easily read as dissembling or fronting for the singular “I.” Yet, at the same time as it does not depart, at least in its apparent form, from the mark of philosophical generality, the “we” announces here that it is taking leave to extend itself by the force and play of writing. It thereby sets the stage for a departure from the non-play of its own signature, which has just begun to show really solid institutional value.

This leave to write “a bit,” “awhile,” must, however, be granted by some other outside the “we,” *even as* the leave is given by the text to itself in the figure and the face of this other’s patience: “the reader must bear with us if we continue on awhile [*on devra patienter si nous continuons encore un peu*].” A more literal translation would be, “one will have to be patient,” employing a tense that engages some future here not just rhetorically but still for a little while to come, who knows for how long.² With this gesture of taking one’s leave at the site of the reader’s passivity, it is as if “we” had just stolen the other’s promise of patience into an undetermined future. By becoming indebted to the essential passivity of the other, writing gives/takes leave to continue and extend itself.

1. Déjà – D.Ja.

There is at least one more feature or trait that should be remarked here. Indeed, it remarks itself in the part of the opening sentence that is being repeated from one paragraph to the next: “we have already said all,” “we have already said everything.” In French, these phrases match precisely: “nous avons déjà tout dit.” The repetition bears what Derrida will later, in *Glas*, call his siglum, his abbreviation or acronym, the semanticization of his initials, D.Ja., which shows up in the common adverb *déjà*, “already.” There is thus, *perhaps*, surreptitiously (and yet altogether in the open), an act of signing performed or staged here. One must say “perhaps” because the common vocable “*déjà*” can always be read as passing along nothing but conventional sense and thus nothing that, now that everything has been said, returns or accrues to a singular signature or to the signatory, unless it has *already* accrued to it or to him.³ The siglum or signature of “*déjà*” takes place, if it does, in the abyss of the text’s relation to itself as other, other than itself. It thereby declares, as well, the debt, the infinite debt to the other who promises the future to some writing and to some play of the signature. *Already* there is debt. Still, on the most apparent semantic level, “we” also reiterate and reaffirm the signature already published on what “we have already said” of what “we meant to say.” In other words, already everything.

What, then, is left? What remains if there is nothing left to say of what we meant to say? If meaning-to-say has achieved the totality of its aim or intention? What is

left over, left out by totality? These questions can be heard to echo in the columnar capitals initiated by the opening lines of *Glas* (GL, 1). First, the Hegel column: “what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?” The right-hand column, meanwhile, likewise opens without capital letter in what’s left of a title of Genet’s: “‘*what remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares and rammed down the shithole*’ is divided in two. As the remain(s).” A Rembrandt, which is to say a signature. Less elliptically and, it might appear, more conceptually, a few lines further down in the left-hand column the initial question of the remains of a Hegel becomes that of the signature of Hegel’s text, the signature of absolute knowledge, that is of the *savoir absolu*, which this first page signals right away will henceforth be designated by its initials, its siglum, *Sa*. Does *Sa* bear a signature? Is it written, has it been written? By what, by whom?

Perhaps there is an incompatibility, which is more than a dialectical contradiction, between teaching and signature, between a teacher and a signatory. To let oneself think or be thought and to let oneself sign or be signed: perhaps these two operations cannot in any case overlap.

Its/His signature, like thinking moreover as thinking of the remains, will envelop this corpus but no doubt will not be comprehended there. (GL, 1, trans. modified)

This possible incompatibility between teaching and signing can bring to mind the distinction made at the outset of “Plato’s Pharmacy,” six years earlier, between meaning-to-say and writing, between a totalizable intention and a remainder. In any case, clearly aligned on the first page of *Glas* are remainders and signatures, to be unfolded thereafter to incalculable effect. Derrida announces there with some fracas, that is, with some breaking of conventions, that, after all has been said that “we” meant to say, there remains the stake of the signature: “The stake of the signature – does the signature take place? where? how? why? for whom? – that will be treated practically, in passing and as we go . . .” (GL, 3).

Any treatment of Derrida’s thinking of signature cannot bypass *Glas*, the most practical treatment of and treatise on signature in his oeuvre, the most extensive work of writing (on) the signature in his corpus. On the signature of philosophy and the signature of literature, the one also signing the other. *Glas* is Derrida’s widest dissemination of what one might call the signature *effect*. Coursing through all possible sense connections in a common language, an effect of signature can be felt to register, like tremblings set off by nearby explosions. It is an effect, a resonance, an impression, which is to say, it is nothing itself and in itself, but rather the trace left behind by some event of signature that was itself never simply present. Under this effect, one can never be sure that the signature is not false, an illusion, a simulacrum, a phantasm. Counterfeit or contraband. “Does it take place? where? how? why? for whom?” These are Derrida’s questions and they resonate from then on in everything he writes.

If no treatment of Derrida's thinking of signature can bypass *Glas*, that is also because, as the most disseminating invention of his oeuvre, *Glas* resonates everywhere throughout it. For example, in *Signéponge/Signsponge*, which dates from 1975, one year after *Glas*. It too is a treatment of and a treatise on the signature. That is, it treats a particular signature, that of Francis Ponge, while profiling a general discourse on signature. But *Signsponge* also would enact if it could what Derrida calls, henceforth, a countersignature, the act of affirming the other work by taking responsibility for it.⁴ Countersignature is a response to the other's writing, the other's signing. Which is to say another name for it is reading, but one that figures an act of responsible response, signed and countersigned.

Like Derrida, who forewarns that he "will treat only a piece, a small piece of [Ponge's] corpus" (SIG, 20), I will be able to treat only a small fragment of *Signsponge*. It stands out starkly from the text around it, which it also bisects exactly at the center. Marking a pause between the two volleys or *volets*⁵ of the original lecture, at the very end of its first half, Derrida proposes to inscribe "the language-event" (SIG, 76) that will have been Ponge's signature countersigned here by J.D. or D.Ja. The countersigning event of *Signsponge* thus puts itself on the line.

This inscription has a lapidary form, as if we were reading an engraved stele: only capital letters, without punctuation or diacritical marks. It thus repeats and quotes a typography that Ponge has used, even as it leaves the mark there of another signature. Its ten lines form almost a square, with a small blank left over at the bottom right, in the place where one often finds a signature. The lines figure thus a quasi-solid object, like a stone tablet or table on which to record the language-event that even here takes place, if indeed it takes place. Before attempting to read it line by line, even word by word, let us look at it first as it appears in French (SIG, 77):

EPONGER DESORMAIS A PARTIR DE LUI MAIS QUI SAIT
 A PARTIR D'AUJOURD'HUI ET DE MOI VOUDRA DIRE
 DANS LA LANGUE FRANÇAISE FRANCISEE PLUTOT OU
 REFRANCISEE COLONISEE UNE FOIS DE PLUS DEPUIS
 LES BORDS DE LA MEDITERRANEE MARE NOSTRUM
 EPONGER AURA VOULU DIRE DEJA LAVER NETTOYER
 APPROPRIER EFFACER DONC PAR EXEMPLE LE NOM DE
 PONGE MAIS AUSSI S'ACQUITTER D'UNE TRAITE INSCRIRE
 LE NOM DES PONGE SIGNER PONGE SIGNEPONGER
 EMARGER DEJA AU NOM DE PONGE

To transcribe the inscription, we'll proceed as if we were doing a rubbing to transfer the image of an effigy or an epitaph from an old tombstone.⁶ Because Derrida's lapidary ellipsis is also that: effigy, epitaph, engraved eulogy. We'll suppose, however, that our rubbing is also able to make visible the elided punctuation and can thus inject pauses for breath, grammatical and logical subordination. The agent of such a transfer operation can only be a difference of tongues, between at least two, one applied

to the other in the act called translation.⁷ (We'll put in reserve the question of whether translation is another name for countersignature.)

Here, then, is a translation/transcription of the lapidary inscription:

Henceforth, starting from him, but, who knows, starting from today and from me, "to sponge" will mean in the French language or rather the francisized or refrancisized language, colonized once again from the shores of the Mediterranean, *mare nostrum*, "to sponge" will have already [*déjà*] meant to wash, to clean, to appropriate, thus to efface, for example the name of Ponge, but also to pay off a bill, to inscribe the name of the Ponges as the noun sponge, to sign Ponge [or "Ponge"], to signsponge, to initial in the margins already [or "already," *déjà*] in the name of Ponge.

Because these lines are a powerful contraction of *Signsponge* into a punctual act of countersignature, because they also function as a synecdochal part for the whole, then they will forever defy an exhaustive reading. This countersignature, in other words, is a chiseled poetic work (in French, one could say it is *léché*, polished, licked). We will thus have to be content with signaling just a few of its effects.

There is, first, the marking of an event with performative language: "Henceforth . . . 'to sponge' will mean." The event remarked here – consecrated or commemorated – is that new uses of the common verb have become possible, starting with him, Ponge, but perhaps as well or instead (who knows?) starting from "today and from me." The countersigning gesture is initiated here with this reminder that the language-event of signing the common language has also to be received and remarked as event. For the signature to take place another must countersign it. What would be a language-event – an event happening to language itself – that could not be repeated by another, but remained the property of a sole signatory? This gesture thus opens the event to its repetition, but also to a history, which is not only a history of the word, but a geopolitical history borne by a language "colonized once again from the shores of the Mediterranean." The countersignature is thereby also signaling from some *other* border of that sea, for example, its North African, Algerian shore. Ponge's effort to sponge his name off language, to sign his name to the unpayable debt owed to things, to clean up French and purify it, francisize and refrancisize it, all these senses of *éponger* are *already* known: to wash, to clean, to appropriate, to efface. Derrida affixes his siglum to that: "'to sponge' will have *already* meant to wash, to clean, to appropriate, to efface . . ." Agreed, *déjà*, D.Ja. But these verbal infinitives also happen to map the space of the work *already* signed by J.D., a space defined by the deconstruction of the trait of the proper. The countersignature, then, has also to bring to bear a pressure that *counters* the properness and property of Ponge's signature.

The inscribed list of infinitives continues, drawn on by a "but also": "but also to pay a bill." This "but also" echoes the earlier "but who knows" that, as I suggested, initiates the gesture of countersigning. Both times "but" sounds a supplementary

note, which reminds us that a countersignature supplements – adds to and/or takes the place of – the signature. That the supplement added here is the act of acquitting a debt puts into an abyss the act that is countersignature. For like Ponge, who writes to give the most common things their due, Derrida opens an unpayable debt to the thing that is Ponge's text, to his signature made text and thing. The scene of the unpayable debt expunged takes place in the only place it can: in the abyss of infinite difference between two signatures.

But the phrase “s'acquitter d'une traite” can also be echoing from those other shores of the Mediterranean in a different register. To be sure, it can mean to settle a bill, to pay off a debt or a mortgage. But the noun “traite” also has the special use of designating slave traffic, Black or White, in which case it usually takes the definite article: *la traite*. In the phrase “s'acquitter d'une traite,” “traite” retains this other possible reference and insinuates a question. To clean the slate of some slave trade? Is that what *éponger* henceforth will have meant in Ponge's properly Francitized French language, colonized once again across the Mediterranean?

The poem, however, has not finished naming what “henceforth” – starting from him, Ponge, but “who knows, from today and from me” – *to sponge* will have meant, beyond those uses we already know. There follow still four more infinitives that trace a progression toward ever greater dispersion and force of meaning. First, “to inscribe the name of the Ponges,” “inscrire le nom des Ponge.” In this instance, the total dispersion of “Ponge” into sponge-like language is prevented by the rules of French grammar, which remarks the proper name by refusing to add an -s to the plural patronymic despite the plural article: *des Ponge*. The name is thus properly returned to the bearer, or would be if there were not a homophonic effect that lets one hear as well: “to inscribe the name of/the noun sponge,” “le nom d'éponge.” In any case, right away, with the next infinitive phrase, the patronymic is reinscribed in a way that divides its proper trait among at least three possible syntactic scenarios: “SIGNER PONGE” configures together (a) Ponge's act of signing his own name, (b) the act of signing (again) the work of Ponge, where that name is now a metonym for the body of writing, and (c) the act of signing “Ponge,” which may always be a fraud, a counterfeit, a fiction – or a countersignature. Derrida next converts the name of his own countersigning work, *Signéponge*, into an infinitive verb *signéponger*, a suitcase word that hinges on the overlapping -é- whereby no sooner does one sign than a sponge passes over the mark.

As for the last of the listed infinitives, *émarger*, it transgresses the border of the names Ponge/*éponge* by way of an assonant word that points to some margin: *émarger déjà au nom de Ponge*. The verb *émarger* means to initial in the margins, and that sense is being underscored here by the siglum *déjà* that follows it. To initial already in the margin; to initial “déjà” or “D.Ja.” in the margin, to initial in the or at the name of Ponge. This final infinitive flight (or theft) of what *éponger* will have meant is also perhaps the place where the countersignature bears down the hardest and leaves its mark on this tablet or table of laws according to Ponge. The verb *émarger* seems to

bear the weight here of a metonym for the Derridian idiom, which is displacing, translating, or countersigning *éponger* (*Margins* is also the title of a 1972 book by J.D.). This initialed countersignature thereby *both* affirms, agrees to, or accepts the debt by initialing in the margin, *and* translates or expropriates the Pongian operation as *already* margining, as already countersigned by the other, *déjà*, “in the name of Ponge.” One should note that the final word of *Signéponge*, inscribed at the bottom right of the last page, is “*déjà*.”

2. The Concept of Countersignature?

From this rather strenuous reading exercise, can we draw the profile of countersigning in general? We are not after a *concept* of the countersignature – for its concept deconstructs, even shatters – but just something to go on so as to be able, perhaps, to recognize another event of countersignature. If we say that the inscription of *Signsponge* is an *example* of inventive, creative countersignature, then it must be because we recognize some generalizable features. What might these be? Let’s enumerate:

1. The countersignature must be an event, which implies that it must take place somewhere.
2. As event, the countersignature is always singular. Which means that where it takes place is essentially unrepresentable *as such*. This singular place or location thus falls into the abyss that is the absolute difference between one singularity and another. *Tout autre est tout autre* (GD, 82–115).
3. The countersignature cannot just repeat the signature, Ponge’s for example. To have the countersigning effect, it must somehow interrupt the signature’s relation to itself, so as to repeat the signature *differently*.
4. This difference is marked through the language or rather the *idiom* of the other. In a certain sense, the countersignature always signs in a language other than the original.
5. The countersignature is indebted, unacquittably, to the other work. Like the previous features enumerated, this one is universalizable. But it also puts in play the condition of indebtedness. What does it mean to be “indebted”? Whose debt to whom? For what? According to which law and which or whose economy? To countersign, one must encounter some version of all these questions in one’s very calculation of response to the other work. That encounter need not be a conscious one, indeed it can never be fully conscious; but even as unconscious, the calculation of the countersigning response will have engaged somewhere with the singular experience of debt.
6. The countersignature confirms and records this experience when the other to which one is indebted is a signed text, of whatever sort. It countersigns an

experience of reading another, a *tout autre comme tout autre*. Countersigning, as we have already said, is another name for reading.

7. Is this not to conclude that by countersignature is meant nothing less or more than an *example* of reading? But can one have an example of an infinite category? For if indeed it is infinite, then there are only examples of countersignature without general concept. Exactly.

Have we fallen, then, into mere empiricism while pursuing this non-concept of countersignature? Or is it not rather one of those structures of universal substitution like that Derrida describes in the case of the witness?

When I testify, I am unique and irreplaceable. . . . But, at the same time the same aporia always remains: this irreplaceability must be exemplary, that is, replaceable. The irreplaceable must allow itself to be replaced on the spot. In saying: I swear to tell the truth, where I have been the only one to see or hear and where I am the only one who can attest to it, this is true to the extent that anyone who *in my place*, at that instant, would have seen or heard or touched the same thing and could repeat exemplarily, universally, the truth of my testimony. The exemplarity of the “instant,” that which makes it an “instance,” if you like, is that it is singular, like any exemplarity, singular *and* universal, singular *and* universalizable. The singular must be universalizable: this is the testimonial condition. (DFT, 40–41)

This *rapprochement* between the witness and the countersigner (and witnesses are often called to countersign another signature, public notaries, for example) raises the question of the exemplarity of a countersigning act. In what sense must a countersignature, like testimony, be exemplary, that is, at once singular and universalizable? Is it indeed *like* testimony, where the medium of substitution or the element to be repeated is, as Derrida notes here, the truth, namely “the truth of my testimony”? If, as we’ve enumerated in the list above (3), the countersignature cannot just repeat the other’s signature, then its testimony, if that is what it is, must also attest and affirm a space of non-truth. The countersignature, in other words, does not vouch only for some truth, in the manner of the witness. It also has to affirm a space of invention that is always, in some sense, invention of the other(’s). It is this invention of the other that has to be countersigned.⁸

3. The Second Invention of *Relever*

We began by reading a certain liminal passage of “Plato’s Pharmacy” that raises the stakes of Derrida’s signature at a specific moment, 1968, of what is now that signature’s history, or one of its possible histories. To conclude, we’ll consider a text from 1998 that sustains a reflection on the history of, if not Derrida’s signature, then an invention signed by Derrida.

That invention is Derrida's translation of Hegelian *Aufhebung* as *relève*. The occasion for recalling this inventive event, 30 years later, is an address to a congress of literary translators in France. In this address, titled "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?", Derrida is obliged to recall the event and its several aftermaths in order to explain what was so extraordinary about hitting upon the same word to translate, 30 years later and from another language, "seasons" in Portia's famous line from *The Merchant of Venice*, "Mercy seasons justice," by "Le pardon relève la justice." This second invention of *relever* seems no less than miraculous, which is why perhaps Derrida's essay keeps returning to the scene and remarking the place of his own highly improbable signature. It asks, in effect: Is this a signed invention? Who signs it? Who takes responsibility for it?

Such questions are taken up by several passages across the essay in which Derrida reflects on this 30-year experience or experiment with *relever*, translating first from German and then from English. In the first of these passages, he writes:

The verb *relever* brings me back to a modest but effective experiment in translation in which I have found myself engaged for more than thirty years, almost continuously, first between German and French, then more recently between English and French. That this same French word (the very same word, assuming that it is the very same word, and that henceforth it is French through and through), that this same word could have thus operated, in a single language, between three languages, so as to "translate," or in any case to *put to work* different words belonging to apparently different contexts in at least two other source languages (German and English) – this fact seems an incalculable stroke of luck, an invention or necessity for which I wonder who can bear the responsibility, even if it was apparently mine at first and if I had to sign it. I harbor no illusion or pretension in this respect: if I took the initiative in these quasi-translations, I could do so only by listening, in order to record, to various possibilities or laws – semantic and formal – already inscribed in this family of languages and, first and foremost, in "my" language. (WRT, 177–178)

Reading this passage, one may well be prompted to recall how, a few pages earlier, Derrida had warned that his discourse, written to be initially delivered to a meeting of professional literary translators, will be making "a vain effort to dissemble [his inadequacies before such an audience] with contrivances more or less naively perverse" (WRT, 175). One such contrivance, perhaps, is operating in the passage we are reading, which indeed contrives to leave a mark of Derrida's signature on the language(s) of philosophy, even as that signatory declines to claim responsibility for it: "this fact seems an incalculable stroke of luck, an invention or necessity for which I wonder who can bear the responsibility, even if it was, apparently, mine at first and if I had to sign it." As incalculably inventive translation, in other words, it must remain essentially unsigned although it will also have to be signed in the register of the philosopher's proper name: "I had to sign it." There is thus a double register being

kept, which consigns to the record recalled here both the unsignable event or invention and the signed or countersigned translation.

The next reminder of Derrida's experience with *relever* expands on the conditions under which he signed it as the most relevant translation of Hegel's idiom of *aufheben*, that is, the canceling/preserving movement that propels the dialectical work of the negative:

And when I say that this has happened to me, as I will try to relate, I cannot designate anything that is empirically personal to me because what happened to me, or what passed through me coming from languages and returning to them, was also a project of institutional accreditation and canonization [*consécration*] in the public sphere. My first concern was therefore not to appropriate this translation for myself, but to legitimate it, to have it be recognized as the most relevant translation possible and therefore, on the contrary, to expropriate it from myself, to dispossess myself of it by putting it on the market – even if I could still dream of leaving my likeness on this common currency and, like Shylock, expect a recognition of debt for it. (WRT, 183)

Derrida is describing here in very economical terms the trajectory of a signature when it has to be countersigned by some institution in order to circulate as legitimate philosophical currency. A “project of institutional accreditation,” that is, must be oriented by the need or desire to see one's signed inventions legitimated by or in an institution. Therefore, the vocation of this signature has to be its own expropriation if the invention it signs is to be recognized and adopted as “the most relevant translation possible.” Its vocation, one might say, is an *evocation*, what calls it forth and inscribes it in a signing, first-person voice. There is thus a signature, but only through the evoking, expropriating force of some other. In Derrida's narrative, this expropriating force is depicted as double: it is at once the faceless, nameless force “coming from languages and returning to them,” a force of *relevant* translation across languages, but also the force behind “a project of institutional accreditation and canonization in the public sphere.” How to know who or what signs such an invention? It comes from and returns to languages and discourses (always more than one, at least three), as if no one signed it, even as someone did have to sign it.

Exappropriation is what Derrida called this experience of a signature, of a work, of a work of signature. Appropriation expropriates (itself). And vice versa.

At the same time, in “What Is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?” might Derrida be recalling the debt due to his signed invention? As if in anticipation of that question, the signatory self-mockingly confesses to having dreamed about it: “I could still dream of leaving my likeness on this common currency and, like Shylock, expect a recognition of debt for it.” This figure of figure, this effigy of likeness, whereby a debt is recognized to the bearer – of the coin, but also of the figure on the coin, the one whose likeness or signature circulates with it, like a signature – is echoed in the next

reminder Derrida places further along in the text, at the point at which he recounts in some more detail the incalculably lucky event of his translation of *aufheben* by *relever*. Having explained how it was remarkable for both its economy and relevance, Derrida asks: “Was my operation a translation?” and then replies:

I am not sure that it deserves this term. The fact is that it has become irreplaceable and nearly canonized, even in the university, occasionally in other languages where the French word is used as if it were quoted from a translation, even when one no longer knows where it comes from, even when one doesn't like the place it comes from – I mean “me” – even when one doesn't like its taste. (WRT, 196)

This reminder cannot simply avoid seeming to call in a debt, in the face of a general and sometimes distasteful reluctance to acknowledge it.⁹ And yet, the same lines can be read as pointing toward a movement beyond debt and property, beyond what can be owed to an inventor of language's own possibilities. If “even in the university” the translation of *aufheben* by *relever* has been appropriated as most relevant, if this has happened despite resistance to recognizing any debt to Derrida, despite even distaste for what his name represents, well, if so, then perhaps it means that this canonization, accreditation, legitimation, or appropriation will have registered something like its own transformation by the invention of the other.

Returning once more to the question of whether this invention is a translation, Derrida hesitates:

I am not sure that this transaction, even if it is the most economic possible, merits the name of translation, in the strict and pure sense of this word. It would be rather one of those other things in *tr.*, a transaction, transformation, travail, travel – and a treasure trove [*trouvaille*, i.e., a lucky find] (since this invention, if it also seemed to take up [*relever*] a challenge, as another saying goes, consisted only in discovering what was waiting, or in waking what was sleeping, in the language). (WRT, 198)

Transaction, transformation, *travail*, travel – the trace of *tr.*¹⁰ Trace of a signature as well and of those remains left on the languages of philosophy by an event of signing and countersigning the other.

Writing in 1998 of “the modest but effective experiment in translation in which I have found myself engaged for more than thirty years” (WRT, 177), Derrida takes us back to the starting point of the present essay and the time of “Plato's Pharmacy.” That same year, 1968, Derrida first presented – in Jean Hyppolite's seminar at the Collège de France, no less (MP, 79)¹¹ – “The Pit and the Pyramid,” where, as he specifies in a note, Hegelian *aufheben* was first translated by *relever* (MP, 196 n.

8). “What Is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?” traces, in filigree as it were, the career of this invention, its legitimation by the corps of philosopher-translators, but also the erasure of the signature effigy on this currency as it gets passed from hand to hand and language to language. The invention *relever/relevant* has thus been at work or in play for 30 years (now over 40 years) transforming more than one language, more than one family of languages. Derrida neither signs nor leaves altogether unsigned this work, for it is impelled by the movement of what he calls exappropriation whose doubled prefix un-decides the trait of the proper and thus what properly returns to a signature. In other words, exappropriation is at work, lifting and leaving, relieving, *relevant* this trait of the proper, tracing it so as to erase it, inscribing it while expunging it, and vice versa. It is at work, or better *à l’œuvre*, making what is called an *œuvre*, the text, thing, or work that takes place in the abyss between signature and countersignature. Between, for example, “Plato,” “Hegel,” “Ponge,” “Shakespeare,” and “Derrida,” in the abyss of a signature that is stolen, lifted, nicked, translated, transformed, transferred, tr-’ed – or as one might say in French, *piquée*.

Notes

- 1 On this passage, see as well my “Composition Displacement” (Kamuf 2010, 133).
- 2 Even more literally, syntactically precise, the clause says “one will have to patient [*on devra patienter*],” using an intransitive verb that English lacks.
- 3 Indeed, there is already more or less than one signature from the moment the trace of “D.Ja.” is translated according to the ordinary sense of *déjà*, “already.” Translation effaces, when it does not counterfeit, signature.
- 4 Ponge originally used the term “countersignature” in a passage from *Pour un Malherbe* that Derrida quotes (SIG, 130).
- 5 Ponge’s poem “Le volet, suivi de sa scholie” receives considerable attention in *Signsponge*.
- 6 See SIG, 76 for Richard Rand’s typographically faithful translation.
- 7 “I don’t know how, or in how many languages, you can translate this word *lécher* when you wish to say that one language licks another, like a flame or a caress” (WRT, 175).
- 8 Derrida takes the phrase “invention of the other” as the second title of the collection *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. The plural evokes the collection’s 28 chapters, titling and naming them “inventions of the other.” They would each, then, be exemplary examples of the practice of countersignature as invention of the other.
- 9 Derrida’s essay, we should recall, is largely taken up with a reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, IV, 4, the scene of canceled debt to the Jew Shylock. On this reading, see Kamuf (2012, 71–87).
- 10 For his astute remarks on translating this particular passage, see Venuti (2003).
- 11 This was, in other words, not just anywhere but at the institutional pinnacle of philosophy as practiced at the time in France and in French.

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An Immemorial Remainder: The Legacy of Derrida

RODOLPHE GASCHÉ

The question has been asked of what remains of Derrida's thought.¹ This question has not only been posed without any consideration of what Derrida himself has advanced as to the nature of memory and heritage – particularly in the context of his reflections on “Europe” – but also without any acknowledgment of his elaborations on “remaining” (*restance*) as opposed to “remainder” (*reste*) which is constituted by a part of a whole left over once the latter has vanished (LI, 52).² It is safe to say that the underlying insinuation of this question is that now that the chaff has been separated from the wheat, what remains of Derrida amounts to very little or nothing. Yet even when on a more positive note, his work is judged to have been a contribution to topical issues, one that remains decisive, can such a remainder be called in any way a legacy? Undoubtedly, a remainder can be of importance to capitalizing memory, but does it therefore come with the injunction to be taken over, and responded to in a responsible fashion? This, however, is what constitutes a legacy. Now, if the question of “remaining (*restance*)” has been an issue in Derrida, it is because it concerns nothing less than a condition of possibility of memory, heritage, or legacy. “Remaining” designates a structural feature of what in a strict sense has been bequeathed upon an addressee, and that continues to address itself to him or her in order to be responded to, and appropriated (however selectively). More precisely, “remaining” names the condition for there to be something like a legacy in a strict sense, namely that something in what is bequeathed must paradoxically withhold itself, maintain itself in reserve, and defy full appropriation. As the noun “remaining (*restance*),” based on a substantivation of the present participle of the verb “*rester*” indicates, “remaining” is not an identifiable remainder. It concerns a

structure of withdrawal that is presupposed by any imparting of a legacy that at once opens the possibility of assuming a responsibility for what is bequeathed, and, at the same time, causes all appropriations of the legacy to remain partial and limited, that is, selective, in short.

It is this thought of “remaining” without which there would not be anything like a heritage, that, among other things, Derrida has transmitted to us. It is a legacy that concerns the “formal” possibility of legacy itself, or, more precisely, since without such “remaining” no such thing as a heritage would exist, it concerns the very (“performative”) imparting of legacy itself. But, however momentous, the Derridean legacy is not exhausted by this formal and ontological condition of possibility of what constitutes a legacy. What he has bequeathed on us is, furthermore, intimately tied to a reflection on “our” memory, “our” legacy, that is, the “double memory” – Greek and Judeo-Christian – of Europe (and, more generally, of the West). The point that I will make hereafter is that in all his work, Derrida has consistently reminded us of the fact that within our own heritage and memory something infinitely resists, and does so in the shape of an “infinitely impassible remainder (*restance*)” to all appropriations and reappropriations, as it is said in “Faith and Knowledge” (FK, 31; trans. modified). Derrida’s legacy, I hold, is above all to have pointed out a certain immemorial remainder in Europe’s double commitment to its Greek *and* Judeo-Christian heritage, a remainder which escapes and counteracts all attempts to conform that heritage to any fixed or dogmatic interpretation and destination. In what follows, I will also link this concern with an inassimilable “remainder” in “our” European legacy to the equally persistent issue in Derrida’s thought of what he has termed “a new, very new *Aufklärung*” (LI, 141), in other words, with an unrelenting critical vigilance concerning what in the name of Europe’s heritage is made of this heritage. If something, then, “remains” of Derrida, it is insofar as he has drawn our attention to what remains inappropriable in our double memory, and which by critically resisting all reappropriations continues to challenge us without end. His work as a whole has been devoted to this “remaining,” or “immemorial remainder”; he has resolutely and unrelentingly sought to watch over, preserve, and maintain (*garder*) this “remainder” throughout the entirety of his work. To think this immemorial remainder – a remaining that Schelling might have termed *unvordenklich* – and to watch over it, this is the task he has bequeathed us. This is the legacy of his thought.

But before elaborating in some more detail, not on what remains of Derrida for sure, but rather on what is the legacy of this thinker, let me linger for a moment on this notion of “remaining (*restance*)” itself, which, strangely enough, has drawn little or no attention from his commentators, in contrast to the many other neologisms that he has coined.³ In “Signature Event Context,” where, to my knowledge, the term “remaining,” more precisely, “the nonpresent *remaining*,” is first introduced, the term designates something that constitutes every mark in its generality, that is, in its ideality of a grapheme, namely the fact of being repeatable (hence identifiable),

readable, and intelligible not only in the absence of its referent, but even in the absence “of a determined signified or current intention of signification, as of every present intention of communication,” in short, even then when a “differential mark is cut off from its alleged ‘production’” (MP, 318). Later – for example, in *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles* – “remaining” is expanded to naming the structure of every text insofar as a text is defined by the possibility of lacking a definite meaning, remaining undecidable, and, therefore, escaping every hermeneutical horizon – although inviting such a horizon while simultaneously undoing it – and yet remaining fully readable. Finally, in *Limited Inc.*, after having emphasized that “remaining” does not mean “permanence,” or “substance,” Derrida expatiates on the modality of being of the structure in question, and argues that, indeed, it escapes “the logic of presence or the (simple or dialectical) opposition of presence and absence” (LI, 53). He writes: “The rest of the trace, its remains [*restance*] are neither present nor absent. They escape the jurisdiction of all ontotheological discourse even if they render the latter at times possible” (LI, 83). Whether “remaining” concerns the constitutive structure of any mark, any text, or, in the context of that in which we are interested here, namely, anything that is bequeathed, transmitted, handed over as a legacy, it designates a “remainder (*reste*),” as it were, in any mark, text, memory, or legacy, that defies all possible appropriation, even though this remainder by virtue of undecidability is the persistent and inevitable invitation to respond to it by seeking to make it one’s own, but which, therefore, also limits all determining appropriations, and thus remains a constitutive challenge. In fact, since there is no heritage (worth its name) without something that resists from within its transmission, it follows, furthermore, that the inheritor is as much, if not even more, indebted to what remains recalcitrant in that heritage to appropriation, than to what is considered to have effectively been handed over, for, indeed, without this abstraction of the heritage no bequeathing could have taken place to begin with. As a result, the “duty” of the thinker consists in watching over, and preserving, what of the legacy resists all appropriation, whatever its nature may be.

1. The Abstraction of the Greeks

The debt and responsibility toward what thus withholds itself in any heritage will become clearer once we focus on the irreducible remainder in the double memory of Europe, in particular, within its Greek memory. But before exemplifying through a close reading of several pages of “Faith and Knowledge” such remainders within what the Greeks bestowed on Europe, I take this also as an opportunity to point out that Greek thought has been a persistent concern of Derridean thought, largely neglected by his commentators and critics who (myself included) have paid much more attention to his debates with thinkers such as Hegel, Husserl, or Heidegger. Undoubtedly, since we are addressing here the question of the memory of Europe –

one aspect of which is philosophy – the Greeks will obviously enjoy a privileged status in our discussion. But considering the amount of work that Derrida has persistently devoted to Greek thought from early on, it would be tempting to argue that rather than concerning modern thought, the legacy of Derrida is primarily determined by his rethinking of the Greeks. In the interview following his presentation of “Double mémoire,” a letter addressed to “Old Europe,” and presented on the occasion of the Festival d’Avignon in 2004, after having reminded his addressee that “philosophy is European,” and that “the place of birth of the form of thought that is called *philosophia* . . . is undeniably Greece,” Derrida explains that, as a deconstruction of Eurocentrism, his work has borrowed its resources from, precisely, what has been deconstructed (DM, 21–22). Now, such deconstruction is said “to have consisted in putting into question [the] philosophical representation of Europe by Europe, or this representation of philosophy by philosophy itself by way of its fundamental concepts” (DM, 21–22). In short, if what has been at issue in deconstruction is nothing less than the Platonizing interpretation of Europe’s, or philosophy’s, own origin in Greece, it is also clear that deconstruction is an attempt to oppose European philosophy’s Platonizing interpretation of itself with something other – within Greek thought – that withstands Platonism, and, in the same breath, philosophy’s representation of its Greek origin.⁴

Indeed, it is qua Platonism, in short, in the shape of philosophy, or Western metaphysics, that Greek thought is a part of European memory. At least from “Plato’s Pharmacy” on, Derrida has taken on the Platonizing appropriation of Greek thought, in particular of the Platonic texts themselves, by seeking to read, as he submits in “We Other Greeks,” certain Greek words “that had already been marked by the irruption of the other” in Greek thought, and that are at work “in sentences, in scenes of discourse and writing, in works that, for this very reason, could not be closed upon themselves” (WOG, 33).⁵ Platonism, insofar as it commands all of Western metaphysical – that is, ontological – thought, has from the start abstracted from these words, which stand for an other Greece within the Greece as we know it. More exactly, Platonism, the philosophy of Plato (as opposed to certain threads in Plato’s texts), is, Derrida claims, the result of “a thetic abstraction at work [already] in the heterogeneous text of Plato,” that is, an abstraction by which certain theses and themes could be extracted from his writings. This abstraction, once “it has been supercharged and deployed, . . . will be extended over all the folds of the [Platonic] text, of its ruses, overdeterminations, and reserves, which [it] will come to cover up and dissimulate” (ON, 119–120). By inquiring in “Plato’s Pharmacy” into one such word that has already been marked by the infraction of the other, namely, the notion of the *pharmakon*, Derrida confronts the abstraction of Platonism, that is, the abstraction of the Greek memory at the heart of the European memory, with another kind of abstraction, namely, that which in Greek thought resists a unifying interpretation, and recedes into oblivion at the moment the Platonic texts become appropriated by Platonism.

Now, if I bring the question of abstraction to bear here on Derrida's reflections on double memory as the heritage of Europe, it is primarily because of "Faith and Knowledge," whose first part will be crucial for what I will construe as Derrida's legacy, and which is uniquely involved in this question to such a degree that it could even be read as a text in praise of abstraction. Indeed, against the all too often expressed claim that all concern for universality is abstract, and as such overrides all particularity, the issue of the so-called "return of religion," and the divisions that accompany it, causes Derrida, in "Faith and Knowledge," to come out in a powerful defense of abstraction as the sole way not only of finding access to something universal, but also as the condition for allowing the other to be other, singularly other, that is. After a terse evocation of the difficulties of speaking about religion today as if it was something readily identifiable, Derrida introduces the question of abstraction already in the first paragraph of the essay, when he holds that in order to muster the necessary courage to begin addressing the issue of religion, one must "pretend [*feindre*] for an instant *to abstract*, to abstract from everything or almost everything, in a certain way. Perhaps one must take one's chance in resorting to the most concrete and most accessible, but also the most barren and desert-like, of all abstractions" (FK, 1). This acknowledgment of the need for abstraction at the very beginning of the first part of "Faith and Knowledge" – the one entitled "Italics," a part that itself is exemplary in putting a politics of bracketing to work – amounts to a reevaluation of abstraction that is seemingly unique in Derrida's work. Ultimately, the stakes of this evaluation consist of conceiving a form of abstraction, which in distinction from what *Margins of Philosophy* called "an empirical abstraction without extraction from its own native soil," is, as we will see, a more than radical, that is, extreme kind of abstraction (MP, 215). In any event, rather than entailing a loss of the object under investigation, the illusive subject matter that is religion today, itself calls, as Derrida points out, for abstraction, in order to be able to be thought at all. In fact, the reference to Hegel's short essay "Who Thinks Abstractly?" not only serves to underline that abstraction is not what one commonly holds it to be, but that wishing to save oneself at all costs from abstraction, amounts to wishing to save oneself from thinking as such, in short, to relinquish thought altogether.

Now, by pretending to abstract, and, moreover, only for an instant, but also to abstract only "in a certain way," Derrida, undoubtedly, evokes the phenomenological form of abstraction (*epoche*). However, the claim that in order to be able to speak about religion today one must perhaps take one's chance "in resorting to the most concrete and most accessible, but also [to] the most barren and desert-like, of all abstractions," that is, I believe, to two markedly distinct, but also interlinked forms of abstractions, the Husserlian conception of abstraction is, from the start, confronted with several other forms of abstraction. There is thus, from the beginning, more than one kind of abstraction. Indeed, although I said that in a way "Faith and Knowledge" could be understood as in praise of abstraction, the latter has also an "evil" side, and this side, furthermore, is intimately linked to the subject-matter here

in question, namely, religion today. When, in paragraph 2, Derrida submits that he wishes “to link the question of religion to that of the evil of abstraction . . . to radical abstraction,” that is, to “the deracination of abstraction,” the resurgence of religion today is explicitly construed as a reaction against what is considered the evil of our time, namely the radical uprooting, delocalization, disincarnation, of peoples and their culture by the worldwide spreading of Western technology, forms of living, and models of community. But Derrida also writes: “In order to think religion today abstractly, we will take these powers of abstraction as our point of departure, in order to risk, eventually, the following hypothesis: with respect to all these forces of abstraction and of dissociation . . . ‘religion’ is at the same time involved in reacting antagonistically and reaffirmatively outbidding itself” (FK, 2). At this point the reason why precisely the subject-matter “religion today,” or the return of religion, calls itself for a certain abstraction in order to be able to be addressed by thought, becomes manifest. Without it, the fact that religion today is not only a reaction against the powers of abstraction, but one as well which at the same time capitalizes on such abstraction, and even exacerbates it, could not come into view. Now my prime concern here is not “religion,” and thus I will not, in what follows, expand on this guiding thesis of “Faith and Knowledge” which, if I am correct, corresponds to what has been referred to as “the most concrete and most accessible” abstraction, and which is taken up in greater detail in the second part of Derrida’s essay. By contrast, I intend to focus on what, in “Italics,” is established with respect to “the most barren and desert-like” abstraction which I consider to represent not only the core of Derrida’s overall argument in “Faith and Knowledge”, but which by touching on the question of the inappropriable remainders in the double memory of Europe, also bears on what I hold to be Derrida’s legacy.

Yet, before we pursue this line of thought, let us remind ourselves that “Faith and Knowledge” is an inquiry into religion today, and an attempt to rewrite Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* for the current situation. This context, in which not only the question of abstraction is posed, but, and intimately related to it, that of the possibility of “World” today, requires drawing on certain resources of *religio* itself if religion is to be rethought for our times in an enlightened manner. Indeed, among the three forms of detachment and abstraction from the world as we know it in order to conceive of another world – the Island, The Promised Land, and the Desert of Revelation – Derrida centers in on the figure of the Desert of Revelation to open up within it another, extreme desert – the epitome of abstraction – as a place that in spite of the threat of complete desolation that comes with it, perhaps, also harbors a promise of a “World” worthy of its name.

But first a brief note on those Greek words of which it is said that they are marked by the infraction of the other, and to which Derrida has paid attention in his writings devoted to Greek themes.⁶ Among them I single out *pharmakon* and *khōra*. By centering his reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus* on the word *pharmakon*, whose manifold meanings can neither be derived from one proper meaning nor dialectically sublated into

one all-embracing signification, Derrida uses the resources of this word to construct the milieu of both the emergence *and* inversion of all the elemental concepts of Platonism. Indeed, one of the overarching agendas of “Plato’s Pharmacy” is to question Platonism, which, with all its grand structural oppositions, “sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality” (DIS, 76). With all its ambiguities and the reversions to which it lends itself, the *pharmakon* is shown to constitute “the original medium of decision, the element that precedes” Platonism as the dominant structure of the history of metaphysics, but that also “comprehends it, goes beyond it,” and which can never be reduced to it (DIS, 99). The system, or chain of the meanings of the *pharmakon* that are distributed throughout the dialogue, and Plato’s writings as a whole – a system in which Plato himself is caught, but which he also seeks to master by stopping the word’s ambiguity and inserting the definition of *pharmakon* into a simple, clear-cut opposition, thus eventually encouraging the Platonist interpretation of his work – is within Plato’s own text the matrix from which Platonism emerges, and, at the same time, “that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance; granting philosophy by that very fact the inexhaustible adversity of what funds it and the infinite absence of what founds it” (DIS, 70). If, while interpreting the *Timaeus*, Derrida has focused on the word *khōra*, it is for similar reasons. In fact, he had already broached the problematic in question well before the publication of the essay “*Khōra*,” namely, toward the end of “Plato’s Pharmacy” itself where the issue of a third genre on this side of the Platonic oppositions is associated with “the passage beyond all ‘Platonic’ oppositions, toward the aporia of the originary inscription” (DIS, 160). But in view of what we will encounter in “Faith and Knowledge” it is also of particular interest that with Plato the third genre is determined as “place” (*lieu*), and that itself, in order to conceive this place of extreme abstraction, requires a highly abstract move (DIS, 159–161).⁷

As is well known, the problematic of a third genre, or *khōra*, arises in the *Timaeus* at the very moment at which Plato, after having argued that the world has been created by the divine Demiurge as a perfect copy of the essences of the intelligible order, faces the necessity to account for the distinction between the original, or paradigm, and the copy, the intelligible and the sensible, the invisible and the visible, and so forth. As a pre-originary origin that does not let itself be framed by any genre of being, or discourse, that is, an origin which escapes both the polarities of the sensible/intelligible, visible/invisible, form/without form, as well as the logos/mythos distinction, Plato shows his embarrassment in the *Timaeus* of being unable to name and identify *khōra*, and, after a brief elaboration, does not explicitly return to it again (ON, 89).⁸ Indeed, although *khōra* can accommodate all kinds of determinations, translations, and identifications, it does not properly possess any one of them to the extent that as a “general place,” it receives them only in order to give place to them (ON, 99–100). As a result, *khōra* as a “general place” must, in Heidegger’s words, “be bare of all the modes of appearance, any modes that it may receive from anywhere.” From

this the question arises whether the meaning of *khōra* may not signify “that which separates itself from every particular, that which withdraws, and in this way admits and ‘makes room’ precisely for something else” (Heidegger 2000, 69–70). In any case, as we shall see, such withdrawal will also be for Derrida a prime characteristic of *khōra*. As he argues, even though Plato interrupts the narrative of the dialogue only for a relatively brief moment to develop his thought about *khōra*, the whole of the *Timaeus* manifests the constraint of responding to this impossibility of properly identifying it by producing on all of this dialogue’s textual levels formal analogies to it, or stories that themselves are contained in other stories. Based on a magisterial reading of the textual complexities of the dialogue, Derrida concludes that the whole of the *Timaeus* is a “*mise en abyme* of the discourse on *khōra*” (ON, 104). It must be noted that Plato’s embarrassment at his inability to give form to *khōra* is not simply the result of a failure of philosophical discourse. The “structural law” that prohibits naming *khōra*, and thus saying what *khōra* is, as well as the constraints that bear on the *Timaeus* insofar as on its conceptual and especially narrative level the text reduplicates what has been said about *khōra*, is also testimony to an essential indeterminacy and abstraction of *khōra*: “a secret without secret [which] remains for ever impenetrable on the subject of it/her,” and which “*khōra* must, if you like, *keep*; it is just what *must be kept for it*, what *we* must keep for it” (ON, 94, 117, 97). In other words, the word’s indeterminacy, as well as the irreducibility of what it designates, must be respected and preserved “as such,” in all its abstraction. *Khōra*, which “is neither generative nor engendered but which carries philosophy,” is a word that names an immemorial remainder in Greek philosophy, something that reserves itself, and the task of thought consists in attending to what of it withdraws itself, and thus abstracts itself from the abstraction that Platonism represents, insofar as the latter reductively isolates various themes and theses in this “theatre of irony” that is the *Timaeus*, “where the scenes interlock in a series of receptacles without end and without bottom” (ON, 126, 119–120).

By drawing attention to these Greek words in Plato’s texts that are the foundation of the conceptuality of Western metaphysics, something other within these founding texts of our heritage comes into view which this heritage is unable to appropriate, or rather, whose very lack of appropriation is the condition for the installation of philosophy in all its conceptuality. This remainder not only resists metaphysical appropriation, it is also of the order of a critical power that, in principle, causes all forms of appropriation of the founding texts to be limited, and even to be deconstructible. This thought of an immemorial remainder in our Greek heritage, one which itself is undeconstructible, but also the source of the deconstructibility of all interpretative appropriations of our heritage, makes up the core of the kind of uncompromising vigilance of what Derrida has referred to as “a new, very new *Aufklärung*,” and that continues to instruct the essay “Faith and Knowledge.”⁹ The thought of this immemorial remainder undoes in all interpretations of the Greek heritage, and claims that are made in its name, the possibility of any absolutist

stance, not to speak of the interested adaptations of the tradition in dogmatic, or ideological perspectives. But since, as we have seen, our heritage is not only Greek, but also includes a Judeo-Christian memory, the same obtains for this part of our memory that is intimately co-joined to the first.

2. Messianicity and Faith in “Faith and Knowledge”

Indeed, in the context of his elucidation in “Faith and Knowledge” of the notion of the “most barren and desert-like” abstraction, two names are invoked, the Greek name “khōra,” and the Jewish name of the “messianic.” We must first reconstruct, at least in a very succinct manner, the arguments that impel the invocation of these two names. While wondering how to think about religion today, in an enlightened, and tolerant way, and, in a way similar to Kant, within the limits of reason alone – that is, in the sense of a religion “which, without again becoming ‘natural [that is, pagan] religion’ would today be effectively universal” (FK, 14), and be constitutive of “World,” hence, beyond its Christian or even Abrahamic paradigm – Derrida evokes two temptations, one Hegelian, the other Heideggerian. The Hegelian temptation is that of ontotheology according to which absolute knowledge is the truth of religion. Yet, as Derrida remarks, even though this temptation is distinct from faith, ontotheology, which undoubtedly destroys religion, is, “also perhaps what informs . . . the theological and ecclesiastical, even religious, development of faith” (FK, 15). The Heideggerian temptation consists in grounding all “revelation” (*Offenbarung*) in the more originary light of “revealability” (*Offenbarkeit*). And yet, the possibility of the more fundamental structure of revealability is, perhaps, also something that becomes only conceivable as a result of revelation, that is, in the wake of positive religion.¹⁰ In the face of the aporias which these two temptations represent, and, especially, in the case of the Heideggerian temptation, the increasing obscurity of the light that is said to be more originary than that of revelation, Derrida is compelled to make the decisive step toward, and in view of,

a *third place* that could well have been *more than* archi-originary, the most anarchic and anarchivable place possible, not the Island nor the Promised Land, but a certain desert – not the desert of revelation, but a desert *within* the desert, the one which makes possible, opens, hollows out, or infinitizes the other. Ecstasy or existence of the most extreme abstraction. (FK, 16; trans. modified)

The third place that Derrida cuts open within the problematic of religion with the help of the resources of religion itself, a place of still *another* light – “Light [always] takes place” (FK, 6) – is distinct from all the other abstract spaces that are the Island, the Promised Land, and the Desert of the revelations of historical religions. This third

place is more originary, or rather it is “*more than* archi-originary,” in other words, it is not a place (and a light) that would come before another, and that would be the truth, or the ground, for what “depends” on it, or is “made possible” by it. Rather than an *arche* that gives the law, this place is anarchic, and, furthermore, does not let itself be archived, or memorized, but remains absolutely immemorial. This abstract place toward which Derrida steps up his pace is not abstract as is the Platonic space of the Isles of the Blessed (and more generally of all forms of utopian worlds), the Jewish concept of a Promised Land, or all the Greco-Christian deserts of historical religions, which as “aporetical places” “shape our horizon, here and now” (FK, 7). In distinction from the desert we know, including the desert of negative theology, Derrida refers to this place as “a certain desert,” more precisely a “desert within the desert,” which makes the desert of revelation possible and, at the same time, hollows it out, or infinitizes it, thus preventing it from ever coming fully into its own. The third place in question, one that puts the desert into the desert, as it were, is a space considerably more abstract than the abstractness and emptiness of the desert we know, one which notwithstanding its extreme abstraction, or precisely because of it, is perhaps the promise of a “World” to begin with. But this place is not only a place of spacing, but of temporizing as well. As “ecstasy or existence of the most extreme abstraction,” it is a place whose abstraction is so extreme that it is never allowed to come to a rest in (an) itself. Always ahead of itself, always withdrawing from itself, this place never becomes present. It is a non-present place, outrageously abstract. Its temporality is such that it resists ever becoming even an abstract place, thereupon remaining a place of “the most extreme abstraction.”

Needless to say, with this third utmost abstract and anarchic place, without any interiority whatsoever in which roads in any sense (sensible or intelligible, properly or figuratively) could be traced, hence more aporetic than ever – a place whose consideration arose from the question of whether today a new *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* could provide a template for a universal world while keeping both the Hegelian and Heideggerian temptations in check – the question of how to orient oneself in this desert becomes an issue. In the same way as with the other three places for which religion in particular offers guidelines for orientation, “religion” provides the resources for how to proceed within this place abstract beyond measure. However, what “religion” means in this case must be rethought beyond the historical religions and all their secular variations, as we know them, because what is at stake with the third place is the possibility of a “World” to begin with, one that would be truly universal. With the two etymological sources of *religio* in mind, *religio* deriving either from *religare*, to link, or re-link, or from *re-legere*, to gather together, to collect, Derrida submits:

That which would orient here “in” this desert, without pathway and without interior, would still be the possibility of a *religio* and of a *relegere*, to be sure, but before the “link” of *religare* . . . , before the link between men as such or between men and the divinity of

the god it would also be like the condition of the “link” reduced to its minimal semantic determination. (FK, 16)

What permits orientation in the “desert *within* the desert” is, first, the possibility of linking, of a *religio* and a *relegere* in advance (yet not, therefore, more originary) of the link accomplished in *religare*, that is, in linking men to men, and men to God; and second, the possibility prior to all identity of a minimal self-linkage (or reference to oneself) as the condition of a link to others. For, indeed, no link to others is possible without a certain reserve, such as “the holding-back of scruple (*religio*), the restraint of shame, a certain *Verhaltenheit* as well . . . , the respect, the responsibility of repetition in the wager of decision or of affirmation (*re-legere*) which links up with itself in order to link up with the other” (FK, 16). In essence, the orientation that a certain return of religion permits in the hyper-abstract place that represents a template for “World” in a strict sense is one that consists in cutting roads for a possible linkage of oneself to oneself, and to others, one that “would precede all determinate community, all positive religion, every onto-anthropo-theological horizon. It would link pure singularities prior to any social or political determination, prior to all intersubjectivity” (FK, 16–17).¹¹ In other words, the social bond that the linkage in question would establish is no longer one between already hardened identities, or determined subjects, but one between others in general, others in the very purity of their singularity, without any horizon of any sort giving as yet a concrete form and substance to the links between these singularities. Undoubtedly, such a conception of “World” can “resemble a desertification, the risk of which remains undeniable, but [this desertification] can – on the contrary – also *render possible* precisely what it appears to threaten. The abstraction of the desert can thereby open the way to everything from which it withdraws” (FK, 17).¹² Abstract to the extreme, such a social bond is, indeed, the condition for there to be “World” in the first place, a world worthy of its name, and consequently, the abstraction in question is one that needs to be cultivated. Without abstracting, without putting for an instant, at least, all determinations between brackets, without risking a desertification, there is no hope whatsoever for a universal world.

Derrida proposes two names for this ambiguous, duplicitous source, or origin that provides orientation in the extreme abstract space of the desert within the desert, which, although it also runs the risk of desertification, provides the conditions for “a universalizable culture of singularities,” that is, for a “World” (FK, 18). He writes:

Here origin is duplicity itself, the one and the other. Let us name these two sources, these two fountains or these two tracks that are still invisible in the desert. Let us lend them two names that are still “historical”, there where a certain concept of history itself becomes inappropriate. To do this, let us refer – *provisionally*, I emphasize this, and for pedagogical and rhetorical reasons – first to the “messianic”, and second to the *chora*. (FK, 17)

This quotation merits several remarks. First, the names given to the two tracks to be cleared in the desert, are names that are only “lent” to them, one Greek, the other Jewish (and Christian), and thus refer to the double memory and heritage of the West alone. These names are given only provisionally to the tracks to be cleared, and merely for pedagogical and rhetorical reasons, in other words, also for historical reasons. However, the stakes of a reflection today on religion within the limits of reason alone, are, as we have seen, those of a universal world. To name the tracks that are still invisible in the desert of extreme abstraction and which are still in want of being cleared, but that need to be drawn for a universal world to become a possibility, can therefore only be a provisional act if these names are intelligible only within the European and Western tradition. But, at the same time, these names are not just any names within that tradition. Indeed, each one of them designates an immemorial remainder in that tradition that resists all particular appropriations of that tradition, and that concerns, as will become clear hereafter, the spatial and temporal forms of the experience of a World that would be genuinely universal, and refers to something anterior to the world as understood by philosophical Platonism, and Jewish-Christian religion.

Even though Derrida’s inquiries into what in Plato resists Platonism seems to overshadow his concern with the analogous structure in the Jewish heritage of Europe, the two tracks that these names designate have been present in Derrida’s work from early on, at least since “Violence and Metaphysics.” But in “Faith and Knowledge” they come together in explicit fashion. This explicit association occurs in “Faith and Knowledge,” not only because of the twofold nature of the European heritage, but also because of the concern with “World,” with a world that would be genuinely universal, and that would be experienced as a “place” for all. Indeed, the reflections on the “messianic” and *khōra* concern nothing less than the possibility of such an experience of “World,” that is, they concern the spatial and temporal “forms” of an “alter-mondialiste” world, a world clear of all ethnocentricity, European and non-European alike.

The name for a first track to be cleared in the abstract place of the extreme desert is

the *messianic*, or messianicity without messianism. This idea of the messianic would be the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but it would be an opening without a horizon of expectation and without a prophetic pre-figuration. (FK, 17)¹³

The messianic, as one of the two sources for orientation in the abstract space distinct from the Island, the Promised Land, and the desert of Greco-Christian religion, names the unconditional openness to the to-come, an openness that is radical in that it does not limit in advance what possibly can come, or happen, by way of a horizon of expectation, or anticipation. Such openness to the future implies exposure to

the absolute surprise and, even if it always takes the phenomenal form of peace or of justice, it ought, exposing itself so abstractly, be prepared (waiting without awaiting *itself*) for the best as for the worst, the one never coming without opening the possibility of the other. (FK, 17–18)

In other words, the messianic is a form of temporality whose ecstatic nature is never fulfilled, or saturated, by any messianism, or Messiah, and names, provisionally, “a general structure of experience” (FK, 18). This “form” of time, which despite its name does not belong to any Abrahamic religion from which it has been abstractly lifted, is the first form of intuition, as it were, more precisely, the first condition for an experience (and the occurrence) of a world that would be unconditionally open to the future, and to all others. Because of its radical ecstatic nature, the form of temporality constitutive of such experience, is, then, also the first “form” of what can only be called a new, very new transcendental aesthetics in which the conditions of experience are also, as the issue of “performativity” in the essay suggests, the conditions for the occurrence of “World.”¹⁴

Intimately connected to “this abstract messianicity” as the temporal “form” of experience is an equally abstract faith as “a believing, . . . a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and [a] trust that ‘founds’ all relation to the other in testimony” (FK, 18). Indeed, a desire for, and an awaiting of justice, or rather, a faith defying “the risks of absolute night,” that is, the risk that the advent of justice in the face of the to-come might turn out to be a disaster, is inscribed into this unconditional openness towards the future named “messianic.”¹⁵ This desire for justice, in other words, for each singularity to have a chance to occur, is one for “a universalizable culture of singularities,” a culture that would permit a relation to the other as another singular other (and that would allow one to be recognized in turn as such) in advance of (and thus in abstraction from) any determined dogmas that could saturate, or to use Husserlian language, fulfill this faith. In the same way as the ecstatic temporization constitutive of experience which is a general, or universal structure of experience, this faith is a general condition of experience tied to its temporal structure, which, rather than simply a given, needs to be cultivated, or say, performed, in order to have constitutive force. It is the abstract condition for the social bond, and has to be cultivated in this very abstraction from all determined social relations, to provide the ground for a culture of singularities, that is, of others, and to provide such a culture with a chance of becoming universal. Derrida adds: “The universalizable culture of this faith, and not of another or before all others, alone permits a ‘rational’ and universal discourse on the subject of ‘religion’” (FK, 18).

The specifically temporal dimension of “messianicity without messianism,” as well as the faith in justice that is its correlate, make up the core of that part of the double memory of Europe, or the West, that is of Jewish extraction. Yet when Derrida holds that the messianicity in question, “stripped of everything, as it should, this faith without dogma . . . cannot be contained in any traditional oppositions, for

example that between reason and mysticism” (FK, 18), a question imposes itself. Indeed, does Derrida, in spite of his invocation of the double memory of Europe, not confer a special privilege to our Greek memory in determining “our” European heritage? Is this search into general structures of experience that are to confront both Platonism as the dominant structure of the history of Western metaphysics, and the historical religions of the West, with truly universal conditions of a World not profoundly indebted to the Greek side of our heritage? In particular, is the operation by which the temporal condition is abstracted from the historical religions, not the philosophical, hence, Greek operation (or performance?) par excellence? Undoubtedly, even though they are the result of an, indeed, “purely rational analysis,” and a reflection that does not flinch (*réfléchissant sans fléchir*) – that is, one that not only does not sway, or give ground, but that by not bending upon itself in self-closure remains relentlessly open to what it reflects upon – messianicity and faith, as Derrida understands these notions, cannot be accounted for by the elementary oppositions of Greek, that is, Platonist, thought, such as, for example, knowledge versus ignorance, opinion versus dogmatic faith, or reason versus mysticism. But, in the very gesture of inquiring into the temporality that orients a space such as the desert within the desert, and that is irreducible to reason and mysticism, knowledge and dogma, is this not a specifically Greek gesture, one that, it seems, is at stake precisely in Plato’s notion of a third genre, in the thought of *khōra*?

These questions lead us to the name for the second source, or track, that cuts open a way within the abstraction of the desert. After the “messianic” as a name for a certain temporal experiential track, the name “*khōra*” serves to designate the spatial configuration of the experience in question. Within the general structures of experience drawn out by this unheard-of kind of transcendental aesthetics, *khōra* designates spacing – “the place of absolute exteriority” (FK, 19) that all places as we know them presuppose – as a “form,” or condition, of the experience of “World.” Indeed, for a culture of singularities to be possible not only ecstatic temporality is required, but a spacing as well that secures the irreducible distance between the singularities without which they would not be able to maintain their otherness with respect to one another.

As a notion which Plato introduces in the *Timaeus* “without being able to reappropriate it in a consistent self-interpretation,” and which thus points within what is Greek beyond the Greek toward something other, this Greek name enjoys manifestly a certain privilege for Derrida, for, indeed, he writes that

from the open interior of any corpus, of any system, of any language or any culture, *khōra* situates the abstract spacing, *place itself*, the place of absolute exteriority, but also the place of a bifurcation between two approaches to the desert. (FK, 19; trans. modified)

And yet as will become clear hereafter, this privilege is only a function of the very resources contained in this Greek name for opening Greek thought to its other.

Indeed, this Greek word overflows the Greek paradigm by which it cannot be appropriated, and *khōra* thus possesses a generality that names the place itself exterior to any interiority, and in which all linguistic, cultural, or ethnic self-relatedness is inscribed. In addition, this Greek word situates the place of a bifurcation of two ways of approaching the desert, the first of which is the *via negativa*, itself a Greco-Abrahamic hybridization, and for that very reason *not* universalizable: “it speaks solely at the borders or in view of the Middle-Eastern desert, at the source of monotheistic revelations and of Greece” (FK, 19). By contrast, the second way of approaching the desert rests on an experience of a resistance within the Greco-Abrahamic complex itself to the cross-like linkage of both.

In a way similar to the abstract faith as a necessary correlate of the temporal track through the extreme desert, this experience of resistance is intimately linked to the spatial way that cuts across its abstract expanse, and represents a formative condition for securing the universalizability of a culture of singularities. Derrida writes that

in addition to investigating the onto-theologico-political tradition that links Greek philosophy to the Abrahamic revelations, perhaps we must also submit to the experience [*épreuve*] of that which within this linkage resists it, which will always have resisted it, from within or as though from an exteriority that works and resists inside. (FK, 20; trans. modified)

This experience of a resistance within the Greco-Abrahamic, that is, within the Christian synthesis of the Greek *and* the Abrahamic, whose universalizability is compromised by its onto-theologico-political agenda, is, however, the experience of something that, by contrast, is, perhaps, universalizable. According to Derrida, the Greek word “*khōra*” offers itself as a name for this very resistance. He explains:

Chora, the “experience of *chora*,” would be . . . the name for place, a place name, and a rather singular one at that, for that spacing which, not allowing itself to be dominated by any theological, ontological or anthropological instance, without age, without history and more “ancient” than all oppositions (for example, that of sensible/intelligible), does not even announce itself as “beyond being” in accordance with a path of negation, a *via negativa*. As a result, *chora* remains absolutely impassible and heterogeneous to all the processes of historical revelation or of anthropo-theological experience, which at the very least suppose its abstraction. (FK, 20–21; trans. modified)

The thoroughly abstract place in question is a place that as such, and precisely because it lacks an “as such,” resists, in Greek thought, as well as in the Greco-Abrahamic hybrid complex, that is, also within the non-universalizable idiom of Europe, or the West, all determining domination. It infinitely abstracts itself from, and resists all places, as the sole place in which the other can unconditionally come, and in which justice can take place. *Khōra*

will never have entered religion and will never permit itself to be sacralized, sanctified, humanized, theologized, cultivated, historicized. Radically heterogeneous to the safe and sound, to the holy and the sacred, it never admits of any *indemnification*. This cannot even be formulated in the present, for *chora* never presents itself as such. It is neither Being, nor the Good, nor God, nor Man, nor History. It will always have been . . . the very place of an infinite resistance, of an infinitely impassible persistence [*restance*]: an utterly faceless other. (FK, 21)

In short, then, *khōra* is a name for something so utterly impassible within Greco-Abrahamic hybridization (and the universalization that it claims), which because it does not let itself be reappropriated by the hybrid complex in question, is of the order of a remainder that infinitely resists all appropriation within any finite philosophical, theological, or anthropological configuration, even though they presuppose the abstraction of its place.

3. The Legacy of Derrida: “Tolerance”

Like “the messianic without messianicity” in one part of the double memory of Europe, *khōra* in its Greek part is an immemorial remainder that withdraws from what it renders possible. According to “Faith and Knowledge,” “this Greek noun [*khōra*] says in our memory that which is not reappropriable, even by our memory, even by our ‘Greek’ memory: it says the immemoriality of a desert in the desert of which it is neither a threshold nor a mourning” (FK, 21). As the reference to immemoriality suggests, that which remains in infinite resistance to all appropriation in the “cultural” memory of Europe, including our Greek memory, is something “older” than thought and the live memory that it presupposes, that resists all appropriation by cultural memory and all particular formations of thought, and that, therefore, has the potential of referring to a beyond of the idiomatic, and is, perhaps, universalizable. To have reminded us of this double immemorial remainder, or the duplicity of the origin of Europe, or the West, which subtracts and abstracts itself from what it makes possible, and never enters religion or philosophy, and which, therefore, remains the source of the essential instability of all such formations, this is, I hold, the legacy that Derrida has bequeathed on us. It is an injunction to watch over this immemorial remainder by never letting down one’s guard in the face of claims that seek, in the name of particular idioms, absoluteness and universality.

Despite this immemorial remainder remaining indeterminate in relation to all idioms, absolutes, and universal, must we still not speak of a certain Greek bias in Derrida’s exploration of the remainder? If there is a bias here it would certainly have to do with the importance conferred upon the notion of *khōra*. Undoubtedly a Greek conception, it would thus seem that, although this word names in Greek the other of Greece within Greece, the Greek idiom is given the privileged position of being able

to point to an other that within its own, but also within every other idiom, or hybridization of idioms, provides the basis for a universal, trans-idiomatic place. But does Derrida simply accord an unwarranted preeminence to the Greek paradigm? In response, let us remind ourselves that the word “khōra” was chosen provisionally, and for pedagogical and rhetorical reasons. Indeed, among “the names that are given us as our heritage” (FK, 20), *khōra* is the “Greek name” (FK, 21), and thus a name we have at our disposal for something that is not Greek anymore but universalizable. Consequently, if there is any privilege associated with the Greek idiom is it not for the fact that Greek language has a reserve of names for that which resists all non-universalizable idioms, and which articulates something that, in principle, is shareable by all traditions? A word such as “khōra” signals within the Greek idiom itself a resistance against its own idiomaticity. But could not also something similar be said of the word, “*messianic*, or messianicity without messianism,” which articulates the abstract relation to the to-come by subtracting from messianicity all hints of fulfillment?

In any case, as I have shown, the two names “messianicity” and “khōra” are names in our tradition that offer orientation, one temporal, the other spatial, in the absolutely abstract place of the desert within the desert. They are the conditions necessary for a possible universalizable culture of singularities based on a minimal social bond, that is, of a “World.” In conclusion I wish to point out that in the context of recasting Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* in light of “religion today,” Derrida follows up on the new transcendental aesthetics that provides the performative conditions for a “World” by an inquiry into an “Analytic of Pure Practical Reason” as it were. To show this I return one more time to this faith in a “World” that I have linked to the immemorial remainder at the core of the double memory of Europe. If in “Faith and Knowledge” where the question about religion today is posed within the limits of reason alone, the culture of singularities that would make up such a “World” is further determined in terms of a culture of tolerance, that is, in terms of a concept whose meaning stems unmistakably from the sphere of religion, this is, of course, in conformity with the demands that devolve from the central question of religion. Yet, because of its origins in early Christianity, and the still essentially Christian nature of this notion during the Enlightenment, Derrida “immediately places quotation-marks around this word in order to abstract and extract it from its origins. And thereby . . . announce, through it, through the density of its history, a possibility that would not solely be Christian” (FK, 21–22). Now, let us bear in mind that tolerance has been “a secret of Christian community” (FK, 22), in other words, of the historical actualization of a possibility for being-together, for being in community, and of which the early Christian community (and later Christianity) was the first, according to the French Enlightenment thinker Voltaire cited by Derrida, to give the example. It offered the world a purely moral, and universal ideal of being in communion with one another, to emulate. But by putting this concept of tolerance in quotation marks, thereby abstracting it from its origins, Derrida gestures towards

another kind of tolerance, free, indeed, of all particular creeds, while, at the same time, mustering also all the resources of *religio*. He writes:

Another “tolerance” would be in accord with the experience of the “desert in the desert.” It would respect the distance of infinite alterity as singularity. And this respect would still be *religio*, *religio* as scruple or reticence, distance, dissociation, disjunction, coming from the threshold of all religion in the *link of repetition to itself*, the threshold of every social or communitarian link. (FK, 22)

By understanding tolerance from the experience of the extreme desert, and the possibilities that *religio* offers for orienting oneself within it, “tolerance” as a condition for being together in the sense of a world and a culture of singularities, becomes respect. Free from all ties to historical creeds, as it must be for there to be the possibility of “World,” tolerance must be an active respect for that which makes the other other, differently worded, for what by linking him- or herself to him- or herself (*relegere*) – thus abstracting, reserving, holding back oneself from others, dissociates him or her from others – so that they become capable of relating to them (*religare*) in the first place. “Tolerance” as a condition for a place called “World” names a way of relating to the other in its alterity, one that respects the singularity of the distance that he or she must uphold to be a singularity to begin with. The “World” that such abstract tolerance would make possible, is a world in a strict sense. Based on the dissociation, disjunction, discretion, and respectful reservation (*retenue*) that the other demands so as to be able to remain singular, and that he or she must never surrender for the sake of a common substrate, essence, or identity, but must hold on to as a remainder that cannot be reappropriated, the “World” in question would be a just world, a place where each discrete singularity would be able to have a place, or rather to take place.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Waldenfels (2010).
- 2 “Restance” has been translated either by “remaining,” or “remainder.” In what follows I will also indiscriminately use both possible translations. For a discussion by Derrida of the translation of the term by “remainder,” see LI, 52. Let me also point out that it would be interesting to explore whether “restance” itself is not also a translation of corresponding Heideggerian notions such as *Bleibe* and *Wahrniss*. Related to the notion of *restance* is certainly also the notion of “demeurance” in IMD, 91.
- 3 One notable exception is Matthias Flatscher’s fine discussion of this neologism in an excursus on Derrida (Flatscher 2011, 207–210). Arguing that the notion of *restance* is intimately interconnected with that of *iterability* (hence, with all repetition with a difference), Flatscher suggests that the term is a non-metaphysical variation on what traditionally has been conceived as the hyletic, materiality, or sensibility, which can no

longer be comprehended within the framework of the dichotomy between the noetic and the aesthetic.

- 4 As Descombes has pointed out, the question raised by various French thinkers in the 1960s about the end of philosophy implies that “philosophy is *the ideology of the Western ethnos*.” Derrida, he argues, subscribes, or rather “has no objection” to this “reductive formula . . . except for the fact that to say it is impossible” (Descombes 1980, 137). However, if Derridean thought is, indeed, involved in a deconstruction of Western ethnocentrism, it is, I add, first of all insofar as Western ethnocentrism is based on a Platonist interpretation of *philosophia*.
- 5 Inquiring into the place of Greek thought within Derrida’s writings, particularly into Derrida’s interpretation of Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, Andrew Benjamin points to “the founding relation to strangeness” that according to Derrida, is from the start inscribed in Greek philosophy. As an “affirmation of ‘hybridity’ (or ‘bastardry’, etc.),” Greek philosophy is thus “*ab initio* more-than-one” (Benjamin 2010, 209–210).
- 6 In the wake of Derrida, Nicole Loraux (2009, 181–186) has shown that *oikein*, which designates the Greek conception of autochthonous inhabitation, or dwelling in the civic space, is another such word without an *as such* in Plato’s text. See also Loraux (1990, 247–268), where the “matric words,” *phren* and *haima*, in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* are shown to be words that resist the sensible/intelligible distinction.
- 7 The reference to abstraction here is to the introduction by Albert Rivaud to the *Timaeus* in Plato(n), *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1925): X, 66–67. In “Abraham, the Other,” after having submitted that “the more radically you break with a certain dogmatism of the place or the bond (communal, national, religious, of the state), the more you will be faithful to the hyperbolic, excessive . . . demand, to the *hubris*, perhaps of a universal and disproportionate responsibility toward the singularity of every other,” Derrida speaks of *khōra* as precisely a place and place-giving well beyond not only all such dogmatisms, but even any negative theology (JDS, 13, 33). As regards the translation of *khōra* as place (*topos*), see Sallis (1999, 116, 153–154). For the pre-philosophical meanings of the word *khōra*, see Sallis (1999, 24, 116–117).
- 8 This is a point that, as Sallis has indicated, was made already by Aristotle in *On Generation and Corruption*. But as Sallis argues, on the contrary, the *khōra* remains in force throughout the *Timaeus* “by the way in which this discourse traces the errancy, that is, marks the traces of its operation in the very midst of the god’s productions” (1999, 132). Derrida, for his part, will show that the whole of Plato’s dialogue is regulated by a *mise en abyme* of what itself does not let itself be properly said, that is, *khōra*.
- 9 The thought of something undeconstructible such as justice, for example, is necessarily co-implied by everything deconstructible. The idea of the undeconstructible therefore does in no way suggest that there is a beyond of deconstruction, or even something like post-deconstruction. For a fine discussion of the status of the non-deconstructible, see Düttmann (2008).
- 10 Whether or not “revealability” (as opposed to “revelation”) is understood as a transcendental condition of possibility for revelation, or, rather, as the factum of being revealed, or being in the open, it is the very possibility of drawing such a difference in a rigorous manner, that is, without any contamination, that is at issue here. Generally speaking, although Derrida does in no way put the necessity of making this distinction into

question, the Heideggerian temptation consists in assuming that the difference between revelation and revealability is unproblematic. Yet the very possibility that revealability, however it is understood, may originate in the positive religions of revelation, shows it to be aporetic, and to require a step toward a third place. The same logic obtains in the case of the distinction between religion and its speculative truth.

- 11 Any horizon of interpretation predicated on an understanding of Being (ontological), an understanding of God (theological), or the human being (anthropological), misses out on the abstractness of the desert within the desert. As Kant already noted, creation without the human being is nothing but “a mere desert” (Kant 2000, 308). To think the desert in all its abstraction requires also removing the human from it.
- 12 Since, indeed, this whole problematic concerns the spatial and temporal conditions for there to be a World in extreme abstraction, it is important to linger just for a moment on how “rendering possible” is to be understood here. As we have seen, *khōra* (despite the imaginary of matrix, womb, and mother that Plato evokes) does not engender, rather it “gives place (*lieu*),” which “does not come to the same thing as to make a present of a place,” but, as Sam Weber translates, “to give way to” something, in short, to make possible, to make something happen (ON, 100). *Khōra*, consequently, is not of the order of a formal transcendental condition of possibility. Rather, as a giving way to something, *khōra* “carries” what it makes possible (ON, 126) in that it permits the repetition of what has been given way, and to repeat it with a difference, thus allowing for a relation of freedom to what is repeated.
- 13 In our heritage the Greeks provide only the spatial conditions for a world. There is nothing like an open future for the Greeks, and the unpredictability that it implies.
- 14 Derrida evokes the need for “a new transcendental aesthetic,” for the first time in *Of Grammatology* (OGC, 290). The conditions of the experience of the “World” defined by such an aesthetic are at the same the conditions for the performative inception of such a “World,” in a way similar to Kant’s contention that “the conditions of *possibility of experience* in general are at the same time conditions of the *possibility of the objects of experience*.” See Kant (1999, 283).
- 15 This is also one reason why the name “messianic,” however charged, and even though it abstracts from all eventual fulfillment by messianism, or a messiah determined in advance, offers itself to naming the condition of possibility for the experience of a universal world. Such an experience presupposes the faith that in spite of the fact that the worst can happen just as well as justice, a World is possible, and will prevail, and which, by way of its “performative” nature, actively contributes to its formation.

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Part II

Derrida and ...

Derrida and Ancient Philosophy (Plato and Aristotle)

MICHAEL NAAS

When reading Derrida on just about any subject, it is not a bad idea to begin by trying to find a place where Derrida himself reflects upon his own relationship to that subject. For if Derrida was an uncommonly rigorous, perceptive, and inventive reader of other thinkers, he was also, and this was probably to be expected but is less well known, a pretty good reader of himself.¹ In the case of Derrida's relationship to "Ancient Philosophy," then, there is perhaps no better place to start than Derrida's own 1992 essay "We Other Greeks," a clear, critical, and comprehensive assessment of his relationship to Greek Philosophy in general and Plato and Aristotle in particular from the mid-1960s onward (WOG).²

In what follows, I will make ample use of Derrida's self-analysis in "We Other Greeks," especially as concerns the important role played by what might be called "the question of inclusion and exclusion" in Derrida's work on the Greeks. But I will then go on to make a claim that Derrida would have no doubt hesitated to grant, namely, that among all of Derrida's engagements with the Ancient Philosophy a single figure, Plato, and a single dialogue of Plato's, the *Phaedrus*, indeed a single scene within that dialogue – Socrates' critique of writing – played a central and unparalleled role in Derrida's work from the beginning right up until the end. I will show this by looking not so much at the essay in which Derrida treats this scene in detail, his 1968 essay "Plato's Pharmacy," but at Derrida's other works from around the same time and then at some of his very last publications.³ While Derrida wrote a great deal on Ancient Philosophy that is not directly related to this scene, on Plato but also on Aristotle, to say nothing of his more occasional readings of Epicurus, Lucretius, Cicero, Plotinus, and others, it is in the story told in the *Phaedrus* of the Egyptian god Thoth's invention of writing that Jacques Derrida would have found, it

seems, many of the key terms for developing his own concepts of writing, the trace, the prosthesis, death, memory, survival, inheritance, and so on.

1. Inclusion and Exclusion

To begin, then, let me consider the theme that Derrida himself underscores in “We Other Greeks,” the theme of inclusion and exclusion in his readings of the Greeks, but then also the more general methodological question of what should be included and what not in *my own* analysis of Derrida’s treatment of Ancient Philosophy. As Derrida himself argues in “We Other Greeks,” it is never easy to delimit a subject or corpus like “Ancient Philosophy,” or even, leaving Rome and Roman philosophy aside for this discussion, Greek Philosophy or, more narrowly still, Plato and Aristotle.⁴ Insofar as Derrida was, and always considered himself to be, an inheritor of Greek philosophy, he was often “reading” Greek philosophy in places where Greek philosophy was not explicitly at issue. Indeed as he himself speculated, “the specter of these Greeks roams perhaps less in those texts devoted to Plato or to Aristotle than in certain readings of Hegel or Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger, of Mallarmé, Artaud, Joyce, Levinas (especially) or Foucault” (WOG, 20). To do justice to Derrida’s engagement with Ancient Philosophy or the Greeks it is thus never enough to consider just those texts where certain proper names (e.g., Plato and Aristotle) dominate. As we will see, Derrida’s engagement with Plato’s critique of writing was central to many analyses and texts where Plato’s name barely appears or is wholly absent.

But this question of inclusion and exclusion must also be thought from the opposite direction, since even in those texts where Greek proper names are predominant something else was often at stake, a reading of Nietzsche (MP, 262–263), for example, or, more often, of Heidegger. Since it was never a question for Derrida of returning purely and simply to Ancient Philosophy or to the Greeks, since, as he well knew, “one never reads anything without mediation” (WOG, 30), it was often through a reading of Ancient Philosophy that Derrida would return to Heidegger. Derrida even claims that it was his own “insistent passage through Heidegger” and “the ‘Greeks’ of Heidegger” (WOG, 24) that set him apart from other French thinkers to whom he is often compared.

[U]nlike Foucault and Deleuze, I constantly had to thematize an explication vis-à-vis Heidegger (and from the beginning a *deconstructive* explication – interior and exterior . . .) – having to do in particular with his “epochal” framing of the history of philosophy and of the history of being, his interpretation of Nietzsche (OGC, 18ff., SPR, 83ff.), of Aristotle (MP, 51–52, 60ff.), his way of situating the Greek and the Greek language (OS, 69ff.), *theos* and *theion* (PSY2, 186ff.), the principle of reason (EU, 129–55, esp. 139), *mimēsis* (and thus also truth, and, most especially, *khōra* [ON, 109, 120, 147–148]) . . . (WOG, 21–22)⁵

When Derrida returns to Plato or Aristotle it is thus often with Heidegger in mind, as if Heidegger's "explication" with the Greeks became a privileged site for his own contestation of Heidegger. Hence texts that initially seem to be about Ancient Philosophy can also, or even especially, be about Heidegger. As Derrida argues again in "We Other Greeks," his own distinction between "polysemy and dissemination can be interpreted, and this would hardly be a stretch, as an 'objection' both to Aristotle and to Heidegger" (WOG, 22 n. 9; see DIS, 262; MP, 247–248ff., 265–266). It is surely no coincidence, then, that Derrida's first and in many ways most important text on Aristotle, a 1968 essay on Aristotle's conception of time, bears the title "*Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time*" (MP, 29–67).

Derrida thus engaged Greek philosophy in places where Greek philosophy is hardly mentioned, and in other places where Greek philosophy is explicitly at issue there were often other, even more central concerns. But this question of the limits of Ancient or Greek philosophy is not just methodological but thematic. Indeed, were one to try to "gather" all of Derrida's concerns and interests in Greek Philosophy under a single, all-inclusive heading, it might well be "the question of inclusion and exclusion." As Derrida himself makes clear in "We Other Greeks," his work on Greek Philosophy always focused on the way in which categories such as "the Greeks" and "Greek things" are delimited only by means of a constitutive exclusion, that is, always in relation to what is supposedly other to the Greek, for example, "the Jew, the Arab, the Christian, the Roman, the German, and so on" (WOG, 31). Derrida was thus always keen to point out not only the ways in which we too are Greek, inescapably Greek, the ways in which we are *other Greeks*, but the ways in which we are *other to the Greeks*, no longer or not yet Greek, especially insofar as the Greeks themselves were also and from the beginning *other to themselves*. We cannot identify "the Greeks" for the simple reason that the Greeks were never identical to themselves. It is here that the thematic of inclusion and exclusion comes to intersect or contaminate the methodology used to approach it. Because the identity of something called Greece or the Greeks is never given – "not to mention those places identified under the name of a corpus or system ('Plato' or 'Aristotle,' for example)" (WOG, 18) – Derrida's engagement with Greek Philosophy can never be completely delimited. As Derrida provocatively wrote in 1968 in "Plato's Pharmacy," we are "today on the eve of Platonism" (DIS, 107–108), a claim that complicates every simple narrative about the beginning or end of metaphysics.⁶

Derrida often began his reading of Greek Philosophy with, as we might expect, Greek texts, Greek words, but he did so in order to follow the "irruption of the other (the non-discursive real, the non-Greek, etc.);" within those texts (WOG, 33). The most famous example of this from Derrida's early works is the word *pharmakon* (along with related words such as *pharmakos* and *pharmakeus*). It is this word, which can mean both remedy and poison in Greek, that is used to describe writing in the story told by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* about the invention of writing. In that story, writing is initially presented as a *pharmakon*, that is, a remedy for memory, though

Socrates goes on to argue that writing is really a remedy only for reminding, that it is in fact a danger or even a poison for memory because those who use it will come to rely on it to the detriment of their own living memories. But Derrida will demonstrate in the course of his analysis in “Plato’s Pharmacy” that beneath this philosophical logic of the either-or (*pharmakon* as *either* remedy or poison depending on the context), beneath the sovereign rule of this logic of non-contradiction, there are the traces of a fundamental ambivalence or undecidability (*pharmakon* as *both* remedy and poison, *neither* remedy nor poison) that disrupts the meaning and order and even the boundaries and limits of Plato’s texts. As Derrida says of his own analysis of the word *pharmakon* (though the same could be said of *hymen* or *parergon*): “There is perhaps something significant about the fact that undecidability or a certain discourse on undecidability found its privileged examples in these ‘Greek’ words, in philosophy, on its borders, that is, beyond its confines” (WOG, 33–34). Again what was at issue was the general question of inclusion and exclusion, the “inclusion” within Greek philosophy of “the wholly other of the Greek, of his language and his *logos*, this figure of a wholly other that is unfigurable by him.” Derrida’s texts on the Greeks thus attempted to show the ways in which what was excluded from the Greek text always came to play a constitutive role “within” it. “This wholly other haunts every one of the essays I have devoted to ‘Greek’ things and it often irrupts within them: under different names, for it perhaps has no proper name” (WOG, 25).

Whether it is a question of *pharmakon* or, as we will see in a moment, *khōra*, what was essential for Derrida was both this wholly other “itself” – even if it has no fixed identity “itself” – and the way it has been regularized or reappropriated, dialectized, by Greek thinkers or those who would come after them. What is sketched out here is thus an entire program for reading not just Greek works, with this emphasis on inclusion and exclusion, on what is excluded *within* these texts, but works that attempt to reappropriate the Greeks for their own ends, works that attempt to *identify* the Greeks and put them to work for other ends. What the “resistance” of something like “the *pharmakon* and its semantic oscillation” comes to disrupt is thus not simply the reading of a particular text, Plato’s *Phaedrus*, for example, but the very

possibility of the system or of the corpus, of the complete, controllable, and formalizable self-identity of a set or a whole, be it that of a system, of Plato’s oeuvre (such as it would be governed by a unifiable meaning-to-say), of the Greek language, of Greek society . . . thus of the identity of the Greek in general. (WOG, 26–27)

This disruption or, really, this “dispossession” of Greek identity would have been at once methodological and thematic, if we still wish to use this distinction. It will have happened as the result of a deconstructive reading and it will “happened *to them*,” that is, to the Greeks, “already from the origin, that is to say, before and outside the originarity that some (sometimes Nietzsche or Heidegger) dream about in relationship to them” (WOG, 27).

This disruption or dispossession of Greek identity can be seen in exemplary fashion in Derrida's many readings of Plato's *khōra* from the *Timaeus*. If Derrida's reading and reinscription of the *pharmakon* of writing from Plato's *Phaedrus* is central to so much of his work of the 1960s and 1970s, his reading of the notion of *khōra* from Plato's *Timaeus* will be just as central to his work from the 1980s right up until his death in 2004. Once again, the question of inclusion and exclusion is absolutely crucial. If *khōra* in Plato's *Timaeus* names that third *genos* after or between being and becoming, the place or receptacle where the ideas come to be inscribed in time and space, where being and becoming mix, it "itself" or she "herself," as the ultimate place of "inclusion," would resist any simple inclusion, even if one will have repeatedly tried throughout the tradition to reduce it to a determinate conception of space or place in order to locate it squarely within the tradition. Derrida argues:

what I attempt to show in "*Khōra*" is a structure utterly resistant to historical narrative, not eternal or ahistorical like an intelligible idea, but radically foreign to all oppositions and to all dialectics that make history or narrative possible, and heterogeneous even to *that* beyond of being or to a *certain* interpretation of the *epekeina tēs ousias* . . . which gives rise to histories, narratives, or myths, and opens a reference to the Good, to God, to some event. (WOG, 34–35)

Without being able to follow all the nuances of Derrida's reading of *khōra*, it should be clear that the question of inclusion and exclusion, of whether or how *khōra* "includes" and whether or how it has itself been "included," is primary. Derrida will thus follow the Platonic and Plotinian evocations of the Good beyond Being, the Good that is said to be *epekeina tēs ousias* in the *Republic*, insofar as it marks a certain limit to the metaphysics of presence and perhaps even to ontotheology. But he will also try to locate a difference between this Good beyond Being and the *khōra* of the *Timaeus* on the basis, once again, of inclusion and exclusion. For the latter, unlike the former, was never really *included* in the neo-Platonic philosophical tradition or in the tradition of negative theology that tried to identify God with this Good beyond Being but not with *khōra*.

Everything about Derrida's reading of the Greeks must thus be thought in relationship to this question of inclusion and exclusion. If, for example, there is no fixed or stable identity of "something like metaphysics *itself*," then we should not be surprised to find traces of what comes *after* or *before* Plato and Aristotle, traces of a kind of post- or pre-metaphysics in Plato and Aristotle "themselves." Hence Derrida will find in Plato's *khōra* not only the precursor of his own notion of *différance* but traces of the Presocratic Heraclitus:

The "one differing from itself," the *hen diapheron heautōi* of Heraclitus – that, perhaps, is the Greek heritage to which I am the most faithfully amenable and the one that I try to "think" in its affinity – which is surprising, I concede, and at first glance so improbable – with a certain interpretation of the uninterpretable *khōra*. (WOG, 36)

Because the Greeks were already other to themselves, we should not be surprised to find the other of the Greeks – a certain conception of difference, for example – at the very heart of discourses that would explicitly promote a thinking of the same.

It was thus never a question, for Derrida, of claiming that we simply *are* Greeks through and through or that we are *wholly other* to the Greeks (see WOG, 27). We cannot break completely from the Greek origins of philosophy and are we not completely determined by them, for the simple reason that this origin itself is not singular, pure, self-identical, because to be Greek means “to bear within us something wholly other *than* the Greek” (WOG, 28). It is in large part because of this question of inclusion and exclusion that the *pharmakon* and *khōra* came to take on an exemplary if not privileged value in Derrida’s work. “What is at stake in all these attempts, in a word, is the question of knowing if, in what sense, and to what extent *pharmakon* and *khōra*, for example, are (1) ‘in’ (2) ‘Plato’ (3) ‘Greek words’ (4) that designate ‘Greek things’ (significations or realities)” (WOG, 19 n. 2). This question of the limits of the Greek, the question of inclusion and exclusion, is thus at once methodological and thematic, and its implications can hardly be limited. Hence the question was also, for example, and already from the beginning, not just philosophical but *political*, which is why, in a text such as *Of Hospitality*, questions of hospitality and hostility, asylum and exile, citizenship and disenfranchisement, of the Stranger in philosophy, are at the heart of Derrida’s reading.⁷

This question of inclusion and exclusion will have had, to be sure, multiple origins and points of confirmation, both inside and outside Ancient Philosophy. But I would now like to argue that there was for Derrida a privileged site in Ancient Philosophy for this question, one to which Derrida would repeatedly return in his writing and thinking – Socrates’ denigration or denunciation of writing, his attempt in the *Phaedrus* to *exclude* writing from thinking and philosophy proper. As I suggested at the outset, this claim regarding Derrida’s relation to the Greeks is one that Derrida himself would have been reticent to accept. For if he will admit in “We Other Greeks” that, “like Foucault and Deleuze,” he “‘privileged in many ways’ the Platonic corpus,” he will insist that “a reference to Aristotle will have played for me (in ‘*Ousia* and *Grammē*,’ ‘The Supplement of Copula,’ ‘White Mythology,’ and even ‘*Khōra*’) a role that is just as indispensable” (WOG, 34). Aristotle does, to be sure, play an indispensable role in *these* essays, but when one looks at Derrida’s work as a whole it is difficult to argue that Aristotle played “a role that is just as indispensable” as Plato. In much later texts, such as *Politics of Friendship*, Aristotle’s understanding of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics* would play a key role, just as his views of democracy in the *Politics* would be important in *Rogues* (ROG, 15–16, 23–25), but these references really cannot compare to Derrida’s emphasis on and persistent return to the *khōra* of Plato’s *Timaeus* in texts ranging from “*Khōra*” (ON, 87–127) to “Faith and Knowledge” (FK, 19–21) to “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” (PSY2, 143–195). Aristotle’s views on time and language are important as well in many of Derrida’s early essays, but not nearly as important, as we will see in a moment, as

Plato's critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. And if it is true, as Derrida argues, that "a few discreet signs suggest how much the Greek 'materialists' or Plotinus ... matter to [him]," "despite the paucity of explicit references to them" in his work, it is difficult to argue that any of these figures mattered as much as Plato. Though Derrida would write a long essay on the question of chance in Epicurus (and Lucretius),⁸ though he would begin an important early essay with an epigraph from Plotinus,⁹ nothing can compare to the insistence with which Derrida returns to Plato's critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. When one considers Derrida's entire corpus, Plato will have been *the* central figure of Ancient or Greek Philosophy, the Plato of *khōra* in later works and the Plato of the *pharmakon* in early texts, though also, as we will see, in many of those later ones as well.

2. Plato's Exclusion of Writing

However broad and far-reaching Derrida's reading of the Greeks may have been, touching on questions of language and writing, ontology and epistemology, ethics and politics, and, of course, the question of inclusion and exclusion in all of these domains, the Socratic/Platonic critique of writing stands out. This is evident not only from the fact that Derrida devoted his earliest, longest, and most comprehensive text on Greek thought to it, the 1968 essay "Plato's Pharmacy," but from the fact that implicit and explicit references to this scene from the *Phaedrus* can be found in a whole series of texts on seemingly unrelated topics from around the same period. While other texts and thinkers, from Rousseau and Husserl to Freud and Heidegger, will have also played a significant role in the development of Derrida's thought, the many references to Plato's *Phaedrus* suggest that this dialogue was something of a touchstone for so much of his work, and for his rethinking of the notions of writing, the trace, supplementarity, *différance*, and so on, that would come to form the conceptual core of deconstruction. It is as if Plato's critique of writing in this dialogue, a critique that is often considered marginal to Plato's ontology, epistemology, politics, ethics, aesthetics, and so on, became the necessary supplement to Derrida's development into that "other Greek" that he will have been. It is thus surely no coincidence that the story – the myth – told in the *Phaedrus* is itself a paradigm of inclusion and exclusion and that it is treated explicitly *as such* by Derrida.

Before demonstrating the importance of Plato's critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* for so much of Derrida's work of the 1960s and 1970s, it is worth recalling briefly the *myth* in which this critique is developed. Indeed it is not insignificant that the scene from Ancient Greek Philosophy that became so central to Derrida's work was first presented by Socrates through a myth or a *mythos* rather than a *logos*, a myth that features an Egyptian, rather than a Greek, invention of writing. In a passage from the *Phaedrus* that Derrida will read in great detail in "Plato's Pharmacy," Socrates recounts how the Egyptian god Thoth presented his invention of writing to the

great Egyptian King Thamus, only to have it rejected and revalued by him. While Thoth thus claims that his invention “will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories,” since what he has discovered is “an elixir [*pharmakon*] of memory and wisdom,” King Thamus argues that Thoth, as “the father of letters,” has been led by his “affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds [*psychais*: the souls] of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory.” It is at this point that Socrates/Thamus invokes the categories of interiority and exteriority to help make his point and put down writing: “Their trust in writing, produced by external [*exōthen*] characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within [*endothen*] them. You have invented an elixir [*pharmakon*] not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom” (274e–275b).¹⁰ The problem with writing is in essence, says Thamus, that it compromises the *interiority* of living memory. The exteriority of written characters will thus have to be excluded from the serious work of philosophy.

After recounting this myth regarding the invention of writing, Socrates in essence repeats the king’s valuation, this time in his own name and voice. But Socrates will go on to oppose in even sharper terms the external written word that cannot defend itself or teach the truth, that appears intelligent but is not, to “another kind of speech, or word, which shows itself to be the legitimate brother of this bastard one, both in the manner of its begetting and in its better and more powerful nature,” namely, “the word which is written with intelligence in the mind [*psychēi*: in the soul] of the learner, which is able to defend itself and knows to whom it should speak, and before whom to be silent,” “the living and breathing word of him who knows, of which the written word may justly be called the image” (276a). Writing in the literal sense, *external* writing, we might say, is thus opposed to *internal* writing, a metaphorical form of writing in the mind or in the soul. Hence writing in the literal or restricted sense of the term is to be used “only in play and for amusement” (276b), “to treasure up reminders” for oneself when one “comes to the forgetfulness of old age” (276c).

Like King Thamus, then, Socrates comes down on the side of live speech, which is closer to living memory, and he comes out against writing as such, which is *external* to the self. The expulsion or exclusion of writing is thus the exclusion of exteriority, of the body, of death, of play, in the name of interiority, the soul, the living breath, full speech, the seriousness of philosophy. If this “gesture” of exclusion is indeed, as Derrida believes, “the philosophical movement par excellence, one realizes what is at stake here” (MP, 316). The question of writing is nothing less than the question of “metaphysics itself,” the question of what constitutes it and, as we have seen, what threatens it from within. Inasmuch as the question of writing calls into question the very values of interiority and exteriority, its implications know no bounds.

It was, let me recall, in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” first published in 1968, that Derrida read in great detail this scene of Plato’s critique of writing near the end of the *Phaedrus*. But one can see the extent to which Plato or Plato’s critique of writing was

already important to Derrida by looking at the three major works published by Derrida the year before “Plato’s Pharmacy” – *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Writing and Difference*. In the first of these, which is essentially a long essay on Husserl, the references to Plato are rather predictable and traditional. Plato is identified with the determination of being as idea or as ideality, a founding determination for Western philosophy that Derrida sees Husserl repeating even when he takes aim at the Platonic conception of *eidōs* (SP, 53, 108). Plato is thus identified there as having inaugurated a metaphysical tradition that continues in some respects right up to Husserl, indeed, right up to Heidegger. Though Derrida will question in this work Husserl’s distinction between meaning and expression and the possibility of ever keeping the self-presence of consciousness pure of all exteriority, in short, of all “writing,” the critique of writing found in the *Phaedrus* plays no real role, at least not explicitly, in this critique of what Derrida is calling a “metaphysics of presence.”

But in the second of these works published in that fateful year 1967, *Of Grammatology*, Derrida adds a new dimension to his characterization of this metaphysics of presence, a reference to the debasement of writing and its expulsion from full speech that seems to come right out of the *Phaedrus*. Derrida writes on the very first page of the exergue to this work:

the history of (the only) metaphysics, which has, in spite of all differences, not only from Plato to Hegel (even including Leibniz) but also, beyond these apparent limits, from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger, always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos; the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been – except for a metaphorical diversion that we shall have to explain – the debasement of writing, and its repression outside “full” speech. (OGC, 3; trans. modified)

“From Plato . . . to Heidegger”: this is a gesture that can be found in many of Derrida’s early works, a way to mark the limits or contours of this so-called metaphysics of presence, to mark a certain *closure* of it, as opposed to an origin or an end. Once again Derrida identifies Plato with this long metaphysical tradition, though in this case the limits of the tradition extend out even before Plato (to the pre-Socratics) and even beyond Hegel (to Heidegger). But what now holds this tradition together, it seems, is nothing other than this privileging of the relationship between truth and logos (understood as reason or as speech) and the concomitant “debasement of writing, and its repression outside ‘full’ speech,” that is, outside logos in its relationship to truth. This is a pivotal moment in Derrida’s reading of Plato, indeed in Derrida’s reading of the entire history of philosophy. Though *Speech and Phenomena* shows the extent to which Husserl provided Derrida with a parallel track for “deconstructing” the interiority of the voice, of meaning and auto-affection, it is, as we see in *Of Grammatology*, the Platonic critique of writing that really became the key point of reference for Derrida’s analysis and reading of other figures, the guiding thread

Derrida would pull on in order to expose and so undo the fabric of Plato's text, along with the entire Platonic tradition it will have inaugurated.

Though the theme of writing in Plato may appear at first glance to be rather secondary or insignificant, hardly worthy of attention, next to themes such as the forms, being and becoming, the immortality of the soul, and so on, the result of Derrida's analysis of writing demonstrates that in order to talk about writing all these other themes need to be rethought: writing is debased – excluded – by Plato precisely because it is furthest away from the truth, because it is identified with the signifying, empirical body and not the soul in its relationship to being and truth. Derrida thus found in the Platonic critique of writing a structural configuration, a matrix of terms and oppositions, for questioning or rethinking the entire metaphysical tradition. Whether we are talking about medieval philosophy, Rousseau on the origin of language, or the linguistics of Saussure, Derrida will see a repetition of the same terms and valuations in relationship to writing that he identified in his reading of Plato.

In *Of Grammatology* the terms that would become central to Derrida's reading of the *Phaedrus* the following year in "Plato's Pharmacy" are already at work in his understanding of writing – of the *grammē* – and of everything that goes along with it. For example, or first of all, secondariness. Writing is always considered secondary throughout the tradition because it has a secondary and only mediated relation to truth, whereas speech – or *logos* – has a more direct or immediate relation to it. Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* of a medieval understanding of writing and of the book just before evoking the *Phaedrus*:

Thus, within this epoch, reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the *logos*. (OGC, 14)

While the relationship between the signified and "the *logos* in general" is "immediate," there is "a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing" (OGC, 15). It is a point that could have come right out of "Plato's Pharmacy."

Writing is thus always secondary and exterior to the truth, and whenever it appears otherwise it is because of a *metaphorical* use of the term "writing" that aims not to give value to writing in the restricted or literal sense of the term but to further its debasement in relation to that of which it would be a metaphor. When Socrates in the *Phaedrus* opposes writing in the literal sense to "writing in the soul," he is not elevating writing but using it as "a metaphorical diversion" to speak of what would come before writing in authority and value. According to Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, writing is then systematically debased throughout the entire history of philosophy, except when "a metaphoric mediation has insinuated itself into the relationship

and has simulated immediacy: the writing of truth in the soul, opposed by *Phaedrus* (278a) to bad writing . . . , the book of Nature and God's writing, especially in the Middle Ages" (OGC, 15). "As in the *Phaedrus*," Derrida writes on the same page of *Of Grammatology*, "a certain fallen writing continues to be opposed to it." The task of deconstruction is thus to follow this systematic debasement of writing, even and perhaps especially when this debasement is carried out through a metaphor that *appears* to privilege writing. What thus needs to be written, says Derrida, is "a history of this metaphor, a metaphor that systematically contrasts divine or natural writing and the human and laborious, finite and artificial inscription" (OGC, 15). Derrida's early work would have aimed to sketch out the program and premises for writing this history. The argument about writing in the *Phaedrus* – the critique of writing in the literal sense or in its metaphorical reinscription as "writing in the soul" – thus became if not a model or a measure at least a privileged example of a much more general logocentrism of the West that needs to be rethought or, indeed, deconstructed.

Writing is thus always related to mediation, exteriority, secondariness and, as the *Phaedrus* also makes clear, forgetting. While presenting itself as an aid to memory, as a technical supplement to live memory, writing comes to pervert and supplant live memory. It is but a *hypomnesis*, a form of reminding, that comes to supplant real memory and exile thought or the logos. In the opening pages of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida recalls this as well.

Writing, a mnemotechnic means, supplanting good memory, spontaneous memory, signifies forgetfulness. It is exactly what Plato said in the *Phaedrus*, comparing writing to speech as *hypomnesis* to *mnēmē*, the auxiliary aide-mémoire to the living memory. Forgetfulness because it is a mediation and the departure of the logos from itself. (OGC, 37)

The case against writing that is developed in the *Phaedrus* is thus repeated in various guises throughout the tradition. Here is Derrida gesturing toward a relationship between the Platonic critique of writing and the valuation of live memory in the Hegelian notion of *Erinnerung*:

Writing is that forgetting of the self, that exteriorization, the contrary of the interiorizing memory, of the *Erinnerung* that opens the history of the spirit. It is this that the *Phaedrus* said: writing is at once mnemotechnique and the power of forgetting. (OGC, 24)

As secondary, exterior, and inferior, as something that, when taken seriously, leads to forgetting and oblivion, to the exile of thought, writing is to be considered, in terms that are taken once again from the *Phaedrus*, as nothing more than a game or a form of play. It is therefore opposed to the serious work of speech, to live communication

from one soul to another. It is the Platonic critique of writing that provides Derrida with the terms not only to rethink writing but to cast his own philosophical project.

Here one must think of writing as a game within language. (The *Phaedrus* (277e) condemned writing precisely as play – *paidia* – and opposed such childishness to the adult gravity [*spoudē*] of speech). This *play*, thought as absence of the transcendental signified, is not a play *in the world* . . . It is therefore *the play of the world* that must be first thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world. (OGC, 50; trans. modified)

Writing is exterior, secondary, mediate, and childish, merely playful, though also fatherless, feeble, wandering, and blind, or at least that is what the tradition has said about it, what the tradition has *declared* about writing even though the analysis that Derrida carries out in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere shows that there is no force without writing and that speech too, like all language, is ultimately fatherless. According to Derrida, what Plato will have inaugurated is the dream of an absolute self-presence that would exclude everything that has been traditionally associated with writing. The Socratic condemnation of writing in the *Phaedrus* will have been the first and in many ways privileged expression of a dream that can be traced throughout the entire history of Western thought. Writing here in the context of “a project of *general linguistics*” (Saussure’s) that sets “the limits of its field by excluding, *as exteriority in general*, a *particular system of writing*,” Derrida argues, once again with reference to *Phaedrus*, that this exclusion of writing is always carried out in the name of a certain kind of speech.

Declaration of principle, pious wish and historical violence of a speech dreaming its full self-presence, living itself as its own resumption; self-proclaimed language, auto-production of a speech declared alive, capable, Socrates said, of helping itself, a *logos* which believes itself to be its own father, being lifted thus above written discourse, *infans* (speechless) and infirm at not being able to respond when one questions it and which, since its “parent[’s help] is [always] needed” (*tou patros aei deitai boēthou* – *Phaedrus* 275d) must therefore be born out of a primary gap and a primary *expatriation*, condemning it to wandering and blindness, to mourning. (OGC, 39)

Plato’s condemnation of writing would have ultimately been carried out in the name of life, and in the name of a father whose only legitimate offspring is the spoken, living word. The association of speech, presence, life, the father, on the one hand, and writing, absence, death, and the orphan, on the other, is a structural configuration that would be confirmed well beyond the Platonic text. Here is Derrida, 30 pages later, using this same language to describe the subordination of writing, here called the trace, in relationship to speech in ontotheology:

The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the *logos*, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required

by an onto-theology determining the archaeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as *parousia*, as life without différance: another name for death, historical metonymy where God's name holds death in check. (OGC, 71)

Because writing leads us away from a putative full presence, away from the father, from speech, from the logos, from what, in Plato's account, is most living in life, it is a harbinger or representative of death. Like painting, it can *look* alive though it is really dead, and it is this capacity for deception that makes it so dangerous. Derrida writes in the context of his reading of Rousseau in Part II of *Of Grammatology*:

Resemblance is troubling: "I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting" (*zoographia*) (275d). Here painting – zoography – betrays being and speech, words and things themselves because it freezes them. Its offshoots seem to be living things but when one questions them, they no longer respond. Zoography has brought death. The same goes for writing. No one, and certainly not the father, is there when one questions. Rousseau would approve without reservations. Writing carries death. (OGC, 292)

Once again Plato's *Phaedrus* provides Derrida with an interpretative key for reading subsequent texts in the history of philosophy. Writing is characterized by the tradition as secondary, mediate, foreign to the truth and to logos; it is associated not only with absence, exteriority, and forgetting, but death, with everything, in short, that *seems* to intrude from the outside. Derrida even suggests in a footnote that certain aspects of this configuration can even be confirmed *outside* Western metaphysics: "This theme inhabits more than one mythological system. Among many other examples, Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing evoked in *Phaedrus*, inventor of the technical ruse, the analogue of Hermes, also performed essential functions in funeral rites" (OGC, 328 n. 31; see OGC, 313).

The configuration that is sketched out in the *Phaedrus* is thus repeated, albeit in a different guise, throughout the entire history of metaphysics. Derrida writes in the early pages of the book in anticipation of his reading of Rousseau: "Rousseau repeats the Platonic gesture by referring to another model of presence: self-presence in the senses, in the sensible cogito, which simultaneously carries in itself the inscription of divine law" (OGC, 17). Or again, just over a page later: "There is therefore a good and a bad writing: the good and natural is the divine inscription in the heart and the soul; the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body. A modification well within the Platonic schema" (OGC, 17–18; trans. modified).

References to Plato's critique of writing regularly scan not only the first part of *Of Grammatology*, the more programmatic part of the work, but Derrida's readings of Rousseau, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss in the second part, what Derrida refers to as "the moment . . . of the example" (OGC, lxxxix). It is as if the Platonic critique of writing is always there in the background as a point of reference for Derrida's reading.

Rousseau, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss thus themselves become exemplary figures of a logocentric tradition that runs from Plato to Hegel and beyond and that finds one of its privileged moments in the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. As Derrida argues near the beginning of the second part of *Of Grammatology*:

If the history of metaphysics is the history of a determination of being as presence, if its adventure merges with that of logocentrism, and if it is produced wholly as the reduction of the trace, Rousseau's work seems to me to occupy, between Plato's *Phaedrus* and Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, a singular position. (OGC, 97)¹¹

And then a page later:

Within this age of metaphysics, between Descartes and Hegel, Rousseau is undoubtedly the only one or the first one to make a theme or a system of the reduction of writing profoundly implied by the entire age. He repeats the inaugural movement of the *Phaedrus* and of *De interpretatione* but starts from a new model of presence: the subject's self-presence within *consciousness or feeling*. (OGC, 98)

Though Plato's *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *De interpretatione* are both mentioned in this last passage, it is clear that Derrida has the former much more frequently in mind. If Derrida will thus cite Aristotle occasionally throughout *Of Grammatology*, or else Husserl, who plays an undeniably crucial role in Derrida's early work, neither figure is mentioned or referred to with anything like the frequency that Plato is.¹²

According to Derrida, the Platonic characterization of writing as exterior and secondary, as leading to forgetfulness and death, can be confirmed throughout Rousseau, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss. Hence Derrida finds in Rousseau's text, and particularly in its own suspicion of writing, "all the signs of its appurtenance to the metaphysics of presence, from Plato to Hegel" (OGC, 246). After reading a passage from Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language*, for example, Derrida comments: "Self-presence, transparent proximity in the face-to-face of countenances and the immediate range of the voice, this determination of social authenticity is therefore classic: Rousseauistic but already the inheritor of Platonism" (OGC, 138). Or much later in Part II, as Derrida is summarizing a view that he has been able to confirm in many of Rousseau's works: "the signifier tends to be effaced in the presence of the signified. This ambiguity characterizes the evaluation that all metaphysics has imposed upon its own writing since Plato. Rousseau's text belongs to this history" (OGC, 301).

What Derrida finds repeated in Rousseau he then sees emphasized in Saussure, for "Saussure takes up the traditional definition of writing which, already in Plato and Aristotle, was restricted to the model of phonetic script and the language of words" (OGC, 46).¹³ Derrida even detects in Saussure not only the same ontological or epistemological devaluation of writing but the same moral condemnation of it.

Listen here to Derrida going back and forth between Plato and Saussure, following the traces and diagnosing the causes of a similar condemnation of writing in these two authors separated by more than two millennia.

Already in the *Phaedrus*, Plato says that the evil of writing comes from without (275a). The contamination by writing, the fact or the threat of it, are denounced in the accents of the moralist or preacher by the linguist from Geneva. . . . Saussure's vehement argumentation aims at more than a theoretical error, more than a moral fault . . . writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. (OGC, 34–35)

And then finally there is this, as Derrida begins to develop his own notion of archē-writing as what precedes and in some sense conditions not only writing in the narrow or restricted sense of the term but speech:

Archē-writing, at first the possibility of the spoken word, then of the “*graphie*” in the narrow sense, the birthplace of “usurpation,” denounced from Plato to Saussure, this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. (OGC, 70)

“From Plato to Saussure,” “from the *Phaedrus* to the *Course in General Linguistics*” (OGC, 103), a certain condemnation of writing will have determined not just our relationship to speech or language more generally but our understanding of interiority and exteriority, life and death, even good and evil. In Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the Nambikwara tribe, for example, what comes to be inscribed is nothing other, Derrida will insinuate, than the *Phaedrus*'s critique of writing: “evil will insinuate itself with the intrusion of writing come from *without* (*exothén*, as the *Phaedrus* says) – the Nambikwara, who do not know how to write, are *good*, we are told” (OGC, 116).

Throughout *Of Grammatology*, then, Derrida reads Rousseau, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss in the very same terms he would use the following year in his reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*. In *Writing and Difference*, the third of those three texts published in 1967, there are, again, dozens of references to Plato and Platonism and, especially, to the *Phaedrus*. And they can be found not only in an essay such as “Violence and Metaphysics” (WD, 79–153), where Derrida is commenting on Levinas's own reading of the *Phaedrus* (WD, 101–103), but in texts where no explicit reference to Plato is at issue or is even to be expected. In the essay “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” for example, Derrida speaks of “a historical repression and suppression of writing since Plato” (WD, 196) and he compares Freud's view of writing and the trace to Plato's:

[Freud's] gesture at this point is extremely Platonic. Only the writing of the soul, said the *Phaedrus*, only the psychological trace is able to reproduce and to represent itself spontaneously. . . . Freud, like Plato, thus continues to oppose hypomnemic writing and

writing *en tei psychei*, itself woven of traces, empirical memories of a present truth outside of time. (WD, 226; see 222)

Elsewhere, after citing a passage on writing from Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Derrida argues:

This does not contradict, but confirms, paradoxically, the disdain of writing which, in the *Phaedrus*, for example, saves metaphorical writing as the initial inscription of truth upon the soul – saves it and initially refers to it as to the most assured knowledge and the proper meaning of writing (276a). (WD, 184)¹⁴

These are just the most explicit references to Plato and the *Phaedrus*; there are many more less explicit allusions in almost all of Derrida's works of the 1960s and even the 1970s, in collected volumes such as *Dissemination* (1972; and not just in "Plato's Pharmacy") or *Margins of Philosophy*.¹⁵ The entirety of *The Post Card* was also inspired, in many ways, from the scene of writing from the *Phaedrus*, or rather from its stranger perversion in a medieval manuscript, as "Plato" is depicted as commanding "Socrates" to write. No other text besides Plato's *Phaedrus* seems to have this pride of place, and no other analysis of a text in the history of philosophy can compete with this one in terms of the marks it will have left on other texts and the readings of other figures throughout the history of philosophy.

3. Conclusion: More and So Less Greek than the Greeks Themselves

What Derrida would ultimately do with Plato's critique of writing is beyond the scope of this essay, indeed its consequences extend, as I have tried to argue, to the limits of deconstruction itself. Suffice it to say that rather than reverse the terms or these relationships and understand writing in terms, for example, of life, presence, memory, originarity, and so on, and speech in terms of death, absence, forgetting, and secondariness, Derrida resituates and rethinks the entire matrix or configuration. He will thus demonstrate not that writing should be privileged over speech but that speech too is a kind of writing and so is compromised or contaminated at the outset by all those things it would attempt to exclude: difference, secondariness, technology, in short, *exteriority in general*. Both writing and speech – which is really just another kind of writing – will thus be related, for Derrida, to death, but death must now be thought not as the opposite or the end of life but as the very condition for it, as the condition for all survival or living on. While writing would be characterized by the tradition as secondary, mediate, foreign to the truth, even deadly, Derrida will demonstrate that there is no life without it. A life without writing, without difference or exteriority, would be a life without life, a life of pure presence or *parousia* that would be, in short, another name for death. Derrida can thus write in *Of Grammatology*

both in relationship to *Phaedrus* and in anticipation of all his work to come on mourning, inheritance, survival, and so on: “All graphemes are of a testamentary essence” (OGC, 69). Everything that a certain philosophical thought believed it could exclude from philosophy itself – writing, death, exteriority in general – finds itself from the very beginning inscribed within it, and first of all within the very notion of *inscription*. If the Greeks were always other to themselves, it is because they could never exclude what they thought they could, and because *exclusion itself* was never what they thought it was.

Plato’s *Phaedrus* was thus absolutely critical, it would seem, for the development of Derrida’s understanding of language, the trace, technology, death, mourning, and so on. And this would continue, with or without explicit reference to *Phaedrus*, right up until the end. To cite just two final examples: in a reading and analysis in his very final seminar of 2002–2003, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, of a strange prayer found on the person (in the garments, actually) of Pascal just after his death, Derrida comments that this written prayer is contained “in a *posthumous* piece of writing,” at which point he opens up a parenthesis that seems to have been inspired by his own analysis of Plato’s myth about writing in the *Phaedrus* some 35 years earlier: “now of course, all writings are posthumous, each in its own way, even those that are known and published during the author’s lifetime” (BS2, 209). And then, just about a year after this final seminar, in August 2004, in the middle of what would turn out to be his final interview, we find a very similar emphasis on the absence or the exteriority – on the death – that accompanies all writing, a claim that could have come right out of “Signature Event Context,” *Of Grammatology*, or, indeed, “Plato’s Pharmacy” in 1968:

The trace I leave signifies to me at once my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the hope that this trace survives me. This is not a striving for immortality; it’s something structural. I leave a piece of paper behind, I go away, I die: it is impossible to escape this structure, it is the unchanging form of my life. Each time I let something go, each time some trace leaves me, “proceeds” from me, unable to be reappropriated, I live my death in writing. (LLE, 32–33)

If the *Phaedrus* is not cited here, the configuration of writing, the trace, death, and absence suggests that Plato’s critique of writing is indeed somewhere in the background. But the fact that these terms are then related to survival, to a structure of life, to inheritance, indicates just how much Derrida will have himself inherited from Ancient Philosophy, and from Plato in particular, and just how much distance he would have taken from Plato in the end – a distance, as we have seen, that might also be found in Plato himself insofar as Plato was never identical to himself.

Let me suggest, in order to conclude, that if this question of inclusion and exclusion has a methodological and thematic dimension it might be seen to have a “personal” one as well. Derrida begins “We Other Greeks” by confessing a certain lack of

competence with regard to Greek philosophy: “let me admit straightaway that I have always felt my relationship to ‘the Greeks’ or to something like ‘Greece’ to be somewhat naïve or uncultured, seriously limited by my philological and historical incompetence” (WOG, 17–18). But Derrida will go on to say that this feeling of incompetence is mixed with concerns regarding the very question of competence and authority in Greek Philosophy, along with the question, which I have been following here, of the very “identity of a referent properly named ‘the Greek,’ ‘the Greeks,’ or ‘Greece’” (WOG, 18). Derrida’s emphasis on the *pharmakon* and on *khōra*, on undecidability and exclusion, on the place of the Stranger in Plato’s text, on Plato’s thesis in the *Sophist* regarding “*difference* as the source of linguistic value” (OGC, 53), and so on, will have done nothing if not call into question the identity or unity of these referents. It will have opened the Greeks and Greek texts and Ancient Philosophy more generally to “the intrusion of the other, of the wholly other, who forces the limits of identification and the relationship of language, the corpus, or the system to itself.” For Derrida, then, it was thus always

a question of locating the traces of this intrusion (traumatism, inclusion of the excluded, introjection, incorporation, mourning, and so on) rather than defining some essence or self-identity of the “Greek,” the originary truth of a language, corpus, or system. (WOG, 19 n. 2; Derrida refers us to DIS, 128–134 and *passim*, ON, 114, 120, 125–127, and PSY2, 167ff.)

But in order to read the Greeks or Ancient Philosophy as he did, it was almost as if Derrida had to see in himself a figure of Thoth, or had to see in Thoth, the Egyptian inventor of writing, a figure of himself. Derrida too came to question Ancient Philosophy from the outside, as an other to the Greeks. But if, as Derrida argued, these Greeks were also already other to themselves, then this inventor of writing – of *écriture*, of *différance*, and of deconstruction – was perhaps also even more Greek than he could have known, more and so less Greek than the Greeks themselves.

Notes

- 1 See, e.g., Derrida’s reading of himself on the question of the animal in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (A, 34–40) or his reading of the theme of the democracy-to-come in his work in *Rogues* (ROG, 37–39).
- 2 The collection in which this essay has been published, *Derrida and Antiquity*, offers an excellent introduction to Derrida’s relationship to Ancient Philosophy, with essays on Derrida and Pre-Socratic philosophy, on “Plato’s Pharmacy” and “*Khōra*,” on Derrida’s reading of Aristotle, Neoplatonic philosophy, Augustine, and so on.
- 3 For an excellent analysis of this now classic essay, see Neel (1988).
- 4 In *Politics of Friendship* Derrida will look at Cicero on friendship (PF, 2–5, 183–184, 195, 238) and he will focus in many places, such as “Circumfession,” on Augustine, but the

vast majority of Derrida's references to Ancient Philosophy are to Greek philosophy and, with just a few exceptions, to Plato and Aristotle.

- 5 Derrida's list here is long but hardly exhaustive, for it could have included Heidegger and the question of sexual difference (in the *Geschlecht* essays), the question of democracy (in *Rogues*), the question of the animal and of originary violence (in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, *Of Spirit*, and the second volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*), the question of metaphor or of logos more generally (which Derrida claims Heidegger always took "in the direction of gathering (*Versammlung*), toward the One and the Same" [WOG, 26]), even the question of the philosophical priority of the question (in *Of Spirit*). See WOG, 37–38.
- 6 It was precisely because of "the non-self-identity of something like metaphysics *itself*" (WOG, 36; see MP, 230) that Derrida spoke always not of an end but of a *closure* of metaphysics, a closure that would not operate as a border between a before and an after but that would come to mark a limit throughout metaphysics "itself" (OGC, 4).
- 7 In addition to what links the Platonic critique of writing to his critique of democracy (OGC, 39, 50, 86, and *passim*; DIS, 143, and *passim*), Derrida says of "Plato's Pharmacy": "this essay is from start to finish, and this can be seen on every page, at every step, a political text on Greek politics and institutions, as well as on the political in general. I would want to claim that this is also true of 'Khōra,' which can be read as a text on the *politeia* (see, for example, [ON] 117–118, 149, et *passim*) on the state and on war (149, n. 8), on the possibility or difficulty of 'speak[ing] at last of philosophy and politics' (121)" (WOG, 29–30).
- 8 "My Chances / *Mes chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies" (PSY1, 344–376).
- 9 "Form and Meaning: A Note on the Phenomenology of Language," first published in 1967, and then in MP, 155–173 and SP, 107–128. The epigraph to this essay – *to gar ikhnos tou amorphou morphē*, form is the trace of the formless – suggests that Plotinus' notion of the trace was something of a forerunner of Derrida's. Derrida returns to this quote near the very end of the essay in a long and important footnote that concludes: "An irreducible rupture and excess may always occur within a given epoch, at a certain point in its text (for example in the 'Platonic' fabric of 'Neo-Platonism') and, no doubt, already in Plato's text" (SP, 127–128 n. 14).
- 10 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- 11 Derrida speaks later of "this movement of the effacement of the trace [that] has been, from Plato to Rousseau to Hegel, imposed upon writing in the narrow sense" (OGC, 167; see 260).
- 12 See Derrida's reference to Aristotle's *De interpretatione* at OGC, 11. Derrida writes elsewhere, "'Sign of a sign,' said Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel" (OGC, 29). And then: "Saussure takes up the traditional definition of writing which, already in Plato and Aristotle, was restricted to the model of phonetic script and the language of words. Let us recall the Aristotelian definition . . ." (OGC, 30; see also OGC, 86, 334 n. 44, and 351 n. 7, for references to Aristotle, and then OGC, 72 for the vulgar conception of time from Aristotle's *Physics* to Hegel's *Logic*). As for Husserl, see OGC, 21–22, 27, 35, 40, 48–50, 62, 63–64, 67, 117, 128, 283, 290–291, and 334 n. 38.

- 13 After summarizing a series of distinctions in Saussure between image and reality, outside and inside, appearance and essence, Derrida writes: “Plato, who said basically the same thing about the relationship between writing, speech, and being (or idea), had at least a more subtle, more critical, and less complacent theory of image, painting, and imitation than the one that presides over the birth of Saussurian linguistics” (OGC, 33).
- 14 See also WD, 236–237, 246, 247, and then WD, 265, where Derrida contrasts Artaud’s and Bataille’s understanding of writing to Plato’s.
- 15 For example, after citing a passage from Hegel where vocal language is defined as original language and writing is condemned, Derrida notes: “Such a condemnation paraphrases Plato, including even the necessary ambivalence of memory (*mnēmē/hupomnēsis*) – living memory on the one hand, memory aid on the other (*Phaedrus*)” (MP, 94 n. 23). And just a few pages later: “The place Hegel assigns to [Thoth, the god of writing] ... in no way upsets the staging of the *Phaedrus*” (MP, 99).

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There Is Neither Jew Nor Greek: The Strange Dialogue Between Levinas and Derrida

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1. The Interrogation: Derrida's Questions to Levinas

Derrida's early essay on Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics" (WD, 79–153), begins with an epigraph drawn from Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. It reads: "Hebraism and Hellenism, – between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them" (Arnold 1965, 163–164). The attempt to differentiate Hebraism and Hellenism so as to bring them together subsequently as two complementary tendencies was, by 1869 when Arnold wrote of it, already a familiar way in which to develop stereotypes and at the same time explore the possibility of moving beyond them. He portrayed lovers of culture as looking for Hebraism and Hellenism to be united into "a joint force of right thinking and strong doing to carry him [man] on towards perfection" (Arnold 1965, 216). It is not clear why Derrida, who gave no indication anywhere in "Violence and Metaphysics" that he wanted to evoke any specific aspect of Arnold's theory, even to oppose it, chose this extract for his epigraph, except perhaps to support his questionable contention in the penultimate paragraph: "We live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek, which is perhaps the unity of what is called history" (WD, 153). Nevertheless, as Miriam Leonard (2006) has argued, Derrida should for a variety of reasons have hesitated before selecting this passage to serve as an epigraph for the essay, not least because Arnold's primary contribution to the understanding of the relation of Hebraism and Hellenism was that he saw their juxtaposition in racial terms. After appealing to the racial science of his day, which was only then beginning to see the Semites as

belonging to a different race from the Indo-Europeans, he wrote: "Hellenism is of Indo-European growth, Hebraism is of Semitic growth; and we English, a nation of Indo-European stock, seem to belong naturally to the movement of Hellenism" (Arnold 1965, 173). The terrain on which "Violence and Metaphysics" moves is volatile as well as complex, both logically and historically.

It is possible that Derrida saw in Arnold's formulation a reflection of Friedrich Hölderlin's comments on the Greeks and the Germans, which had proved so decisive to Martin Heidegger as he sought to negotiate the apparent impasse represented by what he called "the end of philosophy" or what Derrida with more caution taught us to call its "closure" (WD, 110). On the basis of his reading of Hölderlin's letter to Casimir Böhlendorff from December 1801, Heidegger had suggested that it was only in dialogue with the Greeks that the Germans could learn "the free use" of what was proper to them, thereby making possible another beginning of thinking. That is to say, the Germans would first become themselves "when the experience of the foreign and the practice of what is native have become fused into a historical unity" (Heidegger 2000, 112–113 and 137). Certainly there is a moment in "Violence and Metaphysics" where Derrida seemed to be encouraging Levinas to think of the dialogue between Greece and Judaism along these lines. It occurs relatively early in the essay, although the decisive phrase "Hebraism and Hellenism" was accidentally omitted from the English translation. Derrida asked with reference to Levinas what "this explication and this reciprocal surpassing of two origins and two historical speeches, Hebraism and Hellenism" signified (WD, 84). The phrase is revealing because, whether or not it was the position Derrida held at the time of writing "Violence and Metaphysics," it describes the ultimate site or "non-site" from which he subsequently sought to write: "the ultimate site [*lieu*] of my questioning discourse would be neither Hellenic nor Hebraic if such were possible" (Kearney 1984, 107).

This passage about the two historical speeches is the only explicit discussion of the relation of Hebraism and Hellenism in "Violence and Metaphysics" until its final pages, at which point the essay gives rise to a series of ten questions. These questions seem to refer back to the ideas with which the essay opens: that there are questions put to philosophy that philosophy cannot answer, that among these problems is that of the death of philosophy, and that this founds a community of the question, a community of those still called philosophers "in remembrance" (WD, 79). The final questions begin simply enough by assuming a radical difference between Greek and Jew: "Are we Greeks? Are we Jews?" (WD, 153). Derrida swiftly and characteristically problematized the "we" so that it is understood to refer to those of "us" who "live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek." In consequence, the question is reformulated to ask about their conjunction or reconciliation: what form makes possible "the strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek"? Derrida offered the alternative, either the form of the dialogue is that of Hegel's speculative logic or it is that of "infinite separation and of the unthinkable, unsayable transcendence of the other." The latter phrase picks up on Derrida's insistence that the phrase "the infinitely

Other,” as a way of expressing the experience in which the other human being puts me in question, is “unthinkable-impossible-unutterable beyond (tradition’s) Being and Logos” (WD, 114). It is so because, according to Greek logic, as explained in *The Sophist*, the other is always “other than” and so cannot be infinitely other. However, this choice between Hegel or Levinas, a choice which Levinas would probably have understood at this time as one between permanent war and an eschatology of peace, was displaced by Derrida when he stepped back to ask three questions about language (cf. WD, 109): a question about the language in which the previous questions had been posed; a question about what drove this questioning; and a further question about the language which could account for “the historical *coupling* of Judaism and Hellenism.” The thought of coupling leads to a final question about the meaning of the copula in the memorable line from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*: “Jewgreek is Greekjew. Extremes meet” (WD, 152).

With these questions Derrida revealed that the dominant theme of “Violence and Metaphysics,” his claim that Levinas continually employed categories that he had already rejected, was not only about the difficulty of leaving philosophy behind, but also designed to challenge any idea that, by turning to the non-Greek in the form of Judaism, Levinas could claim to have escaped philosophy. But the success of this challenge was predicated on Derrida successfully casting Levinas as someone seeking to exit Western philosophy, so that he could subsequently be reined in. To the question as to whether there was “some indestructible and unforeseeable resource of the Greek logos . . . some unlimited power of envelopment by which he who attempts to repel it would always already be overtaken” (WD, 111–112), Derrida’s answer was in the affirmative. If, as a reading of *Totality and Infinity* suggests, Levinas should be understood as at least in part questioning transcendental phenomenology about what its accounts of violence and language presuppose, then this “interpellation of the Greek by the non-Greek” was “a question which can be stated only by being forgotten in the language of the Greeks; and a question which can be stated, as forgotten only in the language of the Greeks” (WD, 133). In other words, Levinas, while questioning Husserl’s account so as to reveal what it presupposed but had not articulated and could not have articulated in its own terms, had, in conformity with a traditional gesture, to affirm Husserl’s account so that he could then point beyond it to what otherwise could not be said. This is why “the strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek” is also “a strange dialogue of speech and silence” (WD, 133). And it is also why the point of the questions posed at the end of “Violence and Metaphysics” is to suggest that the language to which one would have to have resort in order to account for the historical coupling of Judaism and Hellenism, was the Greek language, the language of philosophy.

But Derrida’s strategy in “Violence and Metaphysics” was more complex than this suggests. Even if it was not yet fully clear to Derrida, and perhaps only became clear to him as he reread the essay for its republication in *Writing and Difference*, one can already see here at work the deconstructive strategy that Derrida formally announced

in the final pages of “The Ends of Man.” Faced with the alternative of attempting an exit from philosophy without changing terrain or attempting to do so in “a discontinuous and irruptive fashion,” Derrida maintained there that neither is sufficient on its own: “a new writing must weave and interlace these two motifs of deconstruction” (MP, 135). In other words, one must write with both hands. Hence too, the necessity according to which every text invites a double reading into which is interwoven both a reading of it as metaphysical and a reading that locates it outside the framework of Western (Greek) metaphysics. So Derrida cannot simply be taken to be reading Levinas through the lens of what he had elsewhere called the “Hegelian law” that “the revolution against reason can only be made within it” (WD, 36). His point was not that one cannot destroy traditional conceptuality because one could only attempt to do it by employing traditional conceptuality. His point was the entirely different one that it is necessary to lodge oneself “within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it” (WD, 111).

My main purpose in what follows is to argue, firstly, that although Levinas already from the beginning was preoccupied with the relation of Judaism to the philosophical tradition, Derrida’s questions altered the way in which he viewed both of them and, secondly, that Derrida’s questioning led Levinas to a place that almost certainly was not the place to which Derrida wanted to lead him. I shall find confirmation for this second point by arguing, thirdly, that on these very same issues Derrida took a somewhat different direction, albeit one that was perhaps in part suggested to him by Levinas.

2. Neither Occidentalism, Nor Historicism

At the heart of the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida is the broad and increasingly equivocal sense that Derrida gave to the notion of “the Greek.” He attributed to both Husserl and Heidegger the idea that “the entirety of philosophy” is to be conceived “on the basis of its Greek source” and because “the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek, it would not be possible to philosophize, or speak philosophically, outside this medium” (WD, 81). Derrida accompanied this assertion with the denial that this was Occidentalism or historicism, which inevitably raises suspicion, particularly if one takes Derrida to have some sympathy with this claim. Nevertheless, given the fact that we now know that Derrida had already problematized Husserl’s claims about Europe in far-reaching ways in his dissertation (*Mémoire*) from ten years earlier, one should not assume that Derrida was underwriting these claims (PG, 153–178).

The main source to which Derrida referred was Heidegger’s 1956 text *What is Philosophy?*, according to which, philosophy is essentially Greek and that “the West and Europe, and only these, are in the innermost course of their history, originally philosophical” (Heidegger 1972, 31). In the same place Heidegger announced that

“the Greek language is no mere language like the European languages known to us. The Greek language and it alone is *logos*” (1972, 45). Derrida adopted or perhaps ventriloquized this claim in formulating his questions to Levinas. Greek not only serves as a guide to what can legitimately and insightfully be said in any text purporting to be philosophical, so that references to Hellenism in the essay can be understood to follow the ancient usage according to which *hellenizo* means “to speak Greek properly” (Aristotle 1926, 418). It inevitably passes into a claim about the historical name that should be attached to the enterprise of philosophy. The power of the *logos* was two-handed; it had the power of inclusion and of universality, but, insofar as it was thought of as Greek, it also bore the power of exclusion.

Nevertheless, the framework within which Derrida applied this claim about the Greek *logos* is significantly different from that employed by Heidegger, albeit in a way not always recognized. Although Heidegger insisted that philosophy is essentially Greek, he did not reduce the Greek *logos* to philosophy so that they could function as equivalent terms. Heidegger from late in the 1930s insisted on differentiating the beginning (*Anfang*) of thinking in Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus from the start (*Beginn*) of philosophy in Plato. This difference meant that when he adopted Hölderlin’s model of a dialogue between the Greeks and Germans, it was possible for Heidegger to suggest that through their relation to the so-called pre-Socratics the Germans could open the way to “another beginning” which would not simply repeat the Greeks but for which they were indispensable (Heidegger 1992, 76–77). The not-yet metaphysical Greeks were crucial to Heidegger’s understanding of the path to the no-longer metaphysical Germans, but, so far as I am aware, Derrida never addressed directly Heidegger’s distinction between the beginning and the start, nor the fissure within the Greeks that it indicated (Heidegger 1979, 75). However, when Derrida positioned Judaism as non-philosophical, and yet nevertheless a resource for future thinking, it was as if he was projecting certain aspects of Heidegger’s account onto Levinas, albeit in a simplified form. It was simplified in the sense that the alleged special relation between the Greeks and Germans had the additional complexity of taking place across different epochs, whereas the coupling of Judaism and Hellenism took place between contemporaries.

Levinas imported certain Jewish ideas into his philosophy. The character of such importations was highlighted by Derrida in “Violence and Metaphysics” when he recognized that “in the last analysis” Levinas never relied on the authority of Hebraic texts, but sought instead to be understood from “within a *recourse to experience itself*” (WD, 83). We know, much better than Derrida could have known in 1964, that the early Heidegger had been engaged in a retrieval of certain Christian ideas (Zarader 1990). Nevertheless, during the 1930s Heidegger purged references to Judaism and Christianity both from his own thinking and from his account of the history of philosophy so that philosophy was Greek to its core, thereby allowing him to insist on the unity of metaphysics as Greek (Heidegger 1985, 145–146). It is easy to ridicule this effort on Heidegger’s part to erase whole strands of the history of philosophy,

but the larger picture is that this erasure has been going on systematically since the late eighteenth century.

Europeans generally did not define themselves as uniquely the heirs of Greece until the beginning of the nineteenth century, not even during the Italian Renaissance. The major moment of the identification with Greece was at the end of the eighteenth century, albeit not always for the same reasons: the Germans were seeking a national identity, whereas the English and French wanted to identify with democratic Athens (Bernasconi 1997). Europe had to think of itself as isolated in order to convince itself of its superiority and philosophers rewrote the history of philosophy to make that point. As Peter Park has recently shown, “That philosophy is exclusively of Greek origin was an opinion held by only three published historians of philosophy in the eighteenth century” (Park 2013, 8). Indeed, Wilhelm Tennemann (1798) was the first to write a history of philosophy that assumed that philosophy began in Greece and omitted all reference to the philosophy of the Hebrews, the Persians, the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Celts and so on, that had been the staple of histories of philosophy earlier in the century (Brücker 1742, 63–102). Christoph Meiners (1786, 9–24) and Dietrich Tiedemann (1791), who prior to Tennemann favored giving the Greeks priority, still debated the question. By locating the birth of philosophy in Greece, all philosophies that could not be seen as deriving from this source were now excluded, often to be reconceived as religions, as was the case with Confucianism, Hinduism, and Judaism.

Derrida ignored the fact that the idea of philosophy as fundamentally Greek was a relatively recent invention, and even though he repeatedly suggested that the questions he was posing to Levinas were not being imposed on him from the outside, it seems that Derrida succeeded in convincing Levinas to take it seriously as a potential challenge. We see it in his comment that although philosophy is “essentially Greek, it is not exclusively so.” He supported this latter claim by pointing to the “non-Greek” sources of philosophy and to the fact that Judeo-Christian culture “has, historically been incorporated into Greek philosophy” (Kearney 1984, 55). That philosophy was essentially Greek seems to have been understood by him as a claim about philosophical language. Levinas had long resisted seeing Judaism as somehow external to philosophy. One sees this resistance already in his 1937 review of Lev Shestov’s *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*. Shestov was not to publish *Athens and Jerusalem* for another two years, but the opposition represented by the title of the later book is already to be found in the earlier one in the form of the contrast between Job and Hegel, between Abraham and Socrates, and between reason and the Absurd (Shestov 1969, 89 and 271). Even though in “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism” in 1934 Levinas had expressed his sense of the inadequacy of the Western philosophical tradition to face Nazism (Levinas 1990c, 71), he still feared that “the synthesis of Greece and Judeo-Christianity that the Middle Ages assumed it had secured” might break apart, and so he refused to join Shestov in “his battle for Jerusalem against Athens” (Levinas 1937).

However, the Holocaust represented a sterner moral crisis than the First World War and after it Levinas was no longer content to cultivate an account according to which the philosophers and the prophets could be synthesized. So in the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas applied the word “hypocrisy” to this “world attached to both the philosophers and the prophets” (Levinas 1969, 24, cited at WD, 163). Levinas was also led to be more critical of Christianity’s contribution to philosophy. In an essay called “Jewish Thought Today” that was published in 1961, the same year that saw the publication of *Totality and Infinity*, we read: “But the fact that the monstrosity of Hitlerism could be produced in an evangelized Europe shook within the Jewish mind the plausibility which Christian metaphysics could have for a Jew” (Levinas 1990a, 161).

While it is true that Levinas claimed to leave behind “the philosophy of Parmenidean being” and even though he did so in the context of descriptions of the feminine and of fecundity that can be associated with his understanding of Judaism, he did not think of himself as breaking with Greek philosophy in the name of Judaism (Levinas 1969, 269; 1987b, 42). His critique of Western philosophy was directed at the dominant tradition within it only. He acknowledged another tendency within Western philosophy, one that favored transcendence (Levinas 1969, 102; 1987a, 47–48). Levinas’s idea seems to have been that although the dominant strand of Western philosophy lacked adequate resources with which to battle tyranny and oppression, and indeed at times seemed to collaborate with them insofar as they reduced truth to a form of assimilation, nevertheless that was not the only tendency of Western philosophy: the all-important idea of transcendence was represented in it by, for example, Plato’s good beyond being.

Derrida’s claim to be posing “the questions put to *us* by Levinas” (WD, 104) runs into problems. Levinas did not at this time accept the idea of the end of philosophy, still less the question of the closure of philosophy with which Derrida began “Violence and Metaphysics” (WD, 79 and 110). He had explicitly distanced himself from the idea of the end of philosophy by attributing it to the philosophy of the neuter (Levinas 1969, 298).¹ And when Derrida tried to legitimate the suggestion that Levinas too ultimately accepted the unforeseeable power of the Greek *logos* to envelop whatever attempts to escape it, he quoted him out of context. Derrida cited the pseudo-Aristotelian formula from the *Protrepticos* that “If one has to philosophize, one has to philosophize; if one does not have to philosophize, one still has to philosophize (to say it and to think it). One always has to philosophize” (WD, 152). Derrida found an allusion to this claim in a passage from “Means of Identification” in *Difficult Freedom*, an essay one of whose main points is that Judaism, like all great civilizations, aspires to a certain kind of universality. In that context and in an effort to clarify the nature of Jewish identity Levinas continued, “One could not reject the Scriptures without knowing how to read them, nor muzzle philology without philosophy, nor put a halt, if need be, to philosophical discourse, without still philosophizing” (Levinas 1990a, 53, trans. modified, cited at WD, 152). Levinas’s point is

to be found in the opening phrase and it is that Judaism has to be approached through its ancient texts, but Derrida wanted only the final phrase and gave it a significance it could not carry.

This misinterpretation was confirmed some years later, when, in “God and Philosophy,” Levinas responded that “Not to philosophize would not be still to philosophize” (Levinas 1998, 77). Although Levinas seems to have been persuaded by Derrida to attribute to the Greek *logos* a power of envelopment that he had not previously articulated, on this point of whether one always had to philosophize he was willing to contract Derrida. It was as true for Levinas in 1961 as it was in 1978 that critique or philosophy finds its source in the face of the Other who questions me with the result that “truth presupposes justice” (Levinas 1969, 85 and 90). But in 1975 Levinas, who had earlier dismissed concerns about the end of philosophy, had now, as if in an effort to join the community of those formally and thematically posing the question of the closure (WD, 110), introduced the idea that philosophy became suspect when the exaggerated pretensions of Hegelian reason were faced with “reasons that ‘reason’ does not know” (Levinas 1998, 77). For Levinas, that meant that the ultimate challenge to philosophy came not from Hegel, Nietzsche, or Heidegger, but with the cry of ethical revolt, issued by Marx and Marxists wanting to transform the world (Levinas 1998, 4; cf. WD, 79). This difference between Levinas and Derrida was to diminish over time.

3. The Historical Coupling of Judaism and Hellenism and Their Decoupling

In conversation with Richard Kearney, Derrida provided some essential background to how he saw “the historical coupling of Judaism and Hellenism.” Insisting that “from the very beginning of Greek philosophy the self-identity of the *Logos* is already fissured,” for example, by Plato’s Good beyond being, he responded to a question about whether Judeo-Christianity represented a radicalizing “alterity” for the Greco-Roman civilization by suggesting that Judeo-Christianity constituted itself as such only by its assimilation into the schemas of Greek philosophy. But to the question as to whether Judaism and Christianity represented a heterogeneity before they were assimilated, Derrida insisted that “these original heterogeneous elements of Judaism and Christianity were never completely eradicated by Western metaphysics” so that “the surreptitious deconstruction of the Greek *Logos* is at work from the very origin of our Western culture” (Kearney 1984, 116–117). Although it is sometimes impossible to avoid the suspicion that Derrida is strategically following Heidegger in investing the Greek *logos* with more force and unity than it merited the better to deconstruct it, Derrida here seemed to acknowledge that deconstruction happens historically with or without us. There is what one might call an historical deconstruction, whereby one only needs the historians to avoid being mesmerized by questionable

identities for the deconstruction of those identities to take place (Engberg-Pedersen 2001, 29–80). Meanwhile, the acknowledgment of Judaism and Christianity as heterogeneous elements would seem to be Derrida's own way of occupying the position he ascribed to Levinas when he referred to Hebraism and Hellenism as two origins and two historical speeches that were to be surpassed (WD, 84). But if Derrida yearned for a discourse that would be neither Hellenic, nor Hebraic, that possibility was less attractive for personal and historical reasons to Levinas. How did Levinas situate himself in relation to these two speeches both before and after “Violence and Metaphysics”?

In an essay written around the same time as he was completing *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas described Franz Rosenzweig as taking theological terms and turning them into ontological categories (Levinas 1990a, 190). This twisting of theological terms into ontological categories seems to have been how Levinas understood his own procedure prior to “Violence and Metaphysics.” A good example, albeit not an altogether innocent one, is demonstrated by the way the notion of the feminine in *Totality and Infinity* reflects the account that he gives in the contemporaneous essay, “Judaism and the Feminine” (Levinas 1990a, 30–38). But after “Violence and Metaphysics” and conceivably because of Derrida's insistence on the power of envelopment that he attributed to the Greek *logos*, Levinas saw the process in terms of the translation from Hebrew into Greek.

Levinas's response to Derrida's challenge on the relation of Hellenism and Hebraism is most fully developed in “The Translation of Scripture,” his 1983 commentary on the story of the translation of the Jewish law into Greek by some 72 translators (Levinas 1994b, 33–54). There are many versions of the story and the oldest of them is recorded in the *Letter of Aristeas* (Hadas 1951). The letter records how the High Priest in Jerusalem, at the request of Ptolemy Philadelphus, sent 72 translators to Egypt so that they might translate the Law into Greek. Subsequent versions of the story, including the one Levinas found in the Talmud, told how the translators, working independently, arrived at identical translations (Pelletier 1962, 78–98). It was seen, in the words of Clement of Alexandria, as “a kind of Greek prophecy” (Clement 1991, 134). Christian retellings of the story would often reflect their image of the Jews as a group apart. So Eusebius claimed that, were it not for Ptolemy, these “treasures” would never have been “wrested from the Jews, who through envy of us would have concealed their oracles” (Thackeray 1918, 107). The translation of the Law came to be seen as the bestowing of a legacy, a moment of transmission that legitimated the continuing exclusion of the people of the Law. Levinas, of course, did not experience Judaism as an outsider. But, even more importantly, he was aware that to the degree that Europeans saw Judaism as an outside, it was because they had chosen to exclude it.

Jewish sources employed the story of the translation as evidence that their readiness to disseminate their “treasures” marked a decisive step in the history of Jewish universalism. Philo Judaeus emphasized that it was felt to be “a shame that the laws

should be found in one half only of the human race, the barbarians [*barbaroi*], and denied altogether to the Greeks” (Philo 1966, 462). Levinas understood himself as continuing the work of the 72 translators of the Bible in this way (Levinas 1994b, 135; 2001, 275; Kearney 1984, 55). But he also emphasized a variation in the Talmud’s version of the story that is not found elsewhere. Apparently the translators, while independently making their identical versions, also made the same mistakes: 13 according to the Talmud of Jerusalem, 15 according to the Talmud of Babylon, as used by Levinas, who understood these mistakes as evidence of a residue of untranslatability at the heart of the Pentateuch (Levinas 1994b, 50). In this way Levinas protected the authority of the Hebrew text.

The decisive step in Levinas’s account, which enables us to understand it as a response to Derrida, was his introduction from the Tractate *Baba Kamma* of the saying, “It is necessary to distinguish the Greek language from Greek wisdom” (Levinas 1994b, 53). Levinas did not attempt to establish this problematic distinction which seems to be threatened both by his own earlier attempt in *Totality and Infinity* to show the inseparability of thought and speech and indeed by the fundamental Greek term *logos*, which embraces both thought and language (Levinas 1969, 204–209). Instead, he referred to an earlier Talmudic lecture in which he had described Greek wisdom as a weapon of ruse and domination, open to sophistry, ideology, and rhetoric through its power for sorcery (Levinas 1994a, 28). Hebraism and Hellenism do not share the same reason: Greek reason is characterized by “repose, calm and conciliation,” whereas the rationality of Hebraic wisdom has its basis in “the anxiety that the Other causes the Same” (Levinas 1994a, 147–149). Levinas admired the Greek language, in the sense of the languages of the West, or, as he also said, the language of the University, for its unique clarity and malleability such that there is nothing that cannot be said in it, but Judaism cultivates “a reason less turned in upon itself than the reason of philosophical tradition” (Levinas 1994b, 53; 1994a, 146). His reluctant acceptance of Derrida’s insistence of the power of the Greek *logos* can be heard when in the context of a description of his “concern everywhere” to translate “this non-Hellenism of the Bible into Hebraic terms,” he complained: “There is nothing to be done: philosophy is spoken in Greek” (Levinas 1998, 85).

Even so, it was never just a question of translation from Hebrew into Greek, because Hebraic wisdom challenged Greek wisdom. Jewish singularity

still needs to be translated into that Greek language which, thanks to assimilation, we have learnt in the West. Our great task is to express in Greek those principles about which Greece knew nothing. Jewish peculiarity awaits its philosophy. The servile imitation of European models is no longer enough. (Levinas 1994a, 200–202)

To translate the Talmud into a modern language was to translate it “into the problems preoccupying a person schooled in spiritual sources other than those of Judaism and whose confluence constitutes our civilization” (Levinas 1990b, 5). And yet

Levinas strenuously resisted the idea that he was a Jewish philosopher, as if acceptance of the label would have compromised his significance as a philosopher (Levinas 2001, 61–65). This resistance suggests that he would also not have accepted any characterization of him as a Greek Jew or a Jew Greek in a context where “Greek” is synonymous with “philosophy.”

4. Beyond Assimilation and the Ghetto

Derrida did not comment much on what was guiding Levinas beyond showing himself aware of the fact that *Totality and Infinity* was written against totalitarianism and oppression (WD, 91 and 132). To be sure, this insight was of itself impressive, given that the term “totalitarianism” appears nowhere in *Totality and Infinity* and the term “oppression” only once, and given that almost all commentators on Levinas miss this dimension of the book, as well as many later ones. But Derrida had nothing to say about what governed Levinas’s preoccupation with the relation of Hellenism and Judaism in Levinas’s works as a whole, which is a distaste for assimilation. It is perhaps here more than anywhere else that Levinas’s very different relation to Judaism from Derrida’s is clearly visible, a difference of which Derrida was well aware.

In the Introduction that he wrote for a collection of his Talmudic Readings which first appeared in 1968, Levinas explained again that his task was that of translating the wisdom of the Talmud into a modern idiom and thereby “to confront it with the problems of our time,” but he went on to explain that in his view the major problem that the Jews of the diaspora had to face in modern times was the impossible choice between the ghetto and assimilation: in either case, Judaism faced annihilation (Levinas 1990b, 9). That ghettoization was also a continuing problem and it helps to explain his sensitivity to the description “Jewish thinker.” But he tended to focus more on the failure of assimilation in the twentieth century. Assimilation failed “because it did not put an end to the anguish felt by the Jewish soul” and “because it did not placate the non-Jews, or put an end to anti-Semitism” (Levinas 1990a, 255). Indeed, within the context of the racial politics of the twentieth century, assimilation, like that passing among African Americans, came to be considered what was most dangerous to the dominant group, in part because of the threat both groups posed to racial purity.

Levinas’s rejection of assimilation as that term is ordinarily understood is reflected too in his retelling of the miracle of the translations. Drawing on the scholarship of Dominique Barthélemy (1974), he recalled the existence of the Jewish colony in Alexandria whose inhabitants now, as a result of the translation, had the advantage of being able to read the Bible in their everyday language (Levinas 1994b, 58–59). This community provided the model for a different kind of “assimilation” – and Levinas emphasized what he called this “most brutal” word that is not to be found in

Barthélemy – which is authorized by the miracle: “rabbinic Judaism wants to belong to Europe” but the Jewish community still remains intact (Levinas 1994b, 47–49).

Levinas believed that the pursuit of assimilation by the dominant culture had a philosophical source in the Greek conception of truth. He used this most brutal word in philosophical contexts to characterize “the conception of reason that prevails in our philosophical profession today”: “Reason is solid and positive, it begins with all meaning to which all meaning must return in order to be assimilated to the Same in spite of the whole appearance it may give of having come from outside” (Levinas 1994a, 147). What Derrida described as the power of the Greek *logos* to envelop whatever seeks to escape it turns out to be what Levinas calls “assimilation” especially after “Violence and Metaphysics.”

The problem that dominated Levinas’s life was not that of the end of philosophy, or even that of the relation of faith and knowledge, but “the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror,” the fact of being persecuted by a culture that identified him and indeed all Jews as alien, as being other than Hellenic, other than Aryan (Levinas 1990a, 191). Nevertheless, as time went on, Levinas clarified his sense of what it means to belong to Europe. In 1980, while addressing the question of the status of the doctrines and institutions of Europe within Jewish life, he remarked characteristically that “The forms of European life have conquered the Israelites,” but he conceded that this was not a total disaster (Levinas 1994a, 196). Like others of his generation, he was haunted by the possibility that the Holocaust was the culmination of the Western tradition. The doctrines and institutions of Europe had been compromised, but one could, he claimed, still identify certain “good seeds” including democracy and “the rights of man.”

Just a few years later, in 1984, Levinas went even further. In the essay “Peace and Proximity” he gave his account of Europe its most philosophical expression, and it was not Derrida’s Europe (Gasché 2009, 287–302). He began by acknowledging a contradiction within the European consciousness, but it was not that between the philosophers and the prophets. Here the contradiction lay between, on the one hand, the promise of a history of peace, freedom, and well-being on the basis of Hellenic truth and, on the other hand, the reality of a history of violence and imperialism culminating in genocides, two World Wars, and the Holocaust (Levinas 1996, 163). And yet Levinas invited his readers to believe that the insight into this contradiction emerged as a problem of conscience only for a consciousness that had felt the force of the Hebraic anxiety of responsibility, as if other cultures were incapable of this insight. The contrast between Hebraic wisdom and Greek wisdom was located in their different ideas of peace. For Greek wisdom peace is established on the basis of the state as the site of assimilation and of the repose of beings self-sufficient in their identity:

Peace on the basis of the Truth – on the basis of the truth of a knowledge where, instead of opposing itself, the diverse agrees with itself; where the stranger is assimilated; where the other is reconciled with the identity of the identical in everyone. (Levinas 1996, 162)

By contrast, in the Jewish tradition peace is experienced in the questioning of one's identity (Levinas 1996, 167). So Levinas claimed that once the priority of the Biblical heritage had been established, there would still be a place for the Greek heritage. Levinas's response to Tertullian, Shestov, and Derrida, was that Europe's Biblical heritage "implied the necessity of the Greek heritage. Europe is not a simple confluence of two cultural currents. It is the concreteness where theoretical and Biblical wisdom do better than converge" (Levinas 1996, 168). They did not converge. Reconciliation between them, Hegelian or otherwise, would be the reassertion of the Greek idea of peace. There was a radical difference, but the Greek component of Europe was not simply its language or its reason. Greek knowledge, its wisdom, presumably even as a weapon of ruse and domination, was also indispensable for the justice that was called for by the Bible (Levinas 1994b, 134).

In *Adieu*, Derrida accepted Levinas's suggestion that peace "*perhaps exceeds the political*" and set out the implications of this concept: it

exceeds itself, goes beyond its own borders, which amounts to saying that it interrupts itself or deconstructs itself so as to form a sort of enclave inside and outside of itself: 'beyond in,' once again, the political interiorization of ethical or messianic transcendence. (AEL, 80)

The "beyond in" is a reference to the sentences from the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* that should guide any reading of the book: "The 'beyond' the totality and objective experience is, however, not to be described in a purely negative fashion. It is reflected within the totality and history, *within experience*" (Levinas 1969, 23). But Derrida did not cite that sentence in "Violence and Metaphysics" and it is arguable that, had he done so, it would have been harder for his readers to attribute to him, as they have tended to do, the double reading or deconstruction *avant la lettre* whereby Levinas's notion of a beyond philosophy was to be found within what it transcended.

But the problem remains that Levinas, in order to uphold the privilege of Europe, was often dismissive of everything else (Bernasconi 2005). For example, he declared in an interview: "I think that Europe is the Bible and Greece. This is not colonialism – the rest can be translated" (Levinas 1988, 174). Like the denial of racism, or of Occidentalism, the gratuitous denial of colonialism provokes suspicion. And Levinas was a great deal more suspicious of assimilation than colonialism (Bernasconi 1990). There is clear evidence that Levinas felt exercised by Derrida's questions to him and it is possible that he thought when he read in Derrida that "We live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek, which is perhaps the unity of what is called history" (WD, 153) that he had found a way of negotiating them, even though it did no more than shift the point of exclusion from whatever lies outside of Greece to whatever lies outside of Europe as Greece and Judaism. The strength of Levinas's presentation of the relation between Hebraism and Hellenism lay in large part in the ethical force that he brought to the issues drawing on his own experience of exclusion, but it was

compromised by an ethical failing, the new exclusions created by a shifting of the boundary line between Europe and its Other. It seems that at a time when Derrida had learned to share with Levinas the themes of responsibility, hospitality, the gift, the wholly other, and justice, in part as a way to draw deconstruction into another realm from the binaries of Western metaphysics, Derrida's questions had taken Levinas further away from Derrida because of their different relation to questions of identity. Remarkably, Derrida had already in 1964 seen as a possibility of Levinas's own thinking a summons to the dislocation not just of our identity but of identity in general (WD, 82). But, the meaning that being Jewish had for Levinas (even as the author of "Without Identity"), not least as a result of anti-Semitism, made it impossible for him to go as far as Derrida in questioning identity itself (Bernasconi 2006).

We see this distance from Levinas most clearly in "We Other Greeks," an essay from 1992 in which Derrida offered a retrospective view of his relation to the Greeks and above all insisted that he had never seen them in simple terms. This lack of simplicity was reflected in such statements as the following: "If we are still or already Greeks, we ourselves, we others (*nous autres*), we also inherit that which made them already other than themselves, and more or less than they themselves believed" (WOG, 27). Among other things this statement seems intended to open a space for a challenge to any attempt to write a history of philosophy with a pure Greek origin without contributions from elsewhere. And if it seems that the claim that "European history has not simply unfolded what was handed down to it by the Greek" (WOG, 31) could be argued more persuasively with the aid of history than without it, one should attend to Derrida's suggestion of what deconstruction had to offer writers of histories. He called for "a 'history' much more impure, with a play that is more unstable and more destabilizing of the tradition and of rupture, of memory, mourning, and incorporation" (WOG, 27).

Nevertheless, his own record on this question is a little ambiguous. He acknowledged that the question of whether philosophy was born in Greece, whether it was European, whether there could be a Chinese or African philosophy, were serious questions with serious consequences and conceded the possibility of a non-European site for the philosophical question about philosophy (PTS, 377), but elsewhere he insisted that "what we can rigorously call 'philosophy' exists nowhere other than in Greece." He did this by defining philosophy "as a specific project of the thinking of being" (FWT, 18), but one wonders about the legitimacy of that definition even on his own terms. So Derrida expressly followed Husserl and Heidegger in characterizing philosophy as "the universal project of a will to deracination" in order to attribute to philosophy "an infinite process of *universalization*" which effectively challenges Heidegger's claim about philosophy as in essence Greek (FWT, 18).

But if Derrida, there in dialogue with Elizabeth Roudinesco, refused the historical deconstruction in favor of one whose purpose is perhaps to save his own incautious

use of the term Greek in “Violence and Metaphysics,” in a conversation on Algeria only a couple of years later in 2003, with Mustapha Chérif, he declared:

The so conventionally accepted contrast between Greeks, Jews, and Arabs must be challenged. We know very well that Arab thought and Greek thought intimately blended at a given historical moment and that one of the primary duties of our intellectual and philosophical memory is to rediscover that grafting, that reciprocal fertilization of the Greek, the Arab, and the Jew. (Chérif 2008, 38–39)

And yet moments later he remarked: “The concept of democracy, the word, originate in Greek culture, no one can deny this” (Chérif 2008, 47). “Word” would seem to be a correction for “concept,” as if even while insisting on the point, and indeed insisting that the remark was not Grecocentric or Eurocentric, he knew that it would only stand if it was reduced to its most trivial form: “the word comes from Greek culture.” But whereas in the context of “philosophy” the Greeks were praised for building a certain universalization into the concept, in this context he renounced that strategy so that Greek democracy needed to be freed from its autochthony. I cite this two-handed oscillation to show the difficulty of negotiating these issues, but also to indicate how Levinas (but not only Levinas) might find in them support for a certain backtracking in the radical deconstruction of identity.

I will conclude by taking a broader perspective on this question that allows the resources and also the pitfalls of Derrida’s approach to appear. When Tertullian asked the question “quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?” which, in context, meant “what indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” or even “what use has Jerusalem for Athens?” he was putting the value of Greek philosophy into question (Tertullian 1946, 14). The attempt to subtract the Hellenic elements from an allegedly purer more primitive form of Judeo-Christianity has been a recurrent theme in the history of Christianity, even though this effort is greatly complicated by the knowledge that the Hellenization of Judaism preceded the advent of Christianity (Hengel 1981). By contrast, as we have seen, it has only been in the last 200 years or so that philosophers have identified their discipline as Greek and thereby sought to locate Judaism outside an exclusively Greek philosophical tradition. The attempt to do so was fueled by anti-Semitism in the same way that the exclusion of Asian and African philosophy from the canon at roughly the same time was fueled by racism. Recalling these histories amounts to a historical deconstruction, but what Derrida aimed at ultimately goes further.

“We Other Greeks” explores other possibilities of the word “Greek” on the basis of the fact that “the Greek himself never gathered himself or identified with himself” (WOG, 31). This non-gathering perhaps is what Heidegger should have recognized about the Greeks had he read Hölderlin’s letter to Böhlendorff carefully enough and seen that they, like the Germans, had their others that helped them establish who

they were (Warminski 1987, 45–70). Going still further Derrida wrote: “we are certainly still *other* Greeks, with the memory of events that are irreducible to the Greek genealogy, but other enough to have not only, also, altered the Greek in us, but to bear within us something wholly other *than* the Greek” (WOG, 28). For Derrida, this way of thinking what it is to “be” Greek passes easily into the thought of cosmopolitanism, but there is some reason for caution (Chérif 2008, 43–44). We have heard the claim that “there is neither Greek nor Jew” before (Galatians 3:28). On that occasion it was in favor of Christian identity. Is cosmopolitanism any different? Can it escape all identity or just reinforce the dangerous dichotomy between cosmopolitans and the rest? To what kind of assimilation does cosmopolitanism call us? And can it do so without reasserting a spirit of persecution and oppression?

Note

- 1 Levinas did employ the phrase elsewhere but only to say that “The end of philosophy . . . is the beginning of an age in which everything is philosophy” (1990a, 185).

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The Crystallization of the Impossible: Derrida and Merleau-Ponty at the Threshold of Phenomenology

SABRINA AGGLETON

The originary givenness and ideality of the living present is the touchstone of Husserlian phenomenology. Yet by virtue of the ever imminent intrusion of the outside, there appears to be an empirical impurity in this ideality. The imposition of the outside, non-presence, threatens the very potency and givenness of the living present. Not unaware of this problem, Edmund Husserl endeavors to exclude the outside from the secure confines of the pure monadological sphere. Yet is it really possible to suspend the mundane through the means of the transcendental reduction? Is phenomenology attempting to purify what is essentially impure and to escape what is constitutive of itself? There are answers to this question thanks to two famous criticisms of phenomenology found in the twentieth century. Phenomenology, claims Jacques Derrida in *Voice and Phenomenon*, is tormented from the inside (cf. VP, 6). Similarly, Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception* claims that the phenomenological reduction cannot be completed (cf. 2012, lxxvii). The similarities between the positions that Derrida and Merleau-Ponty adopt in relation to phenomenology have not gone unnoticed, yet the differences seem to lie in how the relation between inside and outside, self and other, is conceived. It is possible that Derrida's insistence on a kind of inappropriable alterity overlooks the intimacy of the embrace that we find in Merleau-Ponty. In other words, I agree with Jack Reynolds (2004, 173) when he claims that "the Derridean account of alterity too often downplays the importance of the more relational and chiasmic conception of alterity that Merleau-Ponty theorizes." Given the breadth of Derrida's work, we immediately recognize that it might be hard to maintain this kind of claim, but I would like to

explore the relation between intimacy and alterity at the threshold of phenomenology. And to enter into that exploration, we must first understand Derrida's criticism of Husserlian phenomenology.

In the first section therefore I show how Derrida's deconstruction in *Voice and Phenomenon* exposes a double necessity that undergirds Husserl's phenomenological inquiry in the "First Logical Investigation," especially with respect to expression and indication (cf. Lawlor 2002, 167). The double necessity is that the originary givenness of self-presence is, at the same time, the site of non-presence. This reveals the ideality of self-presence to be, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968, 273) words, "a crystallization of the impossible."¹ I am using this phrase to suggest how the transcendental reduction attempts to crystallize an impossibly pure ideality. The terms of the phrase come together in an impasse straddling both genesis and disruption, and hold together with a necessity that generates a meaningful tension. The logic of double necessity is a recurring theme in Derrida's corpus and his treatment of "possible-impossible" aporias reveals an abiding emphasis on impossibility (cf. Reynolds 2004, 173).² The second section turns to Derrida's reflections on the aporia of blindness in *Memoirs of the Blind* in order to further develop the logic of double necessity and to examine Derrida's divergence from Merleau-Ponty's thought.³

In the third section I carry over a thinking of the "possible-impossible" into an examination of Derrida's critique of the auto-affective movement of temporalization in *Voice and Phenomenon* that reveals the impossibility of pure auto-affection. Derrida's earlier critique of Husserl helps to clarify what is at stake in his later critical engagement with Merleau-Ponty in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (see Reynolds 2008, 313). In the fourth section I examine Derrida's reading of Merleau-Ponty with a focus on the questions of coincidence and imminence. This section performs the important task of drawing out the different positions that Derrida and Merleau-Ponty take in relation to phenomenology. Derrida's emphasis on a kind of inappropriable alterity motivates his critical reading of Merleau-Ponty and renders him reluctant to embrace the intimacy of Merleau-Ponty's thought. We will see that the notions of chiasm and flesh enable Merleau-Ponty to think through the aporetic fold of presence and non-presence in a more relational manner than Derrida's emphasis on impossibility.

In a very specific way, the phrase "crystallization of the impossible" allows us to think through both Derrida's divergence from and kinship to the thought of Merleau-Ponty. The final section explores the limits of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology where he has moved beyond Derrida's deconstruction of Husserlian phenomenology. Here Merleau-Ponty engages in a radical investigation of the belonging together of self and world that neither succumbs to an imperialism of the same nor preoccupies itself with a kind of inappropriable alterity. Merleau-Ponty describes chiasm and flesh in terms of hiatus (*écart*), but whereas Derrida would insist that the hiatus is an abyss, Merleau-Ponty thinks of it ontologically as the fullness of an embrace. Ultimately I argue that the chiasmic intertwining of self and world has a complex intimacy that

rescues Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology from the deconstructive charge of reducing the other to the same.

1. Derrida's Deconstruction: Potency Rendered Impotent

Derrida's deconstruction assesses Husserl's analyses of a fundamental ambiguity in the term *Zeichen*, "sign." Husserl utilizes this ambiguity, which I will examine more closely in a moment, in order to contend with certain epistemological and metaphysical impasses posed by the problems of non-presence and alterity. Motivated by a "vigilance to the originary giving evidentness of the present," Husserl endeavors to safeguard the purity of the extra-mundane monadological sphere against the contamination of the mundane (VP, 4).⁴ This vigilance reveals how entrenched Husserl's phenomenological procedure is in the roots of Western metaphysics that bestow an exorbitant privilege upon presence to the detriment of non-presence. We witness Husserl's commitment to Western metaphysics in the incipit pages of the "First Logical Investigation," entitled "Expression and Meaning [*Ausdruck und Bedeutung*]," where Husserl advances "'essential distinctions' that rigorously order all the later analyses" (VP, 3). Husserl's fateful decision to ground his analysis in a fundamental ambiguity in the word *Zeichen* proceeds from its double sense: it can mean either *Ausdruck*, "expression," or *Anzeichen*, "indication." He invests in this distinction in order to develop a rigorous distinction between the *purity* of expression and the *mundanity* of indication.

In the rigor of this distinction we hear the resounding echo of the decision that thrust Western philosophy into a metaphysics of presence, namely, its often tacit commitment to the repetition of the same. A pure ideality cannot express itself with the contingent variation of mundanity; instead, its expression can only be a repetition of the same expression. Husserl's phenomenological vigilance necessitates that the distinction between the purity of expression and the mundanity of indication be *entirely* rigorous (VP, 4). Arguing for this kind of separation, Husserl (2001, 183) claims "*expressions function meaningfully even in isolated mental life, where they no longer serve to indicate anything.*" In other words, expression is at its greatest potency (purity) in isolated mental life, which is the solitary life of the soul. To sharpen the distinction Husserl retreats to the insularity of auto-affective mental life. After all, *within* the confines of the solitary life of the soul, expressions function meaningfully as the ideal sense content of a logical or expressive *Bedeutung* (meaning) even though they are entirely divorced from their mundane indicative function (VP, 17).

Derrida's deconstruction effectively challenges the rigor of this distinction on two related accounts. On the one hand, the distinction between the purity of expression and the mundanity of indication is "more *functional* than *substantial*" because expression and indication are not isolated terms but "functions or signifying relations" (VP, 17). The distinction cannot be substantial because, argues Derrida, "one and the

same phenomenon can be apprehended as either expression or indication” (VP, 17). On the other hand, if the distinction between expression and indication is merely functional then the door is left open for contamination. Expression is never pure because it is not *substantially* different from indication. Deconstructing the purity of expression, Derrida maintains that “the outside of indication does not come to affect accidentally the inside of expression. Their *Verflechtung* (interweaving) is originary” (VP, 74). If the interweaving of expression and indication is originary, then Husserl’s endeavor to purify expression through the reduction renders impotent expression’s phenomenologically potent repetition of the same.

For Derrida, entanglement between expression and indication is a factual necessity. Yet Husserl insists that retreating to the interiority of the solitary life of the soul will enable us to track down “the unmarred purity of expression” (VP, 19). The paradox of this gesture, the impulse to purify expression of its relation to the outside of communication, is embedded within the project of Husserlian phenomenology itself. Even the most patient and methodical reduction to the solitary life of the soul does not secure the purity of expression. On the contrary, “ex-pression is exteriorization” (VP, 27). The possibility of communication, of openness to the outside, cannot be successfully nullified by way of the phenomenological reduction. The entanglement of expression and indication is “not the kind of contingent association” that could be eradicated through the reduction (VP, 74).

The rootedness of Husserlian phenomenology in Western metaphysics is exemplified in this fictional contrast between the purity of expression and the mundanity of indication (VP, 23). There is a fidelity to the guiding intention of metaphysics at work in Husserl’s prioritization of ideal presence. Husserl’s fidelity not only marginalizes non-presence, the outside, and the mundanity of indication, but renders him blind to the way these are constitutive in phenomenal experience. There is always already a rupture in the ideal presence of the *living* present, and it is in this rupture that Derrida is able to locate *différance*, the very opposition which inaugurates metaphysics, the opposition between form, the pure ideality of the transcendental, and matter, the mundanity of empirical content (VP, 6). Passing through the reduction does not enable us to make a rigorous distinction between the purity of expression and the mundanity of indication, yet it is by passing through the reduction that we can come to this important conclusion about the Western philosophical tradition. In other words, Derrida’s deconstruction effectively sets the impulse of phenomenology against its own roots.

Husserl’s decision to examine the fundamental ambiguity of *Zeichen* to sanctify a rigorous distinction between expression and indication leads Derrida to pursue the problem of the sign. From this problem, Derrida endeavors to expose the double necessity that renders the potency of expression, its purity, impotent. Derrida exposes Husserl’s blindness to the very paradoxical experience one can only glimpse by enacting the phenomenological *epoché*: the experience of “what can never be presented, the irreducible void” (Lawlor 2002, 173). This experience cannot be experienced in

the traditional sense of the term because it is the contamination of presence by non-presence. The disruptive experience of *différance* exposes the originary interweaving of presence and non-presence and reveals that their contamination cannot be eradicated by even the most patient and rigorous reduction to the structures of experience. It is here that we glimpse the double necessity that renders potency impotent. To clarify what it means to render potency impotent and to further explore the logic of double necessity, I will now consider blindness, which for Derrida is a multifaceted example of potency rendered impotent.

2. Blindness

Derrida's fascination with blindness is thematized in *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* and he indicates that the point of view will be his theme. His investigation of the paradoxical kinship of drawing and blindness undermines the exorbitant privilege bestowed on vision that conflates knowing and seeing. In a strategic play of language Derrida writes, "blindness is an accident that interrupts the regular course of things [affecting] both Nature and a nature of the will, the will to know [*savoir*] as the will to see [*voir*]" (MB, 12). The impulse to privilege vision and link it with knowing implicitly identifies blindness as an *unnatural* disruption. It is not insignificant that the verb "to see" (*voir*) is embedded within the verbs "to know" (*savoir*) and "to be able" (*pouvoir*). Their etymological relation speaks to an impulse to take for granted that if it were not for the affliction, "*naturally* [the blind man's] eyes would be able [*pouvoir*] to see" (MB, 13). This formulation situates blindness as an aberrancy that prevents the eyes from functioning properly. What the primacy of vision overlooks is that sight is always already necessarily blind.

Derrida's reflection on his own experience of drawing is instructive. He admits that he has always experienced drawing as problematic; he neither knows how to draw nor how to look at a drawing. Every time he sits down to draw, Derrida no longer *sees* the thing that he is trying to draw (Naas and Brault 2003). When drawing, the artist must redirect her gaze from the model to the canvas and back to the model again. Robert Vallier (1997, 194) makes the point that in the hiatus between these two directed gazes "is a spread of invisibility that makes drawing both possible and impossible." The artist is blind to her own seeing, as well as alternatively blind to either the model or the lines she is drawing on the canvas. This hiatus of invisibility haunts drawing and, as Reynolds (2004, 75) aptly asserts, there is a "feeling of powerlessness at those moments when the experience of the gaze is given over to blindness, and it is a blindness that can only be resolved by leaping." Every mark on a canvas is an expressive leap of faith that bears witness to and yet overcomes the impossibility of drawing.⁵

These reflections on drawing and blindness lead Derrida to conclude that blindness "ensures sight its breath" (MB, 32). Blindness is potent in a double and

seemingly contradictory sense. On the one hand, vision develops on the brink of a constitutive blindness and, on the other, blindness is the condition of vision's impotency. In this sense, blindness intervenes and cuts off vision right at its most potent moment of conception. Derrida situates this constitutive blindness precisely where the abortive reflexivity of Merleau-Ponty's conception of visibility, the chiasmic intertwining of the seer and the visible, shows itself.

Merleau-Ponty is not unaware that seeing *always* develops on the brink of blindness. Visibility, the circulation of communion and disruption that is ontologically necessary to the flow of our perceptual life, requires the seer to be simultaneously "at the heart of the visible" yet "far away from it" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 131). In the May 1960 working note titled "Blindness (*punctum caecum*) of the 'consciousness,'" Merleau-Ponty elucidates precisely why the seer must be both proximal to and distant from the visible when he writes:

What does not see is what in it prepares the vision of the rest (as the retina is blind at the point where the fibers that will permit the vision spread out into it). *What* it does not see is what makes it see, is its tie to Being, is its corporeity, are the existentials by which the world becomes visible. (1968, 248)

The *punctum caecum*, the blind spot in the visual field where the retina connects with the optic nerve, indicates an even more fundamental and pervasive blindness: visibility is *invisible*. Perception, our carnal opening onto the world, is disrupted by a hiatus of invisibility yet this hiatus is not indicative of a void, but is the very possibility of sight. It is in this sense that vision is a crystallization of the impossible.

Merleau-Ponty and Derrida both examine the constitutive blindness that underlies vision, yet at the end of *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida diverges from Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on perception. The point of view has been Derrida's theme, but the best or most revealing point of view is not the *punctum caecum*. On the contrary, it "is a source-point and watering hole, a water-point – which thus comes down to tears" (MB, 126–127). Derrida's shift to the revelatory blindness of the weeping gaze disrupts our everyday understanding of the eyes that privileges vision at the expense of other vital functions, such as the production of tears. The weeping gaze of the blind is the best point of view because the blind gaze is always already exposing the constitutive blindness at the heart of vision. In the weeping of the blind, that exposure is effectively doubled.

I have argued that blindness reveals the different motivations from which Merleau-Ponty and Derrida approach the fold of the chiasm. To approach this fold as a hinge between the perceiving body and the world emphasizes the inherent belonging-together and circularity of self and world. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the primacy of vision, visibility, and his relational conception of the chiasm is precisely what Derrida approaches with an air of skepticism. As Reynolds (cf. 2004, 172–173)

claims, Derrida's abiding emphasis on impossibility and alterity renders him more reluctant to *thematize* the intertwining of self and world than Merleau-Ponty.

3. Auto-Affection is Hetero-Affection: Temporalization

Derrida broaches the theme of blindness in the fifth section of *Voice and Phenomenon*, titled "The Sign and the Blink of an Eye" when he examines the movement of temporality, which is the experience of auto-affection. The movement of temporalization as developed in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* offers a conception of "the now . . . as the punctuality of the instant" (VP, 52). In these analyses Husserl insists that one cannot isolate the "now" as a discreet instant at the same time as he maintains that "temporality has a non-displaceable center, an eye or a living nucleus" (VP, 54). The center of Husserl's account of temporalization, the absolute punctuality of an isolated now, contests itself from the inside insofar as one cannot, either in fact or ideally, isolate a distinct "now." In other words, the punctuality of a distinct "now" is a crystallization of the impossible. The impulse to isolate the "now" privileges the simple presence of the present-now.

Derrida's analysis of the isolated "now" in *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* is instructive. Emphasizing the irreducibility of genesis and synthesis in internal time consciousness he asserts:

the purity of the temporal form . . . being manifested in a pointlike actuality is "essentially" and a priori born by a past and oriented by a future. Its very sense, that is to say, the originarity and the originality of its "now" is founded on the possibility of this double movement. Its absolute consists in being taken in a lived "relation." (PG, 97)

As a lived relation, the "now" spreads out across a temporal horizon and has a continuous density. Yet the potency of the "now," its purity and punctuality, is contested by the intrusion of non-presence in so far as the present "now" is irrevocably tied to a past and stretches out towards a future (cf. Lawlor 2012, 513).

Although the temporality of lived experience is not thematized in the *Logical Investigations*, Derrida takes it up in *Voice and Phenomenon* because Husserl examines the transparency of self-presence that can only be given in an originary intuition. Self-presence not only concerns the enigma of the living present appearing in "absolute proximity to itself; it also designates the ideal temporal essence of this proximity as an *undivided* unity" (VP, 50). For Husserl, the reduction to the structures of experience secures the ideal self-presence that is originally intuited in the undivided unity of a temporal present. Yet is the present of self-presence as indivisible as the blink of an eye [*im selben Augenblick*] (VP, 50)?

Husserl's phenomenological descriptions of the movement of temporalization endeavor in vain to remain within the undivided confines of originary givenness.

This endeavor is contested by Husserl's own recognition of the complex structure of temporality (Zahavi 2003, 80–98). The punctuality of the now is a source point that is constituted by the spread of lived experience across retention and protention, which is itself the structure of temporality. There is a complex synthesis between retention, primary memory, “the now,” and protention, primary anticipation, that seems to contaminate the transparency of self-presence with non-presence and non-perception. Irrevocably involved in synthesis with retention and protention, self-presence “is able to appear as such only insofar as it is in *continuous composition* with a non-presence and a non-perception” (VP, 55). One cannot isolate an originary source-point if the *present* now is constituted only with reference to its spreading out across a retentional tail and a protentional anticipation.

The spreading out of the now complicates the simplicity and originality of self-presence. Even the reduction to the ideal structures of experience can neither extricate self-presence from this synthesis nor suspend the width of this spreading out. As Derrida maintains, if self-presence “is constituted in an originary or irreducible synthesis, then the principle of Husserl's entire argumentation,” the absolute transparency of *im selben Augenblick*, “is threatened” (VP, 52). Derrida's argument, however, does not end with the mere recognition that the complexity of a synthesis invites the non-originary into the originary.

Derrida believes the problem is more specific and hinges on Husserl's understanding of the relation between the perception of self-presence and retention. The alterity of retention invites non-presence, non-perception, and the non-now into simple self-presence. Husserl insists on a “radical discontinuity passing between retention and reproduction (secondary memory), between perception and imagination,” the discontinuity between perception and non-perception, yet this discontinuity does not pass “between perception and retention” (VP, 56). In the commerce between perception and retention Husserl insists on an ideal limit; “in the *ideal* sense, perception would then be the phase of consciousness that constitutes the pure now, and memory, an entirely different phase of the continuity” (VP, 56). Perception and retention, are, for Husserl, a different phase of the same continuity, which is perception.

Retention is neither non-presence nor non-perception *if* it is viewed as this ideal limit. If the ideality of this limit crumbles then Husserl's conception of the continuity between retention and perception is functional rather than substantial. What Derrida deems problematic is Husserl's attempt to maintain a radical difference between perception and non-perception when the synthesis is driven by the intrusion of non-perception. On the one hand, retention is a modification of the present “now,” and as a modification, is constituted by non-perception. On the other hand, the punctuality of “the now” is an irreducible synthesis constituted by retention and protention, which means that the now is “indispensably and essentially” constituted by non-perception and non-presence (VP, 55). If non-presence and non-perception are indispensable to the presence of self-presence, then “we welcome the other into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*, non-presence, non-evidentness into the *blink of an*

eye of the instant" (VP, 56). Auto-affection folds into the complexity of hetero-affection and this folding contaminates self-presence with non-presence and non-originality. The experience of auto-affection is irreducibly an experience of hetero-affection, and it is the contamination of auto-affection by the outside, non-presence, and non-perception that contests Husserlian phenomenology.

4. Touch and the Crystallization of the Impossible

Husserl's commitment to the purity of expression and the auto-affective movement of temporalization render him blind to the manner in which his phenomenological analyses are tormented from the inside. What for Husserl is given originally to experience is revealed by Derrida's deconstruction to always already be contaminated by an ineradicable trace of non-presence and non-originality. As a lived relation, the pure simplicity of auto-affection inevitably folds into the complexity of hetero-affection. Ever mindful of what phenomenology might conceal, Derrida investigates what resists Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological descriptions of touch in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Reynolds 2008).

It is significant that Derrida takes up Merleau-Ponty's phrase "crystallization of the impossible" on two occasions in *On Touching*. First, Derrida includes the phrase in the subtitle of Tangent III, "The Exorbitant, 2, 'Crystallization of the Impossible': 'Flesh,' and, again, 'For example, my hand.'" The subtitle is important as it links the motif of flesh and the foundational role of the hand to the phrase "crystallization of the impossible." Although Merleau-Ponty is often accused of ocularcentrism, given his commitment to the primacy of perception and given that his later work offers an ontology of visibility, he also bestows an exorbitant privilege upon touch. The touching of two hands plays an important role in Merleau-Ponty's explication of the chiasm and his descriptions of the elemental notion of flesh (Reynolds 2008, 312). Derrida concludes Tangent III with the second instance of the phrase, quoting Merleau-Ponty's March 1961 working note in which the phrase originally appears. Thus, the crystallization of the impossible occurs at the beginning and the end, framing the Tangent.

In Tangent III, Derrida criticizes Merleau-Ponty's late notions of reversibility, chiasm, and flesh along several fronts. Yet the Tangent still ends on a positive note, saying that *The Visible and the Invisible* "is so strong, so alive, and has contributed so much to open a pathway for the thinking of its time, and our time" (TJLN, 215). Derrida's recognition of Merleau-Ponty's contribution to philosophy is important and may even suggest a certain kinship between these two thinkers, one that can be located by looking further into their accounts of auto-affection and sensibility. As Ann Murphy (2010, 436) correctly asserts, "sensibility," for both Derrida and Merleau-Ponty, "is born of the parsing of the self in a hiatus or interval that disrupts auto-affection." Derrida's emphasis on impossibility, however, distinguishes their

accounts of sensibility and auto-affection. I will show how Merleau-Ponty's phrase "crystallization of the impossible" further illuminates the relationship of these two thinkers.

Before examining Derrida's critique, it is necessary to consider the foundational role of the double sensation in Husserlian phenomenology. This is because, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty turns to an experience that is intimate and proximal to us, the touching of two hands. The double sensation is privileged by Husserl in *The Cartesian Meditations* as the transcendental clue to alterity; it affords an experience of alterity that remains firmly within the confines of the pure monological sphere.⁶ Yet, Derrida's critique concerns Merleau-Ponty's misappropriation of the analyses of touch in *Ideas II* and his exorbitant confusion of non-coincidence with coincidence.

To appreciate the tenor of Merleau-Ponty's (1968, 27) account of touch it must be understood within the context of his task in *The Visible and the Invisible*: "a radical investigation of our belongingness to the world." Merleau-Ponty's radical investigation interrogates and pushes the limits of phenomenology and his ontology of the visible and the invisible complicates any simple distinction between inside and outside and, therefore, the relation of self to world (Toadvine and Embree 2002, 275). To investigate the inherent belonging together of self and world, Merleau-Ponty (1968, 118) maintains that we must "situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with ... [and] attend from within to the dehiscence which opens it to itself and us upon it." Merleau-Ponty harnesses the notions of chiasm, reversibility, and flesh to rethink the relation of self and world, as well as perceiver and perceived in terms of divergence, dehiscence, and differentiation.

Just as the seer is blind to her seeing and does not coincide with the visible, when her right hand touches her left hand they never reach coincidence. On the one hand, the touching never coincides with the touched; their coincidence necessarily "eclipses at the moment of realization" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 147–148). On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty insists that "my left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand" (*ibid.*). This formulation suggests an indefinitely deferred coincidence of the touching and the touched that may be marginalizing their non-coincidence. Further clarifying the chiasm, Merleau-Ponty maintains "there is not a coinciding by principle or a presumptive coinciding and a factual non-coinciding . . . but a privative non-coinciding, a coinciding from afar, a divergence, and something like a 'good error'" (1968, 124–125). According to Merleau-Ponty, a privative non-coinciding is a good error; indeed, this error is the condition of the possibility of sensibility.⁷

Derrida, ever skeptical of what phenomenology covers over, disagrees with Merleau-Ponty's assessment; a privative non-coinciding is not a good error. On the contrary, this formulation is an equivocation that speaks to "Merleau-Ponty's confusion, as well as the confusion of which he speaks ('confusion of self and other')" (TJLN, 195). Merleau-Ponty's confusion refers to his misinterpretation of Husserl's account of touch in *Ideas II*, but Derrida worries that Merleau-Ponty's confusion

suggests something more. The confusion of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is the confusion of self and other, of the perceiver and the perceived, and of non-coincidence *with* coincidence.

Derrida's reading is not surprising; after all, there is certainly evidence in *The Visible and the Invisible* to support his critique. On the exorbitant prioritization of coincidence Derrida asserts: "we re-encounter the movement that we had evoked – this experience of coincidence *with* non-coincidence, the coincidence of coincidence *with* non-coincidence – transferred to the order of (inconsequential) consequence or (interrupted) continuity in philosophical enunciations" (TJLN, 211). An experience of coincidence *with* non-coincidence would denote an ambiguous relation between the incarnate subject and the world; neither coincidence nor non-coincidence would be privileged in this formulation. The chiasm between the incarnate subject and the world, however, is constituted by an abortive reflexivity that renders non-coincidence in terms of an imminent coincidence. For Derrida, this equivocation is not *inconsequential* and he worries that the notions of chiasm, reversibility, and flesh indicate Merleau-Ponty's penchant for (imminent) coincidence and (interrupted) continuity. His preference seems to bestow an exorbitant privilege on possibility and presence to the detriment of impossibility and non-presence.⁸

Merleau-Ponty's earlier emphasis on ambiguity, that coincidence and non-coincidence are mutually relevant, can be distinguished from his later work that seems to be governed by an aporetic logic of *imminence*. Why is Derrida so critical of *imminence* if it will always eclipse at the moment of realization? An imminent coincidence confuses non-coincidence with coincidence. Imminence is, for Derrida, like a "repressed interruption" or "the *continual* interruption of an interruption, the negating upheaval of the interval, the death of *between*" (TJLN, 2). In other words, Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on imminence is akin to the death of heterogeneity. To fuse non-coincidence *with* coincidence runs the risk of effacing the irreducible heterogeneity and spacing that is constitutive of sensibility. By insisting on imminence, abortive reversibility, and a privative non-coinciding, Merleau-Ponty risks effacing the integrity of the chiasm. The pivotal question raised by Derrida's deconstruction is whether imminence allows for the irreducible interval that disrupts and parses out the circulation of sensibility. Derrida's concern is salient. After all, the chiasmic intertwining is "a pure, sensible reflexivity which always remains *imminent*" (TJLN, 212).

Merleau-Ponty certainly emphasizes imminence in his descriptions of the chiasmic intertwining of the perceiver and perceived. In the May 1960 working note, "Flesh of the world – Flesh of the body – Being," Merleau-Ponty (1968, 249) insists "I do not entirely succeed in touching myself touching . . . the experience I have of myself perceiving does not go beyond a sort of imminence." Merleau-Ponty is clear, the perceiver does not entirely coincide with the perceived; the circuit of auto-affection is necessarily disrupted. One must not overlook the import of imminence in that it fosters the presentiment of reflexive sensibility and grounds Merleau-Ponty's

conception of the chiasm as a privative non-coinciding. Does the presentiment of sensibility effectively efface the “irreducible spacing . . . for the hiatus of noncontact at the *very* heart of contact” (TJLN, 221)? The repeated motif of imminence ostensibly encroaches on the integrity of the hiatus or fissure at the heart of the chiasm. This encroachment seems to confirm Derrida’s criticism; Merleau-Ponty’s penchant for imminence and coincidence signal his failure to think the *with* of “non-coincidence with coincidence” in all its complexity. It is here that Merleau-Ponty seems to commit a transgression against alterity, allowing his inclination toward imminence to fall prey to the abiding tendency of phenomenology to cover over and reduce the heterogeneity that is constitutive of itself.

To examine the logic of imminence Derrida asks a series of questions, beginning with what counts most in imminence. Is it that imminence will be “forever breathless and disappointed” or that imminence is “incessantly chasing” an impossible crystallization of reflexivity (TJLN, 212)? These questions seek to clarify imminence, but is it possible they miss what counts most in imminence? Without imminence, there is no sensibility. Imminence fosters the proximity of the perceiver to the perceived yet its perpetual frustration maintains their distance. Imminence, as asymptotic, disrupts the circuit of sensibility and we must not forget that sensibility is, for Merleau-Ponty, born of hiatus, disruption, and divergence. To determine whether Merleau-Ponty falls prey to this fundamental problem of phenomenology we must remind ourselves of his conception of hiatus. The hiatus between the touching and the touched “is not an ontological void, a non-being; it is spanned [*enjambé*] by the total being of my body, and that of the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 148).

The *fullness* of the hiatus between the touching and the touched seems to support Derrida’s worry that Merleau-Ponty runs the risk of effacing non-coincidence. The hiatus between one moment of our tactile life to the next is not an ontological void, but instead gapes open and comes apart at the seams. The presentiment of coincidence and openness of flesh seem to detract from the impossibility of reversibility and pure reflexive sensibility, but Merleau-Ponty resists Derrida’s deconstruction in that alterity and heterogeneity are constitutive of sensibility. The perceiving and the perceived are intertwined, but never simply reducible to one other (cf. Reynolds 2004, xvii). To the extent that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes possibility and coincidence, Derrida’s concern that the chiasm reduces alterity to an imperialism of the same seems to be warranted. Yet Merleau-Ponty’s radical investigation of the relation of self to world in *The Visible and the Invisible* endeavors to grapple with this problematic tendency of phenomenology.

5. At the Threshold of Phenomenology

I have shown that Merleau-Ponty’s phrase “crystallization of the impossible” enables us to think through aporias in a more relational manner than does Derrida’s abiding

emphasis on impossibility. Derrida's deconstruction of the movement of temporalization in *Voice and Phenomenon* contests the possibility of pure auto-affection and reveals an ineradicable trace of non-presence. That the experience of auto-affection is irreducibly an experience of hetero-affection reveals pure auto-affection to be a crystallization of the impossible. We have learned from Merleau-Ponty, however, that a crystallization of the impossible is not a complete failure of phenomenology. On the contrary, this phrase brings us to the very threshold of phenomenology.

In a certain sense, we have seen that the thought of Derrida and Merleau-Ponty does converge on the aporia of sensibility. Sensibility, for both thinkers, emerges in a hiatus that disrupts pure auto-affection (cf. Murphy 2010, 436). Where their thought diverges, however, is in their understanding of hiatus (*écart*) and their respective compartments toward absence and alterity (cf. Lawlor 1997, 84). For his part, Merleau-Ponty leans toward possibility and intimacy. We have seen that a perpetually frustrated imminence is the hearth fire that fuels the chiasm and is understood by Merleau-Ponty as a privative non-coinciding. As the condition of the possibility of sensibility, a privative non-coinciding is akin to a good error. Derrida resists this reading of imminence and deems Merleau-Ponty's confused formulation to be an equivocation that renders non-coincidence in terms of coincidence. A privative non-coinciding is a double negation that effaces the alterity and heterogeneity of *non-coincidence*. Although he favors possibility, Merleau-Ponty does insist on a miscarriage in the transition from one moment of our perceptive life to the next. When understood in its very intimacy this miscarriage is not indicative of a failure; rather "it is only as though the hinge between them, solid, unshakeable, remained irremediably hidden from me" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 148). In this miscarriage, Derrida locates the confusion that exemplifies the exorbitant intimacy of Merleau-Ponty's late thought. In this way Derrida gives us insight into why he evades a phenomenology of perception and an ontology of flesh in the Merleau-Pontian style.

We have seen that Derrida's vigilance to alterity and respect for the aporetic renders him critical of Merleau-Ponty's notions of chiasm and flesh. These notions bring us to the very threshold of phenomenology and, for Derrida, veer dangerously close to an imperialism of the same. Of particular concern is the elemental notion of flesh, which Merleau-Ponty speaks of "by way of the recurring figures of *coiling* and *encroaching*" (TJLN, 212). Flesh coils over, fostering the sense of imminent reversibility, and, therefore, encroaching on the integrity of non-coincidence. Yet *at the same time* Merleau-Ponty insists on interruption, dehiscence, and differentiation. This simultaneity encroaches on the diaporetic moment, and Derrida reminds us that "we should thus be thinking *at the same time, simultaneously*, this spanning [*enjambement*] 'by the total being of my body,' and the whole interruption of what, precisely, lets itself neither be 'spanned' nor totalized, completed, or reflected" (TJLN, 213). Derrida's contribution to Merleau-Ponty's thought is to open us onto the disruptive experience of *différance*, which reveals non-presence as intrinsic to originary presence. In particular, Derrida investigates what eludes Merleau-Ponty's conception

of *écart* as a spread that spans one moment of our tactile life to the next. When Merleau-Ponty (1968, 148) insists on the presentiment of reversibility – “it is only as though . . . [the experience of reversibility] remained irremediably hidden from me” – we see that Derrida’s critique raises salient concerns.

The pivotal question, whether Derrida’s deconstruction applies to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception and ontology of the visible and the invisible, remains. Recall that Husserl’s blindness to the heterogeneity that is constitutive of phenomenology, an ineradicable trace of non-presence and non-originality, motivates Derrida’s engagement with Merleau-Ponty and informs his interpretations of certain threads of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty’s thought does resist Derrida’s deconstructive insight that Husserlian phenomenology contests itself from the inside. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (2012, 430) discusses the relation of inside to outside, arguing that “the interior and the exterior are inseparable. The world is entirely on the inside, and I am entirely outside of myself.” Here Merleau-Ponty clearly challenges any simple binary opposition of inside to outside and, therefore, the opposition of self to world. Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on ambiguity would also call into question Husserl’s radical distinction between the purity of expression and the mundanity of indication.

On the other hand, Derrida’s deconstruction raises important critical questions about the limits of phenomenology and ontology. Derrida is correct; Merleau-Ponty does admit of a preference for coincidence that is exemplified by his ontological characterization of the hiatus or fissure as a *place of belonging* and *embrace* rather than as an empty void. But we must not forget Merleau-Ponty’s endeavor in *The Visible and the Invisible* to rethink the relation of self to world in terms of chiasm, reversibility, and flesh. The tenor of his thought can be evinced in the December 1960 working note: “the body stands before the world and the world upright before it, and between them there is a relation that is one of *embrace*. And between these two vertical beings, there is not a frontier, but a contact surface” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 271, my emphasis). To embrace the hiatus as a place of belonging, requires “showing how the world is articulated starting from a zero of being which is not nothingness, . . . in installing oneself on the edge of being . . . at the joints, where the multiple entries of the world cross” (ibid.). What is happening at the fold of these chiasms is not so much a dance of coincidence and non-coincidence as an embrace between receptive partners, constituted by a profound sense of belonging. Thus, what Derrida’s criticism evades is the fullness of the embrace of belonging. It is within the concept of flesh that Merleau-Ponty pushes these aporias of perception to the very threshold of contact. Here we discover the intimate relation of self and world unfolding in what I refer to as an embrace of belonging. Derrida seems to overlook the embrace of belonging between self and world that is constitutive of perception.

At the very threshold of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty (1968, 130–131) rethinks the relation of self to world in the intimacy of an embrace between the seer

and the visible “as close as [that] between the sea and the strand.” Yet this embrace of belonging must be understood as a crystallization of the impossible. We must not confuse the complexity of intimacy with the simple reduction of the other to the same. Such a crystallization of the impossible is to be understood as an embrace belonging to the very threshold of phenomenology.

Notes

- 1 The phrase “crystallization of the impossible” appears in the March 1961 working note.
- 2 Reynolds’s sustained exegesis of four possible-impossible aporias, giving, hospitality, forgiveness, and mourning, raises questions about their efficacy. He uses Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the reversibility of self and world to challenge and reverse Derrida’s bias toward the impossible side of these aporias.
- 3 It is well known that Derrida’s engagement with Merleau-Ponty is sparse prior to the publication of *Memoirs of the Blind* in 1993 and there his remarks concerning Merleau-Ponty are quite brief. It is significant, however, that Derrida calls for an “entire rereading of the later Merleau-Ponty” in this text (MB, 52). Although Derrida never takes on this project, he does offer a sustained engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s work in Tangent III of *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2005).
- 4 Marratti (2005, 4) maintains that Husserl’s faithfulness to and respect for originary lived experience necessitates “that one take originary lived experience [*le vécu originaire*] as philosophy’s sole legitimate point of departure.”
- 5 Merleau-Ponty’s enigmatic description in *Sense and Non-Sense* (1964, 3) that expression “is like a step taken in the fog – no one can say where, if anywhere, it will lead,” intersects with Derrida’s reflections on blindness. Just as an artist leaps blindly across a hiatus of invisibility, she plunges boldly into artistic expression not knowing what, if anything, will come out of it. Drawing, as an impossible restitution of visibility, “*always* develops on the brink of blindness” (MB, 2–3). Blindness, for Derrida, is not merely a theme of drawing; on the contrary, blindness is *the* theme of drawing par excellence. Merleau-Ponty’s enigmatic simile emphasizes the paradoxical nature of expression and gestures to a link between blindness and expression. For more on Merleau-Ponty’s paradoxical notion of expression see Waldenfels (2000). Waldenfels’s explication of what it means to characterize expression as a paradox is particularly instructive.
- 6 Cf. Husserl (1999, 88–120). In the fifth meditation, Husserl privileges the double sensation as the transcendental clue to alterity insofar as it opens us onto an experience of the dual status of the body that falls within the purview of the pure transcendental ego. We can experience the body not merely as *Körper* (a physical body) but as *Leib* (living and lived body). For Husserl, the double sensation allows the ego to develop bodily self-awareness, and through reflection the body’s tacit experience of alterity at play in the double sensation can be rendered explicit. This experience has the potential to open the transcendental ego onto the analogical apperception of transcendental intersubjectivity. Derrida’s concern in Tangent III, however, is focused on Merleau-Ponty’s misappropriation of *Ideas II*.

- 7 Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968, 9). The last-minute failure of the touching to coalesce with the touched is something like a good error because the miscarriage maintains the integrity of the chiasm. Merleau-Ponty is clear, that which perceives cannot perceive itself perceiving. He insists “the moment perception comes my body effaces itself before it and never does the perception grasp the body in the act of perceiving. . . . But this last minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch myself touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it . . . it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives [*même si ce n’est jamais lui qu’il perçoit ou lui qui le perçoit*].”
- 8 Another place we can examine the prioritization of presence is in the problematic of writing and speech. As we have seen, Husserlian phenomenology endeavors to secure the purity of expression via a reduction to the phenomenological voice, i.e., the solitary life of the soul, and Derrida deconstructs this move in *Voice and Phenomenon*. A key component of the deconstruction is the inevitable introduction of writing, which secures “the constitution of ideal objects” and therefore also the potency of expression, i.e., its ideal repetition of the same (VP, 69). Ultimately, Derrida argues that the possibility of writing “inhabits the inside of speech” (VP, 70). For his part, Merleau-Ponty clearly privileges speech but at the same time he is cognizant that the constitution of ideal objects requires the introduction of writing. After all, in “Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology” Merleau-Ponty asserts that “it is writing which *once and for all* translates the meaning of spoken words into ideal being” (1988, 187). Yet he clearly prioritizes speech insofar as he insists that the appearance of writing is an “essential mutation in speech” (ibid.). Why Merleau-Ponty gives priority to speech becomes clearer when we turn to *The Prose of the World* where he asserts: “the distinct existence of systems of speech and of the significations which they intend belongs to the order of perception or of the present, and not to the order of the idea or the eternal” (2000, 40). Here we observe Merleau-Ponty forging a kinship between speech and perception: they both belong to the order of the *present*. In contrast, Derrida emphasizes writing in order to deconstruct the phenomenological primacy of speech and the prioritization of presence. His deconstruction does not stop with the retrieval of writing, as though the dynamic between speech and writing simply needs reversing, but goes on to show that prioritization itself is a flawed way of thinking. Yet Merleau-Ponty maintains that perception, and therefore speech, are both primary – “perception inaugurates an order and founds an institution” (2000, 79) – and inexhaustible – perception is “never *finished*” (56). Given the primacy of perception, I would suggest that a more thoroughgoing inclusion of writing in Merleau-Ponty’s work would not have come to the same deconstructive conclusion. One example of Merleau-Ponty’s approach to writing is his emphasis on literature. In *The Prose of the World*, “The novelist speaks to his reader – as every man does to another man – the language of the initiated, namely those who are initiated into a world, to the universe of possibilities that belong to a human body and a human life” (2000, 89). Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on possibility, embodiment, and world are precisely what Derrida approaches with skepticism. As Derrida maintains at the close of *Voice and Phenomenon*, “contrary to what phenomenology – which is always a phenomenology of perception – has tried to make us believe . . . the thing itself,” presence, “always steals away” (VP, 89). For Derrida,

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on speech and perception reveals his entrenchment in the phenomenological prioritization of presence; "soaring up to the sun of presence, it is the path of Icarus" (VP, 89).

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The Politics of Writing: Derrida and Althusser

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“Writing” in Derrida’s texts is part of an open-ended chain of non-synonymous substitutions, including “différance,” the “supplement,” and the “trace,” which function as “quasi-transcendental” conditions of possibility and impossibility (of phenomena, philosophical theories, ontologies amongst others).¹ Their status as “quasi-transcendental” helps explain why Derrida refuses any one absolute priority. By substituting one for the other in his different books and articles, Derrida avoids the classic metaphysical move of proposing a “master concept.” For this reason we should be wary about attributing to “writing” such a status in his work. Nevertheless, as the first (chronologically) of that chain, writing has a privileged status. Derrida’s turn to writing even preceded his first formulation of “différance” though the delay was short, and the chronology is tortuous (see Baring 2011, ch. 6). Indeed in Derrida’s own presentation of his career, he placed considerable importance on what he termed the “grammatological opening” produced by his thematization of writing over the summer of 1965 (POS, 4). From the mid-1960s onward, writing became a near obsession for Derrida, the focus of his analysis in *Of Grammatology*, *Voice and Phenomena*, *Writing and Difference*, and then in his monumental *Glas*, among others. Writing extended even further, for it provided a gathering point for Derrida’s twin interests in literature and philosophy. Here his reading of Jabès, Artaud, Joyce, and Genet met his readings of Plato, Hegel, Rousseau, and Heidegger.

The thematization of writing has often been seen as Derrida’s personal contribution to modern philosophy, but it is significant that in his earliest extended discussions of it, he presented it as a sign of the times. Referring to his own moment, the mid-1960s, Derrida argued that what had been “gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the

name of writing” (OGC, 6). In presenting writing thus, Derrida invites us to contextualize his argument, to place it within the broader academic discourse in France in the 1960s.

Despite the extensive literature on Derrida’s work, very few scholars have attempted such a contextual analysis. This reticence can be traced to Derrida’s own critical comments about contextualization in “Signature, Event, Context” (1971) and other essays. It also results in part from the conventional discretion within French, especially Parisian, academic debate; in the relatively small world of Francophone philosophy, references to contemporary authors were more often than not implicit. But given Derrida’s constant engagement with the work of others, and his well-documented anxiety about how his friends and colleagues perceived his work, it is remarkable that so little Derrida scholarship has paid attention to the ways in which he responded to the work of his contemporaries.

A contextual approach to Derrida’s formulation of “writing” foregrounds the politics of his work in two ways. First, it shows how Derrida’s early texts participated in the intellectual politics of 1960s Paris. As we shall see, in thematizing writing, Derrida simultaneously aligned his work with one of the most important and influential philosophical movements in the French capital, structuralist Marxism, *and* furnished himself with the means to challenge its fundamental principles. The classic deconstructive gesture of radical criticism through faithful reading guided his engagement with those in his immediate context. Second, and in consequence, a contextual approach allows us to read Derrida’s work as an intervention in contemporaneous political debates. For, to many of his students and colleagues structuralist Marxism was not simply an abstract intellectual exercise; it informed their concrete political strategies and contributed to the general politicization of French students in the lead up to 1968. Though it has been common to criticize Derrida for being apolitical, in the highly charged atmosphere of 1960s Paris, his seemingly abstract meditations had immediate political resonances.

1. The Three Rs at the École

Derrida provides his most canonical formulation of writing in the 1965/6 “Of Grammatology” articles, republished with an extended discussion of Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau in the 1967 book of the same name. The articles were Derrida’s first major publication after he had assumed his teaching position at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) in 1964, and the ideas he presented there were marked by the political and intellectual climate of that elite institution of higher learning.² For Derrida’s meditations on “archi-écriture” participated in a broader Normalien project of reimagining the most basic intellectual acts: what we might call the “three Rs” to recall the “three Hs” – Husserl, Heidegger, and Hegel – whose work had such an impact on postwar French philosophy in general, and Derrida’s thought in particular

(see Descombes 1979, 4). The similarity of the two terms is fortuitous because as we shall see, reading, writing, and arithmetic were investigated at the ENS in part because they allowed a questioning of phenomenology in all of its guises.

In the ENS curriculum, we cannot divide up the “three Rs” neatly. Lacan’s claim that the “unconscious was structured like a language” drew on the resources of mathematics. Althusser’s attempt to formulate a new theory of reading was, as he made clear, intimately connected to a new theory of writing, and he took mathematics as a privileged model (see Peden 2012). And Derrida too, while concentrating his attention on the formulation of “archi-writing,” drew constant parallels to the non-phonetic mathematical symbol, and remarked upon the impact that this theory of writing should have for the practice of reading (OGC, 86–87).

Meditations on the three Rs were not restricted to the faculty at the ENS. To see how they influenced the students, one only need look at a few representative articles from the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, the student-run philosophy journal at the ENS that brought work by Derrida alongside articles written by Normaliens and other thinkers like Michel Foucault, Georges Canguilhem, Luce Irigaray, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Lacan. Here, what one could label the two bookend essays, Jacques-Alain Miller’s “The Suture” and Alain Badiou’s “Mark and Lack,” in their very opposition show how the appeal to writing and mathematics crossed otherwise deep philosophical divisions (Miller 1966; Badiou 1969). In his reading of Frege’s *Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, Miller argued that “zero” was the mark of a lack, the self-identical sign “0” standing in for the lack of an object conforming to the concept “non-self-identical.” Since the sign “0” was self-identical, unlike the thing it signified, it could be counted. Through the iteration of this process, according to Miller, the integers 1, 2, 3 (etc.) could be constructed. Alain Badiou criticized Miller for failing to appreciate the stratified nature of mathematical discourse. For Badiou the “0” was not the “mark of a lack,” but rather the “lack of a mark,” the recognition in one layer of the lack of a written symbol in another. It made no reference to the non-self-identical.

As the Badiou/Miller debate makes clear, there was no consensus at the ENS on these issues, and discussion pitted Althusserians against Lacanians, and Derrida against both. But the reference to the written sign and mathematics provided a common frame in which differences were aired and negotiated. Indeed in his publications from the mid-1960s, Derrida’s thematization of writing guided his engagement with his colleagues and students. In “Freud and the Scene of Writing” (1966) Derrida used Freud’s “Notes on the Mystic Writing Pad” (1925) to contribute to debates amongst Lacanians about the status of the unconscious. In the “Ends of Man” (1968) he used writing to negotiate the anti-humanism then current amongst his students. And, as I have shown elsewhere, his analysis of writing in Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau in the second half of *Of Grammatology* (1967) responded directly to similar readings undertaken at the ENS at the time (Baring 2012).

In this essay, I would like to focus on Derrida’s discussion of writing in the first part of *Of Grammatology* and provide an analysis of its stakes by bringing it into

conversation with Althusser's new theory of reading. I privilege Althusser for a number of reasons. When Derrida took up his position at the ENS in 1964, Althusser was the most powerful figure in the philosophy department. Lacan had only recently commenced his seminar at the ENS, and then at Althusser's behest. Previously the only *caïman* (tutor) in philosophy, Althusser exercised a significant influence over a large portion of the student body. As Clément Rosset later recalled, though Althusser never tried to "inculcate" his students with his philosophy, many still slavishly followed his work: "the subjugated ear of the faithful to a master" (Rosset 1992, 13).

Althusser's influence was magnified by the perceived political import of his research. Though Althusser always remained a member of the Communist Party, his criticism of the PCF's official "humanism" in the 1965 *For Marx* captured the imagination of many of his students, who participated in the growing enthusiasm for Chinese Communism in the 1960s, a revived revolutionary mood in an era of Party revisionism and reformism. As Julian Bourg has shown, in the mid-1960s "Althusserianism became a veritable phenomenon among left-leaning students" (Bourg 2005; see also Robcis 2012).

But Althusser was also personally important for Derrida. Althusser had been *caïman* when Derrida entered the ENS as a student in 1952, and the two men had had a close relationship ever since. Moreover, Althusser had engineered Derrida's hiring at the ENS in 1964 at the end of his contract as Assistant at the Sorbonne. Whatever the differences in political and theoretical outlook, Derrida was bound to Althusser by a personal debt. Indeed the personal and professional connections between the two men meant that these differences could not be simply ignored. Derrida before 1965 had made his name as a phenomenologist and phenomenology was one of the key targets of Althusser's philosophy. Moreover, while Althusser and his students embraced a radical Communist political program, Derrida remained at best ambivalent about the Communist project. Though Derrida did not refer once to Althusser in *Of Grammatology*, it can be read as an attempt to work through the older man's ideas and to confront their shared students on both political and philosophical planes.

2. Mathematical Writing

In thematizing writing in the "Of Grammatology" articles, Derrida did not open a completely new horizon in his thought. Rather he was able to draw on resources developed in his 1962 "Introduction" to and translation of Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*. Derrida's first publication, the "Introduction" was a contribution to the history and philosophy of science, a fact recognized by the Société des Amis de Jean Cavailles, which awarded it their book prize in 1964. Derrida's argument in his "Introduction" is complex and constitutes a radical criticism of many assumptions common to the philosophers of science at the time, but it can be read as an intervention in the

contemporaneous debate about the value of phenomenology for understanding the history of mathematics.

In this debate writing was a standard reference. Writing, especially mathematical writing, for instance in algebra, seemed to represent best the formal systems of mathematics. The written sign comprised two absences: of the object and of the subject. First, the written sign, say “ \times ” in an equation, stood in for an absent object, an absence that facilitated algebraic manipulation (see Martin 1964, 6; Bachelard 1958, 16–18). As Gilles Gaston Granger noted in 1960: “the form of the scientific object does not directly concern sensible content, but language” (1960, 12). Second, writing marked the absence of the author, and thus provided a precondition for mathematics’ objectivity: the mathematical operation functioned according to rules that were independent of the person performing them. Jean Ladrière, a philosopher of science based at the University of Louvain, suggested in 1957: “In the objective language that constitutes the formal system . . . the movement of speech retires, leaving the elements of the discourse to themselves, in a dispersion which permits us to consider them on their own account” (1957, 434–439). This process was also central to Granger’s account. Pre-empting Derrida’s similar formulation by almost a decade, Granger wrote that to understand the role of writing in the construction of formal systems and thus of science, it would be necessary to “[reverse] the relations between oral language and writing” (1960, 50).³ Rigorous truth drew more from the de-subjectifying and formalizing process of writing than the bound intuitive sense of speech. Such considerations guided Derrida’s analysis of writing, in the famous seventh section of the “Introduction.” Like other philosophers of science, Derrida discusses the two absences of writing, of the object and the subject.⁴ Speaking for many, Derrida asserted that “writing . . . is the condition *sine qua non* of Objectivity’s internal accomplishment” (IOG, 88–89).

But Derrida did not think that writing was sufficient on its own. By the very fact that writing liberated meaning from its “*present* existence for a real subject,” it opened up the possibility of “passivity, forgetfulness, and all the phenomena of the *crisis*” (IOG, 87). Derrida understood the “crisis” in Husserl’s sense, that is, as the uprooting of the formal systems of mathematics from their intuitive ground. Writing thus produced the possibility of a transcendental “*disappearance* of truth” (IOG, 93).⁵ Without intentional reanimation, the meaning of the symbols could be lost. According to this argument, with the passage of time a note we jotted down on a piece of paper could become indecipherable to us. Writing instigated a passivity and an automatism that Derrida distrusted.

The argument repeats Husserl’s in the *Crisis* texts, and was commonly cited by other phenomenologically inclined epistemologists in the late 1950s and early 1960s like Suzanne Bachelard and Jean Ladrière. But the appeal to intuition and reanimating intentionality confronted a significant problem. Ever since Jean Cavailles’s classic work *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science* (1944), many epistemologists like Jules Vuillemin and Roger Martin had been skeptical about such appeals. An autonomous

and unchanging source would act as a brake to the formal development of mathematics that these philosophers identified in its history. If mathematics were ultimately authorized by a reactivation of an original intuition, one that was ahistorical, then the mathematics that it authorized would be essentially ahistorical too (see Cavailles 1947, 86; Vuillemin 1962, 478; Martin 1964, 190).

Derrida's reading of Husserl's presentation of writing can be seen as a response to this criticism. He too rejected Husserl's attempt to reduce completely the equivocality of writing to arrive at a pure and unique meaning. As he noted, following Cavailles and others, such univocity would stall (or render irrelevant) the history of mathematics. But rather than using this as a reason for discarding the phenomenological project, Derrida aimed to recast it as historical. In *The Origin of Geometry* Husserl presented the univocal reactivation of writing only as an ideal or telos, relying on a Kantian "infinite idea" (IOG, 105). And as Derrida explained in the final section of his "Introduction," the appeal to an infinite idea, one simultaneously expressed through transcendental historicity and acting as the "telos" of that historicity, opens up the possibility of history (IOG, 148–150). It saved phenomenology from the ahistoricity that had caused philosophers like Vuillemin and Cavailles to reject Husserl's work. Writing then encapsulated some of the central problems of phenomenology, but provided an occasion (and in his "Introduction" Derrida described at least three others) for recrafting phenomenological intuition to meet those criticisms.

3. Two Theories of Reading and Writing

When Derrida came to the ENS, however, he confronted a more wide-ranging and totalizing criticism of phenomenology. No longer was Husserl's intuition questionable because it stalled the history of mathematics by anchoring it to an unchanging origin. Rather for many students in the ENS, and in particular for their teacher Louis Althusser, the appeal to intuition *per se* relinquished phenomenology to ideology. To confront this criticism Derrida would have to rework his understanding of writing, no longer simply to explain the necessity of the transcendental, but to absorb it.

Althusser's argument against phenomenology received its most influential formulation in his contribution to *Reading Capital*, a book which emerged out of a seminar he taught in the ENS from 1964 to 1965, and which in the first edition contained papers written by him, alongside essays by Pierre Macherey, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, and Roger Establet, all recently graduated students. In his opening piece, Althusser elaborated two different theories of reading: an old "theological" version that aimed to read an essence in appearance, and a new scientific reading concerned with how knowledges were "produced."

The old "theological" theory of reading, and its secular version governed by the "empiricist conception of knowledge," judged a text by its success in expressing

reality, of getting at the “essence” of the real. It achieved this by “abstracting” from experience, separating the rational kernel of the real from the inessential “dross.” Althusser presented this form of reading as “theological” because it found its model in “religious fantasies.” In the Bible it was God’s word, or “the Logos,” that inhabited scripture and that had to be read out of it (Althusser 1965, 35). As Althusser wrote, the theological form of reading made “a written discourse the immediate transparency of the true, and the real the discourse of a voice.” A reading was successful to the extent that it was able to reach through the words and hear this voice and it failed when it remained “blind” to it; it could thus be characterized as a collection of “sights and oversights” (1965, 16–19).

The “theological” form of reading corresponded to what Althusser called ideology, which was structured by the ideal of a direct relation between the “object of knowledge,” constructed in the text, and the “real object” existing in the world (1965, 52–53). By extension, systems of knowledge or theories were declared to be true insofar as they existed in a “one-to-one correspondence” with reality, a correspondence verified by an appeal to experience. But Althusser doubted whether experience was sufficiently reliable that it could act as the guarantee for knowledge. Because experience was posited as an appeal outside the system of knowledge, it could not be disciplined by it. It was at best a merely subjective criterion, and produced knowledge that tended to maintain existing social, economic, and economic structures.

It is in the context of the theological form of reading that Althusser discussed Husserl. Husserl represented the “high point” of “ideological philosophy.” He wanted a “harmony” between his “object of knowledge” and the “real object” for which he sought “guarantees.” Husserl found these guarantees in the conformity of the object of knowledge to a pre-reflexive *Lebenswelt*, a realm of immediate experience from which that knowledge had supposedly first emerged. Phenomenology was thus structured by a “myth of origin,” an “original unity undivided . . . between the real and its knowledge,” which gave the phenomenologist a standard by which he or she could assess that knowledge (Althusser 1965, 52–57, 62–63). But for Althusser, Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* succumbed to the same problems as other appeals to experience. It tried to secure scientific knowledge by rooting it in an extra-scientific and subjective sphere; it could only provide ideological assurance.

In contrast, the second, “symptomatic” form of reading broke with this supposed complicity with the Logos. It no longer judged a theory by its ability to express an external reality, to read out the signified hidden behind the signifier, the “real” object hidden in its appearances. No longer did “a voice (the Logos)” speak through a text. Rather a text was the “inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures,” and it was the task of reading to reconstruct that structure (Althusser 1965, 17). For this reason it examined the ways in which theories (both ideological and scientific) *produced* knowledge. Theories, or rather the “field of their problematic,” determined what was visible and invisible:

The sighting is thus no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of “vision” which he exercises either attentively or distractedly; the sighting is the act of its structural conditions, it is the relation of immanent reflection between the field of the problematic and *its* objects and *its* problems. Vision then loses the religious privileges of divine reading: it is no more than a reflection of the immanent necessity that ties an object or problem to its conditions of existence, which lie in the conditions of its production. (Althusser 1965, 25)

According to a symptomatic reading, experience was not the foundation and guarantee of a theory; such theories generated experience.

The second form of reading corresponded to what Althusser called “science.”⁶ Unlike ideology science was not structured by reference to the real world. As Étienne Balibar would write later in the book, referring to Marx’s science: it “completely *abolishes* the problem of ‘reference,’ of the empirical designation of the object of a theoretical knowledge” (Balibar 1965, 249). Instead Althusser suggested that the object of knowledge and the real object were absolutely distinct, and the production process for each was carried out “according to a *different order*,” one in thought, the other in reality (Althusser 1965, 41).

In place of a referential theory of truth, which provided an external measure against which knowledge could be assessed, science prioritized internal “mechanisms” or distinct “practices” that validated the knowledge it produced (Althusser 1965, 56). The model of such a scientific discourse was mathematics. As Althusser wrote, “no mathematician in the world waits until physics has *verified* a theorem to declare it proved, although whole areas of mathematics are applied in physics: the truth of his theorem is a hundred per cent provided by criteria purely *internal* to the practice of mathematical proof, hence by the *criterion of mathematical practice*.” So too Marx’s science of history was not justified by its success in application but by its conformity to the criteria of his theoretical practice, mechanisms of demonstration and proof (59). Science and ideology thus had different, in Althusser’s terms, “knowledge effects,” ways in which knowledge “appropriated” or “grasped” the real world (66).

The two forms of reading mapped onto Althusser’s distinction between the early and the late Marx, separated by an “epistemological break.” The young Marx, Althusser insisted, followed the old way of reading, for which

to know the essence of things, the essence of the historical human world, of its economic, political, aesthetic, and religious production, was simply to *read* (*lesen, herauslesen*) in black and white the presence of the “abstract” essence in the transparency of its “concrete” existence. (Althusser 1965, 16)

Thus in the 1844 manuscripts, Marx was able to “read” Man’s alienated essence in the capitalist economy, just as Feuerbach had been able to read it in God. The later

Marx, however, read in a different way, separating the object of knowledge from the real object. Though, as Althusser conceded, he was never able to formulate it directly, Marx's mature work produced the "concept of the efficacy of a structure on its elements" (1965, 29).

Althusser's opposition between the theological form of reading governed by referentiality and a new form of reading governed by internal structural criteria provided the unacknowledged background to Derrida's argument in *Of Grammatology*.⁷ Indeed the two forms of writing, which Derrida outlines in the first part of the book, map closely onto Althusser's two forms of reading. First, Derrida presented a "theological" form of writing. Like Althusser's version, it was "theological" because it could trace its history back to Christian theology, where divine writing was believed to express the object thought in the "eternal present of the divine logos" (OGC, 73). So too in its secular manifestation this theory of writing was structured by its reference to a signified, situated outside of the system of language, and it had as its ideal the absolute presence of that signified.

For this reason, according to Derrida, "logocentrism" expressed itself in the teleology of "phonetic writing." Since from this perspective, speech was "closest to the signified," writing remained secondary to and derivative of it, judged by how faithfully it could reproduce the spoken word (OGC, 11). "Good" writing would then be "not grammatological but pneumatological": "immediately united to the voice and to breath" (OGC, 17). The priority attributed to speech led Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of structural linguistics and the subject of the first half of Derrida's book, to exclude writing from his general semiology. The spoken word was "a unity of sense and sound, of concept and voice, or, to speak a more rigorously Saussurian language, of the signified and the signifier," but writing was merely a signifier of a signifier, exterior to the proper functioning of language (OGC, 31). And though Derrida did not use the term ideology, in the opening pages of his book he related phonetic writing to "ethnocentrism," which was for Althusser an ideology par excellence (OGC, 3).

In laying out his argument, Derrida adopts, at least at first, the Althusserian interpretation of Husserl. As in 1962, Derrida refers to the "two absences" in writing – of the object and subject – and explains how they were "linked with the very moment of truth and the production of ideal objectivity." And as before, Derrida makes a connection between writing and crisis:

The *empty* symbolism of the written notation – in mathematical technique for example – is also for Husserlian intuitionism that which exiles us from far from the *clear* evidence of the sense, that is to say from the full presence of the signified in its truth. (OGC, 40–41)

But while in 1962 this posed a problem to be addressed (one admittedly with significant implications for Husserl's philosophy), now Derrida follows Althusser and

suggests that Husserl's appeal to intuition marks his work as ideological. Husserl, Derrida argues, was gripped by a logocentric idea of writing.

In contrast to the theological version of writing, Derrida presented a broader form, "writing in general" or later "archi-writing," that was not disciplined by the idea of an ultimately present truth, of a divine logos, nor structured by the telos of a phonetic writing. Detached from this hierarchy, the "signifier of a signifier" no longer "defines accidental doubling and fallen secondarity" because "there is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language" (OGC, 7). Here Derrida appropriated Althusser's criticism of origins, his rejection of any primordial unity of signifier and signified as the guarantor of truth, and proposed that the interrelation of signifiers had priority over their referential relationship to the real: "relations and not appellations" (OGC, 26). Further, this writing, like Althusser's, had a privileged relationship to science. Derrida labeled his discussion of it "Grammatology as a positive science," and he identified the "practice of science," and mathematics in particular, as particular challenges to logocentrism, because they invoked "from the beginning and ever increasingly" non-phonetic writing (OGC, 3).

The upshot of this version of writing was that, as in Althusser's case, it provided a general theory of the theological model. Every form of language, including speech is, according to Derrida, "only a moment, an essential but determined mode, a phenomenon, an aspect, a species of writing" (OGC, 8).⁸ Writing simultaneously underwrites a speech to which it was supposedly auxiliary, and undercuts speech, by disrupting the apparent identity between signifier and signified that had previously been seen as its defining characteristic.

4. The Movement Between Two Forms

The comparison between the two men is striking. Both outlined two forms of reading/writing, a theological version guided by the ideal of the absolute unity of signified and signifier/real object and object of knowledge, and another which had freed itself from ideology and foregrounded structuring principles. But it is where they are closest that we can best see the extent and stakes of their differences. Both men, in explaining the movement between these two theories, adopted parallel presentations. For both traced the new theory to an internal production of the classical system.

Althusser presented Marx's new way of reading in his ability to see the gaps in the work of the classical political economists. He paid particular attention to the way in which Marx analyzed Adam Smith's claim that "the value of labor is equal to the value of the subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of labor." As it stood the statement seemed nonsense (can labor be "maintained" or "reproduced"?). Marx saw that though Smith seemed to be talking about "labor," his statement only made sense if his analyses were an answer to the question "what is

labor-power?” No longer concerned with the value of the work itself, the classical political economists had surreptitiously moved to discuss the means necessary to keep the worker functioning (Althusser 1965, 20–24). In making this shift, classical economists like Smith and Ricardo had “produced” a new object. As Althusser rewrote the phrase: “The value of labor (power) is equal to the value of the subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of labor (power)” (1965, 22).⁹

Derrida saw in the work of the classical linguists similar gaps that needed to be filled. He read the new object of “grammatology” in the silences of Saussure’s texts. Mirroring Althusser’s own presentation, Derrida rewrote Saussure, replacing the word “semiology”:

I shall call it [grammatology]. . . . Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of that general science . . . ; the laws discovered by [grammatology] will be applicable to linguistics. (OGC, 51)¹⁰

The near identical presentation corresponds to the comparable function it fulfills in both cases. For both Derrida and Althusser the new object had been produced *within* classical theory: Smith and Saussure’s texts demanded to be revised. And yet these revisions profoundly disrupted that theory. As Althusser wrote, the production of the new object of knowledge would provide the “wherewithal” not simply to “modify the old theory *at one point*” but to “revolutionize *all* economics” (1965, 25). For Derrida the thought of writing or of the trace points “beyond the field of the *epistémè*” (OGC, 93). For this reason the new object had been unreadable, “forbidden” within the old theory (Althusser 1965, 26). Simultaneously visible and invisible, according to Althusser, it was what “the classical economists did not see while seeing it,” while for Derrida it was “what Saussure saw without seeing, knew without being *able* to take into account” (Althusser 1965, 23; OGC, 43).

But the two examples diverge in a number of important ways, not least according to the difference between reading and writing.¹¹ Althusser focused his analysis on Marx’s reading. He wanted to know how Marx was able to see (read) what the classical economists could not. That is, he paid attention to the “knowledge effect,” what determined the object as an object of knowledge. Crucially, for Althusser the “knowledge effect” was completely independent of and indifferent to the process by which the object of knowledge was produced, just as the process by which a mathematical theorem had been discovered was irrelevant to its truth-value (1965, 67). Classical economics may have produced “surplus value” but that production played no role in Marx’s identification of it as an object of knowledge.

Marx was able to see something that Smith could not, because he had accomplished a “change of terrain,” and so in his analysis Althusser compared two distinct structures and problematics: Marx’s and Smith’s. Moreover, Althusser refused to

thematize this change of terrain; he took it simply “for a fact, without any claim to analyze the mechanism that unleashed it and completed it” (1965, 27). This lacuna in his work was understandable, because Althusser had elsewhere argued against continuous or progressive history, asserting rather “radical discontinuities,” “epistemological breaks” between science and ideology (1965, 44).

In contrast, Derrida took as his focus “writing.” He wanted to know how the classical linguists had been able to produce (write) what they simultaneously had to exclude. After showing how Saussure remained wedded to the metaphysics of presence and the old teleological model of phonetic writing, Derrida dedicated the longest section of the first part of the book, “The Outside Is [crossed out] the Inside,” to explain how and why the object of grammatology appeared within the work of the classical linguists, and especially Saussure, regardless. In other words, Derrida addressed precisely what Althusser had put to one side.

Derrida noted all those places in Saussure’s work where “writing” cropped up. Saussure in his *Course in Linguistics* used the model of writing in order to illustrate certain essential characteristics of language, including its arbitrariness (the purely conventional relationship of a letter to its sound), its negative and differential nature (the letter *t* is defined by its difference from all other letters), and hence the inconsequence of variations in form and material (it does not matter how and where *t* is written, as long as it is still distinguishable from the rest of the alphabet) (OGC, 52).

Such appeals, according to Derrida, were necessary, because of the philosophical proximity of a traditional understanding of writing to the major claim of Saussure’s linguistics. As understood within the metaphysical tradition, speech was the immediate unity of signifier and signified; it seemed to privilege a referential understanding of language by making that relationship primary. In contrast, within the logocentric enclosure writing represented difference, detachment from the signified. Writing better modeled the importance of difference for the creation of linguistic value that Saussure prioritized. As Derrida wrote: “If I persist in calling that difference writing, it is because within the work of historical repression, writing was, by its situation, destined to signify the most formidable difference” (OGC, 56). Despite Saussure’s explicit prioritization of speech over writing, he was unable to do without the latter in his account of the former. In this way, Saussure produced “archi-writing” from within the logocentric problematic.

By showing how elements of Saussure’s system deconstructed it from within, Derrida refused Althusser’s simple assertion of a “change of terrain.” In the 1968 essay “The Ends of Man” Derrida denied that one could bypass the metaphysics of presence in such a way. The claim that one had “changed terrain” eclipsed the fact that the language one used often remained uncriticized, beholden to the old problematic, and this undermined the radicality of the shift. As Derrida elaborated, “the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the ‘new’ terrain on the oldest ground” (MP, 135). In particular as I will suggest, despite Althusser’s claim that he

had made a break with ideology, Derrida would have considered that his use of the terms “real object,” “object of knowledge,” and “science” bound his analyses to the ideological framework he had hoped to overcome.

Derrida’s account of the production of “grammatology,” in contrast, directly thematized this question of language. As we have seen, in his discussion of “writing” he explained why the old word was necessary (what he would later call “paleonymy”), even if in working through the concept it would become dramatically different to what it had been within the logocentric enclosure. As Derrida wrote, the unavoidability of paleonymy meant that it was “necessary to surround the critical concepts with a careful and thorough discourse – to mark the conditions, the medium, and the limits of their effectiveness and to designate rigorously their intimate relationship to the machine whose deconstruction they permit” (OGC, 14).

Even as the deconstruction of Saussure’s logocentrism relied on the concepts of writing, of the signifier, and the signified and thus of science, it also required their transformation. As we saw, presenting writing as the “signifier of the signifier,” Derrida was able to challenge the notion of a “transcendental signified” upon which logocentrism relied, by showing that it was a trace too. But because the term “signifier” (and hence writing) remained marked by its opposition to the “signified,” the deconstructive operation did not leave “writing” unchanged. No longer simply the “signifier of the signifier,” Derrida argued that archi-writing “founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible, then between the signifier and signified, expression and content” (OGC, 63).

Such a reformulation also brought into question the meaning of “science.” Science, Derrida argued, depended upon “a certain kind of structurally and axiologically determined relationship between speech and writing,” more specifically the idea of phonetic writing. And since archi-writing preceded and constituted this division between writing and speech, it couldn’t simply be studied by science: “Before being its object, writing is the condition of the *episteme*.” As Derrida posed the problem: “The science of writing should . . . look for its object at the roots of scientificity. . . . A science of the possibility of science? A science of science that would no longer have the form of *logic* but that of *grammatics*?” (OGC, 27). As the common condition of the sensible and the intelligible, grammatology “risks destroying the concept of science,” which was built on their opposition (OGC, 74).

The critical edge of this argument was clear. Because he had not subjected his language to sufficient critique, Althusser remained bound by the ideological problematic he hoped to escape. More particularly, Althusser only distinguished science from ideology by relying on the opposition between the real object and the object of knowledge, signified and signifier. Ideology presupposed a one-to-one referential relationship between the two, whereas science did not. But according to Derrida, the opposition between signifier and signified only made sense within logocentrism and hence the “theological” theory of reading/writing. Hence Althusser’s scientific form

of reading did not enact the radical break from ideology that he imagined. Althusser's rejection of reference remained just as ideological as its embrace by previous philosophers, because it was equally structured by the signifier/signified dyad.

Derrida's implicit criticism of Althusser had considerable consequences, in particular for readings of phenomenology. Whereas Althusser condemned the appeal beyond structure – in Husserl's case, to phenomenological intuition – as ideological, Derrida used writing to rehabilitate phenomenology within the structuralist framework. Derrida suggested that just as the origin was already a trace, Husserl's transcendental was already a sign.¹² The differences between Derrida and Althusser are clearest in Derrida's discussion of Louis Hjelmslev, the Danish theorist of glossematics. In the context of *Of Grammatology* Hjelmslev can be read as a proxy for Althusser, for by concentrating on formal systems, like Althusser, Hjelmslev refused any appeal beyond the "irreducible immanence of the linguistic system" and in particular to "experience" (OGC, 60).

But for Derrida "experience" was absolutely central. From a phenomenological standpoint formal systems had no validity if they were not grounded in the "experience" of the transcendental sphere. Derrida considered that the presentation of formal systems was itself an "experience." Without a reference to this more fundamental experience (which put what was traditionally understood as experience "in parentheses"), Derrida claimed that "the decisive progress accomplished by a formalism respectful of the originality of its object, of 'the immanent system of its objects,' [would be] plagued by a scientificist objectivism, that is to say by another unperceived or unconfessed metaphysics" (OGC, 61). Hjelmslev's and Althusser's claims, by rejecting lived experience, threatened to bring about Husserl's crisis of the sciences.

Althusser and Hjelmslev's retort would have been that this appeal to experience was necessarily ideological, because by reaching beyond the formal system of signifiers, it sought to ground science in the vagaries of undisciplined and prejudicial subjectivity. But because in Derrida's schema, this transcendental was already structured by archi-writing, it did not conform to traditional presentations: this was experience "under erasure." Rather than a move outside of the formal system to find a transcendental origin, that transcendental ground revealed itself to be another manifestation of the formal system of writing:

the value of the transcendental arche [*archie*] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased . . . the origin did not even disappear . . . it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. (OGC, 61)

Archi-writing and *différance* preceded the difference between the formal and transcendental, the world and the "lived," appearance and that which appeared, because

it structured both. By appealing to writing Derrida was able to absorb his previous work on phenomenology into the general movement of the sign, reframing it in structuralist language.

5. Conclusion

Reading Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in context, we can see the complex articulation of two different but interrelated conversations. At one level, the book is an extended criticism of Saussure's logocentrism, where the glimpses he catches of writing within Saussure's work allow Derrida to deconstruct the structural linguist's privilege of the voice. But at another level, we see a different debate, this time with Derrida's students and colleagues. And for them writing is not the "repressed" or the "excluded," but rather the ultimate manifestation of a fully formalized science, whose impact would be as much political as intellectual. In this second conversation, the burden of Derrida's argument was not to recuperate writing, but rather to rework it, to use it to bring into question the sharp distinctions that for many at the ENS divided science from ideology.

Indeed this reading of the text explains Derrida's privileging of Saussure within it. As the acknowledged "father of structuralism," a linguist who had prioritized the internal necessities of language over its referential structure, Saussure would have been a strange target for an argument about the "metaphysics of presence." But if one of the goals of Derrida's book was to engage with Althusser and his students, the choice seems more fitting. For by showing that Saussure remained logocentric despite himself, Derrida facilitated the extension of his argument to cover other structuralists, like Althusser.¹³ From this perspective, Derrida's initial attack on phonetic writing, and the priority of the signifier/signified relation that it represented, should be seen not as the heart of his argument but rather as a preliminary ground-laying to highlight his loyalty to Althusser's project, before proceeding to undermine it. It is only later in the book, where he extends Althusser's argument to challenge the older man's conceptualization of science, that Derrida makes his most important contribution. Moreover, though Derrida is apparently hostile to Husserl's phenomenology in *Of Grammatology*, we can read this in part as a concession to his readers. Labeling Husserl as logocentric in the ENS was merely a nod to the orthodoxy. It was Derrida's reincorporation of Husserl's (and Heidegger's) work into the structuralist framework that would have been most provocative.

This reincorporation was especially provocative for its political implications. Despite the characteristic discretion with which Derrida discussed politics before the 1990s, the high political stakes attributed to philosophy at the ENS meant that ivory-tower neutrality was an idle dream there. We must remember that Derrida finished *Of Grammatology* in the months leading up to the events of May 1968, events which

found their epicenter only a few hundred meters from Derrida's classroom. For all the apparently abstract discussion and technical language, when Derrida challenged the idea of science in *Of Grammatology*, his students would have read it as a political intervention. For politics is as much about audience as it is about argument, and the criticism of Derrida as apolitical has often been a function of decontextualized readings of his work.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Knox Peden and Katja Guenther for their criticisms and suggestions, and the support of the Kulturwissenschaftliches Kolleg in Constance during the writing of this essay.
- 2 While "Violence and Metaphysics" was published just after Derrida took his full-time position at the École, it was composed before he arrived. The only other essays published between mid-1964 and the end of 1965 were "Genesis and Structure," initially written for a conference in 1959, and the essay on Artaud.
- 3 Derrida too refers to Granger in OGC, 323n.
- 4 According to Derrida, unlike speech, writing allows the detachment of mathematical truths from any form of subjectivity, either individual or communal.
- 5 Derrida's main concern here is not the factual destruction of writing but the intentional loss of sense.
- 6 Though it was not necessary for science and most science functioned unaware of its mode of knowledge production, this "theory of theoretical practice" expressed in Marx's philosophy had made philosophy "scientific."
- 7 Derrida does not cite Althusser at any point in the book, though in the context of the ENS in 1965 his topic, arguments, and vocabulary would have been instantly recognizable.
- 8 According to this presentation, speech would be the "trace of the trace."
- 9 Citation amended. In his presentation Althusser added only empty parentheses, or "blanks," which he then replaced with the word "power" on the following page.
- 10 Amended citation from Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1916), 16.
- 11 Another crucial difference, that I will not discuss here, is that for Derrida the new object of knowledge produced (grammatology) was the new form of writing, whereas for Althusser that new object (surplus-value) was merely made visible by the new form of reading. Nevertheless "surplus value" allowed the rise of Marx's new science of "historical materialism," which was closely related to his new philosophy, "dialectical materialism," of which the new form of reading was a part.
- 12 Here Derrida referred to his analyses in *Speech and Phenomena*.
- 13 As Derrida wrote about Saussure, but which could equally apply to Althusser, the "scientific exigency of the 'internal system' . . . is itself constituted, as the epistemological exigency in general, by the very possibility of phonetic writing and by the exteriority of the 'notation' to internal logic" (OGC, 34).

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Derrida and Psychoanalysis

ELIZABETH ROTTENBERG

1. Introduction: The “Friend” of Psychoanalysis

“I can no longer consider you as a friend,” said the Satyr, “a fellow who with the same breath blows hot and cold.” (Aesop, “The Satyr and the Peasant”)

In the very last section of his 2001 interview with Elisabeth Roudinesco titled “In Praise of Psychoanalysis,” Jacques Derrida assumes the mantle of “friend of psychoanalysis.” This expression refers back, most immediately, to Roudinesco’s allusion to Sandor Ferenczi’s “beautiful idea” of founding a Society of Friends of Psychoanalysis that would bring together writers, artists, philosophers, and jurists interested in psychoanalysis (FWT, 166). But Derrida does not quote her exactly; he does not say “friends of psychoanalysis” (as Jeff Fort’s otherwise excellent translation has it). No, when Derrida responds to Roudinesco, he speaks in the singular, as the singular “friend” that he is: “I like the expression ‘friend of psychoanalysis.’ It evokes the freedom of an alliance, an engagement with no institutional status” (FWT, 167, trans. modified).

If Derrida modifies and transforms Roudinesco’s expression, if he does not refer back to the plural phrase she has used, it is because he is inflecting the phrase otherwise (he is not simply mentioning it, he is also altering it). In other words, the quotation marks around the phrase “friend of psychoanalysis” are what are called in English “scare quotes.” Used even when they are not required, these quotes immediately elicit our attention and our doubt; they cause uncertainty to be associated with the “friend.” Indeed, as I will suggest, Derrida’s relationship to psychoanalysis *hinges* on our reading these quotation marks as scare quotes. Not only do these quotation

marks serve to distance the “friend of psychoanalysis” from a “Society of Friends” but they also provide this “friend” with a particular and quite special proximity to psychoanalysis. Perhaps we could say that, unlike the Satyr in Aesop’s fable who cannot consider as a friend “a fellow who with the same breath blows hot and cold,” the “friend of psychoanalysis” is precisely one who is capable of this double gesture.

But we would have to say more. For in the case of the “friend of psychoanalysis,” this gesture is not only double, it is also simultaneous. The “friend” is someone who, with the *same* breath, blows both hot and cold. Hence there is, in Derrida’s work, as we will see, not only a contradictory but also a somewhat violent way of treating psychoanalysis. The “friend of psychoanalysis” does not simply accept or receive something called “psychoanalysis.” In the first place, there is no such thing. There is no single and unified concept of psychoanalysis. There is not *one* psychoanalysis: “there is not ‘la psychanalyse’ – whether one understands it . . . as system of theoretical norms or as a charter of institutional practices” (RPS, 20). Consequently, the one who calls himself a “friend of psychoanalysis,” the one who reaffirms “psychoanalysis,” always does two things at once: he says “yes” to “psychoanalysis” but, at the same time, he selects, filters, interprets, and thereby transforms what is called “psychoanalysis.” The “friend of psychoanalysis” is not neutral. He intervenes. “[S]imultaneously faithful and violent” (POS, 6), faithful and unfaithful, “respecting through disrespect” (LLF, 36–37), he chooses, prefers, sacrifices, excludes, leaves certain things behind, precisely in order to keep what has been called, for over a century now, “psychoanalysis,” *alive*. Though “[p]sychoanalysis is ineradicable [*ineffaçable*]” and its revolution “irreversible,” “it is, as a civilization, mortal” (WA, 260). Were psychoanalysis to remain unchanged, intact, unharmed by its “friend(s),” it would not survive: it would be certain death for psychoanalysis. In other words, when the “friend of psychoanalysis” treats psychoanalysis with violence, he does so *out of love*.

From “Freud and the Scene of Writing” (1967) to “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul” (2000), by way of the *Post Card* (1980) (“To Speculate – on Freud,” “Le facteur de la vérité,” “Du tout”) and *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (1996) (“Resistances,” “For the Love of Lacan,” “‘To Do Justice to Freud’: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis”), not to mention “*Fors*: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok” (1976), “Me-psychoanalysis” (1979), “Telepathy” (1981), “Geopsychanalysis” (1981), “My Chances” (1982), “Let Us Not Forget Psychoanalysis” (1990), *Archive Fever* (1995), and “And Say the Animal Responded?” (1997), that is, from his very first essay on Freud presented in March 1966 at the Société Psychanalytique de Paris at the invitation of André Green to his keynote address to the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) at the States General of Psychoanalysis on July 10, 2000 in the Grand Amphitheater of the Sorbonne, Jacques Derrida will *always* have been such a “friend.”

With *one breath*, then, the “friend of psychoanalysis” says “yes” to “psychoanalysis”: “yes” to the existence of psychoanalysis, “yes” to the event of psychoanalysis.

The “friend of psychoanalysis” loves psychoanalysis and, loving psychoanalysis, wants to keep it alive:

In a word, this “yes” of friendship assumes the certainty that psychoanalysis remains an ineradicable historical event, the certainty that it is a *good thing*, and that it ought to be loved, supported . . . “The friend” salutes a sort of Freudian revolution; he assumes that it has already marked and should continue to mark, always otherwise, the space in which we live, think, work, write, teach, etc. (FWT, 167–168, trans. modified)

The “friend” is one who loves and supports the *necessity* of psychoanalysis. In this way, the friend salutes not only the past (“it has already marked”) but also the future (“[it] should continue to mark, always otherwise”), and above all, “the future-to-come” (FWT, 168), of this revolutionary event. Indeed, to ensure the survival of what is most revolutionary in the psychoanalytic revolution, to keep alive its “revolutionary force” (FWT, 172), its absolute originality and secret law, the “friend of psychoanalysis” must give his “irreversible approbation” (FWT, 167) to the certainty that psychoanalysis is a good thing.

With the same breath, however – and this is why we must read the quotation marks as scare quotes – the “friend of psychoanalysis” remains on his guard. There can be no “friendship” without a certain “problematic proximity”¹: “The friend maintains the reserve, withdrawal, or distance necessary for critique, for discussion, for reciprocal questioning, sometimes the most radical of all” (FWT, 167). The “yes” of friendship may, thus, always be followed by the most serious reservations or doubts:

[T]his “yes” of friendship assumes the certainty that psychoanalysis . . . is a *good thing* . . . even when one cultivates the most serious questions concerning a great number of phenomena referred to as “psychoanalytic,” whether it’s a question of theory, of institution, of law, of ethics or of politics.² (FWT, 167, trans. modified)

In a word, the “yes” of the “friend of psychoanalysis” remains vigilant with regard to the project of psychoanalysis, its discourse, its language, its concepts, its institution, and its politics; the “yes” of the “friend” is always a “yes, but [*oui, mais*].” To love psychoanalysis is to submit its texts to an active – deconstructive – reading. To love psychoanalysis is to reserve the right, if not the duty, to criticize psychoanalytic concepts whenever these remain problematic and naïve (and therefore deconstructible). Hence this double gesture, both hot and cold, that belongs to the “friend of psychoanalysis”: irreversible approbation and endless vigilance.

2. An Invincible Force: A Reason Without Alibi

Perhaps another way of putting this or of understanding this gesture is to say that Derrida will always have loved psychoanalysis “in [his] own manner” (EO, 87).³ It

was never a matter, says Derrida, of “taking . . . seriously” Freud’s “unbelievable mythology (be it neurological or metapsychological)” (WD, 228) or of using Freudian concepts “otherwise than in quotations marks” (WD, 197). The friend of psychoanalysis was always mistrustful of Freud’s debt to metaphysics and, from the very beginning, justified his theoretical reticence by appealing to the “metaphysical complicities [*complicités*] of psychoanalysis” (WD, 198, trans. modified): “all of [Freud’s] concepts, without exception, belong to the history of metaphysics, that is, to the system of logocentric repression” (WD, 197).

For the friend of psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis’s naïvety, its unquestioned complicity with classical philosophical oppositions and their violent hierarchies (e.g., speech/writing), its incantatory or rhapsodic way of repeating old philosophical gestures (“Lacan at that time . . . referred habitually, in a frequent, decisive, self-confident, and sometimes incantatory way, to Heideggerian speech, to *logos* as interpreted by Heidegger, to truth” [RPS, 54, trans. modified]; “Despite many elliptical and rhapsodic variations [in Lacan’s work] . . . I have never encountered any rigorous questioning of the value of truth in its most pertinent historical and architectonic site” [POS, 108 n. 1]), betrayed the credulous, sterilizing, and even dogmatic elements of the psychoanalytic project: “faced with so many metaphysical schemas at work in the Freudian and Lacanian projects” (FWT, 171), the friend of psychoanalysis remained on his guard. It is for this reason that Derrida will speak, early on, of the task that inevitably falls to the friend of psychoanalysis: “The necessity of an immense labor [*travail*] of deconstruction of [psychoanalysis’s] concepts and of the metaphysical phrases that are condensed and sedimented within them” (WD, 198, trans. modified).

But why this immense labor if all of Freud’s concepts, without exception, belong to the history of metaphysics? If such a labor is warranted, it is because there are resources in psychoanalysis that cannot simply be reduced to or exhausted by this conceptual heritage: “the Freudian discourse – in its syntax, or, if you will, its labor [*travail*] – is not to be confused with these necessarily metaphysical and traditional concepts. Certainly it is not exhausted by belonging to them” (WD, 198). Hence, there was always, from the very beginning, an alliance between the “labor” of deconstruction and the “labor” of psychoanalysis. What seduced Derrida in Freud were “those elements of psychoanalysis that [could] not easily be contained within logocentric closure” (WD, 198, trans. modified), specifically the “impulse [*impulsion*] coming from psychoanalysis in general . . . to deconstruct the privilege of presence, at least as consciousness and egological consciousness” (RPS, 55). What Derrida points to are not Freud’s “theses” but the “impetus [*élan*] of the initial Freudian send-off [*coup d’envoi*]” (FWT, 176, trans. modified), the ways in which Freud’s “most venturesome soundings [*coups de sonde*]” (FWT, 172) exceed the conceptual mastery bequeathed to him by and as “metaphysics.” This is why Derrida always describes Freud’s historical originality – “that moment of world history, as ‘signaled’ by the name ‘Freud’” (WD, 228, trans. modified) – as a breaking, a breaching, a rupturing,

or an opening (e.g., “the Freudian breakthrough [*la percée freudienne*]” [WD, 199], “the Freudian break [*la coupure freudienne*]” [WD, 209], “the Freudian breach [*la trouée freudienne*]” [WD, 228, trans. modified]) of this conceptual heritage.

And yet to give oneself over to Freud’s *coup d’envoi*, to his *coups de sonde*, one must also be ready and be able to give up the most foundational of psychoanalytic concepts. Thus, in his late interview with Roudinesco, and much to Roudinesco’s dismay, Derrida delivers a kind of *coup de grâce* to Freud’s “grand conceptual framework”:

I may be mistaken, but the id, the ego, the superego, the ideal ego, the ego ideal, the secondary process and the primary process of repression, etc. – in a word, the large Freudian machines (including the concept and the word “unconscious”!) – are . . . only provisional weapons, or even rhetorical tools cobbled together [*bricolés*] to be used against a philosophy of consciousness, of transparent and fully responsible intentionality. I have little faith in their future. I do not think that a metapsychology can hold up for long under scrutiny . . . The “friend of psychoanalysis” in me is mistrustful not of positive knowledge but of positivism and of the substantialization of metaphysical or metapsychological agencies. The grand entities (ego, id, superego, etc.), but also the grand conceptual “oppositions” – which are too solid, and therefore very precarious – that followed those of Freud, such as the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic, etc. or “introjection” and “incorporation” – these seem to me to be carried away . . . by the ineluctable necessity of some “*differance*” that erases or displaces their borders. Which in any case deprives them of all rigor. I am therefore never ready to follow Freud and his followers in the functioning of the grand theoretical machines, in their functionalization. (FWT, 171–173)

Psychoanalysis’s machines, its entities, its conceptual oppositions have become too “grand,” “too solid.” They have ossified and therefore become precarious. Hence, one might hear the *éloge* in this chapter’s heading (“*Éloge de la psychanalyse*”) not only as praise (“In Praise of Psychoanalysis,” as the English has it) but also as eulogy or elegy (*éloge* comes from the Latin *elogium* “inscription on a tomb” through the Greek *elegia* “elegy”). Though Freud’s “provisional weapons” or “rhetorical tools” may have been necessary “for breaking with psychology within a given context of the history of science” (FWT, 172), his battles are no longer our own. Like “bayonets and horses,” to quote Barack Obama’s now famous phrase, their value and pertinence no longer obtain beyond a specific context.

Indeed, when we forget that the id, the ego, and the superego are figural inventions (“rhetorical tools”), when we forget that they were “provisional weapons” cobbled together to be “used against a philosophy of consciousness,” when we literalize their “as if” nature and take them for “scientific and scientifically assured concepts” (FWT, 174), we not only fall prey to ideology or ideological mystification – “What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality” (de Man 1986, 11) – but we also risk colluding with that which threatens to turn psychoanalysis

(and sometimes from within psychoanalysis) into just another “theological, metaphysical, genetic, physicalist, cognitivist” discourse (WA, 240).

If there is anything that marks the specificity of the psychoanalytic revolution for Derrida, it is the “reaffirmation of a reason ‘without alibi’” (FWT, 172):

[T]he very aim [*visée*], and I do say *aim*, of the psychoanalytic revolution is the only one not to rest, not to seek refuge, in principle, in what I call a theological or humanist alibi. That is why it can appear terrifying, terribly cruel, pitiless. . . . All the philosophies, the metaphysics, the theologies, the human sciences end up having recourse, in the deployment of their thought or their knowledge, to such an alibi. (FWT, 173)

When psychoanalysis mistakes its fictional narratives for truths about the world, when it substantializes its metaphysical or metapsychological agencies, it retreats from its own breakthrough. It forgets itself and betrays itself when it seeks an alibi for its thought, its discourse, or its writing in philosophy, metaphysics, theology, or the human sciences. As the only revolution whose aim is not to rest or relax in the deployment of its thought and knowledge, psychoanalysis, much like its friend, “can appear terrifying, terribly cruel, pitiless.”

3. “Too Much at Home”: Psychoanalysis Too Philosophical

Perhaps nowhere is the friend’s pitilessness more on display or his cruelty more staged than in the essay provocatively titled “For the Love of Lacan” (1991). In this essay,⁴ written for a UNESCO colloquium devoted to the work of Jacques Lacan, Derrida quite spectacularly and unexpectedly declares his love for Lacan: “And if I were to say now: ‘You see, I think that we loved each other very much, Lacan and I [*nous nous sommes beaucoup aimés, Lacan et moi*]’” (RPS, 42); “and . . . if I repeated ‘we loved each other very much, Lacan and I’” (RPS, 42); “Who will ever have the right to say: ‘We love each other’?” (RPS, 43); “Was this not a way of saying that I loved and admired him a lot [*que je l’aimais et l’admirais beaucoup*]” (RPS, 56)?

In fact, much of “For the Love of Lacan” reads like a love letter, one that proclaims the future and promise of “the *name* Lacan”:

If I said “yes” . . . if I was happy to accept the invitation [to speak] . . . it is because this colloquium . . . constitutes an international homage to Lacan. And it is with this event, this justly deserved and spectacular homage to Lacan, that I was happy to be asked to associate myself. Not only but also because, in our time . . . I find a political significance in this homage. I consider it an act of cultural resistance to pay homage publicly to a difficult form of thought, discourse, or writing, one which does not submit easily to normalization by the media, by academics, or by publishers, one which rebels against the . . . philosophical or theoretical neo-conformism in general . . . that flattens and

levels everything around us, in the attempt to make one forget what the Lacan era was, along with the future and the promise of his thought, thereby erasing the *name* of Lacan. (RPS, 46)

Derrida's declarations of love are an act of resistance to the erasure of the name Lacan.⁵ If Derrida says "yes," if he accepts to speak at an international conference that names Lacan and only Lacan in its title ("Lacan avec les philosophes"), it is in order to honor, acclaim, applaud, salute, praise, commend, and pay tribute (homage) to Lacan. It is to say "yes" to someone whose "being-with" or "coming-to-terms-with" philosophy has attained "a refinement, a scope, an unexpected illumination of the 'searchlight effect' [*coup de phare*]" (RPS, 46). In this, Lacan would be unique in the history of psychoanalysis: "Lacan's refinement and competence, his philosophical originality, have no precedent in the tradition of psychoanalysis" (RPS, 47). Like Freud's *coup d'envoi* or *coups de sonde*, the historical originality of Lacan's *coup de phare* has a piercing effect.

And yet, just as spectacularly as the friend of psychoanalysis declares his love for Lacan, he declares war on Lacan. One might speculate that by staging such a provocation – "And if I were to say now: 'You see, I think that we loved each other very much, Lacan and I,' I am almost certain that many of you here would not stand for it. Many would not stand for it, which explains many things" (RPS, 42) – Derrida is also at the same time staging his politics of friendship: "Can one speak of loving without declaring love, without declaring war, beyond all possible neutrality?" (PF, 228). And certainly "For the Love of Lacan" rehearses all of Derrida's earlier attacks on Lacan. It is impossible not to hear, for example in his denunciation of Lacan's appropriation of certain motifs in philosophy – "phonocentrism, logocentrism, phallogocentrism, full speech as truth, the transcendentalism of the signifier, the circular return of reappropriation toward what is most proper about the proper place, whose borders are circumscribed by lack, and so forth" (RPS, 54) – reverberations of *Positions* (1971)⁶ or "Le facteur de la vérité" (1975).

But if the friend of psychoanalysis appears cruel in this essay, it is because his declarations of love have become the example *par excellence* of the phenomenon of *destinerrance*. In "For the Love of Lacan," Derrida returns to the problem of the (love) letter and its destination, to the necessary possibility of the letter's non-arrival and internal drifting; Derrida returns, that is, to the question that always separated him "most closely" (RPS, 62) from Lacan.⁷ Thus, when Derrida declares "nous nous sommes aimés," his aim is first and foremost to give an example of *destinerrance*:

As for being shocked to hear someone say "we" when speaking all alone after the death of the other, there is no reason for it. This is one of the most common phenomena of what I have called *destinerrance*. It inflicts an internal drift on the destination of the letter, from which it may never return . . . it is always me who says "we"; it is always an "I" who utters "we," supposing thereby, in effect, in the asymmetrical structure of the

utterance, the other to be absent, dead, in any case incompetent, or even arriving too late to object . . . The asymmetry is even more violent if we're talking about a reflexive, reciprocal, or specular "we." Who will ever have the right to say: "We love each other"? But is there any other origin of love, any other amorous performative than this presumptuousness [*outréouidance*]? If there is some "we" in being-with, it is because there is always one who speaks all alone in the name of the other, from the other; there is always one of them who lives more, lives longer . . . When we are with someone, we know *without delay* that one of us will survive the other. So he already does and will be able or will have to speak on his own. (RPS, 42–43)

For any (love) letter or declaration of love to be what it is, for it to be structurally readable, it must remain readable beyond the death of the addressee. Thus, the presumptuousness or impertinence (*outréouidance*) of Derrida's declaration of love is not determined by the moment of Lacan's death. The presumptuousness is structural: it is already there *without delay* from the moment an "I" says "we." Hence, the thinking of destination can never be dissociated from a thinking of death or of destination as death. The addressee is dead, already dead, from the moment someone says "we": "We love each other."

But if the presumptuousness of Derrida's "nous nous sommes aimés" has a further effect here, if it is indeed shocking or cruel, it is because "For the Love of Lacan" stages Derrida's personal ambivalence toward Lacan in such a way that Lacan's actual death seems *literally* to underscore the *murderous* quality of this structural predicament. For there is something excessive about "For the Love of Lacan," something ruthless about Derrida's repeated appeal to personal anecdote, that lends an aura of cruelty to this essay. The essay begins, for example, by staging an exclamation in both the conditional and future anterior – "What wouldn't Lacan have said! What will he not have said!" (RPS, 39) – and then proceeds to tell story after story of Lacan's appropriations but also misappropriations of Derrida's work (even referencing, at one point, the relevant pages in Elisabeth Roudinesco's monumental *History of Psychoanalysis in France*) before concluding with an ironic and self-ironic but also exultant "What will I not have said today!"

It can be no coincidence, therefore, that Derrida returns at length, in the final section of "For the Love of Lacan," to one of "his" "envois" from the *Post Card* in which the issue is love and murder:

Murder is everywhere, my unique and immense one. We are the worst criminals in history. And right here I kill you . . . the living one over there whom I love. . . . I kill you, I annul you at my fingertips. . . . To do so it suffices only that I be readable – and I become unreadable to you, you are dead. If I say that I write for dead addressees . . . it is not in order to play. (RPS, 65–66, trans. modified)

To write a love letter is to kill without delay. This is not a malicious act; it is something structural. In other words, when a declaration of love becomes the example of

destinerrance, one must distinguish between two things: on the one hand, what the declaration says and, on the other, what the example says. In this case, what Derrida says is “We loved each other very much,” but what his example says is “I kill you, I annul you.” Thus, when a declaration of love becomes the example of destinerrance, the friend of psychoanalysis *literally* and *simultaneously* blows hot and cold.

What elicits this exemplary cruelty from the friend of psychoanalysis is Lacan’s excessive confidence or trust (*confiance*) in philosophy. Lacan is too unguarded – too friendly! – with the philosophers. Paradoxically and perversely, Lacan’s discourse will be “too philosophical” for Derrida, “too much at home [*trop en confiance*] with the philosophers” (RPS, 56):

too much at home with a Sartrian neo-existentialism . . . *too much at home* with Hegel/Kojève the “master” (and Hegel/Kojève is also Heidegger, for Kojève does not anthropologize only the phenomenology of spirit; he also Heideggerianizes it . . .) . . . *too much at home* with the philosophers and with Heidegger. (RPS, 56, my emphasis)

To be too confident or “too much at home,” as Peggy Kamuf beautifully translates “*trop en confiance*,” is to be too *heimlich*, too comfortable with, too wedded to, not “eccentric” or “ex-centering” (RPS, 54) enough in relation to philosophy and the philosophical as such. It is to remain too embedded in “a certain dominant state (meaning the dominance of the master) of the history of philosophy . . . namely the dominant state that at a certain point I called phallogocentrism” (RPS, 69), too cozy with a certain discourse of mastery (“the dominance of the master [*du maître*]”).

It is as if the friend’s expression of cruelty were recalling psychoanalysis to itself, insuring not its life – “[psychoanalysis] is mortal and it knows it” (WA, 247) – but the survival of “something like the psychoanalytic revolution, and even like psychoanalytic reason, the revolution as psychoanalytic reason.”⁸ Indeed, as we have seen, Derrida credits psychoanalysis with having, in principle, heard and understood the necessity of a reason “without alibi.” This is because the revolution as psychoanalytic reason does not yield to a phantasm of mastery or to the alibi of an “invincibly transcendental or ontological structure” (WA, xxvii). On the contrary, psychoanalysis becomes itself an “invincible force [*puissance invincible*]” when it provokes thought “beyond . . . ‘power [*pouvoir*]’ and the ‘drive for power’ . . . and therefore the drive for sovereignty” (FWT, 173).

Whatever the scientific or philosophical presuppositions of psychoanalysis, its force, a force (*puissance*) that must be distinguished from a power (*pouvoir*), depends on the reaffirmation of a “reason ‘without alibi’” (FWT, 172). It depends, that is, on a reason that goes against a certain history of reason and therefore a certain history of philosophy: “At issue here is the history of reason and the mutation that something like psychoanalysis might inscribe in it – which is not an irrationality but perhaps another reason, another putting into play [*mise en jeu*] of reason.”⁹ If, in the end, the friend of psychoanalysis *cruelly* deprives psychoanalysis of a home in

philosophy, if he *cruelly* situates the self-wounding possibilities of psychoanalysis in its “rather somnambulistic submission to a history of metaphysics” (FWT, 6–7, trans. modified), it is not only to uncover the residue of credulity in Freud and Lacan. It is also, and above all, to keep something like “the revolution as psychoanalytic reason” alive.¹⁰

Could one not say, then, that there was love in being cruel? And that, by being cruel, the friend of psychoanalysis was testifying to a cruelty at the heart of the psychoanalytic revolution? What if the cruelty of psychoanalysis were an essential part of its revolutionary and irreversible legacy? What if psychoanalysis were in a unique position to address this irreducible thing in the life of the living being that is the possibility of (self-)cruelty? Could it not be said, then, that the friend of psychoanalysis was simply betraying his love for psychoanalysis by treating it cruelly?

4. Cruelty and Psychoanalysis

The etymology of “cruelty” is bloody: *crucor* is blood (specifically the blood that flows from a wound), “a stream of blood,” according to Lewis and Short. But not all cruelty is bloody. Cruelty “can be and is no doubt *essentially* psychical (pleasure taken in suffering or in making suffer in order to make suffer, to see suffering; *grausam*, in German, does not name blood)” (FWT, 142, my emphasis). When one moves from the Latin *crucor* to the Germanic *Grausamkeit*, one moves from bloody cruelty to a cruelty without blood. That is why, as Derrida says, the end of bloody cruelty does not signal the end of cruelty but rather a shift in the form and the visibility of cruelty:

One can staunch bloody cruelty (*crucor*, *crudus*, *crudelitas*), one can put an end to murder by the blade, by the guillotine, in the classical or modern theater of bloody war, but according to Freud or Nietzsche, a psychical cruelty will always take its place by inventing new resources. (WA, 239)

It is this essentially psychical (bloodless) aspect of cruelty that makes cruelty so “difficult to *determine* and *delimit*” (WA, 239) and therefore, as Derrida also suggests, “one of the horizons *most proper* to psychoanalysis” (WA, 239, my emphasis).

In “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul,” Derrida’s address to the IPA at the States General of Psychoanalysis in July 2000, “psychoanalysis” has become the name of the royal road to psychical cruelty:

Let us merely ask ourselves whether, yes or no, what is called “psychoanalysis” does not open up the only way that could allow us, if not to know, if not to think even, at least to interrogate what might be meant by this strange and familiar word “cruelty,” the worst cruelty, suffering *just to* suffer; the making-suffer, the making- or letting-oneself suffer *just for*, if one can still say that, the pleasure of suffering . . . If there is

something irreducible in the life of the living being, in the soul, in the psyche . . . and if this irreducible thing in the life of the animate being is indeed the possibility of cruelty . . . then no other discourse – be it theological, metaphysical, genetic, physicalist, cognitivist, and so forth – could open itself up to this hypothesis. They would all be designed to reduce it, exclude it, deprive it of sense. The only discourse that can today claim the thing of psychical suffering as its own affair [*comme son affaire propre*] would indeed be what has been called, for about a century, psychoanalysis. . . . “[P]sychanalysis” would be the name of that which, without theological or other alibi, would be turned toward what is most *proper* [*de plus propre*] to psychical cruelty. Psychoanalysis would be another name for the “without alibi.” (WA, 239–240)

Unlike all the other discourses – “[a]ll the philosophies, the metaphysics, the theologies, the human sciences” (FWT, 173) – the discourse of psychoanalysis is the only one that is “without alibi.” Psychoanalysis does not turn elsewhere (*alibi*) or close itself off to the hypothesis of a cruelty essential to life and therefore indestructible (a cruelty, which, following the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920, Freud will reinscribe in the logic of aggressive and destructive drives that are inseparable from the death drive). Psychoanalysis would be, rather, what “open[s] up” the interrogation of the meaning of the word “cruelty,” “open[ing] itself up” to “this obscure and enigmatic concept” (WA, 245). Psychoanalysis would be, *in its very project*, turned toward the language of cruelty, its “grammatical syntax, conjugations, reflexivities, and persons”: “to enjoy making or letting suffer, making oneself or letting oneself suffer, oneself, the other as other, the other and others in oneself, me, you, he, she, you plural, we, they, and so forth” (WA, 240).

But can we not hear this “without alibi” (*sans alibi*) in two ways? As we have seen, “without alibi” marks a certain psychoanalytic imperative (“do not seek refuge in ontological or transcendental structures”); in this sense psychoanalysis would be “without alibi” just as it would be “without peer” – unequaled, unrivaled in its claim to psychical suffering. But we can also hear “without alibi” in a second, more privative sense, as when we say of someone that “s/he has no alibi.” According to this second sense, to “have no alibi” or to be “without alibi” is to be, if not implicated in, at least associated with, a crime and by extension a cruelty: “One rarely speaks of alibis . . . without some presumption of a crime. Nor of crime without a suspicion of cruelty” (WA, 279).

Indeed, it is a little as if these two terms, “cruelty” and “psychoanalysis,” had entered the scene together in “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul,” as if psychical cruelty were in fact “the ultimate ground” on which the figure of psychoanalysis took its proper shape (WA, 239), as if psychoanalysis had become not only the name but also the proper name for (thinking) psychical cruelty. One even might say that, in his repeated use of the word “proper [*propre*],” Derrida yokes these two terms together. Bloodless cruelty, psychical cruelty, would be the *proper* affair of psychoanalysis, one of its *most proper* horizons. What is *properly* psychoanalytic would be turned toward what is *properly* cruel (“*proper* to psychical cruelty”). A psychical

cruelty, a cruelty of the *psyche*, would belong to the life and the soul of psychoanalysis. What this means is that psychoanalysis is that *without* which we can no longer seriously envision something like psychical cruelty or “something like the . . . self-relation of this cruelty” (WA, 240).

Thus, whether we read “without alibi” as the distinctive feature of the psychoanalytic revolution or as the symptom of a linguistic heritage that associates alibi with criminal defense, one thing is clear: to be *without* alibi is precisely *not to be without* cruelty. On the contrary, one might say that psychoanalysis comes into its own (*proprius*), it becomes *properly* psychoanalytic, when it becomes psycho-cruelty-analytic, that is to say, in a certain sense, when it becomes “terrifying, terribly cruel, pitiless . . . [e]ven to psychoanalysis, even to those who, on both sides of the couch, more or less pretend to put their trust in psychoanalysis” (FWT, 173). No psychoanalysis without cruelty, no psychoanalysis that is not also a psycho-cruelty-analysis. In short, no psychoanalysis that does not end up lending both its ear and its name to cruelty: “no other discourse of knowledge stands ready to take an interest in something like cruelty – except what is called psychoanalysis, whose name . . . would become in turn more indecipherable than ever” (WA, 240).

But if “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul” puts the question of cruelty at the heart of the psychoanalytic project, it also puts the question of cruelty to the psychoanalytic project; it puts the psychoanalytic project to the question of cruelty. For psychoanalysis has yet to think the problem of cruelty properly (as distinct from the economic problem of sadism or masochism). To do so, psychoanalysis would have to take history into account, and in particular the history of law; it would have to call into question the metaphysical axioms of ethics, law, and politics:

As I see it, psychoanalysis has not yet undertaken and thus still less succeeded in thinking, penetrating, and changing the axioms of the ethical, the juridical, and the political, notably in those seismic places where the theological phantasm of sovereignty quakes and where the most traumatic, let us say in a still confused manner the most cruel events of our day are being produced. (WA, 244)

What remains to be thought *more psychanalytico* would thus be a mutation of cruelty itself – or at least new historical figures of an ageless cruelty, as old and no doubt older than man. (WA, 270)

Regarding the most unprecedented and inventive examples of cruelty in the contemporary world – not to mention the “ongoing performative mutations” (WA, 274) that have followed from them (e.g., “the new Declaration of Human Rights . . . the condemnation of genocide, the concept of crime against humanity . . . the growing struggle against the vestiges of forms of punishment called ‘cruel’ . . . namely . . . the death penalty” [WA, 240–241]) – psychoanalysis has not said or done enough. And here Derrida shows no mercy: “These are things about which . . . psychoanalysis as such, in its statutory and authorized discourse, or even in the quasi totality of its

productions, has so far said next to nothing, has had next to nothing original to say” (WA, 244). In other words, in the very place where one would expect the most precise, the most nuanced, the “most specific response,” “the only appropriate response” (WA, 245), that is, a *proper* response from psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis says nothing.

What we see in “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul,” thus, is a text that *puts* psychoanalysis to the question of cruelty (this text is moreover addressed to an audience of analysts). As if to make it talk. For this reason, the question of cruelty becomes not only a *question* – “What does ‘cruel’ mean?” (WA, 262); “Where does cruelty begin and end?” (263); “What is this, cruelty? Where does it begin? Where does it end?” (280); “What would psychoanalysis have to tell us on this subject?” (263) – but also a battery or a battering of questions, a *cruelty*:

And what if there were, sometimes, cruelty in *not* putting to death? And what if there were love in *wanting* to give death . . . one to the other, one for the other, simultaneously or not? And what if there were some ‘it is suffering cruelly in me, in some me’ without it being possible to suspect anyone of *exercising* cruelty? Or of *wanting* it? . . . Is the alibi still avoidable? Is it not already too late?” (WA, 280)

Hence, it becomes impossible not to hear the question of cruelty (“Where does cruelty begin and end?”) as the repetition of another question: “Where does the cruelty of the questioning of a question begin and where does it end?”¹¹

Thus, we must also speak, in the end, of Derrida’s question about the question, about the authority of the question or the questioning form, and about the future of the question. How do the possibility and the reality of cruelty, how does the *question* of cruelty force us to ask a question not only about what comes before the question but also about the future of the question, that is, about the future of philosophy (if we understand philosophy to be from its very beginning, from its inaugural moment *a question*, the question “Ti esti, what is?”), about the future of reason and what is proper to deconstruction?

In “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul,” the deconstructive question, if there is one, begins by describing the question it is not:

[My] question will not be: Is there some death drive (*Todestrieb*) that is, and Freud regularly associates them, a cruel drive of destruction or annihilation? Or again: Is there also a cruelty inherent in the drive for power or for sovereign mastery (*Bemächtigungstrieb*) . . . ? My question will be, rather . . . Is there, for thought, for psychoanalytic thought to come, another beyond, if I can say that, a beyond that would stand beyond these *possibles* that are still *both* the pleasure and reality principles *and* the death or sovereign mastery drives, which seem to be at work wherever cruelty is on the horizon? (WA, 240–241)

What resists thought and thus remains to be thought is what stands beyond any economy of the possible (or the conditional), that is, beyond a psychoanalytic discourse that would still order itself, with “its economy, its topography, its metapsychology,” around the (pleasure and reality) principles and the drives (WA, 241). What remains to be thought by a psychoanalysis to come is thus an apparently impossible thing, namely a beyond that would be beyond the “beyond” of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that is, a beyond that would be beyond the death drive or the drive for mastery, a beyond that would also be “the beyond of a cruelty” (WA, 241). What the friend of psychoanalysis asks psychoanalysis to think is “an unconditional without sovereignty, and thus without cruelty, which is no doubt a very difficult thing to think” (WA, 276, my emphasis).

But Derrida’s discussion of this beyond, “the beyond of the beyond of the pleasure principle, the beyond the death drive” (WA, 241), returns us to the language of Freud and in so doing it reminds us that the “beyond of the beyond [*cet au-delà de l’au-delà*]” (WA, 241) is bound to *Beyond*. Just as it is bound to the survival of cruelty: “there is and will be cruelty, among living beings, among men [*de la cruauté il y en a, il y en aura entre les vivants, entre les hommes*]” (FWT, 76). Derrida has no illusions on this subject: “Cruelty there is [*Cruauté il y a*]. Cruelty there will have been [*Cruauté il y aura eu*], before any personal figure, before ‘cruel’ will have become an attribute, still less anyone’s fault” (WA, 280). In the end, therefore, the question remains: Is cruelty still avoidable? Or is it not already too late? To which one may simply respond: there is no telling.

5. Conclusion: Deconstruction’s *Jouissance*

Ultimately, this beyond of cruelty leads Derrida to return to the question of psychoanalytic reason. Following his address to the IPA in Paris (and several months before his interview with Elisabeth Roudinesco in *For What Tomorrow . . . A Dialogue*), Derrida will come back to the question of psychoanalytic revolution as psychoanalytic reason in the Death Penalty seminars. In fact he twice returns to the necessity of a worldwide psychoanalytic revolution (the first time as irony):

I am going to repeat myself here. I wouldn’t want my irony last time on the subject of the worldwide-ization [*mondialisation*] of psychoanalysis to lead . . . to any confusion. We must believe in and hope for the worldwide-ization of psychoanalysis, however uncertain, obscure, and indirect its paths. Beyond all possible or real caricature, it is certain that if a transformation – already under way, moreover, and in any case so necessary – of international law and the very axiomatics of law, ethics, and politics is to come to pass, right down to their most fundamental concepts and principles . . . well then, this transformation passes and must pass through some taking into account [*prise*

en compte], direct or indirect, explicit or implicit, by conscious or unconscious contagion, of something like the psychoanalytic revolution, and even like psychoanalytic reason, the revolution as psychoanalytic reason. At issue here is the history of reason and the mutation that something like psychoanalysis might inscribe in it – which is not an irrationality but perhaps another reason, another putting into play [*mise en jeu*] of reason.¹²

However long and circuitous its path, we must believe in the worldwide-ization of psychoanalysis, which promises to transform the fundamental concepts and principles of law, ethics, and politics. And yet, in a way, we can already begin to read this transformation in the passage that takes us from a *prise en compte* to a *mise en jeu*, from a “taking into account” to a “putting into play.” To *take* the psychoanalytic revolution *into account* here, the history of reason (as the reason that calculates or takes *into account*) has to put itself at risk (*en jeu*). What is at stake (*en jeu*) when reason takes account of psychoanalytic reason is the conceptual hold or grasp (*prise*) of reason.

But this high-stakes game involves not only the history of reason but also the future of philosophy. Indeed, a few months after the Death Penalty seminars, in his interview with Elisabeth Roudinesco, Derrida will describe deconstruction’s relation to its philosophical heritage in such a way that it becomes possible to hear “something like” a *mise en jeu* of philosophical reason by another reason:

Deconstruction is seen as hyperconceptual, and indeed it is . . . but only to the point where a certain writing, a writing that thinks, exceeds this conceptual grasp or mastery [*la prise ou la maîtrise conceptuelle*]. It therefore attempts to think the limit of the concept; it even endures the experience of this excess; it lovingly [*amouusement*] lets itself be exceeded. It is like an ecstasy of the concept: a *jouissance* of the concept to the point of overflowing. (FWT, 5, trans. modified)

A *jouissance* of the concept, an experience of excess to the point of overflowing, an experience that must be endured, undergone, suffered. Perhaps, in the end, one could say that the friend of psychoanalysis, the one who blows both hot and cold, lovingly endures the limit of philosophy because there remains for deconstruction something breathtaking about psychoanalysis.

Notes

- 1 Geoffrey Bennington, “Circanalyse (la chose même),” in Guyomard and Major (2000, 272).
- 2 I can do no more here than refer the reader to Derrida’s larger discussion of friendship in his book *Politics of Friendship*. Derrida will himself refer to this book in these pages: “Of course, it will not surprise you if I say that I implicitly load this word ‘friendship’

with all the worries, questions, affirmations, even mutations that are at work in my book *Politics of Friendship*" (FWT, 168).

- 3 For a discussion of Derrida and love more generally, see Peggy Kamuf's masterful essay "Deconstruction and Love" (Kamuf 2000) in which she argues that a "loving movement" is the "indispensable key" to what deconstruction does. See also the transcription of Derrida's improvised responses in *The Ear of the Other* where Derrida defines deconstruction in terms of love: "I tried to determine this concept [deconstruction] in my own manner, which I did by insisting on the fact that it was not a question of a negative operation. I don't feel that I'm in a position to *choose* between an operation that we'll call negative or nihilist, an operation that would set about furiously dismantling systems, and the other operation. I love very much everything I deconstruct in my own manner; the texts I want to read from the deconstructive point of view are texts that I love, with that impulse of identification which is indispensable for reading. They are texts whose future, I think, will not be exhausted for a long time. . . . my relation to these texts is characterized by loving jealousy and not at all by nihilistic fury (one can't read anything in the latter condition)" (EO, 87).
- 4 This essay is the transcription of a paper that Derrida read at the colloquium entitled "Lacan avec les philosophes" at UNESCO, sponsored by the Collège International de Philosophie in May 1990. It was first published in the conference proceedings *Lacan avec les philosophes* (Cardot et al. 1991) and subsequently in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (RPS, 39–69).
- 5 I can do no more here than refer the reader to the terrible irony involved in Alain Badiou's attempt to erase Derrida's name from the title of René Major's talk at this conference. For a brief account of this ignominious act, see Peeters (2010, 503–509), as well as Cardot et al. (1991, Appendix).
- 6 See in particular the long note to Lacan at the end of Derrida's interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta (POS, 107–113 n. 44) where Derrida points to Lacan's "philosophical facileness" (108), his "art of evasion" (110), or his "reinstallation of . . . psychoanalysis in general . . . in a new metaphysics" (109).
- 7 See, for example, *The Post Card*: "a letter does *not always* arrive at its destination, and from the moment that this possibility belongs to its structure one can say that it never truly arrives, that when it does arrive its capacity not to arrive torments it with an internal drifting" (PC, 489).
- 8 This quotation comes from session 17 of the Death Penalty seminars (1999–2001). The seminars are being prepared for publication in French and English as follows: Jacques Derrida, *Séminaire: La peine de mort*, 2 vols. (Paris: Galilée, 2012–2014) and *The Death Penalty*, 2 vols., trans. Peggy Kamuf (vol. 1) and Elizabeth Rottenberg (vol. 2) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014–2015). The first volume (1999–2000, sessions 1–11) of both editions has already appeared. (To oversee the English-language edition of the seminars of Jacques Derrida, the Derrida Seminars Translation Project was formed in 2006. For more information see <http://derridaseminars.org/index.html>.)
- 9 This quotation comes from session 17 of *The Death Penalty*.
- 10 This quotation comes from session 17 of *The Death Penalty*.
- 11 SPM, 237.
- 12 This quotation comes from session 17 of *The Death Penalty*.

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Derrida and Barthes: Speculative Intrigues in Cinema, Photography, and Phenomenology

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Cinema is, for Derrida, at once the “medium,” the “apparatus,” and the “experience” that proffers a historically unprecedented instantiation of the logic of spectrality, that “haunting element” his later writings were more and more insistently to instate as deconstruction’s “most hospitable place”: at “the heart of the living present” (ET, 117). Qualified as “spectral in its very essence,” cinema would indeed seem, for Derrida, quasi “epochally” destined to its role as that which *singularly* provides a paradigmatic experience of spectrality, which is to say, given the latter’s explicit designation as a “deconstructive logic,” a paradigmatic experience of the very structure of *différance*. The implications of such a claim, making cinema nothing less than a “model” of *différance*, are truly momentous. By discerning an *optical* machine, rather than a *scriptural* one, to most adequately represent the structure of *différance*, Derrida not only contradicts a “founding” tenet of his deconstructive enterprise but, concomitantly, opens up the necessity of profoundly rethinking the conceptual relations encompassed by “différance” or “spacing” understood pre-eminently as a “movement of temporalization and pure auto-affection” (WD, 289). Working through these implications entails, as a result, looping back to “the explication with phenomenology” initiated by Derrida in texts such as *Voice and Phenomenon* and *Of Grammatology* in the 1960s, a return that is all the more necessary given Derrida’s own insistence that everything he was to advance concerning spectrality, and hence the essence of cinema, is informed by his deconstruction of Husserl’s “living present” with respect to the latter’s pretention to appear in an immediate proximity to consciousness.

Yet, while Derrida himself situates the logic of spectrality as the continuation of his deconstruction of phenomenology, the scene of cinema in which this logic is said

to attain its unprecedented disclosure proves to show up, in fact, what might best be called a “constitutive blind spot” in his problematization of the living present, with this conditioning, in turn, the purview of the movement, element, or medium that, given the names of *différance* or spacing, arche-writing or spectrality, is said, for its part, to condition the purview of all there is. That Derrida could not, or would not, countenance such a blind spot is perhaps the reason, moreover, that cinema is itself, whatever the claims he makes for it, subject to a certain occultation in his work. No book, no monograph, no essay, is devoted to it, which, for an author who has been said to have “written on more or less everything under the sun” (Royle 2005), would seem to make this “art of light and shadow” a striking subsolar exception. Of cinema, Derrida would almost exclusively have spoken, his remarks dispersed in a smattering of (nonetheless significant) interviews or, indeed, films, as though the written word was to withdraw into a rare resistance when it came to matters cinematographic. Resistance, occultation: in the one essay he did write on a film (if not on cinema per se), the aptly entitled “Letters on a Blind Man: Punctum Caecum,” Derrida readily avows his “tenacious resistance” to the cinematic set-up, couching this in terms of his preference for words over images, a preference he specifies as one between two different types of “writing machine”:

I then said to myself that I write in a room in order to avoid the camera, the cinema, TV and photography. Not in order to flee or to accuse *the* machine but *those* machines as they function now. I provisionally prefer to them the tempo of another writing machine, another scene of writing, even another “cinematography” – one that is slower, more patient but, at the same time, also more supple. (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 106)

Not only was it, though, the cinematic, and not the “suppler” scriptural, apparatus that, “spectral through and through,” ultimately imposed itself as the best model for *différance* but the same “apparatus” would, by the same stroke, prove to recall or conjure up deconstruction’s constitutive blind spot. Why cinema has this capacity of recalling to Derrida what he would prefer to overlook, what this is, and why Derrida cannot countenance it: this is precisely the *speculative intrigue* that we are to see unfold within Derrida’s scene of cinema.¹

1. Of Ghosts and Machines

As Derrida’s reference to two types of writing machine indicates, contemporary “teletechnologies” consisting of *those* machines like the cinema, the camera, TV, and photography, but also the internet, digital imaging, and so on, partake, in the same way as do more “conventional” scriptural systems, of the regime of arche-writing: that “quasi-transcendental” structure or “space of inscription” characterized by

intervals and diacritic marks, pluridimensionality and non-linear temporality. These technologies are in no way, then, to be construed as supplementing forms of expression supposedly endowed with a naturalness or immediacy; or, put conversely, writing with a pen and paper or, indeed, speaking “in person” is no less a technology than is the processing of digital images. What does, though, differentiate contemporary teletechnologies from all previous forms of technology is their capacity to reproduce the “moment of inscription” – the event taking place – with such an “effect of proximity” that this appears “live,” all while transporting this reproduction, with a hitherto unprecedented speed, over immense spans of space and time. Bringing together, then, “the near” (that which “appears the most ‘living’ or the most ‘live’”) and “the far” (the “différance and delay in the exploitation and diffusion of this live moment”), contemporary teletechnologies have the structural specificity of “restituting the living present”; albeit a “living present,” as Derrida specifies, “of what is dead,” insofar as death is structurally inscribed in any means of reproduction (ET, 38–39).

It is precisely insofar as the (phenomenological) mode of presence of such a restitution is at once, *both and neither*, living and/nor dead, visible and/nor invisible (nothing is presented in “flesh and blood”), sensible and/nor insensible, perceptual and/nor hallucinatory, that Derrida qualifies it as “spectral.” Rendering, in short, the opposition between “effective presence” and its other (be this designated as absence, non-presence, ineffectivity, virtuality, or simulacrum) non-operative, spectrality would, then, quite literally scramble metaphysics’s determination of being as presence. While all the teletechnologies contribute to developing an experience of spectrality hitherto unknown in history, this finds its culminating form, for Derrida, in cinema: “let’s say the cinema needed to be invented in order to satisfy a certain desire with respect to phantoms” (CSF, 80). Appropriately enough, Derrida’s most incisive formulation of cinema’s particular, or indeed *essential*, affinity with spectrality was to be pronounced in a scene of Ken McMullen’s film *Ghost Dance* (1983) that must surely qualify as a spectral *mise-en-abyme*. Here, Derrida first declares he himself to be a ghost, a declaration he glosses elsewhere as referring to the fact that, when filmed and aware of the images’ vocation to be reproduced in your absence, you are haunted in advance by the future conveying your death such that, even before magically “reappearing” on the screen, you are already spectralized by the camera, “seized by spectrality” (ET, 117; trans. modified). Then, after adding that being haunted by ghosts consists in the memory of something never having had the form of being-present, he sets down as a literal formula: “*cinema plus psychoanalysis equals a science of ghosts.*” In 1998, some 14 years after his apparition in McMullen’s film, Derrida unequivocally upheld the basic terms of this formula in an interview published as “Le cinéma et ses fantômes” in the French film review *Cahiers du Cinéma* in April 2001. Describing cinema as “through-and-through of the order of spectrality that I connect to everything psychoanalysis has had to say on spectres,” Derrida particularly accentuates in this context the *credit* that spectators accord to the “perceptual modality” of the cinematic experience. Not only is cinema, like other teletechnologies

of the image, spectral by virtue of its technique or apparatus – the operation of the camera, the projected image, the celluloid and the screen all marking in advance the presence of their absence – but it engages a modality of “belief” that, in an absolutely singular way, suspends the distinction between imagination and the real, hallucination and perception, and, indeed, life and death, such that, by believing in the apparition on the screen, all while not believing, the spectator undergoes a vacillation of her/his own sense of identity.

Crucially, this singularly spectral experience of belief *invented* by the cinema would, according to Derrida in his *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, call for an “absolutely original type of analysis,” “a new kind of phenomenology.” “Such a phenomenology was not possible before cinematography because this experience of belief is linked to a particular technique, that of cinema, and it is historical through-and-through” (CSF, 78). This declaration, whose full import will be seen later in the context of the “phenomenology of the spectral” Derrida outlines in *Specters of Marx*, can well be set aside Walter Benjamin’s very early, seminal analyses of the “phenomenological” revolution wrought by the two contemporaneous techniques of cinema and psychoanalysis. Indeed, Benjamin is for Derrida “a necessary reference” (CSF, 85) in respect of all that is common to cinematic perception and psychoanalytic practice: not only was Benjamin one of the first to note that both these “technologies” draw on the processes of fascination, hypnosis, and identification, but he also insisted on the fact that film’s shifts in perceptual focus, notably via slow motion and the close-up, open onto the unconscious in a way similar to the psychoanalytic attention to slips of the tongue or other details previously unnoticed in the broad stream of perception. This reorganization of perception and the “new structural formations of the subject” that Benjamin limpidly related to the camera’s introducing us to “unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses” (1968, 237) are, moreover, all the more pertinent to Derrida’s own “phenomenology of film” for Benjamin’s equally linking these structural changes of perception to a modality of “belief” hitherto unimaginable. Analyzing the historical specificity of cinema to lie in its constructing a position for the spectator such that the latter completely identifies with the apparatus itself by virtue of her/his eyes being situated on a line parallel with the camera lens, and this eyeline then being reinforced in the editing process, Benjamin claims this yields an illusion of reality all the more potent for its seeming to be unmediated by artistic form. There are, in other words, no theatre wings, no picture frames, no lighting machinery and so on, to recall to the spectator that what s/he sees is a technically produced artefact.

Critically, the way in which Benjamin describes this modality of illusion/belief profoundly concurs with Derrida’s analyses of cinema’s specificity as residing in the restitution of the living present. Through its creation of an “apparatus-free aspect” of the world, cinema proffers an “appearance of immediate reality” – so vividly likened by Benjamin to “an orchid in the land of technology” (1968, 233) – by which it would “salvag[e] phenomenological immediacy” (Koch 1994, 213). Both

Benjamin and Derrida comprehend, as such, the “effect of reality” produced by the camera in terms of a “subjective adherence,” rather than engaging in any form of comparison between “representation” and “the real.” As with the enchained spectators of Plato’s cavern, mesmerized by the shadows of shadows flickering on the wall before them, the cinematic audience would accord a credit to “something” that is there without being there, identifying in this way with simulacra of corporeal presence: sensible insensibilia. Of course, from Plato’s “cavernous chamber” to the camera obscura, then to cinema itself, projected moving images have been likened over and over again to little ghosts (*fantasma*). Derrida would, however, have us understand the spectrality of the image and the *credit* accorded to it as partaking of the same logic: a logic in which the indistinction of perception and hallucination would, in fact, be prior to, and the condition of, any ascription of “reality,” “verisimilitude,” “presence/non-presence,” and so on.

That, “out of everything psychoanalysis has had to say on spectres,” Freud’s deliberations on the uncanny prove to be of particular interest to Derrida has to do precisely with such a scrambling of hallucination and perception. As a form of anguish or dread involving a strange intermixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the feeling of the uncanny is, in Freud’s view, found in its most exacerbated state in circumstances involving a relation to death or the reappearing of the dead, spirits and ghosts. His explanation of the uncanny largely relies, as such, on the mechanism that would underlie the anxiety aroused by the apparition of the dead: namely, the return of a belief that, once familiar, had been repressed in the unconscious or surmounted. Crediting the dead with the ability to reanimate, resurrect, or reappear to the living is, in other words, a form of belief that is supposedly confined to childhood or the “infancy of humankind.” Accordingly, when something happens in our lives that seems to give credence to the “old, discarded beliefs,” we are subject to intellectual uncertainty, the distinction between imagination and reality, perception and hallucination, being called into doubt. “[W]e get a feeling of the uncanny; and it is as though we were making a judgement something like this: . . . ‘Then the dead do continue to live and appear before our eyes on the scene of their former activities!’” (Freud 1955, 249). In short, we are placed before a scene in which we believe without believing, and this is precisely the modality of our belief. With the boundary between the imaginary and the real, fiction and non-fiction – in short, the “testing of reality” – no longer in place, not only are we ourselves, on Derrida’s reading of Freud, projected within the scene of the unconscious, but the very structure of this scene is revealed to coincide with that of the spectral uncanny. Displaying a topology in which the “other” that suddenly surges before us is revealed to already reside inside of us, more familiar to us than our very “selves” – “an an-identity that . . . invisibly occupies places belonging finally neither to us nor to it” (SM, 172) – the uncanny accruing to the return of the dead shares with the unconscious a “spacing” that unsettles any and all notions of the subject as consisting of an identity persevering in the presence of self-relation.

Such a spacing or unsettling of self-relation is what makes of spectrality the continuation of Derrida's deconstruction of phenomenology. Before turning, though, to the "spectralization" of Husserl's "living present," a brief incursion into Derrida's filmography will provide us with another instance of such an unsettling: one, intriguingly, seemingly wrought upon Derrida himself by nothing less than the very workings of *cinematic différance*.

2. *Différance's* "Elsewhere"

In 1999, Derrida served as both actor and subject in Safaa Fathy's *Derrida's Elsewhere*,² a film that Fathy herself was to characterize as an attempt to "translate thought into image" (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 136). Referring, in this context, to images and words as two rival "vectors" or forms of thought, Fathy found herself facing the risk, as a result, that the words she was to film – Derrida's declarations in front of the camera as well as excerpts from his *Circumfession* – might usurp all the resources of her cinematographic translation. What she could not have foreseen, however, was that this risk would be all the more difficult to parry for Derrida's taking up an opposing stance in the "battle" thereby waged between word and image (136, 137).

Constitutive of the very *mise-en-scène* of Fathy's film, this battle equally structures not only Derrida's thought about cinema but, in a particularly dramatic way, his physical implication in the making of Fathy's film. His "tenacious resistance" to the cinematic transposition of his words throughout the film shoot was, as already mentioned, recognized by Derrida himself. He was to insist, in fact, that the camera should frame uniquely his face and hands in close-up, with the rest of the frame being left blank, a scenographic minimalism that, from Fathy's point of view, amounted to Derrida "wanting to speak without there being anything to see and to make images without words, such that he served, in short, as a stand-in for his own role. It was impossible for me to acquiesce to this" (137). Such was the tension between the two on this point that Derrida soon announced he preferred "not to speak at all in the film" and "would only consent to appear in shots which had no voice-over." Fathy thus found herself seemingly having to "make a film about words without any words, a film about a man of words, a philosopher, who doesn't speak" (142). That this catastrophic scenario was not, ultimately, to eventuate is largely due to the cinematic "ruses" deployed by the director. Yet even more intriguing are the details and diagnosis she offers of Derrida's resistance. All seems to turn around the "motif" of dispossession. The technical set-up of the cinematic scene and its tempo profoundly unsettled Derrida. The material was too long to put into place and too overbearing, the repetition of shots too tedious, the interaction between members of the film crew during takes too intrusive. "And when the camera stopped for the film magazine to be changed or for any other technical reason, Derrida felt threatened,

dispossessed, as though he had had something wrested from him" (135). Unable to "visualize" the shots that were in the process of being filmed or to come to terms with the fact of sound being re-recorded later – "this 'later' exasperated [him] even more: why later and not now?" (140) – Derrida seemed to Fathy to suffer from finding himself in "a projection of a future" that he was unable to represent. "Derrida felt really dispossessed of his image, which, separated from him, floated above a profound loss that, in its turn, deprived him of any possibility of speech through the dispersion it provoked of the latter" (142).

Fathy's account of Derrida's reaction to the technical *mise-en-scène* of cinema – his aversion to its delays, its repetitions, its dispersion of speech, and deferring of sense and presence – is for readers familiar with his work oddly disconcerting. After all, were one to attempt to pick out the principal thread that runs through all Derrida's many and varied texts, this would probably best be found in the "final intention" of his 1967 *Of Grammatology*, the book undoubtedly most identified with his "philosophical project": namely, "to render enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words 'proximity,' 'immediacy,' 'presence' (the proximate [*proche*], the own [*propre*], and the pre- of presence)" (OG, 70). Such a "rendering enigmatic" was, of course, the task of "deconstruction": the dismantling and reconfiguration by which a purported "presence" or "present entity" would be revealed as the product of a "non-presence," construed, though, not as a simple contrary or negative but as a point of leverage by which to overturn and reconfigure the entire system privileging the "presence" of the original "element." While drawing in this respect on the play of differences analyzed by structuralist theories of language since Saussure as that rendering signification possible, Derrida set out to counteract what he saw as structuralism's intrinsic reliance on an underlying spatial paradigm. Whence his insistence that signification's dependence on the differentiating intervals or spaces that, simultaneously, separate and place in reciprocal relation the elements of a given field, equally entails that meaning is endlessly "deferred" in an infinitely long chain of referrals such that the "system" of meaning is neither closed nor synchronically present to itself. The differences in play are, as a result, "produced" by a movement or force that, as indicated by the "deferring," "delay," "detour," and "reserve" dismantling the pretensions of "presence," brings a *temporalizing* vector to bear on Saussure's determination of signification. At once, then, "spacing (and) temporalizing" (MP, 13), this now *dynamic* play of referrals or differences is that which, in its capacity of the very possibility of signification or conceptualisation in general, Derrida designates as "différance."

That admitted, the disconcertion that Derrida's readers cannot fail to feel in the face of his tenacious resistance to all that Fathy's cinematic set-up entailed in terms of a deferral of sense and presence or, indeed, the interruption of speech, might well best be set out by drawing (pre-emptively) on the trope of the eye so central to Derrida's reading of Husserl. Put succinctly: Why was Derrida, as the "Actor/Subject" of Fathy's film, seemingly so intent on turning a blind eye to all that the cinematic

mise-en-scène displayed of a deconstructive logic? Indeed, how could he have been so blind to the incongruity of the “thinker of *différance*” declaring, when confronted with an apparatus that was to construct, or reconstitute, a “living-present” of sound and image *après-coup*, in a delayed action: “Why not now, rather than later?” After all, surely the fact that the views taken by the camera would only gain sense in a deferred future moment of “perception” – a projected future not yet representable – could have been embraced as precisely granting a *duration* to the blink of an eye: each and every image projected on the screen being a synthesis of 24 frames (or so many virtual blinks) per second, compounding thereby shots and intervals, presences and absences, the perceptible and the non-perceptible? The answer to these questions certainly lies, in part at least, in the “preference for another writing machine” that Derrida sets out in his “Letters on a Blind Man: Punctum Caecum,” published in the book he co-signed with Fathy. Of the numerous other indices this text proffers of a “rivalry between images and words” structuring Derrida’s thought, not the least is Derrida’s consistent elision of the phenomenality of Fathy’s film as such, with his referring to its images rather as “reserves of infinite words”, as though to reassure himself that “the law of the image” can never bypass or win out over writing.

Yet, while Derrida’s preference for words is as clear in this essay as it is in others he wrote on the visual arts – “I won’t hide from you that only words interest me, the advance and retreat of terms in the taciturn obsession of this powerful photographic machine” is a statement found, for example, in his text for Marie-Françoise Plissart’s “photo-novel” *Right of Inspection*³ – it would seem, ultimately, that the key to his resistance to the cinematic scene is not to be sought in the comparison of “writing machines” per se. It is the very deconstructive operativity of the cinematic apparatus, the fact of cinema’s bringing together *différance* and an effect of “living presence” in an unprecedentedly accelerated way, that calls up, in a manner yet to be determined, what Derrida would prefer not to countenance: an *elsewhere*, let us say, of the very regime of arche-writing qua *différance*.

3. The Core and its Occulted Correlate

That *différance* finds its home, as it were, at the core of the living present is a cohabitation born of quasi-identity. Derrida’s inaugural, if provisional, definition of *différance* attests to this, with the latter being framed expressly, albeit with one significant qualification, in the same terms as Husserl’s characterization of the living “now”: namely, “this constitution of the present as an ‘originary’ and irreducibly nonsimple (and, therefore, *stricto sensu* nonoriginary) synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protentions” (MP, 13). Indeed, for Derrida, following Heidegger, Husserl’s “phenomenology of internal time-consciousness,” in its rigorous elucidation of the way in which the “present moment” or “living now” can only appear as such through its

being continuously compounded with other “nows,” past and future, decisively breaks with the traditional determination of the now as *stigmē* or a pure, punctual instant. For a project of “rendering enigmatic” the values of proximity, immediacy, and presence, Husserl’s analyses proffered, then, the basis on which it was possible to show that the present could in no way consist in a self-identical, indivisible unity. Yet, for all the complex interlacing of each now with nows that have just passed or nows that are to come, Husserl’s temporal syntheses still retain, in Derrida’s view, a notion of the self-identity of the now-as-point insofar as they have their beginning in an “originary impression” or “source point.” Husserl does, indeed, set down this status of “originary impression” as source unambiguously: “The temporally constitutive continuum is a flux of continuous generation of modifications of modifications. . . . The primal impression is the absolute beginning of this generation – the primal source, that from which all others are continually generated” (Husserl 1966, 131–132). This determination is, according to Derrida, the veritable lynchpin of Husserl’s conception of the self-presence of experience as premised on consciousness’s coincidence with its acts. Only by privileging a punctiform “present of perception,” in other words, can Husserl, on Derrida’s interpretation, affirm consciousness’s presence-to-itself to take place “immediately,” without any intervention of signs or representation, on the basis that our mental acts are lived by us “in the same instant [*im selben Augenblick*]” as they are carried out. The upshot being, as Derrida puts it in a play on Husserl’s German, that the present of self-presence is rendered as “indivisible as a *blink of an eye*” (VP, 50).

As most fully elaborated in *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida’s deconstruction of the simplicity of the present – his “troubling” of this eye blink – relies on a twofold argument. He first sets out to show that “impression” (used here interchangeably with “perception”) cannot consist in a “pure now” by means of Husserl’s own analyses of the movement of temporality. If the presence (to consciousness) of the perceived now can appear only inasmuch as it is continuously compounded with non-presence and non-perception, in accordance, that is, with its being constituted through a synthesis of protentions and retentions, then such a continuity of the now and not-now, of perception and non-perception, must equally complicate, Derrida argues, the “immediacy” or “punctuality” of originary impression. Consciousness’s self-presence to itself can, as such, no longer be immediate for the perceived present would be woven by *différance*, such that the “other” (the other now, the other of perception, etc.) is admitted into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*. This, then, is *différance*’s first troubling of the trope of vision: “non-presence and non-evidentness [are welcomed] into the *blink of an eye of the instant*. There is a duration to the blink of an eye and the duration closes the eye” (VP, 56).

To fully establish, however, this deconstruction of the value of presence in both its intertwined forms of the presence of the present and the *present of presentation*, Derrida must more decisively unsettle Husserl’s predication of the originary impression as the source or absolute beginning of the generation of the series of compounded

nows. Rather than being received from an “elsewhere,” this impression must be shown to be an *effect* of the very movement of temporalization – the synthesis of traces, protentions, and retentions – that Husserl would have it initiate. How Derrida does this is through the concept of auto-affection: a concept he first introduces in relation to the phenomenological privilege Husserl attributes to the operation of “hearing-oneself-speak” qua the (purported) pure presence of a relation to oneself, but which he, in fact, takes up and wields in the sense established by Heidegger in his interpretation of (Kant’s) pure auto-affection as the very structure of temporality as identified with subjectivity.

The importance of Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* for Derrida’s deconstruction of the originary impression cannot be overemphasized. Heidegger’s identifying the movement of temporalization as auto-affection is the basis for Derrida’s “second” argument that, if the originary impression, no less than the “living now” which is its correlate, is constituted in a process of temporalization entailing that any one now – any one “originary actuality” – is only what it is by being *affected* by another now/originary actuality, then this impression can, in fact, be nothing other than (consciousness’s) auto-affection. As such a structure of auto-affection (in the sense of a creation of consciousness by which this affects itself), originary impression cannot, then, pretend to be a “source point” engendered by the “presence” of something foreign to internal time-consciousness. Crucially, Derrida frames this disqualification of any “opening onto” something other than time-consciousness in terms taken directly (albeit without any explicit reference) from the section of Heidegger’s *Kantbuch* devoted to establishing pure temporal intuition as necessarily an intuition that “*gives itself* that which is susceptible of being received” (Heidegger 1997, paragraph 32). Just as Heidegger qualifies pure temporal intuition as a “pure production” on the basis that “the pure intuition of the pure succession of nows cannot be the reception of a (real) present,” so Derrida qualifies originary impression as auto-affection on exactly the same grounds: “The intuition of time itself cannot be empirical. It is a reception that receives nothing. The absolute novelty of each now is *therefore* engendered by nothing. It consists in an originary impression that engenders itself. . . . [It is] pure spontaneity” (VP, 71–72; my emphasis). There is, in short, no elsewhere, no “other,” of consciousness⁴: the eye not only “closes” but turns inwards, enveloped in the scene of “a pure auto-affection in which the same is the same only by affecting itself with an other [viz., another ‘now’], by becoming the other of the same” (VP, 73).

Derrida’s “superimposition” of Heidegger’s text to Husserl’s must be understood, however, to both depend upon and consolidate, as it were, an elision of the complex structure Husserl himself attributes to originary impression. Indeed, despite this superimposition being a retroversion of sorts insofar as the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* is itself the basis of Heidegger’s interpretation of temporality as auto-affection, not only does Husserl carefully distinguish originary impression from the movement of time-consciousness but he attempts to determine it in terms that

are far closer to Kant's understanding of pure auto-affection than to Heidegger's. For Husserl, consciousness's self-affection would first depend on an "originary affection" from an "elsewhere than itself" which is just as irreducible to an operation of "inner sense," imagination or temporal intuition as it is to any form of empirical reception of a "being." Originary impression attests, as such, to a structure of transcendence in terms of which temporalization qua auto-affection – encompassing both the compounded reciprocal reference of nows along the "horizon of temporal intuition" and the "ek-static" constitution of consciousness contingent upon this – cannot strictly be said the *sole* condition of objectivity, phenomenality, or experience. For, were there to be no such impression, no such "originary affection," consciousness would, according to Husserl (as for Kant), be "nothing" at all. Derrida's claims to the contrary do not, that said, draw on Heidegger's acceptance of auto-affection alone. A passage from the first appendix to the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* is no less crucial to his argument insofar as he cites this as 'proof' that Husserl himself attributes originary impression a status of "originary creation" and "spontaneous generation" – such that Husserl's own analyses would finally corroborate the interpretation, via Heidegger, of originary impression as a pure *product* of auto-affection. What Derrida's citation carefully elides, however, are the sentences in which Husserl clarifies what he means by "originary creation":

One can only say that consciousness is nothing without an impression. Where something endures, there *a* goes over into *xa'*, *xa'* into *yx'a''*, and so on. The generation of consciousness however, goes only from *a* to *a'*, from *xa'* to *x'a''*. On the other hand, the *a*, *x*, *y* [i.e., the impression] is nothing generated by consciousness; it is the primally generated, the "new", that which comes into existence foreign to consciousness, *that which is received as opposed to that which is generated through the spontaneity proper to consciousness*. (Husserl 1966, 131; my emphasis)

Far then from defining originary impression as a "pure spontaneity" as Derrida claims, understanding by this "a spontaneous creation of *time-consciousness*," Husserl stipulates not only that this impression is foreign to (time-)consciousness, but that the latter, qua spontaneity, creates nothing new but "merely brings about the growth, the development of the primally generated" (Husserl 1966, 131).

Whereas Husserl's analyses seek to determine what some commentators have referred to as an "originary cell" or connexion⁵ (the conjoining of an impression, emanating from an elsewhere of consciousness, with the temporal horizon of nows generated by consciousness qua pure spontaneity), Derrida "splits" this connexion and, retaining solely the series of modifications of modifications, completely jettisons that which, "foreign to consciousness," attests as such to an "affection" by an "outside." With the movement of unlimited modifications, qua "auto-affection," thereby instituted as the *sole* "condition" of originary impression, the latter is ultimately simply collapsed into its correlate, the living present. Nowhere is this reduction

clearer or put to more effect than in the concluding passage of Derrida's "deconstruction" of originary impression qua source point, immediately following his description of the latter as a "pure spontaneity":

The process by means of which the *living now*, producing itself by spontaneous generation, must, in order to be a now, be retained in another now, must affect itself, without empirical recourse, with a new originary actuality in which it will become a non-now as a past now, etc.; . . . such a process is indeed a pure auto-affection . . . This auto-affection must be pure since the *originary impression* is affected there by nothing other than by itself, by the absolute "novelty" of another originary impression which is another now. (VP, 72–73; my emphasis)

Husserl's emphatic refutation that this impression is constituted within the auto-affection of temporality is neither acknowledged by Derrida nor, consequently, ever confronted as a persistent problematic point for deconstruction. Moreover, whatever the undeniable difficulty of Husserl's conception of a necessarily equivocal correlation, or connection, between an "originary" affection, whose reception by consciousness cannot be confounded with the empirical reception of a "being," and the living present, qua "element" of the temporal continuum, the fact that originary impression is explicitly qualified as foreign to the movement of temporalization clearly indicates that, *even were* it to attest to something of the order of a "presence," in no way could this be assimilated to the presence of a "present" nor, even less, to the presence of consciousness to itself. Husserl is proposing, rather, a structure of transcendence that, in its positing of an "alterity" ("foreign to consciousness"; "other" than any presentation of a present) proves to be calibrated in very different terms than the movement of "becoming the other of the same" formative of temporality as auto-affection. Derrida does not "deconstruct" this structure of transcendence in his analyses of the living present but quite literally occults it, confounding impression with perception and eliding the irreducibility of originary impression to time-consciousness, which is to say, its irreducibility to *différance*. Suffice it to say that, in this respect, Derrida's "closing of the eye" gestures to nothing less than the *constitutive* blind spot of deconstruction.

With cinema, something of this "occulted structure" comes back, as it were, to haunt deconstruction by way of what might well be called an "uncanny" corollary of the spectral essence of the cinematic scene. Before attending to this, however, Derrida's elision of an "other-than-auto-affection" needs to be firmly grasped as a constitutive condition of everything he was to advance under the name of *différance*, and hence the "paleonyms" of arche-writing, spacing, spectrality, and so on. This can be most succinctly seen via the reformulation of the analyses of *Voice and Phenomenon* that Derrida proffers in both *Of Grammatology* in 1967 and his *Specters of Marx* some 25 years later. In both these books, Derrida insists far more radically than Husserl himself on the consequences that ensue from the difference, or

“phenomenological fold,” between the “sensory appearing” (the world) and the “appearance” (the phenomenological object or “noema” constituted in the subjective process, qua time-consciousness or lived experience). This difference is “the condition of all other differences,” Derrida states in *Of Grammatology* (OG, 65), insisting above all in this respect on the irreducibility of the phenomenological or “noematic” object in its singular status of a component of lived experience that no more belongs to the world than it “really” belongs to consciousness: the noema is not inherently part of the latter but what is “intended” by it, the object as this is perceived from the transcendental point of view. Whence Derrida’s qualifying the noema as a *trace* that renders any reanimation of the manifest evidence of an “originary presence” impossible: such a presence can only be “referred to” within the movement of *différance* as an absolute past, which is to say a past that has never been present.

In this sense, deconstruction would indeed have simply needed “to realize,” as Derrida puts it in *Specters of Marx*, the resources offered by Husserl’s identification of the noema as an intentional but “non-real” component of lived experience. Neither “in” the world nor “in” consciousness, the noema “is the condition of any experience, any objectivity, any phenomenality”; it is “the very place of apparition” such that it then qualifies, in the context of Derrida’s “logic of spectrality,” as “the essential, general, non-regional possibility of the spectre” (SM, 135 n. 6). It is on this basis, in fact, that Derrida instates spectrality, qua a “deconstructive logic,” as nothing other than a “phenomenology of the spectral”: “For what is a *phenomenology* if not a logic of the *phainesthai* [“to shine, show oneself or appear”] and the *phantasma*, therefore of the phantom?”; “[t]he *phainesthai* itself (before its determination as phenomenon or phantasm, thus as phantom) is the very possibility of the spectre” (SM, 122 and 135). Yet, as the very place of apparition, the condition of experience, objectivity, and phenomenality, the noema yields “first of all,” of course, the structure of *différance*. Derrida’s analyses in *Voice and Phenomenon* state nothing else, all while “demonstrating” by their occultation of that which Husserl stipulated to be “foreign” to any (noematic) object of lived experience that such a structure *forecloses* any “outside” other than that constituted as a pure product within the movement of auto-affection. For, once we admit *différance* – qua temporalization qua auto-affection – as “the openness of the present to an outside-of-itself, to an *other* absolute present” (VP, 72n.), we must equally understand this, on Derrida’s account, as a “spacing” that envelops within itself a “*pure ‘outside’*: namely, time’s ‘outside-of-itself’ as the self-relation of time” (VP, 73).

4. Emanations

The capacity of “restituting the living present,” with an extraordinary effect of “thereness” over even vast expanses of space and time, is, it will be remembered, the “structural specificity” Derrida grants to cinema along with the other contemporary

teletechnologies. As never before in history, the “moment of inscription,” with all this would seem to entail of the contingency of a singular event taking place once and once alone, “there and then,” proves capable of being transported and reproduced as “living” or “live” even when this inscription has taken place or been recorded decades ago and on the other side of the world. Yet, whatever the “apparent immediacy” of a filmed or televised event, even one transmitted “live” or “direct,” this is always/already not simply interwoven with but *constituted by différance*.

What we call real time is simply an extremely reduced “differance”, but there is no purely real time because temporalization itself is structured by a play of retention or of protention and, consequently, of traces: the condition of possibility of the living, absolutely real present is already memory, anticipation, in other words, a play of traces. (ET, 129)

That even a supposedly synchronous presentation is a particular effect of *différance* is not, however, uniquely attributable to the “sheer fact,” if we may put it this way, of temporalization (i.e., that even the most “living” of “living presents” is constituted by a synthesis of retentions and protentions). Each and every teletechnological apparatus comprises modes of intervention – the framing of the “image/sound-event,” point of view, duration of the recording, and so on – which are just as many vectors or operations of differing, delay, reserve, and detour by means of which the effect of a “presence of the present” or “present of presentation” is, in fact, produced. “[T]echnics alone can bring about the ‘effect’ of real time,” Derrida states in *Echographies* (ET, 130; trans. modified), while in the “conversation on photography” published as *Copy, Archive, Signature* he underlines that the production of what is given as “real” or “immediate” is a structural characteristic of even the “old” technologies predating the most recent teletechnological developments:

Is it necessary to recall that in photography there are all sorts of initiatives: not only framing but point of view, calculation of light, adjustment of the exposure, overexposure, underexposure, etcetera? These interventions are perhaps of the same type as those in a digital treatment. In any case, to the extent that they *produce* the image and constituted something of an image [*de l’image*], they modify reference itself, introducing multiplicity, divisibility, substitutivity, replaceability. (Derrida 2010, 7)

All so many instances, in other words, of the workings of *différance* by which any punctual presentation of a “live event” is divested of its claims to “singularity” and “unicity” no less than those of a “synchronous or immediate restitution.”

These remarks recalling the *différance* at work in photography apply equally, of course, to cinematography, insofar as cinema’s material basis, barring the most recent developments in digital technologies, consists of the photogram. The cinematic images that flicker by on the screen are constituted by 24 photographic imprints

per second: a fact sometimes gestured to by the filmic device of the “freeze-frame,” whereby spectators are presented with what appears to be an “instantaneous unit,” albeit that even a still image on the screen is itself, of course, no less comprised of two dozen sequential frames per second. That admitted, Derrida’s reflections on the photographic image are of particular interest in the present context inasmuch as they persistently come up against the “objections” addressed to deconstruction, as it were, by Roland Barthes’s highly influential *Camera Lucida*, an unavoidable reference in the fields of photography and film studies since its publication in 1980. Despite first attempting a rejoinder of sorts in his obituary essay “The Deaths of Roland Barthes” in 1981, Derrida was to find himself confronted thereafter, time and time again, with interrogations querying his response to Barthes’s claim that, with photography, it is impossible to deny that a necessarily real thing, “the Referent,” had been situated before the lens, such that the photographic image, by conjoining “the past and reality,” would command our belief in, or adherence to, “a past *that has been present*” (Barthes 1981, 76). Not only does such a claim run directly counter to Derrida’s deconstructive tenet that “the manifest evidence of an originary presence” can only be referred to within the movement of *différance* as an “absolute past,” but Barthes compounds his “objection” to this deconstructive logic by naming the “that-has-been” as nothing less than photography’s essence or noema. Countering thereby Derrida’s determination of the “noema in general” as an irreducible trace consisting in the memory of something never having had the form of being present, Barthes calls into question that which constitutes, for Derrida, the very “condition of spectrality” and, by extension, of cinema.

Accordingly, while Derrida does of course adduce technology’s necessary substitutability, reproducibility, and multiplicity, no less than its deferring, detour, and reserve, against Barthes’s notion of the “referent” as an indubitably singular occurrence conjoining past (presence) and reality, what truly proves pivotal in his “explication” with Barthes is the concept of the noema. By naming the “that-has-been” a *noema*, Barthes must, according to Derrida (PSY1, 284, 288), be understood to fully inscribe his analyses within a phenomenological framework, as would, indeed, seem confirmed by *Camera Lucida*’s self-ascription as a phenomenology, albeit one Barthes describes as “vague,” “non-classical,” and “even cynical . . . so readily did it agree to distort or to evade its principles according to the whim of my analyses” (Barthes 1981, 20–21). Whatever Barthes’s claim to unorthodoxy however, it follows from this phenomenological framework *per se* for Derrida that the “having-been of a unique and invariable referent” (PSY1, 284) must, precisely qua noema, be construed not in naïve terms of a “reference to a referent” (as Barthes puts it) but as the “phenomenological object” constituted within the movement of “referential implication” that is directed towards “the Referent.” “[T]he referent is noticeably absent, suspendable, vanished into the unique past time of this event”; yet, though “it is no longer *there* (present, living, real), its *having-been-there* [is] presently a part of the referential or intentional structure of my relationship to the photogram.” “[T]he

referential implication is also intentional and noematic; it belongs neither to the sensible body nor to the medium of the photogram" (PSY1, 285).

Once recalled to the "principles of phenomenology," in sum, Barthes should no longer speak of "the referent" but of "reference" (PSY1, 284–285), with the "that-has-been," qua photography's noema, no longer "the guarantee" of an undeniable presence of something having been there in a "real" transcending ourselves but a *trace* of something that has never been present. Whence, as rigorously recast in terms of the phenomenological reduction, Barthes' noema falls no less within the compass of deconstruction, which is equally to say the "logic of spectrality": far from attesting to an impression by something "real," foreign to "my relationship to the photogram," the "that-has-been" would, as a trace constituted within a play of traces, refer to an absolute past and not a past presence. "Reference to the referent" can then but be a conjuration of phantasmatic "re-appearance": the "return of the referent indeed takes the form of a haunting" (PSY1, 285).

That in all photography there is a "return of the dead," with the photographic referent thereby, indeed, a sort of specter, is, in point of fact, a declaration that could well qualify as the veritable leitmotif of *Camera Lucida*. Yet, unlike the specters of which Derrida speaks, those whose "haunting" fills us with "the memory of something that has, basically, never had the form of presence" (ET, 115; trans. modified), Barthes's specter would not only "protest its former existence", laying down, from the photographic support, "a claim in favor of its reality" (Barthes 1981, 89), but, as "a kind of little simulacrum," an "*eidolon emitted by the object*" (1981, 9; my emphasis), no less vigorously refute any phenomenological (or deconstructive) reduction that would deny its attesting to an originary affection by an "outside." In short, the referent is a specter, for Barthes, first and foremost in the sense that the specter is literally an *emanation* of the referent:

The *noema* "that-has-been" was possible only once a scientific circumstance (the discovery that silver halogens were sensitive to light) made it possible to recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object. The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. . . . [T]he thing of the past, by its immediate radiations (its luminances), has really touched the surface which in its turn my gaze will touch. (Barthes 1981, 80–81; trans. modified)

In short, for the photograph to present the viewer with what Barthes, recalling the shared etymology of "specter" and "spectacle", names a "Spectrum" (1981, 4), it is necessary that light rays touch a light-sensitive material (photographic plate or film), with the impression thereby registered on this support then eventually via an entire chain of various processes of development and duplication, and whatever be the length of its transmission, coming to "touch," in turn, the viewer's gaze.

Barthes's very insistence on the chemical processes rendering possible the photographic noema suffices in itself, before any other consideration of the devices of framing, development, reproduction, and so on, to show that he is not ignoring the workings of *différance* in the production of the image. Indeed, he dismisses as fatuous any such claim that "realists," like himself, commit the naïvety of ignoring that all photography is the product of technical artifice (1981, 88). Nor is he, for that matter, denying the status of the noema as a "phenomenological object," as is evident from a passage in *Camera Lucida* given immediately after the definition of the "that-has-been" as the noema of photography:

what I see has been here . . . ; it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred. . . . What I *intentionalize* in a photograph . . . is Reference, which is the founding order of Photography. (Barthes 1981, 77; my emphasis)

Rather, Barthes's claim is of a different order. By qualifying photography as "an emanation of *past reality*" (1981, 88), he is contending that, before all else, before the technological modes of intervention, before even the event, as it were, of an empirical inscription upon the chemical emulsion, the noema must be understood as conditional upon an impression, or affection, from outside of the photographic apparatus: that it would, in sum, be "nothing" were it not for the materiality of light.

The interest Barthes's analyses hold with respect to Derrida's thinking on cinema as a restitution *par excellence* of the living present should, by now, be seen to consist pre-eminently in their echoing something of Husserl's insistence that whatever is constituted in intentionality is first of all conditional upon an originary impression that is, of necessity, foreign to the intentional movement itself. It is in no way surprising, then, that Derrida, in his *Copy, Archive, Signature* conversation, directly reframes Barthes's claims for photography in the same terms as those he had previously employed for Husserl's problematic:

A chrono-logic of the instant, the logic of the punctual *stigmé*, governs Barthes' interpretation, which is in fact the common interpretation of the ineffaceable referent, of what has taken place only once. This *Einmaligkeit* – this "onceness" – supposes the undecomposable simplicity, beyond all analysis, of a time of the instant: the moment as the *Augenblick*, the eyeblink of a *prise de vue*, of a shot or of taking (in) a view. . . . There is a point where the photographic act . . . passively records; it captures a reality that is there, that will have been there, in an indecomposable now. (Derrida 2010, 8–9)

In sum, Barthes would, in the same way as Husserl, adhere to a logic of the now-as-point essentially because the very fact of his understanding photographic perception to consist, at its "source" so to speak, in the passive reception of an affection emanating from "outside the apparatus" amounts (on Derrida's account) to privileging in

the final instance the *present of a presentation*. In strict conformity then with his twofold argument in *Voice and Phenomenon* aimed at deconstructing the “primacy” of the originary impression, Derrida’s response to Barthes here first involves introducing duration into the “eyeblick of a *prise de vue*” before setting out to more decisively trouble the primary postulate of a passive reception of an originary emanation.

It would take too long to detail the ins and outs of Derrida’s argument in *Copy, Archive, Signature*: an argument, moreover, that is not altogether rigorously unified, insofar as the interview format basically restricts Derrida to posing a series of key argumentative constellations, each of which, crucially, refers to the analyses he has elaborated in all due rigor elsewhere, principally in the triad of books published in 1967, *Voice and Phenomenon*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Writing and Difference*. Suffice it to say here that, after recalling the synthetic structure of temporality as his first premise – “if ‘the one single time’ . . . of the shot already occupies a heterogeneous time, this supposes a differing/deferring and differentiated duration: in a split second the light can change and we’re dealing with a divisibility of the first time” (2010, 8) – Derrida then notes that, once duration is recognized as correlative to a technics, not only is there not any sort of (pre-technical) perception that would be somehow immediate and natural but “the totality of the photographic act” is marked by a *technê* (2010, 10). There is, in other words, no longer any pure passivity, such as that presupposed by the conception of a “passive exposure.” Yet, this is not to say that activity effaces passivity: “[i]n the opening (or ‘aperture’) to light and to what is supposed to be an object, photography does not do everything” (2010, 12). Rather it is question of “another structure, a sort of *acti/passivity*” such as that precisely set out in “Heidegger’s great meditation in the wake of Kant”: a meditation, as we know, concerning “temporality as a pure auto-affective synthesis in which activity itself is passivity” (2010, 12, 14). This problematic is, Derrida underlines, “indispensable.” Indeed, just as “temporal auto-affection *in* perception” undoes the postulation of an undecomposable simplicity of a time of the instant, so too, the impossibility of opposing passivity to activity, no less entailed by temporality as pure auto-affective synthesis, rules out any conception of a purely passive reception “with respect to some given thing, light or shadow” (2010, 17). Certainly “activity is at the service of a certain passivity” – this being, after all, the very structure of *auto-affection* – but the passivity in question here “is passive . . . with respect to a difference” (*ibid.*).

That Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, qualifies this difference with respect to which the photographic apparatus orchestrates its “acti/passivity” as the “condition of all other differences,” qua the “phenomenological fold” in its radicalized guise of a deconstructive logic, hardly calls for elaboration. In this respect, as with the other arguments mobilized in his deconstruction of Barthes’s originary emanation (e.g., the impossibility of opposing the presumed immediacy of perception to the delay and differing involved in technics, the necessity of an “interpretative repetition” of

Heidegger's analyses of "temporality as a pure auto-affective synthesis," the play of shadow and light as "already a form of writing"), Derrida is restaging here, as it were, the major conceptual constellations comprising the thinking of *différance* he was to pursue over a period of some 40 years. Yet, in the context of his explication with Barthes, two points of particular insistence or, indeed shall we say, of "speculative intrigue," can be observed. The first concerns the question of materiality, a question that Barthes's comprehension of "emanation" as consisting in "luminous rays" compels Derrida, as it were, to address, despite materiality being a question he rarely raises of his own volition.⁶ Certainly, he does little more in his "conversation on photography" than acknowledge that this is a question that can be neither simply avoided nor accorded too ready a (metaphysical or even *onto*-logical) signification as "substance" or "the presence of a present being." Yet "matter" would, Derrida states, persist as a "remainder": one which prompts his precision, moreover, that photography/perception "does not do everything" by way of guarding against any misapprehension of *différance* (the economy of the trace, writing, spectrality, etc.) as a "new idealism" in terms of which the concepts of sense and reference would simply be suppressed (POS, 66). What's particularly intriguing, though, is that this way of "countenancing" the materiality of Barthes's emanation is markedly at odds with the rejoinders Derrida addresses to Barthes elsewhere, where, in conformity with his resituating the noema "that-has-been" within the strict confines of the phenomenological reduction, he chooses to "bracket" the question of materiality and (explicitly) recast emanation as of a purely phenomenological order. So it is that in "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" Derrida compares the "return of the referent," which he has just specified to be constituted within the "intentional movement of reference," to a "spectral arrival" that "indeed *resembles* that of an emission or emanation" (PSY1, 285; my emphasis). An even more incisive phenomenological reformulation of this kind occurs in his interviews with Stiegler when, confronted with his interlocutor's insistence on precisely the *materiality* of Barthes's luminous emanation, Derrida states that, as he understands it,

what Barthes calls 'emanation' . . . is not a ray of light but the source of a possible view: from the point of view of the other. . . . The 'reality effect' stems here from the irreducible alterity of another origin of the world. . . . What I call the gaze here, the gaze of the other, is . . . another source of phenomenality, another degree zero of appearing. (ET, 122–123)

In short, emanation is, for Derrida in these texts, nothing "material," nor would it attest to any form of a "real" (or, indeed, "remainder"?) irreducible to phenomenality: it is, put simply, *another phenomenality*. The fact that he would, on one occasion at least, feel compelled to countenance "light as light," so to speak, rather than as a kind of noematic "aura" or the point of view of the other, surely indicates that the photographic-cum-cinematic scene poses a persistent problematic for a

phenomenological reduction that, itself defined as a “scene” (VP, 72 and 74), would admit of no “outside,” no “alterity,” other than that encompassed *within* pure auto-affectation.

This brings us to the second point of “speculative intrigue” enfolded within Derrida’s restaging of his key conceptual constellations in *Copy, Archive, Signature*. Given that “originary impression”/“emanation” as defined within a Husserlian/Barthesian problematic would, on Derrida’s interpretation, presuppose an immediacy or “pre-technical” state to perception, his entire deconstructive recapitulation is framed by the impossibility of opposing perception and technics. The explicit analogy Derrida proffers in this context between the photographic machine and the perceptual/psychic apparatus seems straightforward enough, as does too the accompanying reference to his 1967 “Freud and the Scene of Writing” where the analogy is said to find its elaboration:

In perception there are already operations of selection, of exposure time, of filtering, of development; the psychic apparatus functions also *like*, or *as*, an apparatus of inscription and of the photographic archive. Think of Freud’s *Wunderblock*, the “mystic writing pad.” What I attempted to say about this a long time ago, about writing, also concerned photography. (Derrida 2010, 15)

What is “intriguing,” however, is that what Derrida “attempted to say” in 1967 about Freud’s recourse to a scriptural model for the psychic apparatus not only did not “also concern” photography but was, to the contrary, expressly premised on Derrida’s *disqualifying* as potential models for the psyche’s structure any and every optical machine, be this a photographic apparatus or, say, a cinematic one. “Freud and the Scene of Writing” contradicts, as such, not only what Derrida purports in *Copy, Archive, Signature* to have said there but equally what he had to say in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, when he hailed the “particular technique of cinema” to be what alone gives us the “experience” of *différance* just as “cinematic perception is alone capable of making us understand through experience what a psychoanalytic practice is” (CSE, 75). It is, therefore, to Derrida’s confrontation of optical and scriptural “models of *différance*” that we need to turn by way of conclusion.

5. Conclusion: Optical Recalls

“Freud and the Scene of Writing” has a two-pronged objective. Derrida purports to show, on the one hand, that Freud, unbeknown to himself, reveals an “originary temporality” of the psyche – a “temporality as spacing,” equally qualified as “the movement of temporalization and auto-affectation” – and, on the other, that this temporal structure is what “determines” Freud to propose the Mystic Writing Pad, in 1925, as an analogy for what he himself names the “psychic apparatus.” “Only a writing

machine" can, in other words, furnish an adequate model for the psyche on Derrida's reading, insofar as the temporality the latter evinces "in its very structure" is ultimately to be understood as a "psychical writing" identified as "the writing of difference." In this perspective Freud's own repeated (and, ultimately, enduring) proposition of not scriptural but optical models for the psyche, as exemplified most famously in the *Interpretation of Dreams* that "we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus or something of the kind" (Freud 1953, 574), poses a major obstacle. Derrida's argument depends, as a result, on his *disqualifying* all optical mechanisms, photographic and cinematic apparatuses no less than the telescope or microscope, from claiming any sort of privilege as Freud's preferred means of representing "psychical writing." To this end, he imbues his text with what can best be described as a "teleological dramaturgy," in terms of which the search for a model capable of representing the psyche's twofold capacity of perpetually receiving fresh perceptions and transforming the latter into permanent memory traces would lead Freud, over some 30 years, to "test and abandon" all the optical models "until finally" discovering, in 1925, the Mystic Writing Pad, "a writing machine of marvellous complexity into which the whole of the psychical apparatus will be projected" (WD, 200).

For this scenario to work, however, Derrida has to do more than "overlook" the fact that Freud's search for a model continued beyond 1925, with his last text, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, returning in 1938 to a resolutely optical model of the psychical apparatus, said (again) to resemble "a telescope or microscope or something of the kind" (Freud 1938, 145). He has to show that optical machines fail, on Freud's own terms, as a model for the psyche there, where a scriptural model succeeds. Derrida's insistence on the "imperfections" Freud acknowledges in his optical model, in 1900, is not, in this respect, altogether sufficient, since not only does Freud state that such (unavoidable) imperfections are negligible for the purpose of his analogy but he reiterates exactly the same acknowledgment-cum-disclaimer with respect to the Mystic Writing Pad. In a long note, inter-referencing Freud's photographic analogies with those proposed by a nineteenth-century author, Hervey de St-Denys, Derrida sets down however what seems to be a more conclusive disqualification of optical models on Freud's part. Despite the latter's frequent recourse to the photographic process as a model for the workings of the psyche, he was to judge (from what Derrida's note leads us to believe) such an analogy imperfect insofar as "memory, compared to a camera, has the marvellous superiority of natural force: to be able to renew by itself its means of action" (WD, 330 n. 18).

Yet only indeed by means of a certain "speculative intrigue" can such a judgment be imputed to Freud. Not only does the cited comparison between memory and the camera belong to St-Denys, but the one time when Freud does remark on the inability of one particular type of mechanism to represent memory's capacity to "spontaneously reproduce its contents from within", he does so precisely in his 1925 text with reference not *to the camera, but the Mystic Pad*. That this is a remark he had "skipped

over” (*sauté par-dessus*) is acknowledged by Derrida at the very end of “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” when he then considers such a claim for living memory’s superiority to betray Freud’s continued allegiance to the metaphysics of presence. By opposing “the writing of living memory,” capable of spontaneously reproducing itself, to a non-autonomous writing machine, Freud would perpetuate, that is, the tradition’s privileging of nature over technology and life over death. Be this as it may, however, by “skipping over” Freud’s remark all while hailing, on the one hand, the Mystic Pad to solve “all the previous difficulties” encountered with mechanical models, and insinuating, on the other, that Freud judged the inability to reproduce memory’s spontaneity to be an imperfection tainting optical, and not scriptural, models of the psychic apparatus, Derrida would effectively have “staged” a disqualification of optical machines’ capacity to capture the workings of the psyche.

The “troubling” of *différance* induced by optical machines finds here, after Barthes’s photographic apparatus and Fathy’s cinematographic shoot, further corroboration. Yet while, in 1967, Derrida was concerned above all to “counter the threat,” as it were, of an optical machine providing a more comprehensive model for *différance* than would a scriptural apparatus,⁷ some 20–30 years later, in the early to mid-1990s and from then on until his death, he was, of course, to acclaim photographic and cinematographic apparatuses as paradigms of spectrality. One could be tempted to couch this in terms of a teleological dramaturgy of “final realization” were it not for the fact that, for Derrida, the threat then (or still) posed itself of these exemplary models of *différance* showing up insufficiencies in the latter’s conceptualization. It is instructive to compare in this respect the confrontation of deconstruction and the cinema proposed in the 1970s by Jean-Louis Baudry (1970, 1975). Not only does Baudry argue that the cinematic apparatus is singularly capable of representing all *three* functions Freud ultimately assigned to the psyche – namely, those of continually receiving fresh impressions, preserving memory traces *and* reproducing the latter – but his incisive elucidation of the way in which cinema exemplifies the workings of *différance* makes it clear that film’s multi-stratified “spacing” of differential elements *depends* on the camera lens receiving light rays emanating from a source foreign to the camera itself.⁸ Baudry’s analyses concur, as such, with the proposition that has resounded throughout this entire investigation of the “speculative intrigue” enfolded within Derrida’s scene of cinema. Namely, the future of deconstruction, as projected, certainly, from the point of view of its pertinence to cinema, but not from this alone, depends on countenancing what Derrida himself was systematically to “skip over,” “resist tenaciously,” or simply “turn a blind eye to” in order to preserve for *différance* a “model” of writing “dictated,” as it were, by his “interpretative repetition” of Heidegger’s determination of temporalization as auto-affectation. In keeping with Derrida’s caution against the ease with which designation can lend itself to metaphysical or ontological reappropriation, let us simply note that “materiality,” a “different ordering of spacing,” and, of course, “light” are the *conditions* under which the cinematic scene was incessantly to recall to Derrida that what is ultimately in

question here is an alterity irreducible to the internal workings of an auto-affective apparatus.⁹

Notes

- 1 This investigation into the speculative intrigue of Derrida's scene of cinema draws, in part, on an earlier text of mine (Burchill 2009) but seeks to bring out more incisively the way in which Derrida's confrontation to cinema reveals the "constitutive limits" of his conceptualization of *différance*.
- 2 In addition to Fathy's film and McMullen's *Ghost Dance*, Derrida also "played his own role" in Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering-Kofman's *Derrida* (2005) and Jean-Christophe Rosé's documentary *Jacques Derrida* (1994). Derrida's filmography comprises as such a fiction film, a documentary, and two "docufictions."
- 3 Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985 (my translation from the French.) Another explicit acknowledgment of Derrida's preference for words is found in the interview "The Spatial Arts" in Brunette and Wills (1994).
- 4 We should note that when we refer to Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl, "consciousness" needs to be understood in a sense large enough to encompass the *unconscious*. That is, while the unconscious may well be understood as "the other scene," this is an "alterity" that is of quite a different order than Husserl's originary impression, which, for its part, is strictly irreducible to "subjective processes."
- 5 See especially here Desanti (1992, 146–147).
- 6 In the early interview "Positions" (1971), Derrida sets out the reasons why the word "matter" is one he rarely uses; this being a statement that would seem to remain valid for the totality of his corpus.
- 7 Derrida's analyses in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" are explicitly framed as a repetition of Heidegger's reading of Kant. Just as Heidegger deemed it necessary to *counter* "the threat posed to the transcendental priority of time by space," so too Derrida has to ward off a similar threat to his determination of *différance* as proto-temporalization. See Burchill (2011).
- 8 For a fuller discussion of the manner in which Baudry proffers a counter-proof to Derrida's disqualification of the optical model for the psyche, all while continually reworking Derrida's thought such that the cinematographic apparatus comes to exemplify the workings of *différance*, see Burchill (2009).
- 9 The author would like to thank Eon Yorck, as ever, for his spectral input.

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Derrida and de Man: Two Rhetorics of Deconstruction

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This essay contrasts Derrida's strategies of "deconstruction" with Paul de Man's. They are the twin patriarchs of so-called deconstruction. Since deconstruction, one tends (mistakenly) to assume, is some unitary thing, these two critics, it follows, must deploy similar analytical methods. That is not the case. I shall juxtapose one essay by each. That may help show what is distinctive about Derrida's rhetoric of deconstruction. Identifying de Man's reading strategies may also perhaps give us clues about how to read Derrida. Perhaps. Much, indeed most, of the work on both de Man and Derrida is thematic in the sense of making a series of brief citations and attempting to tease out their conceptual meaning as they relate to one another. My goal is different. I want to identify how each characteristically puts an essay together to make it performatively effective. Each wants to make a given essay persuasive, a way of doing something with words, not just a way of saying something constatively.

1. Not Even a Hint of Disagreement

First, however, a brief history of the relation between Derrida and de Man over the years. They first met, according to Derrida, in Baltimore in 1966 at breakfast "during a colloquium" (MDM2, xvi, 127). This was the famous Johns Hopkins structuralism conference at which Derrida presented "Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Each found that the other was greatly interested in what was until then thought to be a minor essay by Rousseau, not even included in the Pléiade edition of Rousseau's work, the "Essay on the Origin of Languages." Derrida then in 1967 brought out *Of Grammatology*, and de Man eventually published "The Rhetoric

of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau" (de Man 1971, 102–141). It was first published in French in *Poétique*, in 1970, though de Man says in *Blindness and Insight* that it was written especially for that book (de Man 1971, xiii). De Man takes issue with Derrida in what is still the best critical reading of Derrida's early work and of its rhetorical strategies. These two lifelong friends played hardball, as we say, even with each other's work. Though de Man's essay is complex and subtle, he challenges especially two features of Derrida's reading of Rousseau.

First, de Man says that Derrida is blinded by a false, more or less Foucauldian, periodizing assumption about "epistemes," distinctive historical epochs. Rousseau wrote in the eighteenth century, therefore he must be logocentric. "Of course," writes de Man, "if Rousseau does not belong to the logocentric 'period,' then the scheme of periodization used by Derrida is avowedly arbitrary" (de Man 1971, 138). Second, de Man claims, in the climactic sentences in his essay, that Derrida appropriates to himself insights that are already there in Rousseau:

There is no need to deconstruct Rousseau; the established tradition of Rousseau interpretation, however, stands in dire need of deconstruction. . . . Derrida did not choose to adopt this pattern: instead of having Rousseau deconstruct his critics, we have Derrida deconstructing a pseudo-Rousseau by means of insights that could have been gained from the "real" Rousseau. The pattern is too interesting not to be deliberate. (de Man 1971, 139–140)

Could that last sentence possibly be de Man's ironical way of saying: "Surely Derrida cannot have been so blinded as to make unwittingly this dumb mistake in reading?" Derrida, in the third lecture in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, cites letters he received from de Man in 1970 and 1971 apropos of "The Rhetoric of Blindness." This happens in the context of Derrida's discussion of madness in three great writers whom de Man championed: Rousseau, Hölderlin, and Nietzsche. Rousseau and Nietzsche were also crucial writers for Derrida from his adolescence onward, as he confesses in this lecture. Derrida had written to de Man, who was then in Zumikon, his home outside Zurich while he was a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Zurich. After reading the manuscript of de Man's essay, Derrida affirms that he is fully in agreement with what de Man says. De Man answers that to say this must be "kindness," because "if you object to what I say about metaphor, you must, as it should be, object to everything" (MDM2, 129). After de Man's essay appeared in *Poétique*, Derrida must have thanked de Man again, since Derrida cites another letter from de Man in which the latter says that "there is no disagreement between us about the basis of your thinking but a certain divergence in our manner of nuancing and situating Rousseau" (MDM2, 130). De Man goes on to specify that "The desire to exempt Rousseau (as you say) *at all costs* from blindness is therefore, for me, a gesture of fidelity to my own itinerary" (MDM2, 130). De Man asserts that Rousseau is completely lucid about the rhetoricity of his writing and that this lucidity was crucial to

de Man's own intellectual development. In other ways, writes de Man, Rousseau was hyperbolically blind, to the point of madness. *Émile*, says de Man, "seems to me one of the most demented texts there is" (MDM2, 130).

Between de Man's accusations of Derrida and Derrida's accusations of de Man in "Typewriter Ribbon," discussed below, many long years of close association and mutual support occurred. Each repeatedly declared fidelity to the other's work, as when de Man says, in the preface to *Allegories of Reading*:

I consciously came across "deconstruction" for the first time in the writings of Jacques Derrida, which means that it is associated with a power of inventive rigor to which I lay no claim but which I certainly do not wish to erase. (de Man 1979, x)

(This is odd phrasing; how would you "erase" it? Is this an unconscious way of saying he wishes he could erase it?) Derrida in turn, in the eulogy he pronounced at the Yale memorial service for de Man in January 1984, said: "From then on [after their first meeting], nothing has ever come between us, not even a hint of disagreement" (MDM2, xvi). In the same speech Derrida mentions meetings that he and de Man had over the years not only at Johns Hopkins and Yale, but also in Paris and Zurich.

Both de Man and I faithfully attended Derrida's seminars at Yale over the years, along with up to 80 or more students and faculty. De Man and Derrida often met for lunch during Derrida's annual five weeks of seminars at Yale. De Man and I, when Derrida was not in residence, used to spend a whole lunch trying to decipher another almost illegible handwritten letter from Derrida to me, usually about proposed plans for that year's seminars. After de Man's death Derrida attended a memorial gathering at Yale and gave a lecture there in de Man's memory, "Psyché: Invention of the Other." He also pronounced the eulogy cited in part above. Derrida then wrote in two months, in an amazing intellectual feat, one of his most extravagant "acts of mourning," the first three essays in *Memoires for Paul de Man*. They were presented in French at Yale in March and April 1984 and then in English at Irvine in May 1984. These essays remain perhaps the most generous and penetrating readings of de Man's work.

To "read" here Derrida's reading of de Man at all adequately, in my turn, would take another essay or even a book. Derrida was many times instigated by the death of a friend or colleague to write superb essays on the dead critic's work. I have written elsewhere of what is a little odd about this (Miller 2009, 90–96). It is as though Derrida had been waiting for these friends to die so he could write a definitive essay about their writings, put them in their place, so to speak, when they could no longer answer back (see WM).

I was present at the Derrida conference at the University of Alabama during which Derrida called a special meeting of the participants to tell us about the discovery that had just been made of de Man's wartime journalism. At Derrida's instigation, we all agreed that those writings should be immediately published in facsimile, with the

Flemish ones in an English translation, to be followed by a broad-based collection of responses to those writings (de Man 1988; Hamacher et al. 1989). After the publication of the wartime journalism, the second edition of Derrida's *Memoires* was augmented by his elaborate reading of de Man's wartime writings in "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" (MDM2, 155–263). "Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments" (BIO) followed in 1989. The first essay remains the most penetrating reading of de Man's wartime writings, both for interpretation and for stern judgment, in their original context as well as in the context of the journalistic and academic furor that arose from the "revelation." "Biodegradables" is Derrida's aggressive response to the attacks his first essay received. In one of the few places where Derrida uses the language of ecocriticism, Derrida casts his attackers as "biodegradable" (they will vanish), while de Man is like nuclear waste beneath the sea, still radioactive, or like a trace of oil on the sea-bottom (think BP gulf oil spill). The toxic waste epithet arises in a miming of de Man's critics' desire to dump him permanently in the ocean. Nevertheless, as Tom Cohen has argued in a wonderfully forceful essay, the nuclear waste figure operates as an expression of Derrida's own perhaps not so covert desire to exile all de Man's writings from the ongoing work of "deconstruction" (Cohen 2011; BIO, 819, 861, 866).

Derrida bided his time for almost 30 years after de Man's reproaches in "The Rhetoric of Blindness." He finally answered back in "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) ('within such limits')" (WA, 71–160). This essay was presented in April 1998, as an address for a conference at the University of California at Davis in honor of de Man's work. Derrida's essay is an admirably eloquent reading of de Man's theory of the "machinal" aspect of performatives. They just work automatically, whether you intend what they do or not. Derrida focuses especially on the speech act called an "excuse" in Rousseau's work, in particular the famous excuse in the "purloined ribbon" episode in the *Confessions* as read by de Man in "Excuses (*Confessions*)" (de Man 1979, 278–301). Derrida praises de Man in this late lecture with hyperbolic generosity. He speaks of "the extraordinary event constituted by de Man's reading of Rousseau, a reading to which I above all wanted to pay tribute by recognizing everything I owe to it" (WA, 148). Nevertheless Derrida's essay at key moments convicts de Man, with persuasive detailed evidence, of having misread Rousseau more or less in the same way that de Man had in 1971 accused Derrida of doing, that is, by adding something not there and by omitting something that is.

In a Derrida conference at Yale in October 2005, the year after Derrida's death, Andrzej Warminski took up the gauntlet to defend de Man in a superb lecture called "Machinal Effects: Derrida With and Without de Man" (Warminski 2009). Warminski's essay is of great interest throughout, but here is the key sentence for my purposes now:

... however productive Derrida's additions, emendations, and supplementations of de Man may be at times – and they are certainly productive of *more text* at all times! – it

is fair to say that they are all in one sense or another already included in de Man's reading, at the very least as plausible extensions or corollaries of his argument. (Warminski 2009, 1077–1078)

This, *mutatis mutandis*, is just what de Man said of Derrida, and just what Derrida decades later said of de Man! The strategy seems to be catching, like a virus that reprograms one's cells to replicate itself. The critical procedure seems to be passed on by machinal effects from critic to critic, as a mode of analysis not consciously contrived but transmitted as an ineluctable heritage. The pot always calls the kettle black, only to be called black in its turn by the kettle, or the kettle by the frying pan, in another form of what Freud in *Jokes and the Unconscious* calls "kettle logic."

So much for testimonial memoirs about the Derrida–de Man relation. The facts you can check. With the other details you will have to believe me or not when I utter an example of that special performative called "bearing witness" and say, "I swear to you this really happened. I was there. I saw it with my own eyes." Both de Man and Derrida have, by the way, contributed immeasurably, for example in the two essays that are my examples below, to our understanding of speech acts, especially testimony in Derrida's case and excuses in de Man's case.

2. De Man and Derrida Juxtaposed

I do the best I can to mark the limits of the linguistic and the limits of the rhetorical: this was the crux of my profound debate with Paul de Man, who had a more "rhetorician" interpretation of deconstruction. (TS, 76)

My primary concern is to understand better Derrida's rhetorical strategies in his essays by contrasting them with de Man's. I choose, somewhat (but not entirely) arbitrarily, an essay by each about religion. I make this choice partly because I have never written explicitly about religion in Derrida. The two essays I have in mind are de Man's only essay explicitly about religion, "Allegory of Reading (*Profession de foi*)" (de Man 1979, 221–245; see my discussion of this essay in Miller 2011, 58–75) – a "profession of faith," by the way, is a performative speech act if there ever was one, saying "I swear this is what I believe" – and "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone" (FK), one out of a great many essays by Derrida about religion. Even to write at all adequately about just these two essays, setting them side by side, might be a virtually interminable task. I shall say what I can within the limits of reason and within the space allowed me, or at their limits.

I begin my comparison with a description of de Man's essay, partly because its rhetorical strategy is relatively straightforward, and partly because, as I have said, it is the only essay by de Man explicitly about religion. That means no need arises, as it does hyperbolically in the case of Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge," to investigate

other works by de Man on religion. De Man was one of the least religious persons I have known, at least ostensibly. On the one hand, he once told me that he had been brought up in a Belgian Flemish-speaking anti-clerical non-churchgoing family and so did not need to lose his Christian faith because he never had one. On the other hand, he once solemnly said to me, in a relatively serious context: "Religious questions are the most important." I have continued to puzzle over just what he meant by that. He did not say what answers he would give to such questions, though "Allegory of Reading (*Profession de foi*)" provides at least one answer.

Limitations of space forbid a full investigation of de Man's strategies of deconstruction. I must limit myself to a brief summary, with the *Profession de foi* essay as my paradigmatic example. De Man's essays characteristically proceed in four logically progressive steps: (1) first a summary of what previous critics have said about a given text; (2) then a close reading of the text that shows how the previous critics were demonstrably wrong, often absurdly wrong; (3) then a conclusion about what the text really says drawn from his reading; (4) finally a challenging generalization. De Man's "Allegory of Reading (*Profession de foi*)" is a splendid example of this rhetorical strategy. The essay begins by summarizing previous work on Rousseau's *Profession du foi*, then moves on to his own radically revisionary "rhetorical reading" of that text. This reading shows that previous distinguished critics have read Rousseau's essay wrong, that they are bad readers. De Man's essay culminates in the conclusion that you cannot tell whether Rousseau's *Profession de foi* is or is not a theistic text. That undecidability puts the reader in a bind:

If, after reading the *Profession de foi*, we are tempted to convert ourselves to "theism," we stand convicted of foolishness in the court of the intellect. But if we decide that belief, in the most extensive use of the term (which must include all possible forms of idolatry and ideology) can once and forever be overcome by the enlightened mind, then this twilight of the idols [a reference to the book by Nietzsche] will be all the more foolish in not recognizing itself as the first victim of its occurrence. (de Man 1979, 245)

This disquieting formulation leads to the famous generalizing last sentence: "One sees from this that the impossibility of reading should not be taken too lightly" (ibid.).

3. Derrida's Strategies of Argumentation

At this point I ask the most simple and naïve questions. Do Derrida's essays characteristically follow anything like de Man's itinerary? Do they use anything like his rhetorical strategies? Do de Man's essays help us to read Derrida? Are de Man's methods transferable?

Derrida's rhetorical procedures, I assert, are the reverse of de Man's. "Faith and Knowledge," like so many of Derrida's essays, begins with an enigmatic formulation.

Other examples out of many are the opening of “Psyche: Invention of the Other” (also in part about religion): “What else am I going to be able to invent?” (PSY1, 1); or the quotation from Montaigne, who cites a remark attributed to Aristotle, that opens every session of the seminars published as *Politics of Friendship*: “O my friends, there is no friend” (PF, vii); or the first line of “Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation” (also about religion): the epigraph is: “‘God,’ if you’ll pardon the expression” (GD2, 117). I must give the first line of that essay proper in French, since it is so multiple in meaning: “*Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire*” (GD2, 119). Derrida says (in the translation) this means “Pardon for not meaning (to say)” (ibid.), but the meaning is much more complex than that, as I have elsewhere argued. I beg your pardon for referring again to a previous essay (Miller 2009, 198–199).

In the case of “Faith and Knowledge” the enigmatic initial formulation is the allusive and parodying subtitle: “The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” Note that “Religion” is in quotation marks, as if to stress that its meaning cannot be taken for granted. The allusions in Derrida’s subtitle are to Henri Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and of Religion* and to Immanuel Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. The reader will note that Derrida makes a subtle, but highly significant, change in Kant’s title. Kant says “*within the limits [innerhalb der Grenzen]*.” Derrida says “*at the limits [aux limites]*” (my italics). Kant will remain sanely reasonable. Derrida promises to be right out there at the limits of reason, at the borders of the unreasonable or even the mad. He certainly keeps that promise, not least in the linguistic extravagance of his text and in its meandering trajectory. Being safely inside reason or, on the contrary, at its limits or frontier are two quite different things. The latter is a much more dangerous and precarious place. That border is where Derrida places himself.

The immensely complex, wandering, discontinuous, contradictory, paradoxical, and rich essay that follows Derrida’s subtitle is an elaborate digressive deciphering, explicating, or unfolding, of the meaning of that initial formulation. This deciphering is never complete and can in principle never be complete, since it leads everywhere. In one place Derrida says he cannot hope to fulfill the publisher’s charge that he state a position on religion in 25 pages, since “a serious treatise on religion would demand the construction of new Libraries of France and of the universe, even if, not *believing that one is thinking* anything new, one would content oneself with remembering, archiving, classifying, taking note in a memoir, of what one *believes* one already *knows*” (FK, 39–40). Note the play on the doublet in the title: “Faith and Knowledge.” Derrida’s task is hopeless, he says, whereas de Man can summarize fairly easily what previous critics have said about Rousseau’s *Profession de foi*. It is a finite task.

Just why is Derrida’s task infinite? It is partly because religion is such an immense topic, inexhaustible in its ramifications, partly because Derrida’s explication is not, as in de Man’s case, the reading of a single text, but the unfolding of the meanings a single extremely complex word has had over the centuries in the West. Usage or

context gives meaning, as we know, but meaning is also a product of etymological entanglements that seem to lead everywhere. Extended sections of “Faith and Knowledge” cite, discuss at length, and take issue with Émile Benveniste’s authoritative accounts, in *Indo-European Language and Society*, of the origins of the word “religion” and related words (FK, 30–32, 73–75; Benveniste 1973). Derrida objects to Benveniste’s imperturbable but extremely problematic belief that he can identify the original “proper meaning” of the words he investigates. For Derrida the “true,” “real” first meaning, the *etymon*, is always already bifurcated.

I leave a fuller account of Derrida’s “religious thought” to my colleagues in this present book who are charged by our editors to write on that topic. I wish them luck in doing this in 8000 words each. My suspicion is that it would take innumerable new National Libraries of France and of the universe to do it right, so multitudinous and complex are Derrida’s writings on religion. My focus, however, is on *how* Derrida says what he says in just this one essay, “Faith and Knowledge.” To a necessarily incomplete sketch of that I now turn. The “how” cannot of course be entirely separated from the “what,” as the reader will note in what follows. The “how” is not arbitrary. It is forced on Derrida by the nature of what happens when he tries to unfold the meanings of his subtitle.

The first part of “Faith and Knowledge” was written as Derrida’s contribution to a private colloquium with several other scholars held in 1994 on the Isle of Capri. Derrida himself suggested the topic of “*la religion*” for their discussions. This part, which was at least in a preliminary form apparently presented at the colloquium, is printed in italics. He later added a “Post-scriptum” that is much longer than the first part, and is printed in roman type. The whole essay is divided into 52 sections. Derrida says, somewhat implausibly, that it is a reversed or anagrammatic allusion to the fact that the publisher allotted each participant 25 pages to state a “position” on religion. “Circumfession” (CIR) has 59 sections, one for each year of Derrida’s life at the moment of writing. The point of these numbers is that they are pointless, arbitrary, and artificial. “Faith and Knowledge” is in its rhetoric like another long essay on religion by Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” (HAS). The latter is a lengthy and digressive denial and simultaneous admission (denegation in the Freudian sense) that so-called “deconstruction” is a form of negative theology. Like “Faith and Knowledge,” it was a contribution to a colloquium, this one public and in Jerusalem. All Derrida’s multitudinous writings on religion employ a similar evasive rhetoric. Did he ever write on anything but religion? Religion is even, unexpectedly, a central topic in *Specters of Marx*.

I give Derrida’s chief rhetorical devices in “Faith and Knowledge” in no particular order because I do not think they have an intrinsic, logical order. Even given as a disorderly cascade I hope they may help a reader who is perhaps bewildered (as I am) by Derrida’s writing and thinks it may be his or her fault to feel like a “challenged” reader. My 14 categories overlap to a certain degree, as is to be expected. Derrida

tends somewhere or other in a given essay to call attention to the rhetorical devices being used and to the relation of the “how” to the “what.”

(1) Discontinuity. Wandering. Each section of “Faith and Knowledge” starts over again from the beginning, so to speak, after a blank place on the page, though it may have some thematic connection to the sections that proceed and follow, or pick up from where the previous section stopped. Derrida seems to wander from one segment to another, discontinuously, stopping and then starting again.

(2) Embarrassed postponement. Like all Derrida’s writings on religion, “Faith and Knowledge” is longwinded, digressive, wandering, paradoxical, complex, full of wordplay, repetitive, reticent, and, one might say, “embarrassed.” It seems as though Derrida were putting off “coming clean” about religion, or could not quite figure out how to “get it right” in saying what he believed about religion, much less about his own faith or lack of it. He keeps drawing himself up and saying something like either, “To follow this path would take more time and space than I can give to it now,” or “I have treated this at length elsewhere” (with a footnote reference to *Khōra*, or *Sauf le nom*, or *Comment ne pas parler*, or some other of his multitudinous writings about religion). It sometimes seems as if Derrida were doing everything he can to “avoid speaking” conclusively about religion while at the same time speaking about it at great length, though still refraining from coming to the point.

(3) Improvisation. The discontinuity of “Faith and Knowledge” suggests that the essay may have been the result of a series of 52 improvised reflections, each written down at one time or another over a space of time as they came into Derrida’s mind, perhaps as a daily chore during that time. Derrida had an amazing power of invention. It sometimes almost seems as if some demonic power (like Socrates’ *daemon*) were dictating to him, or using him as a medium through which to speak. Derrida wrote two spectacular works, the *Memoires for Paul de Man* and *Specters of Marx*, in a few weeks each. He once told me that he was never more than a week or two ahead of his schedule for seminar presentations. He always showed up, however, with a written lecture that in itself would earn other scholars lasting fame if they could write anything like it. Derrida came to Irvine in the spring of 1993 and told me casually that he had to prepare something for an imminent Marx conference at the University of California at Riverside but that he had no idea what he was going to write. The topic, he said, was extremely difficult for him. About a month later, a month during which he was giving three two-hour seminars a week at Irvine, he had finished the first version of *Specters of Marx* in time for it to be translated by Peggy Kamuf before the conference at Riverside on April 22 and 23, 1993. How in the world did he do it?

(4) Dating. Derrida has a propensity to anchor a given lecture or essay in the circumstances of its writing or delivery, in a way that de Man rarely does. The importance of dating is the leitmotif of “Schibboleth: For Paul Celan” (SCH). De Man’s

voice is the magisterial scholarly ironic “we” speaking from nowhere and everywhere, from some sovereign place of authority. Derrida, on the contrary, makes a lot of the fact that the first part of “Faith and Knowledge” was spoken by a certain person on a certain date at a small gathering of multilingual scholars (all Judeo-Christian men; no women; no Muslims) on the Isle of Capri. The insistence on dating stresses what is ephemeral about the essay, what is irreducibly contextual about it (FK, 3).

(5) Duplicity. The leitmotif of “Faith and Knowledge” is duplicity, doubleness, contradiction, paradox, the always more than one, the “division and iterability of the source” (FK, 65), the bifurcation at the sources of religion and the incalculability that results, “the more than One *<plus d’Un>* [that] is at once more than two” (FK, 65). The capitalizing of “One” here refers dismissively to the assumption in Western monotheisms that God is One. Derrida must try over and over different ways to express this perpetual doubleness and doubled doubleness, without ever “getting it right.” The original doubleness at the source spawns innumerable further doubles that are not opposites but strange permutations of the same, as machinal teletechnology, according to Derrida, is by no means the “opposite” of religion, but has the same doubled source. This proliferation means that Derrida needs to add yet another section and yet another doubleness, and yet more, potentially ad infinitum.

Like almost everything else in “Faith and Knowledge,” this thinking by way of doubleness is anticipated and exemplified in section 1, in this case in a cascade of doubles that are almost the same as one another but not quite: “*‘Religion and mechane,’ ‘religion and cyberspace,’ ‘religion and the numeric,’ ‘religion and digitality,’ ‘religion and virtual space time’*” (FK, 2). Derrida’s goal, he goes on to say, is “*to take the measure of these themes in a short treatise, within the limits assigned to us, to conceive a small discursive machine which, however finite and perfectible, would not be too powerless*” (FK, 2). The doublets, each made of two elements that are different and yet the same, are aporetic, but they also create in their permutations a machine for thinking that automatically generates all the sections of “Faith and Knowledge” that follow. In one place Derrida cites Henri Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (echoed, as I have said, in the essay’s subtitle) to formulate the way the duplicity at the source is machine-like in its productive power (FK, 51). Derrida appropriates Bergson’s famous formulation “the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods” (Bergson 1986, 317) for his own slightly different argument about the mechanical generative force of duplicity, faith and knowledge, as the source of human beings’ propensity for religion (FK, 23).

(6) Aporia. “Faith and Knowledge” abounds in contradictions, paradoxes, undecidabilities, uncertainties, locutions that take the form of both/and, or neither/nor. At the end of the first section he says that knowledge and faith, technoscience and belief, are “*bound to one another by the band of their opposition.*” He goes on to give this contradiction the name “*aporia*”: “*Whence the aporia – a certain absence of way, path, issue, salvation – and the two sources*” (FK, 2). “Aporia” means, literally, a dead-end in

argumentation. Dozens of such aporetic formulations can be cited from “Faith and Knowledge.” They make up the tissue of the text.

(7) Repetition. Derrida speaks more than once of the iterability indissociable from the two sources (FK, 65). Iterability means both repetition and “othering.” The elements that are introduced in section one appear in inexhaustible permutations and combinations in the 51 further sections that follow, often in the same, or almost the same, words. An example is that often-iterated string given first in section one: “*can a discourse on religion be dissociated from a discourse on salvation: which is to say, on the holy, the sacred, the safe and sound, the unscathed <indemne>, the immune (sacer, sanctus, heilig, holy, and their alleged equivalents in so many languages)?*” (FK, 2).

(8) Speech acts. “Iterability” is a feature of performative speech acts as Derrida describes them in *Limited Inc* (LI), in modification of Austin (1980) and in opposition to John Searle. “Faith and Knowledge” is permeated by uses of the rhetorical distinction between language that performatively does something with words and language that states some fact constatively and so may be right or wrong: “faith” versus “knowledge.” To give one example, Derrida recalls at one point that Aristotle said prayer is neither true nor false (FK, 6). Prayer is a performative utterance, though of an odd kind. It is an optative that does not constrain God, unless you can say that it constrains God to answer or not answer the prayer, as He wishes. Faithful testimony to an experience of the sacred is another major example of a performative speech act in this essay.

(9) Allusion. I have mentioned Derrida’s habit of saying something like, “I have discussed this elsewhere” or “I do not have space here to explore this adequately.” Such locutions are essential to Derrida’s rhetoric of allusion. This takes two forms, in another duplicity.

Sometimes allusion is a shorthand reference to another of Derrida’s own works. A long series of previous works by Derrida is alluded to in “Faith and Knowledge,” sometimes explicitly by name, sometimes just implicitly, as in the references to what he has written earlier about Kant and Hegel. Endnote 11, for example, says, “I must refer here to the reading of this text, in particular to the ‘political’ reading of it, that I propose in ‘How to avoid speaking: denials,’ ‘Khōra,’ and ‘Sauf le nom’” (FK, 68–69). Following out all these deviating allusions to Derrida’s other work would take a long time.

The other form of allusion is a detour, long or short, from his own argumentation to discuss or cite some other writer. A long string of such predecessors is “read,” often at length, in “Faith and Knowledge”: Kant, Hegel, Plato, Nietzsche, Bergson, Benveniste, Voltaire, Husserl, and, of course, as always, Heidegger. Heidegger was for Derrida what King Charles’s head was for Mr. Dick in Dickens’s *David Copperfield*. Whatever Derrida wrote about sooner or later led to yet another analysis of Heidegger. “Faith and Knowledge” contains, among other things, the dispersed pieces of a short deconstructive treatise on Heidegger and religion. It demonstrates that Heidegger was as embarrassed as Derrida about religion, though in a different way.

(10) Footnotes or endnotes. Derrida's allusive digressions often, but by no means always, take the form of long footnotes or endnotes. A footnote is a *Parergon*, something beside the main work, an *hors d'oeuvre*. Derrida comments in section 16 on *Parerga*, apropos of Kant's *Parerga* added after each section of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, especially the first *Parergon*, added in the second edition, that defines a certain Christianity as the only moral religion (FK, 13).

Derrida was a master of the footnote or endnote as a *Parergon* or *Exergue* that seems subordinate, as the format of footnotes or endnotes suggests, but is actually essential. These footnotes seem to be sidelines, interruptions, but are actually part of the main road, or would lead to an alternative and perhaps endless different main road. Each note might be something Derrida calls in endnote 30, a long admiring but contesting note on Benveniste, "the premises here of a work to come" (FK, 75). Two other long endnotes, 31 and 42, are about Heidegger. Endnote 31 begins with reference to Derrida's own previous work on Heidegger (FK, 75). Derrida's extravagant use of the typographical device of the endnote is yet another factor keeping that work from being a straightforward argument going by stages from here to there, as is the case with de Man's essays. The editors of this Blackwell *Companion to Derrida* have forbidden contributors to use any footnotes at all. They have exhorted us to keep to the main road.

(11) Questions. Derrida makes extravagant use of a series of perhaps unanswerable questions as a way to gesture toward issues that are problematic. Derrida's questions are by no means simply "rhetorical." The subtitle of Derrida's book on Heidegger, *Of Spirit* (OS), is *Heidegger and the Question*. The book raises the question of Heidegger's use of formulations that are posed as questions. An example of a cascade of questions that just hang in the air in "Faith and Knowledge" comes in a parenthesis in section 36:

(What of reason and of radical evil today? And if the "return of the religious" was not without relation to the return – modern or postmodern, for once – of certain phenomena, at least, of radical evil? Does radical evil destroy or institute the possibility of religion?) (FK, 41)

Nice questions. One of Derrida's examples is the rapes, mutilations, and massacres in Rwanda, at that time fresh in the news. Today we might add the United States torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib. Many, though not all, of the United States Republican candidates for President in November 2011 applauded the use of waterboarding as a legitimate "enhanced interrogation technique," whereas it is clearly, in my view, illegal torture. It is yet another example of what Derrida means by "radical evil."

(12) Wordplay. "Faith and Knowledge" has as its goal a definition of what is meant by "religion." The attempt to do this leads to seemingly endless and not

always clearly relevant plays on words. An extravagant example is the word “abstraction” in section 1. That section, as I have said, holds the whole essay in a nutshell. It would take more than my allotted 8000 words to explicate even that opening two-page section properly. Perhaps it would require innumerable Libraries of France. The implications of the first section are unfolded, never completely, in the 51 additional sections that follow. After having posed in the first sentence of section 1 the question that is his topic throughout, “How ‘to talk religion?’” (FK, 1), Derrida asks whether having the courage to “*pretend for an instant to abstract, to abstract from everything or almost everything, in a certain way*” (ibid.), will save the day and allow him to get on with it in the allotted space. He could thereby avoid all the historical specificities associated with the word or concept “religion.” Derrida of course does no such thing in the rest of the essay. It has much historical specificity. The initial question leads Derrida to remember Hegel’s little essay of 1807, “Who Thinks Abstractly?” (an essay that he has already discussed in earlier writings). Hegel’s essay has an equivocal attitude toward the question of whether thinking abstractly is or is not a means of salvation for a thinker. Remembering that essay leads Derrida to use the word “abstraction” to name a set of things apparently quite different from just thinking abstractly in the way Hegel apparently meant it: radical evil as abstraction; the desert as abstraction, that is as a place where religious hermits abstract themselves from the human community; abstraction as a name for what came to be called “ethnic cleansing”: “radical extirpation . . . *the deracination of abstraction*” (FK, 2); abstraction as a (surprising, to me at least) name for “*those sites of abstraction that are the machine, technics, technoscience and above all the transcendence of tele-technology*” (FK, 2). I suppose he means that digitizing technologies abstract the names of things by turning them into zeroes and ones and storing those abstractions in databases. Derrida seems to be wandering unpredictably from one idea of abstraction to another apparently unrelated one, by way of word associations: “Of what does the word ‘abstraction’ make you think?”

(13) Endless qualifications and reticent modifications. Derrida does not seem to be able to say anything straight out, unequivocally. He seems to be afflicted with a mental or linguistic stutter that generates perpetual reservations and hesitations. Religious reticence before the sacred is a big theme later in the essay. The reader will note the characteristic reservations and qualifications in a sentence quoted above: “*abstract from everything or almost everything, in a certain way.*” “*Almost everything?*” Just what is exempt or left over and why? Just what does he mean by “in a certain way”? What “certain way”?

(14) Apposition. An ingrained habit of thinking by way of elements set in apposition that are the same and yet different (else why would you need different terms?). After having brought up on the first page the theme of salvation by way of Hegel’s joke (in French) about saving oneself at all costs from abstraction (“*Sauve qui peut!*” [Save themselves who can!]), Derrida presents the first example, cited in (7) above,

of that extravagant sequence of words or phrases in apposition that appears often in the essay. The 52 sections are also like large-scale examples of iterative apposition. Each says the same thing again, differently. The structure of “Faith and Knowledge” is fractal. A large-scale pattern is repeated with a difference in smaller segments.

At one point much later in the essay, after reversion to roman type, at the junction or border, the no man’s land between sections 37 and 38, Derrida interpolates, under a cryptic heading in bold and italics (“ . . . **and pomegranates**”), a sentence also in italics and within parentheses that presents, again by way of a long string of words in apposition, his own forceful description, in a cascade of figures, of the rhetorical strategy of “Faith and Knowledge”:

(Having posed these premises or general definitions, and given the diminishing space available, we [he means “I, Jacques Derrida”] shall cast the fifteen final propositions in a form that is even more granulated, grainy, disseminated, aphoristic, discontinuous, juxtapositional, dogmatic, indicative or virtual, economic; in a word, more than ever telegraphic.) (FK, 47)

I cannot see, by the way, that the rhetoric of the last 15 sections differs materially from that of the first 37. The essay is all grainy and disseminated, from one end to the other. In section 4 Derrida already speaks of the preliminary sections in italics as “*a sort of schematic and telegraphic preface*” (FK, 3). I suppose the phrase “*even more*” gives the answer, though I cannot see that the last entries are “*even more*” grainy, aphoristic, or telegraphic than all the preceding ones. In any case, I abstract from this dazzling list three possible spatial models for the rhetorical form of “Faith and Knowledge,” always keeping in mind that form is meaning, or “form is function,” and that my models are incompatible. You cannot logically have them all.

(1) One model would see the 52 sections as radically discontinuous, granulated, and grainy, just side by side, like the seeds in a pomegranate. Derrida mentions pomegranates cryptically in another place in “Faith and Knowledge” (FK, 66), perhaps in allusion to the consumption of pomegranates by Jews on Rosh Hashana, though pomegranates have significance within Islam and Christianity too (see Exodus 39:24–26 and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomegranate>, accessed March 4, 2014.)

(2) A second model would see the 52 sections as appositional variations on a theme: “*How ‘to talk religion’?*” These variations are generated mechanically, as he says in the first section, by the set of oppositions that are not oppositions (FK, 2). Section follows section, as word follows word in Derrida’s sequences in apposition, with no reason ever to bring them to an end.

(3) A third model would pick up on the word “aphoristic,” remembering its duplicitous etymology (Greek *aphorismos*, a delimitation, from *aphorizein*, to mark off by boundaries: *ap(o)-*, off, away from + *horizein*, to limit. But my dictionary gives seven different contradictory meanings for *ap(o)* as a prefix in borrowed Greek

compounds. In “apocalypse,” for example, the “apo” indicates reversal.) One might think of “Faith and Knowledge” as a series of aphorisms lodged at the horizon or boundary in elliptical shape around the secret, “mystical,” and wholly other double source of religion. “Religion,” says Derrida, punning on “ellipse” in section 41, “as a response that is both ambiguous and ambivalent <à double détente et à double entente> is thus an ellipsis: the ellipsis of sacrifice” (FK, 51–52). The ellipse as a geometrical figure, a quasi-circle with two centers, becomes the name of a figure of speech in which something is left out. The earth makes an elliptical orbit around the sun, one center of which is the sun, the other an empty spot in space. But see Derrida’s remarkable “Aphorism countertime” (*contretemps* in the French) for a view of aphorisms as *contretemps* (“an inopportune or embarrassing occurrence; a mishap” [*American Heritage Dictionary*]), as a dissonant counterpointed temporal sequence (PSY2, 127–142).

The three (or four) models differ from one another in the meaning they would infer for the essay “as a whole.” The rhetorical structure and devices of the text support all of them, but you cannot logically have them all. One must choose. But there are no solid grounds for making a choice. My reading of “Faith and Knowledge” has culminated in that extremely uncomfortable fix: an aporia. The 52 sections do not seem to have got us anywhere in a search for an answer to the initial question, “How ‘to talk religion?’” I cite once more the conclusion of section 1: “*Whence the aporia – a certain absence of way, path, issue, salvation – and the two sources*” (FK, 2).

4. Conclusion: Not a Unified Theory

Unlike de Man’s essay, Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge” does not end in a climactic unforeseen concluding formulation. It just sort of stops, without by any means having exhausted the energy of repetition with a difference, or “iterability,” that has generated section after section, up to 52, followed by a short unnumbered coda in italics and parentheses. This coda is dated from Laguna Beach, California (Derrida’s residence when he was at Irvine for his annual seminars): 26 April 1995. The coda crowds into two allusive and characteristically scattering cryptic sentences a reference to Mount Moriah (where Abraham took Isaac to sacrifice him, an event of crucial importance for Derrida’s “religious” writings), to Capri, where the colloquium that occasioned “Faith and Knowledge” took place (set earlier against Patmos, where Saint John received *Revelations*), to Freud’s book on Jensen’s *Gradiva* (associated with Mount Vesuvius, nearby to Capri, but on the Italian mainland, and involving ghosts in their relation to religious belief; ghosts are an important motif in all Derrida’s “religious” writings), and to Jean Genet’s *Genet at Chatila* (a book Derrida had been reading before the Capri colloquium; it is about Genet’s visit in 1982 to the

Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila outside Beirut, the day after the notorious massacre there by Christian Lebanese Phalangists [with the complicity of Israeli forces] of as many as 3000–3500 Palestinian civilians). The coda ends with a citation from Genet's book that Derrida appropriates for himself, in a final way of referring to religion's power to bring about "radical evil": "One of the questions I will not avoid is that of religion" (FK, 66). Derrida ends not with a ringing ironic constative assertion such as de Man often makes at the end of an essay, but with reference to yet another question, the question of religion, still unanswered and unanswerable after all the pages devoted to it.

I conclude that the juxtaposition of an essay by de Man and an essay by Derrida demonstrates their radical differences in rhetorical strategy. This shows that so-called deconstruction is by no means a unitary "theory" or a unitary method of reading or a unitary set of ideas. This duplicity should not be taken too lightly in attempts to say what deconstruction "is" or to say where we are going, or ought to go, "after deconstruction," whose death has been prematurely announced. I suggest, in conclusion, that the difference in rhetorical strategy between Derrida and de Man derives from that distinction Derrida identifies. De Man has "a more 'rhetoricist' interpretation of deconstruction," that is, he focuses on the discrepancy between *what* is said, the meaning of a given text that he reads, and *how* it is said, its use of figurative language and other rhetorical devices. Derrida, on the contrary, tries to "mark the limits of the linguistic and the limits of the rhetorical." What is beyond those limits is given the name "religion" in "Faith and Knowledge." Elsewhere he repeatedly calls it "the wholly other."

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Fraternal Politics and Maternal Auto-Immunity: Derrida, Feminism, and Ethnocentrism

PENELOPE DEUTSCHER

Of Grammatology (published in French in 1967) was the first work by Derrida in which it became clear that his analysis of the status of writing, *différance*, and deconstructibility could intersect with an analysis of political philosophy, and with an interest in sexual difference. This intersection had become an important conjuncture in his work by the time of late publications such as *The Politics of Friendship*, *Rogues*, and (posthumously) *The Beast and the Sovereign* lectures, but the starting place for an assessment of these interests is *Of Grammatology*, and particularly, its reading of Rousseau.

1. Derrida's Reading of Rousseau: Auto-Immunity and Nature's Supplement

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida gave his attention to a number of philosophies of language for which writing is attributed the status of a supplemental form, with speech considered a more original form of language and the proper object of the linguist's science. When Derrida turned to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* and then to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, we also see the overlap between speculations about the genesis of forms of language and the representation of primitive peoples as pre-literate. As Rousseau claims in the *Essay* "the depicting of objects is appropriate to a savage people, signs of words and of propositions to a barbaric people, and the alphabet to civilized people" (OGC, 3).

Yet with Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss, Derrida turns in *Of Grammatology* to a philosopher and an anthropologist for whom hierarchies of peoples ("primitive,"

“advanced”) take on a more complicated register. Both disparaged the supposed merits of European progress, figured as introducing (in Lévi-Strauss’s case) such ills as disease, perversion, degradation, artifice, and deceit to primitive peoples, or in Rousseau’s case, alienation, domination, and corruption. Yet in *Tristes Tropiques* non-literate peoples prove to have their own forms of inscription, artifice, and deception. For Rousseau’s part, although perverting forms of social organization leading to advanced states of human civilization are opposed to an original state deemed more natural, states considered original must become the context for the emergence of emotional and social bonds that lead inexorably to small social units, community, culture, political organization, and eventually, the worst of civilization. In both writers, what is valued as original proves (on Derrida’s reading) to already embody the characteristics, or the necessity, of its own degradation.

Moreover, as Rousseau describes the origins of love, family, society, and political communities, the characteristics of what is deemed “natural” alter. In any case, states of nature, while in principle pre-political and/or pre-social states, are, as Derrida proposes, “almost societies” because the conditions for the eventual formation of familial, social, pre-political, and political bonds emerge within the state of nature. Thus they already have a double status, natural and imminently social. Also, the factors that prompt either lesser nomadism, the formation of language, and/or the formation of human sentimental ties are presented in a constantly bifurcating way. They are the beginnings of what will make us quintessentially human (linguistic, social, intimate, bonded). These factors are concurrently the beginnings of what will alienate us from nature, leading, seemingly inevitably, to the formation of property owning, urban, large, alienating, highly artificial, denatured, and exploitative political communities. Each account of origin described by Rousseau contains the seed of a society that will prove denaturing. Therefore unnatural, artificial measures will offer the only means (through a highly designed education and upbringing, through highly organized, deliberate social organization) by which a state of society might, with great care, be made more natural.

The resulting Rousseauist view of social forms and arrangements can be understood by means of a well-known term from Derrida’s early work, supplementarity. Derrida proposes of Rousseau that his concept of “nature can only be thought in terms of the supplement” (OGC, 180). The fact that nature is, and is intended by Rousseau, to be understood as dynamic, is often taken to explain the shifting Rousseauist representations of nature and the natural. But Derrida offers a different approach to the problem, focusing both on the highly flexible form of supplementarity, and on the fact that the only means offered for creating a social state according to nature’s dictates is via artificial means. Artificial social arrangements are therefore a necessary supplement to nature. According to Derrida’s account of the supplement, in adding to, such arrangements also “hollow out” nature, which is incomplete, not “itself” without this supplement. (Also because Rousseau is unable to give an account, even hypothetically, of the purely natural that is not at the same time

the “almost social.”) We are also able to understand this relationship by using another term Derrida would introduce later in his work: “auto-immunity.” This term repeats an early interest Derrida had in what is simultaneously “harm” and “remedy” (see DIS). Despite the devaluation of the unnatural and artificial, in a social state, only social, contrived and artificial means (such as education, and as is seen in *Émile* a number of human arts) can render humans more natural or closer to nature’s dictates. Derrida would later describe the logic of auto-immunity (FK, 44) as characterizing a relationship, seen in a number of contexts (for example the defense of religion, of origins, of the specificity of one’s mother country, of the phallic) where an avowedly artificial or non-original measure is used, paradoxically, to restore what is concurrently contaminated by virtue of that very defense. To decry certain social forms as artificial is to shore up the sense that there is a coherent natural form prior to their introduction. But the argument is that social forms ought to aim at *cultivating* what is natural. Interpreted as auto-immune, such social forms concurrently undermine (as artificial, and promoting an artificiality) the aspiration to a natural order that they concurrently defend. The remedy for the loss of nature also constitutes the artificiality requiring the remedy.

2. Sexual Difference and the Supplement

Rousseau often gives himself the task of describing the natural or original states of sexual difference, family, love, human affection, and maternal care. These too have a status as “almost social” and a relationship to the formation of the social. These accounts vary. For example, in “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality” both sexes are originally deemed nomadic, ferocious and vigorous. Here the family state is not deemed original, rather, Rousseau imagines original nomadic primitives with no fixed dwellings and random sexual encounters occurring between men and women (Rousseau 1987, 48). Children would leave their mothers as soon as possible, with mothers feeding them at first only from “need” followed by “habit.” But Rousseau does identify pity as a natural sentiment, and identifies it in the reaction mothers will have towards their children in the most original state. Maternal pity is, furthermore, an instance of a natural human sentiment Rousseau takes to be fully original. The capacity for pity to be awakened is considered present in all original humans, and in the most primitive mothers. It is from pity that the human capacity for benevolence and friendship will eventually develop.

But a number of different accounts are given by Rousseau of the genesis of sentimental ties between the sexes and of the family bond within the state of nature. This genesis relates to factors said to produce a less nomadic existence. In the “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality” this includes the eventual “enclosure of land,” considered by Rousseau the real origin of human ills. But prior to that, a number of factors are identified. These include survival, the need in some circumstances to

produce food from cultivating the land, the need to improve it, and so to cooperate. In “Essay on the Origin of Languages,” climate is also said to play a role. But while referring to several different factors, Rousseau depicts the conversion from nomadism to be a critical element in the development of sentimental ties. He deems it both contingent (he does refer to the possibility that humans “could,” if not for the factors mentioned, have remained nomadic and isolated), yet in every work in which states of nature are depicted it is inevitable that humans will eventually develop so as to depart an isolated and nomadic existence. Once they do – once they are regularly at the same watering holes or fixed huts – Rousseau will accordingly describe in humans the new conditions in which the “the habit of living together gave rise to the sweetest sentiments known to men: conjugal love and paternal love” (Rousseau 1987, 62–63). The sexes would slowly become less ferocious and vigorous, and the families, described in *The Social Contract* as “the most ancient of all societies and the only natural one” (Rousseau 1987, 142), will give rise to small communities. But such circumstances also and concurrently, though providing the context for the development of uniquely and valuably human ties (including sexual and familial) also provide the context for vanity, the desire to impress, the desire to possess, land ownership, jealousy, competition, deceit, war, and so on.

In line with his view that contemporary states of social organization are highly denatured, Rousseau argues that the failure to defend sexual difference as indicated by the dictates of nature is catastrophic. Nature dictates rigidly different sex roles. But as we turn to the state of nature, we will not find an account that offers a model. The fifth book of *Émile* gives an account of how girls must be educated carefully to be feminine in accordance with dictates of nature, but no model for this femininity can be found *in* nature. Another reason there is no stable referent for “natural” forms of sexual difference, maternal love, or social organization is, again, the variation in the descriptions of states of nature. Consider the reference in *The Social Contract* to the family as the only natural society, once it is juxtaposed with Rousseau’s account of natural humans in the *Discourse on Inequality* who are said to exist in a state prior to family organization. If we turn to this version of the original state of nature – nomadic, isolated humans lacking language or community, procreating through random encounters, we certainly will not find an original state of the family unit. To find this, we must look to Rousseau’s varying accounts of the advent of factors that would have propelled humans towards intimacy and social states (which tend to share the characteristic of coinciding (whether as cause or effect) with lesser nomadism.

Because Rousseau considered the state of sexual difference in his day denatured, this begged the question of how he could preserve a coherent reference to a natural sexual difference, given that the isolated, pre-familial random sexual encounters ascribed to an original state of nature were obviously no model for what Rousseau took to be the ideal and natural version. Again the phenomenon arises because seen as “natural”, sexual difference is in fact compensating for the “loss” of the natural

version that never was present. To use the term from Derrida's later work again, sexual difference could be described as an (auto-)immune measure, defending the social from its denatured state.

Thus Derrida is able to describe the textual form in question:

we may perceive here the strange workings of the historical process according to Rousseau. It never varies: beginning with an origin or a center that divides itself and leaves itself, an historical circle is described, which is degenerative in direction but progressive and compensatory in effect. On the circumference of that circle are new origins for new circles that accelerate the degeneration by annulling the compensatory effects of the preceding circle. (OGC, 202)

This form has as its effect that the supplement will be repeatedly represented as concurrently "good" and "bad," "high" and "low." Variations on this particular form repeat in Derrida's later descriptions of auto-immunity in "Faith and Knowledge": "the same source divides itself mechanically, automatically, and sets itself reactively in opposition to itself: whence the two sources in one. This reactivity is a process of sacrificial indemnification, it strives to restore the unscathed (*heilig*) that it itself threatens" (FK, 28). In relation to sexual difference, just as it does more generally, Rousseauist nature offers an example of a concept its defender strives to "keep safe" (it is a reference to an ideal point of origin, an important guarantor for Rousseau's devaluations of what is deemed unnatural) and an early example of the patterns of redivision into the high and the low that ensue in these "indemnificatory" discourses.

In consequence, natural sexual difference could be considered both always too early, and too late for itself. It is always too early for itself (the original state of nature illustrates a state prior to family units and sentimental bonds associated with natural sexual difference) and too late, because even at the earliest stage of such units and bonds, humans in front of their huts are described as already taking steps towards the vanity, posturing, competition, and desire to impress that will manifest as eventually catastrophic forms of artificiality, superficiality, hypocrisy, and sexual distortion.

Though it is hardly remembered – nor did it present itself – as a canonical feminist text, *Of Grammatology's* deconstruction of the referent "nature" that Rousseau would seek to "keep safe" is an excellent early illustration of the feminist implications of deconstructibility. For Rousseau, "nature" would have determining political implications for the subordinating account of sexual difference he installs. He is part of a longstanding tradition of those who have used a reference to nature's dictates to secure the exclusion of women from equal education and participation in the public sphere, restricting their role to man's "helpmeet," mother and nurturer and initial former of citizens, devaluing "masculine" women as against overly artificial "feminine" women.

3. Supplemental Objects of Desire

Not only does Rousseau's work, as read by Derrida, illustrate the deconstructibility of historical accounts of sexual difference, and the deconstructibility of terms (origin, law, nature's dictates, purity) used as references in political accounts curtailing the role and rights of women, but the deconstructibility of the "supplement" extends still further in Rousseau's considerations of the sexes, encompassing his account of natural and unnatural sexual desires, and natural and unnatural mothers. Rousseau deprecates not only unnatural women but also "unnatural" sex – masturbation receives a long denunciation in *Émile* and in his *Confessions* in these terms (OGC, 150–151). But we might well ask for which "real good" it is that masturbation so dangerously substitutes? In the *Confessions*, Rousseau proposes that masturbation allows one to summon and manipulate in one's imagination the "whole sex" as one desires. It is here judged as harmful for allowing auto-erotic substitutions for a "beauty" without having to seek her consent (OGC, 152). Derrida goes on to describe the repetition through Rousseau's narrated life of "summoning absent beauties" through substitutes (OGC, 153), presenting Rousseau's desire for women as endlessly substitutive. Rousseau famously recounts desire for a series of love objects that would seem to substitute for an original lost mother, of which the best-known example is Madame de Warens, called by Rousseau "Maman." It might be said that this sequence of desires is substitutive, preservative, and in a sense restitutive. An absence is seemingly replaced by a presence, with the supposition being that the absence once was present, and that the substitution fills in for the missing absence. It is restitutive – a substitute seems to fill in for, to offer again, what is missing. It is preservative, seeming to preserve a connection to what is missing and by substitution deliver it. But it also threatens what it seemingly replaces. As a replacement for something missing, the substitute by its very function does not definitively retribute what is missing, for it marks the absence as it seemingly replaces it. Mme de Warens or any similar substitute "already signified the disappearance of the true mother and has substituted herself in the well-known ambiguous manner" (OGC, 152).

Derrida's intervention also describes Rousseauist desire for women in terms of a chain of substitutions for which there is no clear original. Has there ever been a present, true mother, who subsequently "disappeared," he asks? In Rousseau's case, the answer is seemingly, "yes." Rousseau's mother is figured as a lost object deceased shortly after his birth. This mother was almost from the origin, literally absent. Yet Derrida proposes that if Rousseau's "Maman" (Mme de Warens – for whom his companion Thérèse is later said by Rousseau to be the successor) "was already the supplement of an unknown mother," the "true mother" herself was, from the outset, missing. Moreover this mother was "already in a certain way a supplement, from the first trace, and even if she had not 'truly' died in giving birth" (OGC, 156). This early reading connects with a late and repeating interrogation in Derrida's work of this

question: Is any mother – any other – ever fully present? Are they not always already mediated by fantasies (fantasies of completion and wholeness, for example, or images and ideas of the meaning of maternity, the meaning of a lost – or present – mother? Thus as a general point, the phantasmatic “absolute present, Nature, that which words like ‘real mother’ name, have always already escaped, have never existed” (OGC, 159).

Though it is made persuasively clear in *Of Grammatology* that there is never, and never could have been, a fully present beloved mother for which subsequently adored figures such as Madame de Warens substitute, and who would in this sense be “natural,” Rousseau certainly – and relentlessly – elevates the ideal of a natural mother, criticizing denatured contemporary women as having greatly lost their capacity for the natural maternal role. These unnatural mothers send their children away to wet-nurses, consider motherhood a burden, and injure in the bodies of their children, the race and the future of Europe (Rousseau 1974, 12).

If Rousseau is willing to say that women who do give birth, who are indeed in that sense mothers, are improper mothers, not the mothers dictated by nature, that they “cease to be mothers . . . and will not return to their duty” (Rousseau 1974, 14; cited OGC, 152), then it is clear one can be a mother not necessarily recognized as such – mothers are mediated by expectations, conventions, and fantasies concerning what a mother really is. So mediated, they are never present in a pure immediacy and are never fully natural.

To turn to a number of later comments made by Derrida about maternity and birth, the interrogation of the elevated status of the natural mother (seemingly lost, original object of love, seemingly lost original natural presence, and as a figure of a supposedly natural genealogical bond) continued to be challenged by Derrida in a trajectory extending well beyond *Of Grammatology* to a number of late interviews in which he will not agree, for example, that contemporary reproductive technologies can be held responsible for replacing the natural mother–child bond. In the sense described here, these technologies could not replace natural maternity, because the mother has never, and can never be natural: “Techno-scientific capabilities (artificial insemination, surrogate mothers, cloning, etc.) will no doubt accelerate a mutation . . . But . . . the ‘mother’ . . . has always been a ‘symbolic’ or ‘substitutable’ mother . . . and the certainty acquired at the moment of giving birth was . . . an illusion” (FWT, 41). Here Derrida discusses the various cultural apparatuses and legal devices that establish the recognition of maternity, the point being that they, along with a symbolic maternity, mediate all apparently natural maternities.

Though Derrida will also challenge the status of natural fathers, brothers, and families, it may be disconcerting to see Derrida (for example in dialogue with Elisabeth Roudinesco) challenge the reality of mothers. But Rousseau, and Derrida’s early reading of Rousseau, reminds us of the often limiting ends to which references to real and natural mothers have historically been deployed. The auto-immune, belligerent idealization of natural mothers is used to decry mothers who are deemed

not proper mothers, to decry women who will not properly be mothers, to limit women's role to that of mothers, to recall them to their duty, to do so in the name of the future of the race, Europe, the common good, men: "when women become good mothers, men will be good husbands and fathers" (Rousseau 1974, 14). In Rousseau's work the appeal to natural mothers is extensively deployed to deny women equal education, a role in the public sphere, to constrain the ways in which they are ("improperly") mothers, and to confine them not only to the role of mother but to an image of the "natural mother" Rousseau attempts via such means, strenuously, to preserve.

The feminist inflection that can be given to these readings can also be associated with *Politics of Friendship*. Here Derrida pursues the long history of thinking of political ties as established by fraternity, and the strange status of the figure of birth in this context.

4. Fraternity and the Exclusion of Women

In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida proposes that his work has had two major questions: what he calls "textual hegemony" (the deconstructibility of concepts that are hege- monically sustained) and phallogentrism or (given the thematic of fraternity and male bonds in *Politics of Friendship*) phratrocentrism (PF, 278). *Politics of Friendship* considers the relationship between political bonds and forms of identification, often between citizens, whose model or language is that of fraternity between men. This is a tradition with Christian inflections (as he elsewhere comments "the canonical model of the friend . . . , the brother in the Christian, even evangelical or Pauline sense of the term, man as brother, neighbor as brother." In "Countersignature" Derrida claims that, in this respect, "what is valid for the Christian is naturally also valid for the Muslim" (CS, 24). And in *Rogues* he continues that the "privileging of the figure of the brother in ethics, law and politics" is seen in the Greek, Abrahamic, Jewish, but especially Christian and Islamic traditions (ROG, 58). The work considers writing on literal friendship (Montaigne and Nietzsche), on friend-enemy relations (Nietzsche and Schmitt), and concepts of civic identity and the relationship to home or nation for which fraternity often serves as a figure, as does birth (Hugo, Michelet).

Sometimes Derrida reminds us – as he does with Schmitt – that there is not a sign of women, sisters, sexual difference in these accounts (PF, 149, 155, 186). Sometimes he considers a tension – on the one hand, we think of friendship as intimate, private, not as a founding politics, but on the other hand, Derrida argues, considering Plato, Montaigne, Aristotle, Kant, Cicero, and Hegel, for example, "the great philosophical and canonical discourses on friendship will have explicitly tied the friend-brother to virtue and justice, to moral reason and political reason" (PF, 277). As such it does bear remark that women (and so the models of female friendship and friendship between men and women) have been excluded. A questioning voice echoes

throughout *Politics of Friendship* asking the reader multiple times to speculate: what if the sister is made a case of the brother (PF, viii), what is a friend in the feminine (PF, 56)? What if the compact between men as brothers in friendship or in political community included the figure of the sister or mother? Women must take up positions in fraternal relations either as excluded figures (the wives and daughters of the citizens united as non-literal “brothers”), mothers of the “brothers” or as substitute brothers. Derrida neither draws out the consequences of this substitution, nor does he draw out the answer to the question that repeats through his work: but what if the brother were a sister? But he can be added to those, most obviously Carole Pateman, who in work such as *The Sexual Contract* has argued that the social or original contract between brothers is founded in a tacit sexual contract that must already be presupposed. Without this supposition, we cannot understand why the individuals imagined as forming a social bond (allocating to the sovereign a portion of their liberty in order to achieve life-preserving rule and order), are the fathers (Pateman 1988, 48). In the *Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida similarly refers to this issue in Hobbes’s work, with its dissonance between a state of nature in which the mother has sovereignty over her children and is not subordinate to men and the point at which male heads of households (the women now mysteriously absent) are imagined to form the civil compact together, and supposed also to have sovereignty over children (BS1, 29).

While Derrida does not, in *Politics of Friendship*, offer an answer to his repeating question (*and what if the sister were made a case of the brother?*), he offers the means to deconstruct conceptually the bond between the brothers, in a direction different to that of Pateman. If women are excluded, we must ask on what basis the brothers are included. For one thing, Derrida notes that the bonds of “brothers” are both non-literal and yet seemingly more pseudo-literal than is avowed. Thus the tradition of fraternity contains an instability with respect to its pseudo-metaphorical (and pseudo-literal) status. One might say to the tradition of fraternity, as Derrida does say, continuing the trajectory of remarks about mothers (and fathers, FWT, 40–41 and families, see ROG, 58) we have seen above: “Has anyone met a brother? A uterine or consanguine (distantly related) brother? In nature” (PF, 93)?

This is a challenging question to be posing, and it is in one respect unlike the challenge to natural mothers directed at Rousseau. For Rousseau stakes all on his evocation of the ideal of a natural mother he takes to be entirely literal so as to condemn the dangerous challenge to natural maternity from denatured contemporary women. By contrast, the fraternal language for friendship and political unity discussed in *Politics of Friendship* is supposed to be metaphorical: the men are friends “like” brothers, or “as if” they were brothers. Thus fraternity, as a model for what unites citizens is to be understood as non-literal. Yet, Derrida observes, the figure cannot be entirely figurative, because it specifically – and in its most literal instantiations – does not include the sisters, the daughters, or the mothers. Thus, when Derrida asks what happens when the sister is made a case of the brother (PF, viii), the question is

striking because in principle, since these are merely figures of speech, the sister ought to be able to offer a “case” of the brother perfectly well. But this is not the case. The sister is, in no philosopher or political theorist mentioned by Derrida, considered substitutable, let alone substituted, for the brother – and her exclusion calls uneasy attention to the concurrently literal and metaphorical status of fraternity:

In fraternalism or brotherhoods, in the confraternal or fraternizing community, what is privileged is at once the masculine authority of the brother (who is also a son, a husband, a father), genealogy, family, birth, autochthony, and the nation. And any time the literality of these implications has been denied, for example by claiming that one was speaking not of the natural and biological family (as if the family was ever purely natural and biological) or that the figure of the brother was merely a symbolic and spiritual figure, it was never explained why one wished to hold on to and privilege this figure rather than that of the sister, the female cousin, the daughter, the wife or the stranger, or the figure of anyone or whoever. (ROG, 58)

A similar phenomenon (of putative non-literality possessing a complex, unavowed pseudo-literal status that is disavowed, remains a covert presence, and is deconstructible) repeats in an associated series of images relating to the images of maternity and birth. For example, the nation and its constitutive bonds are given the metaphors of birth (as when Hugo’s *Humanity as a Nation* refers not only to the “fraternal” continent, to Man as brother, but also to the “embryo-genesis” of the French nation of the future (PF, 264–265), or of family, as when the French nation represented in terms of colonialist glory is described as “radiating” over all continents like a “family”). Earlier in the work, in a reading of Plato’s *Menexenus*, with its evocation of fraternity, the earth, the mother, and autochthony, Derrida had re-evoked his point that brothers, mothers, and fathers are all “legal fictions,” “dreamt conditions,” “phantasms.” For “a genealogical tie will never be simply real; its supposed reality never gives itself in any intuition, it is always posed, constructed induced, it always implies a symbolic effect of discourse” (PF, 93). But, important as this point is, it does not offer Derrida the same lever it does in his reading of Rousseau. Rather Derrida must target the double strategy enfolded in these metaphors of family, birth, fraternity, pointing out that these are both non-literal and literal references, to get traction from the critique of the induced, constructed, phantasmatic, and mediated nature of the genealogical bond.

As Derrida acknowledges, the intent of these languages is to express a “fraternity beyond fraternity, a fraternity without fraternity (literal, strict, genealogical, masculine, etc.)” (PF, 237). Acknowledging that the traditional notions of birth and brotherhood are presented as metaphorical and that these models of fraternity are never presented as “literal,” Derrida recognizes that it is in principle a misreading to take the figure of the brother throughout the texts discussed in *Politics of Friendship* too literally. It is always a given that the brother is not really a true brother. And the point

is not, he claims, to condemn the aspirations of the “brothers” – to community, to solidarity, often to peace. He comments that his intention “is not to denounce fraternity or fraternization.” For the language of fraternity has also been an occasion (in both Christian and revolutionary contexts, for example) to claim universal rights and at least, “theoretically challenge the limits of natural, literal, genetic, sexual determined (etc.) fraternity” (PF, 237).

And yet the concurrently analogical and literal play is apparent. Women always were excluded from the metaphorical fraternity that ought not to have excluded them. The references to being born to the nation, as when the nation of brothers imagined by Hugo are described as a fetus born of a mother, are again to be taken as analogical in just this complex sense. There are a number of consequences for women’s political exclusion. They guarantee (as mothers and “mothers”) not just the symbolic or analogical relationship between the brothers, but also this concurrently literal (or pseudo-literal) relationship, as when political arguments for the exclusion of women from the “fraternity” refer to the importance of their contribution to the nation as mothers and as raisers of its citizens – as seen in the widespread arguments following 1789 that women could not be citizens, for their duty to the nation was to give birth to and raise citizens. Yet because immigrants and foreigners are not born of the right mothers on the right “mother” soil, they will be excluded from the fraternity, they will not be able to vote, perhaps not to reside – they will not be accepted as metaphorical brothers. Thus again, the relationship to a “mother” that binds the metaphorical “brothers” is concurrently literal and non-literal.

5. Birth, Nation, and Violence

If there are social and political implications for women, traditionally held responsible for Hugo’s national “fetus,” the family, and securing the national fraternity, we have seen in Hugo’s *Humanity as a Nation* and other texts discussed in *Politics of Friendship* that there are concurrent implications for the representation of race and nation and for ethnocentrism. As we see Derrida remark in *Rogues* (just as he says of the sister, daughter, and wife), if the fraternity and the sons really are non-literal, why, furthermore, should one not privilege the figure of the stranger, the foreigner, for this supposedly symbolic and spiritual figure of fraternity? (ROG, 58). So we can understand Derrida’s claim that not just in every fraternity, but also in “every racism . . . , every ethnocentrism . . . in every one of the nationalisms throughout history – a discourse on birth and on nature, a physis of genealogy (. . . a phantasm on the genealogical physis) regulates . . . , it defines the alterity of the foreigner or the barbarian” (PF, 91).

This is why Derrida’s analysis of a concurrently literal and metaphorical maternity and femininity enabling but excluded from the concurrently literal and metaphorical political bond, and his analysis of the ethnocentrism of the political bond should be read together. When women’s role is subordinated to the reproductive

conduit of citizenship and fraternity, the role of women as mothers of the nation is embedded in the exclusionary logics relating to nation, for the concern about correct genealogy and nationality attaches to symbolic and pseudo-literal birth. Fraternity is symbolic, to be sure, but “citizenship by birth” also relies on women continuing to give birth to the right brothers on the right territory (“whether as blood-right or land-right, itself always a birth right” [ROG, 61]), and the exclusion from the resulting fraternity of the strangers, the others. When in “Racism’s Last Word” Derrida comments, “There’s no racism without a language,” he adds: “it offers the excuse of blood, color, birth” (PSY1, 379). The deconstructibility of the mother reveals itself in this context to be intimately linked with the deconstructibility of ethnocentrism. Both mother and stranger are excluded from fraternity, with the latter’s exclusion from fraternity and citizenship interlocking with that of the former, when the stranger can be said to be born of the wrong mother (the mother of the wrong nationality, the mother on the wrong sovereign soil).

The intersections of nationalism and birth are also seen in remarks made by Derrida in interviews concerning, on the one hand, contemporary turns to violence on ethno-religious grounds, and on the other hand, stands taken by politicians concerning necessary limits to immigration policy. Discussing what is often described as a contemporary return to religion, with the rise of fundamentalisms of all kind (he includes Christian fundamentalisms and extremism), Derrida points out that such a return “tries to go back” to the earth and blood (ROG, 116–117). Commenting, therefore, on the relationship between “religion, the nation state . . . , language . . . national idiom . . . social, familial or ethnic place – . . . a particular nation, people or land,” Derrida stresses that immunization efforts, often aggressively political, often opposing while also appealing to modern technologies, are thus through processes of “self-immunization” often destroying what they seek to protect (ROG, 117). These remarks are one of the best-known components of Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge,” but this also addresses the turn to ethno-religious violence, particularly sexual violence:

this would perhaps be the place to enquire why, in the most lethal explosions of a violence that is inevitably ethnico-religious – why, on all sides, women in particular are singled out as victims (not “only” of murders, but also of the rapes and mutilations that precede and accompany them). (FK, 49)

Derrida interprets a number of ethno-religious impulses to protect and defend origins, peoples, lands, the integrity of beliefs, culture from what is deemed invasion, encroachment, often associated with modernity, or with competing religions and peoples. In a number of works including *Monolingualism of the Other* he challenges appeals to origin, even when the claim to identity or one’s rightful land and language seems entirely justified; instead, he speaks for claims based in the recognition that a culture can never be pure, never original. Thus he comments in *The Other Heading*:

“What is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself. . . Monogenealogy would always be a mystification in the history of culture” (OHD, 9–11), and in *Monolinguisism of the Other*:

Sometimes the struggles under the banner of cultural identity, national identity, linguistic identity are noble fights. But at the same time the people who fight for their identity must pay attention to the fact that identity is not the self-identity of a thing . . . it is a duty, an ethical and political duty, to take into account this impossibility of being one with itself. (MLO, 13–14)

The objection could, of course, be ideological, and it could also be grounded in an opposition to the violence to which such claims often lead. In fact, however, Derrida’s approach questions the viability of the defense mechanisms in question – on this reading the mechanisms used to fend off encroachments from those peoples, cultures, measures, and developments that seem to threaten an original identity, culture, or purity will themselves partake in what the measures are intended to defend against. When this is the case, Derrida deems these “immunitary” measures auto-immune. Thus, when Derrida includes a reference to the turn by ethno-religious violence to forms of sexual violence in particular, to “rapes, and mutilations” often preceding murder and the fact that “women are in particular singled out as victims” (FK, 49), we are effectively being invited to understand this as both catastrophic, and as an auto-immune measure.

Derrida also returned often in late interviews to attempts at defense and filtration manifesting the “fear of being altered by what comes from outside, by the other” (ET, 19). This is a fear also seen in both cautious and violent approaches to immigration policy, widely discussed by Derrida in the context of his work on hospitality, for example, and in the context of positions taken by a number of right-wing (and some left-wing) politicians in France. He mentions Jean-Marie Le Pen’s concern that an unlimited, or “unfiltered” immigration threatened to overwhelm France. Le Pen spoke in favor of a filtering policy limiting immigration to France’s best interests. Immigration is represented as threatening a social body, as if that social body had a prior, identifiable and stable self-identity – although any attempt to define that original identity rigorously could fare little better than Rousseau’s attempts to define a hypothetical state of nature. And such attempts at filtration are in any case auto-immune. It is not possible to predict with certainty the impact on a social body (that in any case lacks the integrity required for such a calculation) of those admitted (quite apart from how one assesses the ethics and politics of such calculations). The only way in which any body could be entirely unaltered, and predictably so, by what is considered to come from the outside is, as Derrida says, if it were dead (ET, 18–19). And in any case, in taking the very defensive measures in question, it is already altered. Derrida proposes that such attempts at defending a territorial or national or cultural identity, given the incoherence of the fear of being altered, have often taken

the form of “racisms, biologisms, organicisms, eugenics” and given rise to theaters of death (ET, 18–19). These racisms and eugenics have included among their many violences, violence against women he mentions. To take the example of eugenics, attempts to defend biological stock often results in violent attempts to control reproduction. In addition to impact on economy, on social “harmony,” on unemployment rates, those hostile to immigration may also offer a negative characterization of the impact on the nation of immigrant birthrate – in a characterization of threat to a “homogeneous” “fraternity.”

Derrida’s remarks about birth overlap in a different way with his remarks about immigration, and concerns about the impact of the unknown *arrivant*. Describing the impossibility, and auto-immune (though often violent, if not deadly) variants of defensive measures of this kind, Derrida speaks further to this figure of the *arrivant*: “The immigration of which France’s history is made, the history of its culture, religions and languages, was first a history of these children, children of immigrants or not, who were so many absolute *arrivants*” (ET, 20).

The *arrivant*, and birth, become figures in Derrida’s work for the inevitable unpredictability of what is deemed to come from the outside. The question is posed – erroneously – of what impact the *arrivant* may have on what (appears as) a known, prior identity: culture, territory, tradition, home. The *arrivant*, and the term “birth” are re-coined by Derrida as the figure of this inevitable uncertainty (see Haddad 2013), thus the remarks about immigration are sometimes taken as calling for an ethics affirming the *arrivant*, and affirming the element of chance (ET, 20). There is an extensive debate about whether Derrida’s affirmative stance here is best understood as amounting to a deconstructive ethics (see, e.g., Häggglund 2008), for Derrida is in any case describing the auto-immune mechanisms through which attempts at defense and the maintenance of Le Pen (or anyone’s) “living membrane that only admits what is beneficial” cannot succeed. We have seen in this chapter that from his early to his late work, Derrida integrates an analysis of deconstructibility and auto-immunity with a sustained focus on the incorporation of women, mothers, and indeed their births, into the attempt by “brothers” to sustain their living membranes.

6. Feminism, Ethnocentrism, and Auto-Immunity

A number of Derrida’s remarks pointed out that the very defense of democracy, or human rights, even where they excluded children, women, workers, and colonized peoples, also provided the resources for subsequent claims by these groups for inclusion (see Deutscher 2007). Feminisms bear witness to the historical auto-immunity of the denial of women’s rights. It is most in the spirit of Derrida’s work, however, to remember a different interpretative direction manifest in his work, for example in discussions of feminism in two interviews, “Choreographies” and “Women in the

Beehive.” In the former, Derrida took the opportunity to suggest that “feminist movements will perhaps have to renounce a too easy kind of progressivism” (PTS, 91). In looking back at its history, feminism ought to recognize that it has also participated in the defense of European values, indeed European identity has sometimes been associated with its recognition of women’s rights, as when (the example is not from Derrida), the Netherland’s immigration process has a mechanism filtering applicants in terms of their recognition of sexual modernity (Fassin 2011, 153).

The historical exclusion of women’s rights can be interpreted as an auto-immune measure, defending the fraternal “living membrane.” Historically, women’s rights claims will also have their own auto-immune logics, in their identifications with nationalist logics, in their alignment with an image of progress often disseminated at the expense of other cultures or classes, in an ethnocentrism or race blindness to which feminism has often been prone. Such defenses could, for example, be considered auto-immune in having undermined feminist claims to complete universalism, all the while that they promoted (in the very form of their claims) new conditionalities, exceptions, hierarchies, inclusions, and exclusions. This provides an answer to the question not answered in *Politics of Friendship*: what happens when the sister is made a case of the brother? In response: she may well espouse what effectively amounts to fraternity: and with inevitably auto-immune results.

A deconstructive approach, consistent with and arising from Derrida’s early and late work, facilitates a feminist analysis of the historical auto-immunities taking place in the name of community, nature, nation, origin, fraternity. But this same approach also facilitates, at the same time, an attention to feminism’s auto-immunities. If such a position can be located in interviews such as “Choreographies,” it might also be derived from the comments that follow Derrida’s remarks about Jean-Marie Le Pen. Excluded from models of fraternity, and sometimes (as in the case of Rousseau) specifically by virtue of attempts to reduce them not just to their maternal role, but to a “properly” maternal role, and to the defense of the “proper,” women have been intertwined and encaptured in two ways with the travails of fraternity, both excluded from fraternity, but as maternal, also the lynchpin of a proper fraternity (born of the right and of the same mother, and of a mother on the right soil). Moreover, as maternal, women have also been encaptured in fearful logics about immigration futures.

But as we think about these overlaps between women and the “stranger” in the politics of fraternity, we can understand women as concurrently participating in the defensive politics of inclusion, sameness, and fraternity. When Derrida responds to Le Pen’s auto-immune “organicist axiom” he takes an extra step that, he claims “can’t possibly make anyone happy.” Le Pen’s membrane may be repellent, but Derrida cautions his reader who would “put on airs and give lessons in politics.” No nation, and no subject is exempt, it seems from a degree of commitment to the “membrane.” Such commitment will be pursued at the expense of the stranger – and will be forced to deal with the consequent permeability and auto-immunity of the

membrane. Not intended by Derrida to lead to an apolitical position, he proposes instead that “it is to appeal to our duty to courageously formulate and thematize this terrible combinatory” (ET, 19–20).

A deconstructive approach to feminism would take a step beyond the analysis of sisters, daughters, and mothers as coopted lynchpins in the auto-immune defense of fraternity. A deconstructive feminism could be characterized by its disposition to identify its own claims as auto-immune, and by the resources available for that analysis.

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Antigone as the White Fetish of Hegel and the Seductress of Derrida

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Derrida's concern in *Glas* with the theme of the family in Hegel's discussion of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* has spawned what I shall identify here as two strands of scholarship. On the one hand, we might group together commentators who have traced themes such as how the ancient, ethical conflict of values embodied by Antigone and Creon is destined to be surpassed in Hegel's dialectical narrative of Spirit's progression, by its resolution into the emergent legal subject of modernity (Thompson 1998). This strand of commentary takes up the issue of recognition in the struggle to death between master and slave in terms of which Hegel describes the emergence of consciousness into self-consciousness (Critchley 1999). It also takes up, in varying degrees (depending on which commentator one has in mind) the question of sexual difference, and how the tragic form of art endemic to ancient Greece gives way to Spirit's ostensibly more sophisticated understanding of itself, as an ethics of duty is transformed into a morality of self-legislating (male) individuals (Gearhart 1998). The equal validity of the duty that Antigone, according to Hegel, embodies to familial ethics and that which Creon embodies to the state's authority is sublated by a conception of morality that subordinates family to state, and women to men. This morality is based not upon duties assigned by sexual difference, but upon the moral conscience of free individuals as (male) citizens and heads of households.

A second strand of Hegel scholarship, either dealing directly with Derrida's reflections on Hegel's consideration of *Antigone* (Sussman 1998), or concerned with the wider issues of how to read Hegel on questions of slavery and race (Buck-Morss

2009; Bernasconi 1998), problematizes Hegel's racialized preconceptions, interrogating the privilege such conceptions accord to the West. In doing so, this strand of scholarship begins to correct a widespread neglect in mainstream Hegelian scholarship to problematize Hegel's privileging of the West. This neglect has resulted in, amongst other things, a white-washing of Hegel's views on slavery, a disinclination to read his famous master–slave dialectic as having any application to actual, historical new-world slavery (and its relation to ancient slavery), and a failure to put into question Hegel's exclusion of Africa from world history.

Making good on the effort to set the record straight, we can surmise the following. Hegel's account of the emergence of self-consciousness through a life and death struggle has everything to do with both the new world and new world slavery, and in fact amounts to a justification of colonial slavery. By making freedom and self-consciousness central to the master–slave dialectic, Hegel is not so much departing from Aristotelian arguments that there are those (non-Greeks) who are naturally suited to slavery, as he is providing an insidious twist to the argument. In effect, Hegel suggests that colonialism provides Africans, whom he associates with a kind of naturalized slavery, since, in their alleged barbarism, they are considered to be outside of world history, with the “opportunity” to risk death in order to liberate themselves from slavery. Needless to say, this position offers, at the same time, a not so indirect and not so residual rebuttal of arguments for the abolition of slavery. Slaves should not be liberated by fiat, or by law: they should liberate themselves by proving their self-consciousness through a trial that will probably result in their death, but, if it does not, will prove them worthy of freedom (see Buck-Morss 2009). Thus Hegel is implying that European slavery is better than African slavery, and at the same time justifying European colonialism. In Europe, the implication is, slaves at least have the chance to set themselves free, the chance to die, or to become self-conscious subjects. Simply by entering into the sphere or realm of a Europe that is by definition world-historical in Hegel's sense, Africans are granted the possibility of overcoming their non-historical (read improperly human, viz. African) status.

In what follows, I bring together the two sets of concerns I have identified, the first clustering around ethics and sexual difference, the second around race, slavery, and colonialism. I suggest that, for Derrida, each of these concerns implicates the other, and to the extent that this is true, his reflections on Hegel's *Antigone* have not been read as carefully as they need to be. At the same time, we might say that Derrida has not read Sophocles as well or as closely as he might have done. Should it seem sacrilegious to accuse Derrida of failing to read closely, we should concede immediately that *Glas* makes no particular claim to read Sophocles well, or even at all. The claim is rather to read Hegel, who himself, as many have pointed out, could be called to account for not reading Sophocles closely, for not even wanting to do so, for appropriating *Antigone* only as a pretext, using her as fodder for his dialectical machine – and that, let me add, is precisely the issue at stake here.

1. *Antigone*: As Much about Slavery versus Freedom as Sexual Difference

At issue is whether in reading Hegel in *Glas*, Derrida allows himself to be seduced by a still-too-Hegelian reading of *Antigone*, whether, not to put too fine a point on it, he allows himself to be seduced by the fetish Hegel makes of *Antigone*. The virginal *Antigone*, then, will not only have seduced Hegel; Derrida will have fallen prey to Hegel's fetishization of *Antigone*, despite his best intentions. To the extent that Derrida's readers have failed to problematize this seduction, they too have continued to fetishize *Antigone*. A white *Antigone* will have seduced Hegel, Derrida, and their readers, her seductiveness, however, sublimated in and by her whiteness. For her allure, I would suggest, lies partly in her racialized exoticism, in her association with the old (according to Hegel) more primitive order of the chthonic gods, who must be overcome by the new order of gods (with which Creon is associated), in part because they are too Asiatic, too immanently bound to nature.

Hegel purifies *Antigone*, quelling her exoticism, staging her domestication in a series of substitutive maneuvers – she is the other who stands in for other others, shadowy figures who populate the margins of Hegel's philosophy; slaves, foreigners, outsiders (non-Westerners) – which returns us (if we ever really left it) to fetishism. Both Derrida and Hegel will have been seduced, then, by an *Antigone* who is the product of Hegel's imagination, a product emanating from an identificatory procedure, elicited by a response to a Sophoclean character, refracted through the lens of a dialectical logic that cannot cope with her, ejected from the Hegelian machine, too much for it to handle, elaborated in order to keep at bay a feminized threat that articulates a still greater racialized danger.

Antigone must be castrated. The threat she presents to Hegel, especially in an age when feminist voices are beginning to make themselves heard, is too great. And yet her castration must be compensated for. She is tamed through Hegel's veneration, rendered palatable through her association with, and subordination to, religious sensibility. Hegel purifies her, domesticating the political threat she represents, disciplines her by containing her within religious piety, confers on her a special aptitude for the divine, confines her to religion, posits her as sublime, all the better to master the overpowering threat she embodies, a threat tinged with racialized connotations. *Antigone* must be quelled, because in her unruliness is condensed a profusion of characteristics that cannot be admitted into Hegel's system. The bad, overwhelming infinity of Eastern art, the heathen practices of exposing the dead, the natural extravagance with which *Antigone* is associated, all mark her as a figure of excess. She is a little too much, a little too foreign, a little too undisciplined. She is too reminiscent of all those effeminized Persians, who not only fail to bury their dead in the proper manner, but also fail to keep proper tabs on their women, and thus are themselves marked as effeminate.

Quite a feat, then, of seduction. Antigone becomes an eroticized substitute, a sticking point, a point of difference that won't quite be tamed by, or made to fit neatly or seamlessly into, the fabric spun by the dialectical machine that, in part, helped to produce her. She defies the king, in the name of religion, and she is tainted with her association with primitive gods, who smack of Eastern religions. She must, in short, be Christianized, civilized. And this, indeed, is Hegel's brilliant, and intensely European, white, solution. In Hegel's philosophical meditations, Antigone becomes a white, Christian, pious soul, the embodiment of Western, virginal, desexualized, femininity, a cardboard cut-out for the good wife that she would never become in Sophocles' rendition of her.

In following out the mutual implication of the two strands I have (no doubt falsely, irresponsibly) isolated from one another (let me call them, by way of shorthand "sexual difference" and "race"), by exacerbating the implication these concerns have for one another, and asking about the specific bearing this has for re-reading *Antigone*, I propose the following claim. *Antigone* is just as much about slavery versus freedom as it is about sexual difference, family versus state, or divinity versus humanity. In burying her brother, Antigone not only insists on distinguishing Polynices from a husband or a son, the logic of which commands Hegel's and Derrida's attention (in addition to that of many others); not only does Antigone insist that the brother is "irreplaceable" (GL, 165, 186), but she also distinguishes her brother from a slave, for whom, she says explicitly, she would not have violated the law (*Antigone*, line 517). While the question of the brother's irreplaceability, as distinct from a husband or a son, has generated a great deal of scholarly discussion, the question of what is at stake in Antigone's distinction of her brother from a slave has suffered critical neglect. In order to draw the consequences of this neglect, let me first briefly review the need to resist the tendency in Hegelian scholarship to insist that Hegel regards the ethical duties embodied by Antigone and Creon as equally valid, a view that might be accurate in that it reflects the claims Hegel makes for the tragic conflict in its own terms, but which fails to take any account of the role that Hegel's consideration of this tragic conflict plays in the larger context of his philosophy as a whole, his understanding of ethics and morality, the relationship between art and philosophy, and the relationship between family and state.

2. Women Remain in Excess

Although the ethical duties embodied by the feminine and masculine consciousness form two parts of what presents itself, in Hegel's understanding, as the whole of ethical Spirit, and even though neither the human law (which Hegel identifies with Creon's overriding concern for the welfare of the state) nor the divine law (which Hegel identifies with Antigone's insistence upon burying Polynices) "is by itself absolutely valid" (Hegel 1977, 276), there are several important asymmetries that

organize this discussion. Perhaps the most obvious asymmetry that characterizes Hegel's account of the human and divine laws is that men are destined to become citizens of the nation, while women are destined to remain guardians of the household. "The husband is sent out by the Spirit of the Family into the community in which he finds his self-conscious being" (Hegel 1977, 276), while the "sister becomes, or the wife remains [*bleibt*], the head of the household and the guardian of the divine law" (275). This destiny is said by Hegel to have been arranged by nature: "Nature . . . assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law" (280). There is, however, a kind of overcoming, although a strange one, of the naturalness of sexual difference. Although Hegel understands both sexes to "overcome [*überwinden*]" their natural existence, and to "appear in their ethical significance, as diverse . . . beings who share between them the two distinctions belonging to the ethical substance" (275), the initial, natural assignation of the female sex to the household, and the male sex to the community that Hegel identifies with the state, with government, is never brought into question, and its overcoming does not amount to sublation. Sexual difference, as such, is not sublated, but remains. "The difference of the sexes [*Der Unterschied der Geschlechter*] and their ethical content remains [*bleibt*]" (276) and is subject to a constant becoming of substance. The naturalness of being blood relatives supplements ethics. In this sense, the natural law of sexual difference, *as a natural law*, thoroughly permeates Hegel's account, without itself ever being subject to thought, or surpassed by thought. That is, sexual difference is taken to be an absolute law – absolute in the sense of outside the realm of interrogation for Hegel – just as (for all intents and purposes) Lacanian psychoanalysis takes it to be. It is uncircumnavigable. The absolute law of sexual difference accounts for why Hegel (and not just Hegel) distributes certain capacities and qualities to women and certain traits and capabilities to men, and then grounds these, in a retrospective projection of that which *must be* natural, in their allegedly natural disposition, such that the very nature of sexual difference is now said to account for the cultural and historical restraints and constraints a given culture places upon women, due to their alleged natural lack of rationality.

It should not come as a surprise then that, for Hegel, while man passes out of the family and into the ethical life of the community, the sister, or the wife, remains, where she is, even as both the man and the woman overcome their natural ethical assignments according to sexual difference (Thompson 1998). The slippage between the sister and the wife is instructive, especially in the light of the fact that the figure who is implicitly evoked throughout Hegel's discussion, Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, product of Oedipal incest, and sister of Polynices, goes to her death for burying her brother instead of to her marriage chamber to become the wife of Haemon (see GL, 143, 162). The sister, of course, is said by Hegel to have no desire for the brother. Be that as it may, whatever the exact nature of the strange overcoming of sexual difference, an overcoming that leaves sexual difference in place, this overcoming, for the sister (or the wife) consists in not moving, but in staying exactly

where she is; her overcoming constitutes remaining in the household, while that of the man constitutes a going beyond. After all, woman is predestined to remain in the household, according to the way that Hegel takes up specific cultural traits (women's exclusion from citizenship in ancient Greece or modern Germany) and reads them back into nature.

While it is true that brother and sister freely recognize one another in the sense that they constitute "free individualities" (Hegel 1977, 274) for one another (although they do not derive their being-for-self from one another), it is also true that the decisive difference between man and woman's ethicality lies in their divergent relationships to desire and freedom; as such it is their differential relationship to self-consciousness that comes into its own. The capacity for self-consciousness is bound up with the fact that man is destined to be a citizen, and for combat in war, and, in the general Hegelian scheme of things, true freedom can only be expressed in the state. A man (a husband), in his capacity as a "citizen" possesses "the self-conscious power of universality" and "thereby acquires the right of desire and, at the same time, preserves his freedom with regard to it" (Hegel 1977, 275). In contrast to the way that man has the right to desire, but also the freedom not to be tied to desire, Hegel understands the woman's interest to be focused on the universal. From an ethical point of view, for a woman, "it is not a question of *this* particular husband, *this* particular child, but simply of husband and children generally" (Hegel 1977, 274). Why does Hegel say this? Derrida suggests that Hegel's idea of the irreplaceability comes from the "mouth" of Antigone (GL, 165, 186). Presumably Hegel focuses on the generality and universality of woman's relationship to husband and children, because he understands it to be a woman's duty to take over the household. While such duties must also be ethical in some sense, Hegel reserves burial as the specific content of familial ethics. It is only the specifically ethical duty of burial that attends to the particularity of the family individual. In realizing this latter duty, the woman overcomes her natural, abstract determination – an overcoming, which, however, involves her remaining precisely where she is, in the (any) familial hearth (whether as sister or wife) – and accedes to an ethical determination.

Given that it is a woman's duty to be guardian of the household, whatever the particularity of the husband or children, whatever her feeling for them, whoever they are, the woman must guard them, take care of them. Yet the substitutability of husbands and sons also harbors another undertone, one not confined to *Geschlecht* as narrowly defined according to sexual difference. The replaceability of soldiers in war is mitigated by their burial as particular individuals belonging to the family, a specificity denied soldiers in war, and one that gains its content from a generality that contrasts soldiers belonging to a nation/polis/state with those who do not belong to the state – with foreigners. Elided with the opposition between those who do not belong to the (Greek/European) state, and those who do, is another less legible opposition (one that Hegel does not address directly in the context of his discussion of

human and divine law). Alongside the opposition between Greek and non-Greek, European and non-European, is the opposition between free men and slaves.

3. Free from Servitude

According to the account Hegel provides, self-consciousness is apportioned to man as a citizen in a way that it is not accorded to woman, who remains in the household. At the same time, true freedom is realized only in the state. Hence, despite the mutual recognition that is said to pertain between the brother and the sister, it is hard to see in what sense woman can be construed as truly free. Indeed, in the case of Antigone, it is hard to see what sort of recognition could be elicited from a brother whose corpse it is her ethical deed to bury. If, as Derrida puts it, “one only belongs to the family in busying oneself around the dead” (GL, 143, 162), if the proper work of the family turns out to be that of mourning, what does recognition mean in this context? The proper work of familial burial and mourning turns out to be a matter of distinguishing the male warriors of one’s family from slaves, over whom, one would have hoped (presumably) the army they represent prove victorious. Antigone hopes to distinguish her brother from a slave in burying him, and here is the rub when it comes to Polynices, whose corpse Creon treats as if he were a slave when he forbids burial, precisely because, in attacking Thebes, Polynices is, for Creon, nothing but a traitor (and therefore should be treated as a captive of war, as a slave). A more profound complication arises from Derrida’s suggestion, which Gearhart explicates, that Hegel’s *Aufhebung* is to be thought of as akin to repression, and that *Aufhebung* is not merely a matter of negation, but also of the production of an ideal. To the extent that rational subjectivity is produced through a sublation of the natural order, its production not only enshrines masculinity in its unquestioned entitlement to the freedom that man enjoys as a citizen of the nation; it also inscribes woman (and, by implication, ostensibly effeminate foreigners/slaves) as the locus of implicit, rather than explicit, rationality – as pre-rational. Just as the unconscious, divine law of the family is the origin and model for the human law of the state, even if it must be surpassed, canceled out, and repudiated through a process that raises the natural diversity of sexual difference to the level of a community that takes shape as the state, so it is also the case that, despite everything we have said above, there is also a sense in which woman (and by implication slaves/foreigners) partakes in the process by which self-consciousness is realized. Even if women as such are left behind, excluded by this process, they nonetheless facilitate it and become incorporated by it. Even if the family must be gone beyond, it is also the enabling condition of that which lies beyond it. Precisely the alleged natural status of the female sex, the law of sexual difference, is what guarantees and underwrites the state as its enabling condition, and in becoming, for Hegel, nothing but the family, women remain in excess to both the family and the Hegelian system.

By constituting the family as a natural community, even if this natural aspect is (said by Hegel to be) overcome, by concentrating the ethicality of the family in the deed of burial, and by construing the divine law that dictates burial of family members as the pinnacle of this ethics, Hegel ignores the fact that burial rituals are just as custom bound and culturally constituted as are the ethical customs that become enshrined in state law. Or rather, although he acknowledges, for example in the *Aesthetics*, that rituals in honoring or treating the dead differ widely, he fails to acknowledge this difference in rituals when he discusses *Antigone* either in the *Aesthetics* or in the *Phenomenology*. Indians, Hegel says, “burn their dead or let their bodies lie and rot on the ground” and therefore fail to make a “firm distinction between the living and the dead” (Hegel 1988, 650; Hegel 1977, 270–271). The fact that the exposure of Polynices’ corpse is precisely what is at stake in *Antigone* would, one might have thought, give Hegel reason for pause. And perhaps it did, but pause he did not, at least not in any way that admitted of recording in the written text of his work concerning *Antigone*.

In effectively ignoring in his discussion of *Antigone* this complication, Hegel also ignores the fact that even the determination of who is a blood relative and who is not – which he treats as purely natural – is itself determined by a political framework, in the sense that who is allowed to *count* as a blood relative is itself circumscribed by whether one is a slave or whether one is free. Ironically, the very nature that Hegel attributes to blood relations, and to sexual difference, is itself permeated by an understanding of kinship relations, and of the proper treatment of corpses that is peculiar to particular cultures, a peculiarity that admits of the influence of symbolic structures as always already having infiltrated what one understands to be a blood relation, and what one understands to be the rites pertaining to death. To count as a blood relation is not merely to be united through the maternal line (a lineage that Hegel already understands through the kinship of man and woman, through their union in marriage); it is also to be construed as human in such a way as to be exempt from what Orlando Patterson (1982) calls social death. In other words, it is to be exempt from the fate of slaves, who suffered deracination.

Both the rituals of mourning on which *Antigone* insists, and the need for loyalty to the polis to which Creon appeals, are inscribed in cultural traditions that are transmitted through a collectivity. Yet while Hegel will come to identify the collectivity with the state, within which true individual freedom can be expressed, the rituals of mourning, which also constitute a collective form of life, the transmission of which specifies a cultural heritage, are not granted the same recognition by Hegel, just as women, to whom the rituals of mourning are entrusted, are not recognized as citizens, either by the Greeks or by Hegel. Drawn from a specific historical and religious context, the rituals that *Antigone* observes in burying Polynices are compromised because she has to bury her brother in secret, and on her own. In Hegel, this context is one that implicates, and is implicated by, not just the relationship between family and state as defined by the overcoming and incorporation of the

former by the latter, but also the differentiation of the specific, historical configurations of both family and state that pertain to Thebes/Athens/the German state from the non-Greek, non-European, colonial worlds within which ancient Greece and modern Germany situate themselves politically and culturally.

In distinguishing between a slave and her brother, Antigone is delimiting both her act and the family on behalf of which she acts: she is making sure that she honors the spirit of her brother, and at the same time, she is delineating her family, and herself, as free from servitude. Although Hegel characterizes the actions of Creon and Antigone as duties that are dictated by the natural opposition of the sexes, the position Antigone articulates is one that also assumes, or rather enacts, her own mastery over slaves, including male slaves. As such her construal of what constitutes her familial duty does not follow directly from her natural sexual destiny, but takes shape against the background of the non-familial, against those deprived of family, those who have been deracinated, those whose families do not count as families, those who have been subjected to social death.

Given the attention Derrida devotes to the difference between the mutual recognition that pertains between brother and sister and the recognition that pertains between master and slave, it is significant that Derrida does not consider Antigone's differentiation of her brother, as a free person, from a slave. As noted, insofar as Derrida concerns himself with the actual reading Hegel provides of *Antigone*, rather than the adequacy of the reading Hegel provides of Sophocles' play, his failure to mention this passage in *Antigone* is easily explained at one level. Still, this omission remains surprising, given that the difference between the recognition that occurs in the master/slave dialectic and the recognition that characterizes the brother/sister relation is very much at issue for Derrida. In particular, Derrida is interested in the fact that the latter, for Hegel, does not involve struggle or conflict. This is a crucial aspect of the discussion in *Glas*, which involves what Derrida identifies as "quasi-transcendental" and the "inadmissible."

4. The Form of the Text of *Glas*

The graphic, pictorial presentation of Derrida's intervention in *Glas*, one might say, operates on a figurative level that at the same time exceeds, informs, and organizes the path that Derrida traces throughout Hegel's texts concerning the family. Graphically, artistically, even hieroglyphically, one might say, Derrida organizes the text of *Glas* in a way that is reminiscent of the "phallic column of India" that Hegel discusses in his *Aesthetics* (GL, 2, 8). These "objects of veneration" were, Hegel tells us, originally "solidly erected like towers," but, like the presentation Derrida employs in the pages of *Glas*, these columns come to be indented. They are towers in which later people began "to make openings and hollow chambers . . . and to place images of the gods in these" (Hegel 1988, 641, 280). Likewise, Derrida makes indentations in

the hegemonic, Western narrative of *Glas*, which he both thereby reproduces and undermines, making a space for the gods of religions other than those of Greece or Christianity, even if these “foreign” gods have to be fitted in, slotted into the narrow openings that the governing narrative concedes to them. “These hollowings, holes . . . would be like accidents” says Derrida (GL, 3, 9). Derrida’s own insertions, niches, cuts, and interpolations into the columnar texts that stratify *Glas* serve as a way to reintroduce into the corpus of Hegelian thought that which Hegel himself regards as “accidental and contingent” art that “loses itself” and confuses “architecture and sculpture” (Hegel 1988, 640). Art, in other words, that does not serve the same purpose as art did for the Greeks, and therefore does not make itself available for sublation in the religion of Christianity, art that does not understand itself in the way that it should, in the way that Hegel, the philosopher of Christianity, does.

Derrida reproduces these already allegedly confused forms on the pages of a book, graphically, pictorially, on the pages of *Glas*, confusing the issue of art genres still further. He thereby also picks up on, and contests, a motif on which he comments, namely the figurative role that a certain family – God’s family – plays in relation to *Geist*. In remarking on the figurative and generative function of the familial, as played out between God the father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Derrida concerns himself with the sense in which the “family history” that Hegel tells is a “Greek-German” one, in which the sun sets in “the West” and “recalls itself within itself,” and in which is announced the “hermeneutic and teleological resolution of the enigma [of Egyptian religion] in the Greek (esthetic) religion, then in the Christian (revealed) religion” (GL, 256, 285).

In graphically privileging, in his columnar organization of the text of *Glas*, not the religion of Christianity, replete with its trinitarian overtones, but the religion embodied in Memnons, replete with phallic overtones, Derrida amends the relation between art, religion, and philosophy that pertains for Hegel. Derrida, the philosopher, mimics the architecture/sculpture of Eastern religion pictorially in the arrangement of his commentary on Hegel and Genet. He becomes a sort of artisan, who brings into question the privilege that the architectonic organization of Hegel’s philosophy accords to Greece, and to Christianity as the fulfillment of the religious, political, and ethical ideals inaugurated by the Greeks. Instead of approving, as does Hegel, of the “admirable” mythical slaying of the “Egyptian *Sphinx* . . . by a Greek,” instead of endorsing the solving of the enigma by the “*free, self-knowing spirit*” of Oedipus (GL, 256, 285), Derrida arranges his discourse in *Glas* in the mute shape of columns, allowing his text to resonate or sound with the reverberations of India and Egypt, echoes of which can be heard throughout *Glas*. He contrasts the “innocence” of the religion of flowers with his choice of the family as his guiding thread, a choice, Derrida makes a point of telling us, that is “far from being innocent” (GL, 5, 11).

Hegel’s narrative has always already decided in favor of monotheism, Christianity, language, and self-consciousness. Derrida, playing with the role Hegel ordains for the artisan (see GL, 255, 283; Hegel 1977, 424, 489) concerns himself with that

which for Hegel must be surpassed, transmuted into its higher, objective truth, in civil society and the state. Derrida tarries with the family, not merely as that which finds its true object beyond itself, in the nation, but as that which is figuratively overdetermined by an “essentially Greek history” (GL, 257, 285) told from the perspective of Christianity/atheism. The family is not an innocent choice. Derrida concerns himself not only with the inevitability of Hegel’s outcome, once he has framed the family within the teleology Christianity confers on it, but also with that which gets left aside in the privileging of a certain, predetermined family. Derrida returns us to pantheism, to the religion of flowers.

In the narrative supplied by Hegel’s philosophy of religion, the family marks itself a second time as the Christian family is elevated above the Jewish family (and there is no question here, let’s say, of a Muslim or a Hindu family). It is, then a “certain” family (GL, 21, 28) that will resolve itself into civil society. The true family, for Hegel, is one that is based on the unity of love, on a love that is understood as Christian love. Hegel’s identification of the family with the Christian family is bound up with the concept of the trinity. Insofar as the entire concept of *Geist* or Spirit in Hegel is a “trinitarian” (GL, 20, 27) concept, a concept that derives its inspiration from this structure of Christianity, and one that privileges “a certain familial schema,” Derrida asks, “Will one rashly say that the finite family furnishes a metaphoric model or a convenient figuration for the language of philosophical exposition” (GL, 21, 28)? The Christian family, based upon the model of the love of God for his son, in whom “God knows and recognizes himself” (GL, 31, 39) furnishes a model for Hegel’s conception of Spirit. Derrida says, “The spirit is neither the father nor the son, but filiation, the relation of father to son, of son to father, of father to father through the mediation of the father. The spirit is the element of the *Aufhebung* [sublation] in which the seed returns to the father” (GL, 31, 40). Quoting Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Derrida goes on: “God is eternal love, whose nature is to have the other as its own (*das Andere als sein Eigenes zu haben*). It is this trinity [tripleness, *Dreifaltigkeit*] which raises Christianity above other religions” (GL, 31, 39). This, then, is what Derrida has in mind when he refers to the family as both “a part” and “the whole of the system” (GL, 20, 27). The family is both a part, the “first moment of the third moment of objective spirit, *Sittlichkeit*’s first moment” (GL, 20, 27), as laid out by the *Philosophy of Right*. Yet at the same time, an idealized family, the family of Christ, furnishes the model for the whole system of Hegel’s philosophy, and in this sense, it is the whole. God the father recognizes himself in his son, and it is his nature to do so, just as Spirit recognizes itself in its other. The family, then, is both inside the system, and it provides the structural integrity of the system at the same time. It is both internal to the system, and it is the system, it provides the model for the system, it houses (or buries) the system. It is, one might say, both the “shell and kernel” (GL, 3, 9) of the system. As the shell, a finite family, a determinate family, drawn from Christianity, provides the figure for the philosophical system as a whole. As a part of the interior system, the family gives rise to, plants the seed for, the proper

development of *Sittlichkeit* as it takes the form of the state, during the course of which feeling gives way to rationality, and love of family is subordinated to the state. The metaphorical work that the determinate family of God performs for Hegel is displaced by Derrida's architectural figuration of *Glas*, in columns, into which are etched the gods of other religions, along with considerations that are not governed by Hegelian hierarchies.

The family, then, is both a term that is situated within the system of Hegelian determinate negation, with a limited field of operation within the dynamics of the teleological development of Spirit that Hegel describes (and prescribes), and at the same time it figures the system as a whole. The kind of work accomplished by the family, then, appears to operate on two planes. On the one hand, it occupies a rigorously delimited function, situated in the immediacy of ethical life, and endowed with the potential to develop into a mediated form of ethics, one that will take shape in service to the State. On the other hand, it operates figuratively, accomplishing the work of shaping the dialectic as a whole; a specific, religious figuration of the family informs this work. This figurative accomplishment has an outside, one that is not accounted for by the relationship that Hegel designates between Christianity and Judaism.

Derrida marks the thread he follows throughout *Glas*, weaving in and out of Hegel's texts, a second time, in the "thread" (*fil*) that he calls the "law of the family" (GL, 4, 10), by which Derrida both erects, and allows to fall, Hegel's name. Derrida memorializes Hegel, builds him a monument, erects multiple architectural, phallic columns in his name in the form of the text that is *Glas*, and in doing so he celebrates Hegel's remains, sanctifying his name, building him a funeral pyre. In the process, he pokes holes in Hegel's arguments, reinserting allusions to Eastern religion into the midst of Hegel's system, destabilizing the relationship between the accidental or contingent, and the necessary or absolute, pointing to the figures of irresolution, or self-effacement that inhabit Hegel's logic, places that are not resolved through the mediation of opposites, sites that fall by the wayside. In doing so, he illustrates what he calls in the right hand column the "two functions" of "the remains" (GL, 1, 7), that which "assimilates, interiorizes, idealizes ... embalms" (GL, 1, 7) or erects a tombstone to Hegel's fall, to his demise, and that which "lets the remain(s) fall" (GL, 2, 8).

5. Conclusion: From Sexual Difference to Racial Difference

The thread(s) that Derrida weaves in and out of the texts of Hegel, the thread of the family, and the thread by which women of India pull the phallus, erect the phallic, Oedipal discourse of Greek tragedy, and subordinate racial difference to sexual difference. A certain conception of the family, then, a Christian family, is collapsed with the phallic model of the family, and in this collapse, the Eastern religions from which

the figure of the phallus is drawn are “civilized,” and their cultures erased. I have sought to make the case for reading the question of race (and its cultural eclipse) as much more significant to Derrida’s argument in *Glas* than has been assumed. If critics have been right to focus their readings of Derrida’s consideration of Antigone around sexual difference, such readings need to be extended to racial difference. The implication of my argument, which neither Derrida nor his commentators have followed through, is the necessity to return to Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and ask how Derrida’s *Glas* might help exhume the remains of Sophocles’ text, what is left of it, that is, after Hegel. In such an exhuming, the question of slavery would appear to be inextricably linked with the corpse of Polynices, a corpse that elicits so much anxiety in Antigone that she accepts (though not without a struggle) her own death, rather than leave the corpse of her brother unburied. In the burial she performs, a burial intended to distinguish her brother from the taint of slavery, Antigone sets herself up as complicit with the institution of slavery, from which she is so eager to differentiate herself and her own family. As such, she inscribes the family of Oedipus as a European family, to be supplanted by the Christian family, a family fit to model free, European, nations upon, nations that Hegel will construe as justified in colonizing Africa, nations that will give slaves the chance to free themselves, at the risk of death, nations that confer on Africans the status of historical peoples, a status that Hegel’s philosophy had denied them, a status that history, as it unfolds in its necessity, as narrated from the perspective of “Western civilization,” will have endowed upon African peoples.

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Art's Work: Derrida and Artaud and Atlan

ANDREW BENJAMIN

1. Opening

To write on art is already to have written. Writing about painting may already have equated art and the written. In such instances what will have occurred is a practice whose history defines, from one perspective, the relationship between art and writing. While there is no one point of origination, it is clear that what Philostratus in his *Imagines* stages is not only a position that continues to haunt any engagement with art, but also a position that should have troubled, if only by its absence, the general project of philosophy's engagement with art.¹ The position continues to be named as *ekphrasis*.² The question of description and thus the location of description within writing can never be far from both the history of art and a philosophy of art. The contention of this essay is that Derrida's writings about the "dessins" (drawings) of Artaud and the "tableaux" (paintings) of Atlan remain trapped within the problems posed by *ekphrasis* (the linguistic description of a visual artwork).³ However, if there were a way around the problem stemming from the retention of art's subordination to both writing and rhetoric, then it is not by abandoning deconstruction or by refashioning *ekphrasis*. Instead, one must pose again the question of what a deconstruction of art would actually entail. Part of the answer lies in the need to reconfigure the "object." It is of course precisely this reconfiguration that will undo by distancing the hold of *ekphrasis* and what will be called the "ekphrastic impulse."⁴

A great deal of preliminary argumentation needs to be adduced. In addition to any attempt to identify both the place of *ekphrasis* and its legacy, what also needs to be established, as part of that opening move, is the limit of *ekphrasis*. This is a limit

that occurs both within the terms that *ekphrasis* sets for itself, as well as in the nature of its legacy. The limits can be located in how both particularity and singularity within art are to be understood. Underpinning that thinking, indeed the possibility of posing the question of the particular, demands understanding the restrictions imposed by the failure to have recognized that the work of art is also art as work. Work needs to be allowed both an actative as well as a substantive dimension (the latter, were it to be the exclusive focus, would be the named presence, the presence of the work bearing a title, hence an entitled presence). To affirm the actative is to affirm the work's work. Emerging as central therefore is a rethinking of the object. What would have been the work of art becomes in the context of this project, art's work: the work as a named presence cedes its place to work as the being proper to art. The tradition within which writing on art assumes the position of *ekphrasis* – and this need not be an intentional decision – fails to note that the work's work has significance, indeed it is the *sine qua non* for meaning, and thus as evidence of that failure continues to identify the work with its substantive presence. The presence of work defined in terms of activity does not mean the introduction of the actative as well as the substantive. There must be a more radical claim. Namely, that the being of art is work as work. As a result substance becomes activity. The substantive was therefore always the actative. The consequence is that the work of art becomes art's work. Only within the latter is it possible to allow art's materiality a "workful" presence and to the extent that this occurs what then has to take place, a taking place defining a specific stand within the philosophical, is a philosophical account of matter's work, an account in which matter's work becomes, as a result, mattering.⁵ Art matters. What is mattering is art – and it should be remembered that it is art as work. In the case of Artaud mattering pertains to drawings and portraits, while with Atlan, as a beginning, its locus is the complex relation between abstraction and figure within painting.

The way into this set of interconnected problems and questions is to concentrate on particularity. It will be in terms of particularity that the problems created by the forced separation of the substantive and the actative can be taken up and consequently Derrida's writings on Artaud and Atlan can then become the locus of exploration.⁶ Particularity here refers both to the work of art and thus equally to art's work. Addressing the particular work – even though from one perspective writing on works of art is only ever to write on particular works – and thus at the same time engaging with the philosophical problem of particularity can only be resolved by repositioning the nature of particularity itself, which in turn has to refuse any forced separation of the actative and the substantive. It will be this repositioning that establishes both the limit of *ekphrasis* as well as Derrida's writings on art. In addition, it will allow another writing in which force – a term central to Derrida's own engagement with Artaud – will itself have acquired an importantly different presence than the one that Derrida gives to it. Force will have other uses. As will be suggested, the problem that Derrida is keen to note and which appears in the separation of the

intelligible and the sensible was the initial separation of force and form.⁷ Contrary to this positioning, the argument here is that forming is already work. As will become clear, form is forming and consequently any attempt to think of the work of art in terms of either the opposition of the sensible and the intelligible or their subsequent identification becomes impossible. To be precise, once it can be argued that works of art work as art, then the question that needs to be taken to art is: how does any one work of art work as art? Part of the answer is that works – as integral to their work – both recall and stage their presence as art (the latter is art's self-staging). As will be suggested, particularity is positioned in relation to both recalling and staging. In other words, the position of the substantive – substance – as activity has to be addressed on the level of the particular. However, if this particular is not to be the particular of empiricism – the latter is the particular that exists within and for description – then the question to be addressed concerns how the particularity of the particular is to be understood. There needs to be a further opening in relation to which it will have become possible to return to this question.

Procedurally, the project here is to begin with the problem of *ekphrasis* and thus with what is presupposed within it. As has already been suggested, the limit of *ekphrasis* opens up Derrida's engagement with his work on Artaud and Atlan. The conclusions to be drawn will come to concern what another philosophy of art will be like, once force, which will be repositioned as this specific project continues in terms of mattering, is taken as central to that which allows the particularity of the particular work to be of primary importance. (This is a position that not only demands an understanding of the particularity of the particular but one that allows a confluence between work, mattering, and the actative. They mark the active terminological presence of another thinking of art.)

While it may appear that Derrida's work has been distanced in the process, the engagement with both *ekphrasis* and particularity needs to be understood as the attempt generally to stage the way his project can be understood, and then specifically as the attempt to engage the way what is named as the "signature" occurs in the context of his writings on art.⁸ The problem of the signature brings with it the limit of meaning. He states this position with exacting clarity:

There will be a signature every time that an event occurs, every time there is the production of a work, whose occurrence is not limited to what can be semantically analyzed. There is its significance: a work, which is more than what it signifies, that is there, that remains there.⁹

What does it mean for an event to occur? What is the taking place of an event? As part of the continuity of his engagement with the event Derrida positions the event in relation to an occurrence or a happening. The event is "what comes, what happens [*arrive*]" (LD, 225). And yet given this formulation, it might then be the case that everything could be subsequently recast as an event. There is a further point to be

made, one that locates that which yields the event as the event. The happening of the event has a form of interruption. In this regard Derrida writes that: “there can be an event only when it’s not expected, when one can no longer wait for it, when the coming of what happens interrupts the waiting” (LD, 225). The event therefore is not simply an occurrence. Accepting the link to a certain experiential quality, it can be suggested that the event is neither awaited nor anticipated. There is therefore always more than an occurrence in the precise sense that this “more” breaks the hold of the expected, the awaited, and the anticipated.¹⁰ It is what is, to recall the formulation noted above, “not limited to what can be semantically analyzed.” But what is this? The event and the signature – the latter marking the former – bring into play that which is always “more than what it signifies.” Again there is both the limitation and the delimitation of meaning. Again a question returns. What is this “more”? While it cannot be addressed at this point, it should be recognized that an essential part of any answer to this question is the need to begin to allow for that possibility – this “more” – to inform the particularity and thus the identification of work – here art’s work – with the particular’s work. And it should be noted in advance that fundamental to the purchase of the term “particular” is that, to the extent that it allows for forms of generality, it also has to refuse them. By definition, particularity always particularizes. Particularization however is not individuation. Particulars emerge with and thus within relations. Relationality is the already present presence of the work’s own acts of recall. This identification of the limits of the semantic demands that the question of this “more” is of primary importance. The “more” emerges at the limit of the “ekphrastic impulse,” delimiting that impulse. The question that arises here concerns the extent to which Derrida, even though he has identified this “more,” actually allows it to be thought philosophically.

2. From Philostratus’ *Imagines*

Philostratus’ *Imagines* (third century CE) will provide a way into the question of *ekphrasis*. As has been intimated, *ekphrasis* will be understood here not only as the equation of the work of art with a form of description that depends upon the literary and the rhetorical, but also we must understand that the equation of art and description entails the privilege of meaning – with the result that work and meaning coincide. They coincide in and for a subject. The ekphrastic impulse privileges looking. The effective presence of the “gaze” is thus central.¹¹ What is important however is that the privileging of sight and subsequently immediacy’s unfolding will always have occurred at the expense of the work’s work. At the outset of the *Imagines*, having identified the origin of art as the technique of “mimesis,” Philostratus goes on to distinguish between “painting” (ῥαφία) and “the plastic arts” (το πλαστικόν).¹² The significance of the disjunction between painting and the plastic arts lies in the power attributed to painting. It achieves its effects “from color” (ἐκ χρωμάτων).

Moreover, it is color that sustains the presentation of varying states of mind of the characters or personages within the subject matter of painting. In addition, it is color that allows for the recognition of those emotional states. Within that form of recognition, work has become the subject of the gaze.

After having opened the text in this way, Philostratus then goes on to present “discourses” (λογιοι) about what he has seen (295K15). The ensuing text that comprises the *Imagines* is for the most part made up of “discourses” of what he saw in Naples. However, while the descriptions refer to what is seen, the language used in their presentations deploys the terminology and phraseology of literature. A clear example is the description of the death of Hippolytus in Book II.4. To a significant extent, that description depends on the reiterated presence of the language of Euripides’ own play. This reiteration occurs without the complexity, let alone the presence, of the play as theater to register. After all, in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* the accident leading to the death of Hippolytus actually occurs off stage. What occurs off stage is itself staged by Philostratus. In addition, what is not present is the fact that what is being described in this instance, deploying in part the language of the play, is most probably the image of the emergence of the bull from the sea prior to any ensuing effect its presence had on the horses pulling Hippolytus’ chariot, as it occurs on a vase painting. It would be possible to detail the way, in that actual description, the work is evoked through it having been named and described such that what remains unnamed and thus not described is the work’s work. Even when painting is named – as in the case of the painting of Eros in Book I.29 – its having been named does not involve a reference back to the painting. Rather, what occurs is an unfolding of the work in terms of its having presented a narrative.¹³ While *ekphrasis* may be thought to privilege the gaze, it does so at the expense of a relationship between looking and the work of art. The gaze in this context will have been determined by the temporality of narrative. The gaze is taken to have responded to what has been defined by and as the surface as the place of meaning. Within this purview, meaning is an effect of presentation, and not an after-effect of the work of materials; as such, meaning cannot be attentive to art’s self-staging. Art’s self-staging includes art’s capacity to recall, as part of its work, its presence as art. Meaning’s contingency would now be no more than a form of semantic relativism rather than the result of mattering.

However, what remains significant in the opening paragraphs of the *Imagines* is that the distinction between painting and the plastic arts has an inherent fragility. All that holds them apart is the superior use of materials in one instance rather than another. And here materials have a literal presence. The comparison would be, for example, between painting and jewelry. Leaving to one side the viability of such a distinction, what is important about the distinction is that at the beginning Philostratus is concerned neither with meaning nor with mere storytelling. And even though the text will become an instance of what Elsner calls “interpretative description,” at the beginning that project concedes that meaning is the after-effect of the

way materials work (Elsner 2010, 13). Distinguishing between materials is delimited by how effective they are, where effectivity is defined in terms of the complexity of the presentation. Moreover, what is recognized in a painting, even though the results of the recognition are presented in terms of emotions, is the effective use of materials. What that means of course is that in the opening paragraphs of the *Imagines* what is staged is the problem at the center of the ekphrastic impulse. Materials are both necessary and unnecessary. In general terms, it will be this position that defines Derrida's encounter with both Artaud and Atlan.

The movement in the opening of the *Imagines* is from γραφια and πλαστικη on the one hand and then to λογος on the other. In other words, what is occurring is not just a repositioning in terms of the discursive. Here the passage to the discursive is predicated upon a twofold movement. In the first instance, the passage involves noting the presence of art's materiality which, were it to be taken as the locus of the investigation, would then appear as art's work. And if materiality would be taken as the locus of the investigation, then art's material presence would be the site of art's work. Hence that possibility is obviated by the second aspect of this twofold movement, namely, that when the presence of the materials is noted, the literal presence becomes a locus of commentary and, as a result, materiality as the producer of meaning is left to one side. Meaning prevails. In other words, what will always have been retained within this set-up is the position in which the material will only ever evidence the work of meaning. Again, materials will not function as the site of art's work. The further consequence is that a concern that took painting and the plastic as the site of material activity would be undone by a conception of meaning that remains philosophically indifferent to the effective presence of materials. And yet, the presence of the material and the work of materiality cannot be disavowed. This presence of the material and its work is what was noted above as the problem at the center of the ekphrastic impulse. Equally, however, the problem of the ekphrastic impulse is not resolved and nor is the disavowal of materials to be overcome. We shall not be able to recover the materiality of the work's work merely from the refusal of *logos* in the name of the material. In other words, while *ekphrasis* as a presence demands the elimination of matter in the move to *logos*, it is also the case that the viability of any description depends upon the effective presence of materials. The accuracy of this formulation is clear from the presence of color since color is not an end in itself. With art's work, there will always be color's meld with the an-originally ideational. Color is inevitably more than one.¹⁴ Despite the presence of color and the fact it is necessarily required, neither that presence nor the ensuing necessity figure as demanding a philosophical account.

Significantly, this point indicates that the recognition of materials is a not, *eo ipso*, recognition either of mattering or of art's work. This lack of recognition leads in a number of important directions. The point to be made here however is that the disjunctive relation between materials and *logos* – despite the connection noted above – means that a discursive (or ideational) content cannot be given to materials.

Thereby, what is maintained is the separation of meaning and materials. Overcoming that separation and thus also the opposition between materials and meaning by attributing to the former an ideational content – or at least by not separating the ideational from the material – becomes integral to the work of materials, which we have already termed “mattering.” Once that point is argued, then one has to provide an account of how there is both the work of materials – mattering – and the impossibility of meaning invariance. Answering that question necessitates recourse to particularity.¹⁵

If there is a question here that organizes this engagement with particularity, it is the following: Wherein lies the particularity of the particular artwork (the drawing, the painting, etc.)? This “wherein” is the question of particularity precisely because what is being asked concerns both a particular drawing or painting as well as drawing *as* drawing and painting *as* painting. In a sense however this question is too broad to be addressed here insofar as its development necessitates a reconfiguring of particularity itself. Nonetheless, the question delimits the particular as a site and thus as the particular’s presence. The general formulation – one whose generality can only in this context be stated – is that a particular is only ever an after-effect of the network of relations that at any one time constitute it. Its singularity therefore is the recognition of its position within relationality. Iterability is not the iterability of the object; that would be to reduce the object to the “one” – being as “one” – that is able to be reiterated. On the contrary, iterability is the potentiality that constantly reconstitutes the network of relations the after-effect of which is the particular. Iterability therefore does not pertain to the object. The position is quite different. Iterability pertains to the network constituting the object. This position is a philosophical claim concerning the particular and thus the generality of particularity. In addition, it underscores both what particularity is as work within historicity, and as the historicity of any one work of art. Art’s work is located within particularity. The history of a work addresses and pertains to singularity within relationality. (Indeed it might even be thought to be constitutive of singularity itself.) The history of art, thought philosophically therefore, takes relationality as the locus of the particular. As such the philosophical position staged here holds being-in-relation as primary. It is not the history of the particular as though the latter were a given end itself, given to be described. Taken as such, namely, taken as an end to be described would necessitate the disavowal of relationality (a disavowal that of course would have left its own traits). The contrary is the position to be affirmed. The history of the particular is the inscription of the particular within a set-up that holds particularity in place within the potential continuity of its being reworked.

What then of a given particular? Prior to addressing this question, it remains the case that what has to be taken up is what is addressed within the question of a given particular. To what does the question of particularity – particularity as question – refer? Of a given particular what has to be noted are three defining elements. First, that any particular stages its presence as what it is (e.g., as drawing, as painting, as

pictogram, etc.), or it stages a set of overlapping determinations whose locus of identification is the work. Second, that it is in terms of those determinations that what the work recalls, and its recall is integral to its work as a work, is that relation in terms of a form of reiteration. For example, a portrait by Artaud cannot be separated either from the history of portraiture or from art's relation to questions of its own self-presentation and the presentation of self. Its being a particular portrait is that which figures from the start in any account of its presence as an after-effect. The way it is as particular within that relation becomes a claim about the work's singularity. What is constituted is a singularity within relationality. As such there cannot be a unique event. There can only ever be particulars. Indeed, it is the ineliminability of relationality that establishes singularity. And then third, while any one work will have a relation to forms of presentation that are not delimited by art's work – a delimitation held in place by the ineliminability of relations to that which will have already been given in the work's self-presentation as art – the work cannot be reduced to that set of relations. To do so would be premised on forms of disavowal some of which have already been noted. The most significant in this specific context would be the disavowal of the work's presence as art's work if it could be reduced to its position within an array of documents. Integral to the latter are these moments of recall in which relations, and they will always be relations of indetermination to what can be described as the history of art, are maintained. Works work beyond any given context precisely because the relations that constitute any one singularity are the site of continual transformation, adaptation, and renewal.

3. Artaud

Artaud continued to figure in Derrida's writings.¹⁶ His text on Artaud's drawings and portraits begins thus:

J'appellerais cela une scène, la scène du subjectile, si une force n'était là déjà pour stabiliser ce qui toujours met en scène: la visibilité, l'élément de la représentation, la présence d'un sujet, voire d'un objet.¹⁷ (I would call that a stage, the stage of the subjectile, if a force was not already there stabilizing what is always being staged: visibility, the element of representation, the presence of a subject, indeed, of an object.)

These are the text's opening words. The use of the conditional "J'appellerais" introduces a specific *topos*. In sum, it is a possibility that might have been. The entire argument of Derrida's text is summed up in this opening line. There would be "une scène" were it not for the fact that force is always stabilized. Dorothea Olkowski's succinct formulation captures this idea perfectly. She is writing of Derrida's approach to all the media in which Artaud worked: "The drawing, the painting, the theater the poetry all succumb to the stability of form in order for there to be any relation

to them at all, but in so doing they become objects.”¹⁸ The limit of the project is clear from the start. For Stephen Barker, it is that “Derrida’s Artaud must work within this limit, and within what amounts to a dialectical framework of force/counterforce and binary resistances.”¹⁹ Within one mode of argumentation, those limits allow for their own transformation and thus for the project of winning back force. As such there would need to have been another force that, by opening itself up beyond the work, would have generated another site of meaning. The suggestion here however is that this production of meaning would still occur at the expense of the work and the identification of art with art’s work. It may be that what has to be undone is the very opposition between force and stability – an undoing in which, as has been noted at an earlier stage, what was thought to have been stable is itself always already the site of force. In other words form is, *ab initio*, informed or un-formed. Hence what is necessary is another conception of the “object”/object. Derrida has already noted the object’s presence. He names this yet-to-be-determined object at the beginning of the opening sentence, even though by the sentence’s end it is determined as “un objet.” He names it thus – “J’appellerais cela.”

What this “cela” names is an important question in its own right. In the French edition, the passage cited above occurs on page 55. On page 54, a page that will be seen opposite page 55, there is a reproduction; a “Page de Cahier,” with the detail added “Sainte-Maxime, septembre 1946.” The page from the Cahier, on one level of description, contains words and images drawn with either crayon or pencil. Furthermore, part of one of the elements of the drawing has been rubbed away. Given the way writing and drawing are present on this page it would appear that the writing preceded the drawing. The drawn elements hinder and restrict the written. That much can be seen. That is, they are seen prior to any attempt to read. Both pages are seen together. Is the “Page de Cahier” the “cela”? Or is this “cela” not the particular, but Artaud’s drawing in general? The problematic presence of the particular and the general are posed therefore from the very beginning. The problems posed lend themselves to a direct summation in the following question: About what is Derrida writing?

This “about what” is not a trivial question. It is the question that pertains to philosophy’s encounter with art. As Derrida’s opening page continues he cites from a letter written on September 23, 1932 to Rolland de Renéville in which the word “subjectile” reappears. Artaud wrote: “Ci-inclus un mauvais dessin où ce que l’on appelle le subjectile m’a trahi”²⁰ (“Here included is a bad drawing in which what one calls the subjectile betrays me”). Derrida asks in relation to this line if indeed a subjectile can “betray.” Moreover, not only is there the problematic presence of a “bad drawing” (and this assessment is of course Artaud’s own estimation), that designation is located in a formulation whose subject position lacks specificity. Thus the claim itself is far from straightforward. To repeat the formulation, Artaud wrote, “ce que l’on appelle le subjectile” (“what one calls the subjectile”). Who is stating this? And about what? It is precisely a formulation of that nature that allows for a

continual questioning and thus retention of the “subjectile.” This is Derrida’s approach. And yet what ensues within a questioning of this sort is the problem of the extent to which the “cela” now refers to the letter and its content, or if the point around which the subjectile figures is its figuring within art’s work. Is the “cela” now no more than the sign for the continual deferral of art’s work in the name of writing on art that passes by that work without engaging with it? In other words, is this “cela” implicated, perhaps inextricably, in that passage where passing by becomes, in fact, a doing without and thus a movement in which the actative would have been refused – passed over – in the name of the substantive? And thus what continues to be questioned and thus what comes to be the focus of investigation and therefore the locus of deconstruction is this specific act of substantivization and therefore not the drawing. To the extent that this formulation is viable, then the “cela” would have become a substance entailing the stilling of the work’s activity as drawing. It will be essential to return to this point since, if this estimation were true, what it opens up is the place of another and different project which would be what would have occurred if deconstruction were to turn to the drawing as art’s work.

Derrida’s text “Forcener le subjectile” begins with the “subjectile,” a term that names neither an object nor a subject, neither the surface nor that which is on the surface. It is a base that debases in allowing for work. It is of strategic importance to make two comments here; in part they restate what has already emerged. The first comment is that Derrida, as has been suggested, will locate at the center of Artaud’s project a sense of impossibility that is equally present in the limits that he discovered in Artaud’s engagement with theater. In “La parole soufflée,” Derrida wrote:

One entire side of his discourse destroys a tradition which lives within difference, alienation, and negativity without seeing their origin and necessity. To reawaken this tradition, Artaud, in sum, recalls it to its own motifs: self-presence, unity, self-identity, the proper, etc. (WD, 194)

There was an inevitable recuperation. The “destruction” of tradition cannot escape being reminded continually of what defined the tradition that his project wished to destroy. A possibility encounters its own impossibility. A similar state of affairs pertains here. In this context however the relationship is between force and form. As such what that means in the context of Artaud is “la subjectilité du subjectile appelle . . . deux projets contradictoires”²¹ (“the subjectility of the subjectile calls forth . . . two contradictory projects”).

The second comment that has to be made is that at no time – though the details are yet to emerge – will this analysis approach the drawings as art’s work. The drawings and portraits are interpreted within the framework provided by the letters and the writings. The writings are connected by a linkage of terms to Heidegger. Even in the moment in which the subjectile is connected to a history that locates the

operative presence of this term in writings on art that stem at least from the Renaissance, a concern with art's work remains an almost unimaginable project. On one level, this criticism is unfair as Derrida is clearly linking the emergence of the work, its birth, in which bodily presence and a mode of writing cohere in a form of incoherence that gives rise to a specific work.²² The subjectile is bound up with subjectivity. For both Deleuze and Kristeva in their engagement with Artaud, both the body and the self are co-present concerns, perhaps their only concerns. Art's work – its workful nature, the mattering of art – is not.²³ Even if all three can be understood as staging a preoccupation with the singularity of Artaud – and even by extension Artaud's work – the singular keeps pertaining to Artaud. For Derrida, there is an additional element. His analysis is not content to stage the destruction of the work of pure force as though either could be taken as ends in themselves. Derrida's analysis returns it to the place of deconstruction.²⁴ Artaud, the name "Artaud," names a site in which the possibility of the affirmation of destruction meets the necessity of its own impossibility. Even if within the moment at which possibility and impossibility are brought together and drawing becomes "ce phénomène, ce que vous voyez ici,"²⁵ ("this phenomenon, what you see here"), it is still the case that the drawing does no more than allow for this impossible possibility. As such it becomes the scene of deconstruction – of a certain deconstruction, one in which appearance is thought in terms of a "you" ("vous") who sees. While this may yield the particularity of Artaud, and indeed that is what the majority of writers on Artaud seem concerned to establish, what of the work? That latter question notes that something remains. What is seen cannot rid itself of its presence as a drawing. Drawing becomes it. What of the particularity of art's work? How is its particularity to be thought? Hence the question asked earlier: About what is Derrida writing?

As part of an attempt to establish the site of impossibility as occurring within and as part of Artaud's "thought," Derrida locates Artaud's thinking of "being" in terms of the "jetée" understood as a modality of movement – for Derrida within Artaud. "L'être s'annonce à partir de la jetée, non l'inverse."²⁶ ("Being is announced on the basis of the thrown, not the reverse.") After which he continues:

De la force avant la forme. Et j'essayerai de démontrer que c'est la pensée même d'Antonin Artaud avant toute thématique du jet, elle est à l'oeuvre dans le corps de ses écrits, de sa peinture, de ses dessins.²⁷ (From force prior to the form. And I will try to demonstrate that this is Antonin Artaud's very thought prior to every thematic of the throw; it is at work in the body of his writings, his paintings, and his drawings.)

Again it will be this positioning that will have to meet its own impossibility. Rather than identifying the inscribed presence of a process of forming that will become the object, one in which forming and being would be the same, the subjectile is without narrative, yet it demands the presence of narrative. It is as though with the movement that separates force and form there is the echo of the final line of Blanchot's

La folie du jour, “Un récit? Non, pas de récit, plus jamais” (Blanchot 1975, 33). (“A story? No, no stories, never again.”)²⁸ And this, of course, despite the fact that the work itself is marked by its impossible possibility of recounting the story that is able to end “A story? No, no stories, never again.” Again impossibility and possibility construct a presence that resists that the conception of presence that conditions. And yet, even wanting to hold to such a positioning is to attribute to this set-up a form and thus presence.

The argumentation is able to proliferate. What carries it is the identification of that which is “at work” (“à l’oeuvre”) within all media and thus can never be medium specific. However, this statement is neither a claim about medium specificity nor a demand for medium specificity. Rather the statement resides in the question of whether or not materiality – and material presence is named in terms such as “writings,” “drawings,” and “paintings” – could ever be the site of work and understandable in its own terms. Were it to be, then materials would be the locus of force and as such there could never be a relation between force and form that created an impossible presence. Intrinsic to the project that maintains subjectile as the point of orientation is the initial refusal to allow representation or mimesis a determining place within its work, even though in the end it will be determined in ways that accord with both representation and mimesis. The subjectile is extrinsic and yet recuperable. However, the counter to this position is first to accept the distancing of both representation and mimesis, and in so doing to accept the space of allowing that accompanies it. However, by extricating works from that necessity, what has to be conceded at the same time is that works have elements of an inscribed presence that brings legibility into consideration. Form is already significant. As a result, the legibility of work in this instance pertains to the legibility of art’s work as opposed to narrative’s legibility (to which it should be added that it is not as though legibility has to be adduced). Once it can be assumed that there is an already present relation between work and legibility, then not only does that construct the particular as a site insofar as the legibility of a “drawing” will differ radically from the legibility of a “poem” or a “painting,” it entails in addition that the legibility of the particular also evidences the way that a given particular recalls its presence – and it is a continually constituting presence – within a network of relations. Legibility evidences the way any one particular recalls. Legibility is a quality that is continually present. The particular becomes as a consequence a singularity. Any particular underscores therefore the already informed presence of form and as such allows for the position in which form is already forming.

While as a conclusion it is still provisional, the argument has to be that what is excessive in relation to the processes of signification – identified earlier in terms of that which is “more” than signification – is intrinsic to signification. The impossibility of meaning’s invariance is the consequence of a material presence which is – is what it is – in the process of constitution and reconstitution.

4. Atlan

Atlan is a painter whose work has exerted a hold on a number of contemporary French philosophers. Along with Derrida, both Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy have devoted important texts to his work (Levinas 1991; Nancy 2010). As a beginning, it has to be noted that Derrida's own writing in this area brings the question of color and the nature of color to the fore, a positioning that occurs almost immediately in the untranslatability of the title of his text on Atlan: "De la couleur à la lettre" ("From Color to the Letter" or "Literally on Color"). Material presence – color as a form of presence – is announced therefore from the start. The movement that is the passage "from color to the letter" in the first rendering and "literally on color" in the second stages the complex presence that color and letters will have in the text. Provisionally at least, the title can be understood as introducing a number of significant variations into what might be understood as the relationship between art's material presence – in this instance color – and the inescapability of writing and hence literally the presence of letters. While there is clearly more than one mode of writing in Derrida – and more than one understanding of "writing" – what is important here is that the conception that "letters" stage marks the orientating presence of *ekphrasis*.

Derrida's text is extraordinary. It begins with "the dreamer" held by a work, held by its "trait de couleur" ("trait or characteristic of color"). The dreamer enters a world described by Derrida as "loved" by Atlan, the world of the Incas. Within it, Derrida continues:

Le support du message, disons le subjectile, consistait en faisceaux de cordelettes à noeuds, variés dans leur couleur, dans leur tressage, dans leurs formes torsadées. Les noeuds de couleur se mettent à figurer, à la lettre, des lettres. Ajoutez-y le rythme, la danse, la tension extrême, la force qui emporte la forme, la prévient ou lui survit, et c'est la signature d'Atlan.²⁹ (The medium of the message, let us say, the subjectile, consisted in bundles of knotted cords, varied in their color, in their tapestry, in their braided forms. The knots of color begin, literally, to figure letters. Let us add to this the rhythm, the dance, the extreme tension, the force that carries the form away, that forewarns it or survives it. This is Atlan's signature.)

The signature of Atlan, which both includes and is more than Atlan's own signature, from within this perspective, the perspective of the dreamer, are the figures of colored letters charged with "force." (That the dream is being written up, perhaps even written for the dreamer, should be noted even though we are not able to pursue this idea here.) The presence of force is defined in a relation of separation from form. Hence, the claim that it is force "that carries the form away." Moreover, the "signature" in this extended context can be understood as marking the singularity of Atlan's work and thus its presence as an event. Though, as should now be clear from

our earlier discussion of the way in which the relation between force and form occurred in Artaud, that it is not so much that “the force carries the form”; it is more accurate to suggest, and this despite the effect it has on the position’s own formulation, that form is already forced. As a consequence, at work here is what can be described as the already present enforcing of form; force informs form from the start.

The work in relation to which these initial points in Derrida’s text are made is Atlan’s painting *Pentateuque* (1958). Moreover, the dreamer knows that the painting is to be explained in relation to its title: “Il sait que le peintre s’est expliqué sur la grande, la décisive, l’inépuisable question du titre”³⁰ (“He knows that the painter is explained on the basis of the great, the decisive, the inexhaustible question of the title”). Hence, this level of engagement is presented in connection to a range of possible references that follow from this name. As the analysis unfolds, what is of interest for “the dreamer” is the place of the work within a set of concerns defined by the interdiction of images, the problem of idolatry, and the silence of God. These themes are there in Atlan’s work to the extent that they are carried by the titles of paintings. It should be noted, of course, that this reference to dreaming and to the dreamer could be seen as having a recurrent role in Derrida’s philosophical project. In his work on Levinas, for example, he describes empiricism as “the dream of a purely heterological thought at its source” (WD, 151). The dream both yields a state of affairs but in so doing demands the position of the non-dreamer. The impossible possibility that defines the locus of deconstruction emerges at that point. In other words, the dream stands in need of a type of countering.

As Derrida’s text moves from italics to roman – a movement that does of course indicate that Derrida’s own text is aware that form is already informed such that the work’s mattering is the site of meaning – the one who does not dream appears. He was already there: “moi qui ne rêve pas.”³¹ “The self who does not dream” was there writing about, if not for, the dreamer. Within the text’s second half the complexity of the analysis begins to unfold; a transformation of approach occurs. The way in is provided by the sublime. Derrida finds in Atlan’s paintings, both in terms of elements of content as well as in the size – their “grandeur” – sufficient evocations of the sublime. The sublime is then immediately refracted through Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in order to allow the sublime to structure Derrida’s analysis. Before the works following this lead – before both their size and the “jets de couleur” (“sprays of color”) – the non-dreamer is forced in two directions. An awakening occurs at this precise moment, a doubling, and yet an injunction that ends and begins: “tais-toi et parle” (“be quiet and speak”).³² This injunction is to be explained in the following terms. First, there is the evocation of that which has disappeared as well as the forms of silence that are bound up with name “Atlan.” As such, the importance of the determinate works and instructive titles begins to wane. With the works in question – works which are still named rather than being held by color and then a title – the name “Atlan” comes to play a predominating role. The name “Atlan” is linked to “Atlas” and then to “Atlantide” (“Atlantis”). It is now possible that

the works work without titles, as there is a form of disappearance. Or, at least, the titles work in ways that are not determined by the works. The title cedes its place to that which is present without a title. It is the “sans titres” (literally “without titles” or more idiomatically “those without proper documents”) that will open another space. However it is a space in which to approach the work and in which the work can approach. What has been constructed is an inevitable space, one with borders and frontiers. The move from titles to the “sans titres” will allow the ethical to figure, a figuring in which an alignment comes to hold between art and the other. While within the argument of Derrida’s text such a move is inevitable, the question haunting the move is the extent to which it does justice to art’s work. In other words, while the “sans titres” evokes, as will be noted further on, a generalized site of the ethical, there would need to be a further argument that does justice to the work of art – to art’s actual work – within the “sans titres.” In other words, could the figuring of the ethical be no more than a version of the ekphrastic impulse? In this case the impulse would be present in terms of the inscription of the subject’s relation to a work which is already there, for example, in the necessity of the subject in any evocation of the sublime. Would there be therefore the necessity of matter to occasion that setting while simultaneously there would be its lack of necessity – since what in fact matters is not the work’s mattering but the position of both subject and object within a subject/object relation? To the extent that the latter pertains, the substantive effaces the actative.

What Derrida is tracing with the disappearance of the name are the problems that will be encountered once the authorizing power of the name – be it title or author – is no longer there. The problem of description and description’s authorization occurs at that precise point. Within this setting, in part stemming from an injunction linked both to an impossibility of description and a respectful silence is the position that:

Il n’y a tableau de peinture, et qui fasse oeuvre de cet événement, que là où le titre, la légende, le discours (explicatif, descriptif, constatif, prescriptif, performatif même) est appelé à se taire, à tourner les mots, à passer ses titres sous silence – ou presque.³³ (There is a picture of painting, and which makes this event work, only where the title, the legend, the discourse (explicative, descriptive, constative, prescriptive, even performative) is called forth to be quiet, to turn the words away, to pass over the titles in silence – or nearly.)

This injunction brings the effect of the sublime into play. The sublime effect forms one part of the Atlan effect. And yet there is the other impetus: “ces toiles me font parler. Et même raconter des histoires”³⁴ (“these canvases make me speak. And even to tell stories”). This double quality is the full effect of Atlan’s work. It is the response to his paintings. However Derrida will use this doubled injunction and the impossible/possibility that it establishes to go on and make a larger claim about “all painting.”

Toute peinture, toute peinture en tant que telle, et même si en apparence elle porte et supporte, comme son “sujet,” un titre, c’est-à-dire un nom . . . toute peinture digne de ce nom . . . , a vocation à se passer de nom, je veux dire de titre. Là s’exposerait son essence et son espace, l’espacement même de sa spatialité, et littéralement de sa couleur.³⁵ (All painting, all painting as such, and even if in appearance it carries and supports, as its “subject,” a title, that is, a name . . . all painting worthy of this name . . . , has the vocation of doing without a name, I mean title. Its essence and its space would then be exposed, the very spacing of its spatiality, and literally its color.)

It would be therefore that “all paintings” would need to be approached as if they existed without titles. Hence his provocative claim that as a consequence “tous les titres esquissent le geste de s’effacer”³⁶ (“every title sketches the gesture of self-erasure”). What is there without either name or title, there and named by Derrida, is “la Chose.” “The Thing” is a form of almost unconditioned anonymity. It is that which appears. It is what he describes as “l’arrivée d’un événement” (“the arrival of an event”).³⁷ As will be seen, it is this precise formulation that will allow him to see that the demand made by the complex relation between the title and the “without title” (“sans titre”) is repeated in arguments made in relation to the position of the hostage and the host set within the context of an engagement with hospitality.

Given the twofold demands already noted – “Be quiet and speak” – Derrida draws a conclusion in terms of a “hypothesis”:

Ce qui advient alors, comment le décrire? Comment rendre compte au-delà de thème? Mon hypothèse, c’est que ce qui se passe de titre, ce qui se passe alors entre le “sans titre” . . . de la Chose, entre la Chose sans titre et vous, c’est un tremblement de terre auquel chaque tableau fait aussi allusion, comme s’il s’employait à décrire, parfois à sur-nommer telle ou telle dimension, telle signification de la dite convulsion.³⁸ (What happens then, how are we to describe it? How are we to give an account that goes beyond the theme? My hypothesis is that what does without a title, what then passes between the “without title” . . . of the Thing, between the Thing without title and you, is an earthquake to which each painting alludes, as if it was used to describe, to nickname at times some such dimension or other, some such meaning of the so to speak convulsion.)

This “hypothesis” is played out under three interrelated headings. The first concerns the question of hospitality. The paintings welcome “you.” They do so “without reserve.” In the second place within this act of welcoming there is more than mere or sheer openness. There is a condition that is both openness as welcoming and an invasion that is conquering. The “you” is both “l’hôte et l’otage” (host, guest, and hostage). Finally, the work is a form of singularity. The painting seeks “you” out. It provides nothing and yet it demands that “you” speak. Although each of these headings stand in need of sustained expansion and clarification, it is not difficult to note that within them the singularity of the event and the place of this

singularity within that set up is at issue. Hospitality is always given in relation to a “you”; however what is given – and the anonymity of “the Thing” as the event is decisive here – could never be the always already informed presence of form. What matters is the relation to the “you.” The work’s matter is a question to which the posited centrality of the “the Thing” and the “you” remains indifferent. Further evidence for this position can be found in the actual language of the “hypothesis.” Derrida argues for a point of connection “between the Thing without title and us.”³⁹ Retaining this description, even as a problematic presence and locating within it a structured existence that inscribes the “us” as an essential element, should be understood not just as the mark of the ekphrastic. More significantly, it repeats the excision of the actative in the name of the substantive. If we can ascend back to an earlier position in the argument, we can argue that what is at stake here is a general claim about art. The general claim about art resides in the already noted way that the “without a title” becomes a concern with “all painting as such.”⁴⁰ While any one work as an event takes on the quality of what Derrida calls the “wholly other” such that the work both invites and welcomes while simultaneously distancing, this “wholly other” can never be a claim about any one work such that justice is done the work’s particularity.⁴¹ It must be true of all works of art. It is a claim whose generality may have an important provenance within a philosophical engagement with hospitality in which the unconditional may play an important role. What is far from clear is that the particularity of art work, art as work, and hospitality are constituted in the same way. Art’s work involves what can be called particularity’s recall.

The continuity of the ekphrastic impulse allows Derrida to site details, such as color and line, thereby conceding the presence of matter and a possible opening to mattering. And yet the other element of that impulse means that this inscription of the material is undone by the presence of both the anonymity of the event and the necessary presence of the “you.” As a result, mattering becomes matter and the substantive supplants the actative. If a singular work can appear only in this way – appearing as an “event” – then what is silenced is what the work already “knows.” There is an already given presence which is there both in terms of legibility and thus in terms of recall. However it is essential to add that this “presence” is indeterminate precisely because it is subject to constant reworking. The constant reworking is particularity’s recall. Acts of recall – and a work can be caused to recall and thus caused to come into relation where such setting would not have been anticipated – constitute the particularity of the work as that which is there, always already there, within relationality. It is the presence of indetermination and thus the impossibility of causing a work to return to itself as a self-completing and self-completed entity that should be the point of departure for a deconstructive philosophy of art. Such a position, rather than premised on the effacing of the actative – an effacing that leaves a mark, hence the role of matter within the ekphrastic impulse – would have to take the actative as the point of departure.

Notes

- 1 All future references to Philostratus are to Philostratus (1979).
- 2 There is an important movement within contemporary art history that is oriented around the centrality of *ekphrasis*. The leading figure in that movement is Jaś Elsner. See, amongst many texts, Elsner (2010, 10–27). Part of what is at work, albeit *sotto voce*, in this present paper is an engagement with that development. For an important attempt to rework *ekphrasis* for a contemporary philosophical project in relation to the arts, see Goehr (2010, 389–410). While defining his project within the framework of art history, David Carrier (1987) draws a distinction between *ekphrasis* and interpretation. However, even if *ekphrasis* is understood as that which “tells the story represented” while interpretation, for Carrier, “gives a more systematic analysis of composition,” they can easily become the same if what is not brought into consideration is the general proposition that meaning is the after-effect of the way materials work.
- 3 Even though the exact term *ekphrasis* is not used, Joana Masó, Gabriela Garcia Hubard, Javier Bassas, and Santiago Borja also argue in relation to Derrida’s writings on art that “rhetoric and literary tropes . . . are the philosopher’s medium when he writes about painting, drawing and photography” (Masó et al. 2007, 215).
- 4 It should not be thought that recourse to ancient sources to advance arguments about contemporary philosophical or art historical concerns is unproblematic. There have been a number of recent investigations into the presence or absence of art history and in addition the easy translation of terms from one period to the next. For a good overview of some of the issues see Platt (2010).
- 5 I have begun a development of formulations such as *mattering*, *art’s work*, and *art’s self-staging* in Benjamin (2011, 2012).
- 6 While there has been a considerable engagement with Derrida’s writings on Artaud’s theater, there has been little engagement with his writings on Artaud’s “dessins” let alone with his writings on Atlan. For a survey of Derrida’s writings in this area see Patke (2011). For a good overview of Derrida’s writings in the period in which these texts were composed, even though it is not directly concerned with Derrida on art, see Rapaport (2003, 97–137).
- 7 In his text “Economimesis,” in *Mimesis des articulations* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1975), 57–93, Derrida is also concerned with locating “something” (*quelque chose*) that resists incorporation into oppositions such that “*on ne peut le nommer dans un système logocentrique* [one cannot name it within a logocentric system]” (93).
- 8 Derrida’s initial and foundational work on the signature is “Signature, Event, Context” (MP, 307–330).
- 9 “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, ed. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9–32. Some of Derrida’s most important comments on “art” and the “image” are to be found in “Trace et archive, image et art,” http://www.jacquesderrida.com.ar/frances/trace_archive.htm, accessed March 4, 2014.
- 10 Even though it indicates the presence of a larger project, it should be noted here that Derrida’s conception of the event needs to be understood as a distancing of the position

advanced by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* concerning what he describes there as the “Anticipations of Perception” (see A 166–176/B 208–218). Part of the position developed here is that between “anticipation” and the “unconditioned” – terms that stage an important point of connection between Derrida and Kant. There is a relation of indetermination.

- 11 For a version of this specific argument see Elsner (2007).
- 12 Philostratus, *Imagines*, 294K12. For an excellent overview of the project of the opening paragraph of the *Imagines* see Thein (2002). For a significant examination of Philostratus as the inventor of a conception of the image as autonomous in relation to the empirical, see Alexandre (2011).
- 13 See in this regard Kostopoulou (2009). In discussing Philostratus’ description in *Imagines* 2.18 of a specific painting of Polyphemus and Galatea, Kostopoulou writes the following, a formulation that accords with the orientation of this engagement with both *ekphrasis* and Derrida. “Deflecting attention away from the visual appearance of the painting, the passage directs the focus, inevitably, to the textual nature of the story behind it, giving prominence to a verbal dimension more accessible to the ear rather than to the eye” (83).
- 14 I have tried to argue elsewhere for the impossibility of pure color and coloring. Color is always already informed. Part of that forming is the an-original presence of the ideal. See Benjamin (forthcoming).
- 15 I have outlined this approach to particularity in Benjamin (2007).
- 16 While it has not been discussed here, reference should also be made to Derrida’s other major work on Artaud that concerns the question of art, *Artaud le Moma* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).
- 17 Jacques Derrida, “Forcener le subjectile,” in Paule Thévenin and Jacques Derrida, *Artaud: Dessins et portraits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 54.
- 18 Olkowski (2000, 195).
- 19 Barker (2009, 22).
- 20 Derrida, “Forcener le subjectile,” 54.
- 21 Derrida, “Forcener le subjectile,” 105.
- 22 A number of commentators on Derrida’s writings on Artaud’s art identify the limit of his approach. For example, Martine Antle argues the following: “Tout se passe comme si les dessins d’Artaud ne pouvaient servir que de miroir de l’homme, de l’oeuvre et souvent de son expérience asilaire. Tout se passe comme si les dessins et les autoportraits n’avaient pour fonction que de permettre de s’approcher de plus près du personnage d’Artaud et de son oeuvre pour mieux la saisir sans réellement y parvenir” (2007, 85). For an overview of Artaud’s conception of art that locates it solely within the province of his own writings, see Poutie (1996).
- 23 See Kristeva (1977). The importance of the body also appears in Irwin (2011, 24–25).
- 24 This is also part of the argument developed in Barker (2009). Barker’s account of Derrida and Artaud is still the most judicious there is. As with Olkowski, he sees that the way of overcoming the limits of Derrida’s analysis is bound up with the work of Deleuze (and exclusively in his case also the work of Bernard Stiegler).
- 25 Derrida, “Forcener le subjectile,” 105.
- 26 Derrida, “Forcener le subjectile,” 63.

- 27 Derrida, "Forcener le subjectile," 63.
- 28 Blanchot (1981, 18). This book is a bilingual edition. One can find the original French on p. 31.
- 29 Jacques Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," in *Atlas: Grand Format* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 8.
- 30 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 10.
- 31 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 16.
- 32 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 18.
- 33 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 20.
- 34 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 20.
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- 36 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 21.
- 37 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 22.
- 38 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 22.
- 39 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 22.
- 40 Derrida, "De la couleur, à la lettre," 21.
- 41 A similar formulation is used by Jérôme de Gramont when linking this conception of the work ("le tableau" to the "l'offrande"). He writes in this context that "le tableau accueille" (de Gramont 2011, 278).

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Heidegger and Derrida on Responsibility

FRANÇOIS RAFFOUL

1. Introduction

Derrida often writes that responsibility is and can only be the undergoing of an aporia,¹ an “experience of the impossible,” as if responsibility became possible from its own impossibility: “The condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible*” (OHD, 41). When speaking of responsibility and ethics, it should be noted from the outset, Derrida does not mean a system of rules, of moral norms.² It is a matter instead of thinking the very ethicality of ethics (*l'éthicité de l'éthique*), of re-engaging a philosophical questioning on the possibility of ethics, without presupposing its senses. Insisting on the necessity and urgency of raising anew the question of ethical responsibility, of making it problematic, indeed aporetic, Derrida writes:

All this, therefore, still remains open, suspended, undecided, questionable even beyond the question, indeed, to make use of another figure, absolutely aporetic. What is the ethicality of ethics? The morality of morality? What is responsibility? What is the ‘What is?’ in this case? Etc. These questions are always urgent. (ON, 16)

The issue is thus to return to the possibility of ethics. Yet, this return leads us to the impossible, to aporias, which will appear as the conditions of possibility (or impossibility, undecidedly!)³ of what they affect. What interests Derrida are “the aporias of ethics, its limits”: not to point to its simple impossibility, but on the contrary to reveal aporia as the possibility of ethics.

What I do is then just as much an-ethical as ethical. I question the impossible as the possibility of ethics: . . . To do the impossible cannot make (be) an ethics and yet it is the condition of ethics. I try to think the possibility of the impossible. (JDPE, my translation)

It is then a matter, we are told, “of thinking according to the aporia” (AP, 13).⁴ It is then in the aporia, in the impossible, that we should situate the possibility of responsibility. Each time, ethical responsibility can only happen as impossible, that is, undergo an experience of what will remain *inappropriable* for it.

Now, precisely, responsibility has traditionally been associated with a project of *appropriation*, understood as the securing of a sphere of mastery for a willful subject, a model one finds unfolded from Aristotle’s discussion of the voluntary and responsible decision in Book III of *The Nichomachean Ethics* to Kant’s discussion of transcendental freedom in the third antinomy and his understanding of enlightenment as self-determination and self-responsibility,⁵ and culminating, although not without some paradoxes and reversals, with Sartre’s philosophy of hyperbolic responsibility.⁶ Indeed, the concept of responsibility has traditionally been identified with accountability, that is, it is conceived of in terms of will, causality, freedom or free-will, subjectivity, and agency. In that tradition, responsibility is understood in terms of the *subjectum* that lies at the basis of the act, as ground of imputation,⁷ and opens onto the project of a self-legislation and self-appropriation of the subject. It thus belongs to a semantics of power and appropriation, as it is about owning one’s actions and owning oneself, as well as establishing an area of mastery and control for a willful and powerful subject: to be responsible in this context designates the capacity by a sovereign subject to appropriate itself entirely in an ideal of self-legislation and transparency. As Derrida put it, “all the fundamental axiomatics of responsibility or decision (ethical, juridical, political), are grounded on the sovereignty of the subject, that is, the intentional auto-determination of the conscious self (which is free, autonomous, active, etc.)” (WA, xix).

However, one finds in Derrida, and already in Heidegger, the reversal – indeed the deconstruction – of such a tradition, and responsibility understood instead as an exposure to an inappropriable: “experience of the im-possible” for Derrida, assumption of an inappropriable thrownness and finitude for Heidegger in an original *Schuldigsein* or being-guilty. Indeed, one finds at several stages of Heidegger’s work the presence of such inappropriable: in the “ruinance” of factual life in the early writings and lecture courses; in his definition in paragraph 7 of *Being and Time* of the original phenomenon (that is, being!) as that which does *not* show itself in what shows itself; in the *Uneigentlichkeit* of existence and the being-guilty of conscience; in the thrownness felt in moods and in the weight of a responsibility assigned to an inappropriable facticity; in an un-truth co-primordial with truth; in the concealment that not only accompanies but is indeed harbored in unconcealment; in the withdrawal in the sendings of being; and finally in the presence of *Enteignis* within

Ereignis in the later writings. Each time and throughout, one finds in Heidegger this motif of an exposure to an inappropriable. Indeed, the event of appropriation that *Ereignis* is said to designate includes eminently the expropriation of *Enteignis*. For both Heidegger and Derrida, responsibility can no longer be conceived of as the imputation or ascription of an act to a subject-cause. As Derrida explains, responsibility “is in no way that of the tradition anymore, that tradition implying intentionality, subjectivity, will, conscious ego, freedom, autonomy, meaning, etc.” (RES, 178–179). Rather, responsibility has to do with the encounter and exposition to an event as inappropriable and is an *experience of the impossible* (for Derrida, experience itself means to be in the impossible, in the aporia, in the contradiction). I will begin by identifying instances of inappropriability in Heidegger’s thought of responsibility, before engaging Derrida’s thought of the im-possible as site of an aporetic responsibility. In the process I will engage the complex and tortuous relation of Derrida to Heidegger.

2. Heidegger’s Thought of Responsibility

A. *Dasein and Responsibility*

Heidegger develops an important thought of responsibility, developed in the early works as well as in the later writings. However, responsibility for Heidegger is not, and cannot be, accountability in the classical sense. Indeed, as a concept, accountability assumes the position of a subject-cause, an agent or an author who can be displayed as a *subjectum* for its actions, an interpretation one finds as I alluded above in Kant’s definition of imputation in the third antinomy in the first *Critique*.⁸ Accountability, a notion that has defined the traditional concept of responsibility, if exhausted it, rests upon the motifs of agency, causality, free will, and subjectivity: as one knows, Heidegger’s thinking of *Dasein* breaks decisively with the tradition of subjectivity, as well as that of free will; as for causality, it is said to be foreign to the eventfulness of being. The basis for an identification of responsibility with accountability thus disappears in Heidegger’s work, which does not mean that it does not harbor another thought of responsibility. Indeed, at the same time that the concept of accountability is phenomenologically deconstructed, Heidegger renewed the philosophy of responsibility, of what *to be responsible* means, no longer associated with the accountability of the sovereign subject, but with a certain *responsiveness*. For instance, playing on the proximity between *Verantwortung* and *Antwort*, Heidegger explains in (the 1934 summer semester course) *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language* that responsibility should not be understood in its moral or religious sense but “is to be understood philosophically as a distinctive kind of answering” (Heidegger 2009, 101). In *The Zollikon Seminars*, Heidegger interpreted this answering as a kind of correspondence: “The expression ‘to correspond’ means to answer the claim, to

comport oneself in response to it. *Re-spond* [Ent-sprechen] → to answer to [Antwortworten]" (Heidegger 2001, 161).

Such resituating of responsibility opens the thematics of answerability and responsiveness, responsibility as "responding to" or answering a call. Derrida considers that any sense of responsibility must be rooted in the experience of responding, and belongs to the domain of responsiveness.⁹ Responsibility is first and foremost a response, as its etymological origins, traceable to the Latin *respondere*, betray. Derrida distinguishes three types of responsiveness: there is "to answer for [répondre de]"; "to respond to [répondre à]"; and "to answer before [répondre devant]," Derrida giving nonetheless a priority to the second sense, "responding to," as it mobilizes the inscription of an other to whom or to what I respond. One for instance reads in *The Politics of Friendship*:

One *answers for*, for self or for something (for someone, for an action, a thought, a discourse), *before* – before an other, a community of others, an institution, a court, a law). And always one *answers for* (for self or for its intention, its action or discourse), *before*, by first responding to: *this last modality thus appearing more ordinary, more fundamental and hence unconditional.* (PF, 250, my emphasis)

Responsibility will thus have to find another origin than that of the free autonomous subject. This was indeed the reason for the choice of the term *Dasein*: it was a matter for Heidegger of approaching the human being no longer as a subject but in terms of the openness of being as such. Responsibility will likewise be situated outside of egology, arising instead out of the very openness of being where the human being dwells as *Dasein*. In fact, responsibility defines the very concept of *Dasein*, which, as care, means to be a responsibility of and for oneself. Heidegger states that *Dasein* is distinctive in the sense that it does not "simply occur among other beings," but rather "is concerned *about* its very being" (Heidegger 2010, 11). This original non-indifference to being, and to one's own being, defines *Dasein* as care, and as primordial responsibility. Care, concern, solicitude, anxiety, authenticity, being-guilty, all these names designate such primordial responsibility in *Being and Time*. In later texts, responsibility would be thought in terms of the human's response and correspondence to the address of being. In this renewed context, responsibility then names the correspondence between humans and being, humans' belonging to being, as well as their essence as humans. Responsibility thus designates no less than the co-belonging of being and *Dasein*, a co-belonging that is *the* question of Heidegger's thought, the very heart of his thought.

Yet, this co-belonging remains affected by a certain *expropriation*: for what must be stressed from the outset is that the response to a call, whether the call of conscience in *Being and Time* or the address of being in later writings, is always a response to what remains *inappropriate* in such calls. Indeed, as Heidegger explains in *What Is Called Thinking*, it is from a certain withdrawal of being that *Dasein* finds

itself called. In its very eventfulness, being withdraws, is the mystery: such a withdrawal, Heidegger stresses, *calls us* (Heidegger 1968, 7–10, 17–18). This “withdrawing is not nothing. Withdrawing [*Entzug*] is an event. In fact, what withdraws may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him” (Heidegger 1968, 9).

As I just suggested, such withdrawal might prove the secret and paradoxical origin of responsibility. What one might call instances of inappropriability at the heart of the analytic of *Dasein*, far from threatening the very possibility of responsibility (as they represent not only what I am not responsible for, but what I could never appropriate, what will always evade my power), will turn out to be the paradoxical origins of responsibility. For instance, when discussing moods (*Stimmungen*) in *Being and Time*, Heidegger begins by emphasizing the element of withdrawal and expropriation that seems to interrupt and foreclose any possibility of cognitive or practical appropriation. Having a mood brings *Dasein* to its “there,” before the pure “that” of its There, which as such, Heidegger writes in a striking formulation, “stares directly at it with the inexorability of an enigma” (Heidegger 2010, 132). Heidegger states that in being-in-a-mood, the being of the there “becomes manifest as a burden [*Last*]”; he then adds, “One does not *know why*.” In fact, *Dasein* “cannot know why” (Heidegger 2010, 131). Any rational enlightenment finds here an impassable limit, for “cognition falls far short.” This phenomenon is not due to some weakness of our cognitive powers, but has to do with the fact that the “that” of our being is given in such a way that “the whence and whither remain obscure” (Heidegger 2010, 131). In the phenomenon of moods, there is a “remaining obscure” which is irreducible: it is, Heidegger says, a characteristic of *Dasein*’s being, which he names: thrownness. “We shall call this character of being of *Dasein* which is veiled in its whence and whither . . . the *thrownness* [*Geworfenheit*] of this being into its there” (Heidegger 2010, 131). The thrownness revealed in moods thus reveals the inappropriability of our existence, and more precisely of our coming into being, of our origins. In a 1928/9 course, *Introduction to Philosophy* (*Einleitung in die Philosophie*), Heidegger evokes the “darkness of *Dasein*’s origins” and contrasts it with the “relative brightness of its potentiality-for Being,” to then state the following: “*Dasein* exists always in an essential exposure to the darkness and impotence of its origin, even if only in the prevailing form of a habitual deep forgetting in the face of this essential determination of its facticity” (Heidegger 1996, 340). Does any meaningful sense of responsibility not collapse in such an expropriation?

B. Responsibility as Appropriation of the Inappropriate

In fact, it is at this juncture, at this very *aporetic* moment, that Heidegger paradoxically situates the responsibility of *Dasein*, a responsibility arising as it were from its own impossibility, a paradoxical phenomenon that harbors for Derrida the “secret” of responsibility. In fact, Derrida stresses that, in principle, responsibility is situated

in paradox: “the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty, are condemned a priori to paradox, scandal, and aporia.”¹⁰ How does such a paradox of responsibility appear in Heidegger’s text? In contrast to Derrida’s constant claims (except for a few exceptions, as in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, PT, 90) that Heidegger privileged the proper and appropriation in his thinking, here on the contrary we find that Heidegger reveals an expropriation at the heart of responsibility: on the one hand, Heidegger explains that *Dasein* “exists as thrown,” that is, “brought into its there *not* of its own accord” (Heidegger 2010, 272). Thrownness means that *Dasein* can never get back behind its coming into being, and can never appropriate its origins. *Dasein* can never “gain power over one’s ownmost being from the ground up” (Heidegger 2010, 273). At the same time, existence means being called to appropriate one’s own being, *from the ground up*. Hence the paradox of responsibility: “The self, which as such has to lay the ground of itself, can *never* gain power over that ground, and yet it has to take over being the ground in existing” (Heidegger 2010, 273). This is why it is this very impossibility that *Dasein* must make its own and possibilize; it is that very inappropriate that *Dasein* must appropriate, in what Derrida called a movement of “ex-appropriation.” In the course *Introduction to Philosophy*, Heidegger explained that it is precisely that over which *Dasein* is not master that must be worked through and survived:

[What] . . . does not arise of one’s own express decision, as most things for *Dasein*, must be in such or such a way retrievingly appropriated, even if only in the modes of putting up with or shirking something; that which for us is entirely not under the control of freedom in the narrow sense . . . is something that is in such or such a manner taken up or rejected in the How of *Dasein*. (Heidegger 1996, 337)

Responsibility is hence the “carrying” of the inappropriability of existence, the paradoxical appropriation of an inappropriate: exappropriation.

This is indeed why one speaks of the *weight* of responsibility. What weighs is what remains inappropriate in existence. The call of conscience calls *Dasein* back from the disburdened (deresponsibilized) existence in the everyday back to its “own” being-guilty. As we saw, what *Dasein* has to be, what it has to assume and be responsible for, is precisely its being-thrown as such. *Dasein* has to be not being itself the ground for its being. Heidegger writes, “Even though it has *not* laid the ground *itself*, it rests in the weight of it, which mood reveals to it as a burden” (Heidegger 2010, 273). This is the very weight of responsibility, as it registers this incommensurability of being a thrown origin.

Ordinary language does speak of the connection between ethics, responsibility, and weight: one speaks of responsibility in the sense of carrying a weight, of “shouldering” a burden. Heidegger speaks of the human being as burdened or heavy with a weight, in a situation of care and concern, in contrast to the lightness or care-lessness of inauthentic or irresponsible being. Heidegger thus evokes the

fundamental “burdensome character of *Dasein* even when it alleviates that burden” (Heidegger 2010, 131). So-called “moods of elation,” which do lighten the burden, are said to be possible only on the basis of this burdensome character of *Dasein*’s being. Indeed, being as “having to be” is a task, a weight *Dasein* has to carry. In his early lecture courses, Heidegger stated that factual life (later renamed *Dasein*) is a fundamental caring, marked by the difficult weightiness of a task, and affected by an irreducible problematocity and questionableness. That weight, Heidegger claims in a 1921/2 winter semester course, “does not accrue to life from the outside, from something that lacks the character of life, but is instead present in and with life itself” (Heidegger 2008, 75). One verifies this in the phenomenon of the so-called “difficulty of life.” With respect to such difficulty, Heidegger stresses the following in the 1922 “Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle”:

A characteristic of the being of factual life is that it finds itself hard to bear. The most unmistakable manifestation of this is the fact that factual life has the tendency to make itself easy for itself. In finding itself hard to bear, life is difficult in accord with the basic sense of its being, not in the sense of a contingent feature. If it is the case that factual life authentically is what it is in this being-hard and being-difficult, then the genuinely fitting way of gaining access to it and truly safekeeping it can only consist in making itself hard for itself. (Heidegger 2002, 113)

The weight is here the weight of existence itself, an existence which, as Heidegger puts it, is “worrying about itself” (Heidegger 2002, 118). Interestingly, the very concept of weight and burden reintroduces, as it were, the problematic of responsibility. In a marginal note added to this passage, Heidegger later clarified: “‘Burden’: what weighs [*das Zu-tragende*]; human being is charged with the responsibility [*überantwortet*] of *Dasein*, appropriated [*übereignet*] by it. To bear [*tragen*]: to take over something from out of belonging to being itself” (Heidegger 2010, 131, trans. slightly modified). The burden is “what weighs,” what has to be carried. The weight of facticity, the burden, is to be carried; responsibility carries this weight, takes the weight of an inappropriable facticity.

The motifs of weight, of being-guilty, of being-a-ground, of thrownness, and the taking on of the inappropriable, all point to expropriation as the paradoxical site of responsibility, or, more precisely, to the *exappropriation of responsibility*. Indeed, for Heidegger responsibility now means, as the taking on of facticity, the appropriation of expropriation. This is why authentic existence is nothing but the taking on of the inauthentic. “Resoluteness appropriates untruth authentically [*Sie eignet sich die Unwahrheit eigentlich zu*]” (Heidegger 2010, 286), and authenticity consists in “projecting oneself upon one’s *ownmost* authentic potentiality for becoming guilty” (Heidegger 2010, 275). It is thus the inappropriable that *Dasein* is called to appropriate. In this sense, the original sense of responsibility is: the appropriation of the inappropriable *as* inappropriable. But how is one to read that sentence? In what

sense, or direction [Fr. *sens*]?) Is it the appropriation of the inappropriable, or the inappropriability of appropriation? This is the question that Derrida poses, following the thread of a responsibility understood as an experience of the impossible.

3. Derrida: From the Inappropriable to the Im-possible

A. *The Primacy of the Improper*

It is indeed around this motif of weight that Derrida breaks with Heidegger, and with the notion of appropriation that, according to him, still governs Heidegger's thought of existence and responsibility. For weight, according to Derrida, indicates the impossibility of appropriation, and the primacy of expropriation. In *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, Derrida returns to the motif of weight, while discussing several texts from Jean-Luc Nancy, and cites a passage from *The Gravity of Thought*, where Nancy wrote that existence “is the appropriation of the inappropriable.”¹¹ Derrida reads that expression by insisting on the “ex-scription” revealed in it, that is, on what remains inappropriable in the appropriation (“it thus inscribes the un-inscribable in inscription itself, it *exscribes*”). Derrida reverses Heidegger's “appropriation of the inappropriable” into an “expropriation of the proper,” which he also calls “exappropriation.” For instance, in “Politics and Friendship,” Derrida describes a “paradoxical ex-appropriation” as “that movement of the proper expropriating itself through the very process of appropriation” (NEG, 171). Ex-appropriation refers to that “interminable appropriation of an irreducible nonproper” that limits “every and any appropriation process at the same time” (TJLN, 181–182). Thus, the most proper sense of existence is such “on the condition of remaining inappropriable, and of remaining inappropriable *in* its appropriation.” On the condition, then, as Nancy put it, of existence “*having weight or weighing [faire poids]* at the heart of thought and in spite of thought” (cited in TJLN, 299). This “in spite of thought” indicates the *outside* to which thought is assigned, and how existence weighs on thought from the outside. Such is, precisely, “the weight of a thought”: “*The weight of a thought* is quite exactly the inappropriability of appropriation, or the impropriety of the proper (proper to the proper, absolutely)” (cited in TJLN, 299). From this thinking of weight as mark of the inappropriable in existence, Derrida introduces the motif of the impossible: “Another way of saying that ‘existence,’ ‘is,’ ‘Being,’ ‘is quite exactly,’ *are all names of the impossible* and of self-incompatibility” (TJLN, 299, my emphasis).

Seeking to collapse the proper into the improper, the possible into the impossible – indeed attempting to show how the possible is possible *as* im-possible – Derrida states that the Heideggerian thought of being as event, as *Ereignis*, involves a certain expropriation. Going against the grain, one must admit, of many of his previous interpretations, in which he tended to stress a privilege of the proper in Heidegger's work

(and still in *Aporias*, AP, 56!), in 2001 Derrida claims that “the thought of *Ereignis* in Heidegger would be turned not only toward the *appropriation* of the proper (*eigen*) but toward a certain expropriation that Heidegger himself names (*Enteignis*)” (PT, 90). He then adds, explicitly linking the Heideggerian thought of the event to the inappropriable and the impossible: “The undergoing [*l'épreuve*] of the event, that which in the undergoing or in the ordeal at once opens itself up to and resists experience, is, it seems to me, a certain unappropriability of what comes or happens [*ce qui arrive*]” (PT, 90). Even if Derrida recognizes that any event necessarily calls for a certain appropriative reception, he insists on the fact that “there is no event worthy of its name except insofar as this appropriation falters at some border or frontier” (PT, 90). For Derrida, the event manifests an irreducible inappropriability: unforeseeable, unpredictable, without horizon and incalculable. This is manifest in the surprise of the event, which forecloses understanding or comprehension: “The event is what comes and, in coming, comes to surprise me, to surprise and to suspend comprehension: the event is first of all *that which* I do not first of all comprehend. Better, the event is first of all *that* I not comprehend” (PT, 90). Derrida finds here access to his own thinking of the impossible, in particular in an interpretive reading of the expression “possibility of the impossible,” borrowed especially from Heidegger’s definition of death in *Being and Time*.¹² Derrida seeks to reinterpret that expression, in opposition with Heidegger, in terms of a primacy of the improper, as mark of the inappropriable. In fact, in *Aporias*, Derrida claimed that the expression “possibility of the impossible” should be read as the indication of *Enteignis* within *Eigentlichkeit* (AP, 77). Everything for Derrida is at stake in this expression, which he seeks to *reverse* towards the impossible. It is a matter, he tells us, “of knowing in which sense/direction [*sens*] one reads the expression the possibility of impossibility” (AP, 77), reminding the reader, following the polysemy of *sens* in French, that the term should also be heard as “direction.” Hence, reversing the direction, the expression “the possibility of the impossible” becomes “the impossibility of the possible,” although ultimately Derrida seeks to grasp possibility *as* impossibility.

Now, as I just mentioned, the expression, “possibility of the impossible” appears in *Being and Time* to designate the existential meaning of death, which is defined by Heidegger “as the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general” (Heidegger 2010, 251). Derrida discusses this expression at length in *Aporias*, an expression he seeks to preserve – and complicate – in his thinking of the eventfulness of the event, of its arrival/happening (*l'arrivée*). Derrida begins by clarifying that for Heidegger death is grasped as a possibility, and not as impossibility: “this is indeed the possibility of a being-able-not-to or of a no-longer-being-able-to, but by no means the impossibility of a being-able-to” (AP, 68). *I can* die; death is a possibility for *Dasein*, that is, the possibility of the impossible, but not the mere impossibility of existence. This is a crucial precision, as Derrida explains, “The nuance is thin, but its very fragility is what seems to me both decisive and significant, and it probably is most essential in Heidegger’s view” (AP, 68).¹³

Now, Derrida seeks to complicate matters, and understand the expression, “the possibility of the impossible” as an aporia. For Heidegger, we know, death is *the most proper possibility of Dasein*; for Derrida, *on the contrary*, it will be an issue of leaning towards the impossible, that is, the improper and expropriation. For, as Derrida argues, if the most extreme and most proper possibility turns out to be the possibility *of the impossible*, then we will have to say that expropriation always already inhabits the proper, and that death becomes *the least proper possibility*:

If death, the most proper possibility of Dasein, is the possibility of its impossibility, death becomes the most improper possibility and the most ex-proprating, the most inauthenticating one. From the most originary inside of its possibility, the proper of Dasein becomes from then one contaminated, parasited, and divided by the most improper. (AP, 77)

When Heidegger speaks of the possibility of death “as that of the impossibility of existence in general” (*als die der Unmöglichkeit der Existenz überhaupt*), Derrida understands this “as” as revealing that possibility is approached *as impossibility*, for this is “not only the paradoxical possibility of a possibility of impossibility: it is possibility *as impossibility*” (AP, 70). Now, to my knowledge, Heidegger never speaks of possibility *as impossibility*. Rather, he speaks of death *as the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general*. How does one slide from the possibility *of an impossibility* into possibility *as impossibility*, except through some interpretive violence? For Heidegger always stressed, as if to prevent possible misunderstandings, that death is a possibility that “must not be weakened”, and that “it must be understood *as possibility*, cultivated *as possibility*, and endured *as possibility* in our relation to it” (Heidegger 2010, 250).¹⁴ Yet Derrida evokes a *disappearance* of the possible in the impossible, explaining that for *Dasein*, death “is both its *most proper possibility* and this same (most proper) possibility *as impossibility*,” and is “hence, the *least proper*, I would say,” although he immediately concedes: “but Heidegger never says it like that” (AP, 70).

B. Rethinking the Possible . . . as Im-possible

This reversal affects Derrida’s renewed thinking with respect to the possible and the impossible. In “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” Derrida challenges the traditional opposition between the possible and the impossible, seeking to “upset” the distinction, and attempts to grasp the impossible no longer as the opposite of the possible, but, as he puts it suggestively, as what “haunts the possible” (CIP, 452). The possible is never free of the impossible, it is always affected by it: “Even when something comes to pass as possible, when an event occurs as possible, the fact that it will have been impossible, that the possible invention will have been impossible, this impossibility continues to haunt the possibility” (CIP, 452). Everything takes place as if the impossible is what truly enabled or possibilized the possible, as if the possible could only be possible *as impossible*. In *Rogues*, Derrida insists that

“what is at issue is precisely another thought of the possible (of power, of the masterly and sovereign ‘I can,’ of ipseity itself) and of an im-possible that would not be simply negative” (ROG, 143). To such an extent, the impossible, Derrida claims, *is* possible, not in the sense that it would become possible, but in a more radical sense in which the impossible, *as impossible*, is possible: “*There is the impossible*,” Derrida states (PT, 120). It is thus a question of converting or “turning” the possible into the impossible (CIP, 445), and to recognize that if the impossible is possible (as impossible), the possible in a certain way *is* impossible (arising out of an aporia).

I’ll say, I’ll try to show in what way the impossibility, a certain impossibility of saying the event or a certain impossible possibility of saying the event, forces us to rethink not only what “saying” or what “event” means, but what *possible* means in the history of philosophy. To put it otherwise, I will try to explain how I understand the word “possible” in this sentence in a way that this “possible” is not simply “different from” or “the opposite of” impossible, and why, in this case, “possible” and “impossible” say the same thing. (CIP, 445)

Such thinking radically transforms our understanding of the possible and the impossible: the possible is no longer the opposite of the impossible, but what is possibilized by it; the impossible is no longer what cannot be, but the possibility of the possible. Because the possible becomes possible *as impossible*, Derrida rewrites “impossible” as im-possible. For an event to be possible, it must arise from the im-possible, it must happen as the im-possible:

We should speak here of the im-possible event, an im-possible that is not merely impossible, that is not merely the opposite of possible, that is also the condition or chance of the possible. An im-possible that is the very experience of the possible. (CIP, 454)

An event is thus not made possible by conditions; it can only be an event by breaking the possible. “If only what is already possible, that is, expected and anticipated, happens, this is not an event. The event is possible only when come from the impossible. It happens (*arrive*) *as* the advent of the impossible” (PM, 285). It is indeed paradoxically the condition of possibility that impossibilizes the experience of which it claims to be the condition; and it is on the contrary the im-possible, as a leap outside of the horizon of expectations, which possibilizes the event, the eventfulness of the event, or what Derrida calls the happening/arrival of the *arrivant* (*l’arrivée de l’arrivant*), the welcome of which will be called, precisely, responsibility.

C. *Of an Im-possible Responsibility*

Responsibility thus becomes approached as an experience of the impossible; each time, responsibility can only happen as impossible: as a decision without norms, as

a law that is itself lawless, as the undergoing of the undecidable, as a decision without or beyond knowledge, as the unconditional – and thus impossible – welcome of the other, finally as a responsibility for an incalculable and unpredictable event. Let us briefly draw the features of this im-possible responsibility. A first aporia marks the excess of responsibility with respect to any norm or rule, indeed in relation to duty itself. One typically understands responsibility in terms of a conformity to a rule or a law, in terms of an act done in conformity with or out of duty. For Derrida, this conception would be the height of irresponsibility, as it reduces responsibility to the application of a rule, to the unfolding of a program. Ethical responsibility cannot consist in applying a rule: the “ought” of ethics cannot and “must not even take the form of a rule” (ON, 8). One needs to seize responsibility instead as an event, as a risk, as a *taking* of responsibility, which can only take place beyond norms and rules: “the ethical event, if there is such a thing, must take place beyond duty and debt” (RES, 175, my translation). The event of responsibility takes us beyond the law, beyond the language of duty, beyond the categorical imperative itself! Ethical responsibility would be here a duty beyond duty, and Derrida breaks at this point with the Kantian formulation of duty: “Would there thus be a duty not to act *according to duty*: neither *in conformity to duty*, as Kant would say (*pflichtmässig*), nor even *out of duty* (*aus Pflicht*)” (ON, 7)? A counter-duty, or rather a duty beyond duty, a hyperbolic duty or hyper-duty, a responsible decision that must judge without rules, is a decision “that *cuts*, that *divides*” (FL, 24), infinitely exceeding duty and norm. The aporia of the rule (the fact that “as in all normative concepts . . . it involves both rules and invention without rule,” writes Derrida, giving the example of politeness, ON, 9), in which “one knows the rule but is never bound by it,” leads the responsible decision to the undecidable.

For Derrida, there is no decision and no responsibility without the confrontation with the aporia of undecidability. That is to say, with the impossible. “Undecidable” does not mean the impossibility of decision, but its paradoxical condition, that is, its condition of possibility and/or impossibility. The undecidable is the horizon of ethical responsibility. A decision made does not suppress the undecidable. Derrida is quite clear on this point: *a decision does not end some aporetic phase*: the undecidable as impossible haunts any decision, including when a decision is made; decision *remains* confronted with the undecidable that makes it possible *as decision*. A decision must decide without rules to follow, to apply or to conform to, each time a singular decision as an event. The undecidable designates the event-character of decision, Derrida evoking “the event of a decision without rules and without will in the course of a new experience of the undecidable” (ON, 17, trans. modified). Happening outside of prior conditions of possibility (and therefore “im-possible”), a decision is an absolute risk that can rely on nothing (no rules) but its own absence of foundation:

there is no “politics” of law or ethics without the responsibility of a decision. In order for the decision to be just, it is not enough for it to apply existing norms or rules, but it

must take the absolute risk, in each individual situation, of rejustifying itself, alone, as if for the very first time, even if it enters into a tradition. (PM, 128)

Ethical responsibility is thus a matter of *invention*, an invention of the impossible, as it were, and not the application of a rule. In fact, there are no rules, no technique, for such responsibility.

A not-knowing – *a secret* – is thus a condition of responsible decision, marking another appearance of the impossible: “If I know what I must do, I do not take a decision, I apply a knowledge, I unfold a program. *For there to be a decision, I must not know what to do . . .* The moment of decision, the ethical moment, if you will, is independent from knowledge. It is when ‘I do not know the right rule’ that the ethical question arises” (JDPE, my translation). Of course, Derrida recognizes that “it is necessary to know as much and as well as possible before deciding” (FWT, 52), but there will always remain a gap between decision and knowledge. The moment of decision, the moment of responsibility, supposes a rupture with the order of knowledge, with calculative rationality, if it is the case that “a decision always takes place beyond calculation” (GD, 95). To that extent, there is what Derrida calls a “madness of the impossible” (CF, 45) as opening to the incalculable: “the moment of decision, and thus the moment of responsibility, supposes a rupture with knowledge, and therefore an opening to the incalculable” (TS, 61). It is a matter of deciding without knowing, without seeing (*voir*) or foreseeing (*prévoir*), thus from a certain invisible or unforeseeable, without being able to calculate all the consequences of the decision, by entering into “the night of the unintelligible” (CF, 49). To that extent, Derrida will go so far as to speak of an “unconscious decision”! “*In sum, a decision is unconscious* – insane as that may seem, it involves the unconscious and nevertheless remains responsible” (PF, 69).

If the decision takes place as a leap into the unknown, then it can never be “my” decision.

Just as we say “I give” and “I forgive” too easily, we also easily say, “I decide” or “I take responsibility” or “I’m responsible.” These statements are all equally inadmissible. To say “I decide,” to say “you know that I decide, I know that I decide,” means that I am capable of deciding and master of my decision, that I have a criterion that allows me to say that I’m the one who decides. If this is true, the decision is a sort of expression of my power, of my possibility. (CIP, 455)

Derrida seeks to imagine an alterity of decision, a decision that would be *of the other*, marking a hiatus within the subject. A decision worthy of this name should mark the splitting open of the self in its identity or self-sameness.

A decision should tear – that’s what a *decision* means; it should interrupt the fabric of the possible [which Derrida understands here as the “I can” of the ego, as power and

will of an *ipse*]. Whenever I say “my decision” or “I decide,” you can be sure that I’m mistaken. Decision should always be . . . the other’s decision. My decision is, in fact, the other’s decision. (CIP, 455)

That decision of the other is nonetheless a decision of the other *in me*, for at the same time, it engages me: just “as no one can die in my place, no one can make a decision, what we call ‘a decision,’ in my place” (GD, 60). Hence the paradox of a passive – or “*passactive*” – decision, “the paradox without paradox to which I am trying to submit: a responsible decision must be that im-possible possibility of a ‘passive’ decision, a decision by the other in me that does not exonerate me from any freedom or any responsibility” (PM, 87). With such a “passive decision,” it is a matter of designating an alterity at the heart of responsible decision, an alterity or heteronomy from which and in which alone a decision can be made. “That is what I meant . . . by heteronomy, by a law come from the other, by a responsibility and decision of the other – of the other in me, an other greater and older than I am” (PT, 134).

This is why responsibility becomes rethought as responsiveness to the incalculable arrival of the other, and no longer ruled by the authority of the principle of sufficient reason, of giving accounts and reasons (what we could call the “accountability principle”). Responsibility is no longer placed under the request or demand for a ground or justification, characteristic of metaphysical thought. Derrida understands responsibility as response to the event of the other, an event that is always unpredictable, incalculable, and thereby always breaks the demand for sufficient reason, always exceeds the enframing of the principle of sufficient reason. “The coming of the other, the arriving of the arriving one (*l’arrivée de l’arrivant*), is (what) *who arrives* as an unpredictable event,” he explains, an event that can only challenge the demand of the principle of reason “insofar as it is limited to a ‘rendering of reasons’ (*reddere rationem*, ‘*logon didonai*’).” Responsibility is not to comply with the demands of such reason rendering, but instead not simply to deny or ignore “this unforeseeable and incalculable coming of the other” (FWT, 50). Derrida will thus speak of a responsibility to the “to come” of the other, the arriving of the *arrivant*, “a future that cannot be anticipated; anticipated but unpredictable; *apprehended*, but, and this is why there is a future, apprehended precisely *as* unforeseeable, unpredictable; approached *as* unapproachable” (GD, 54).

4. Conclusion: The Secret of Responsibility

“Any responsibility is, in a certain way, secret.” With this motif of the other, one is brought back to the question of the inappropriable, the inappropriable event of

the other, and the responsibility that arises from it. Heidegger showed that the responsibility of *Dasein* arises out of the aporia of being a thrown ground, a thrownness and an expropriation felt in a mood, and carried as a weight. *Dasein*'s belongingness to being, to *Ereignis*, happens from a certain expropriative motion, which Heidegger called *Enteignis*. As we saw, for Derrida, responsibility is and can only be an experience of the impossible. Responsible decision is thus assigned to a "secret." In fact, "there is never any responsibility without trembling": one trembles whenever one makes a decision. Such a secret makes the I "tremble." I tremble "at what exceeds my seeing and my knowing [*mon voir et mon savoir*] although it concerns the innermost parts of me, right down to my soul, down to my bone, as we say" (GD, 54). It is therefore not *my* secret, but a secret of myself, or a secret that I carry within myself and which does not belong to me, which in fact belongs to no one; it is in me but other than me.

Original responsibility is hence a responsibility to a secret, a responsibility that is "in the secret" (*ibid.*). This reveals the otherness to which responsibility is assigned, if it is the case, as Derrida wrote, that "the other is secret insofar as it is other" (PM, 136–163). Ultimately, responsibility is to the unpredictable event of the other – that is, the event of who or what happens and arrives, the absolute *arrivant* (*l'arrivant absolu*). An event can never be included in a horizon of expectation, I cannot see it come. An event never arrives "horizontally," it does not appear or *present itself* on the horizon from where I may be able to fore-see it, anticipate it; rather, an event falls upon me, comes from above, vertically, from a (non-theological) height and is an absolute surprise. It is the surprise of an event that happens vertically, but also "by coming at my back, from behind or from below, from the underground of my past, or even such that I never see it, having to content myself with feeling or hearing it. But barely" (FWT, 52). An event is thus unique, unpredictable, that is to say, without horizon, and to that extent, secret. Responsibility is to the secret of the other, and it may well be around this motif of the secret and the inappropriable that Derrida may be closest to Heidegger. Indeed, responsibility is to "the event of the other, the coming of the other, or as other: non-reappropriable" (RES, 178, my translation). As such, as a responsibility to the event, responsibility *itself* is an event, itself unpredictable, a matter of invention, an invention of *the impossible*: "The responsibility to be taken is and must remain incalculable, unpredictable, unforeseeable, non programmable. Each one, each time – and this is where there is responsibility – must invent" (RES, 179, my translation). Certainly, as Derrida concedes, what unpredictably happens/arrives "exceeds my responsibility"; yet from such an excess I am called to responsibility. Responsibility thus becomes the response to such an absolute arrival, an arrival that remains inappropriable and yet to which I cannot not respond: the event is "an *arrivance* that would surprise me absolutely and to whom or for whom, to which or for which I could not, and may no longer, *not respond* – in a way that is as responsible as possible" (FWT, 52).

Notes

- 1 As he stresses, “I will even venture to say that ethics, politics and responsibility, *if there are any*, will only ever have begun with the experience and experiment of the aporia” (OHD, 41; also cited in CPT, 250).
- 2 In an interview given a few months before his death to the Communist newspaper *L’Humanité*, Derrida explained that “if by ethics one understands a system of rules, of moral norms, then no, I do not propose an ethics” (JDPE, my translation).
- 3 The expression “condition of impossibility” can be found, among other places, in PM, 79, 84, 90, 91.
- 4 Deconstruction, as Derrida conceived of it and practiced, precisely aimed at revealing the aporias inherent in philosophical systems, aporias that are constitutive of what they limit, and to that extent are positive phenomena: hence the affirmative sense of deconstruction as openness, which must always be associated with, as Derrida put it, “the privilege I constantly grant to aporetic thought” (ROG, 174 n. 3). Deconstruction as such, Derrida tells us, needs to be understood as aporetic thinking, and he evoked in a late text “all the aporias or the ‘im-possibles’ with which deconstruction is concerned [*toutes les apories ou les ‘im-possibles’ qui occupent la déconstruction*]” (FWT, 48, trans. modified). Deconstruction is wed to the impossible. This is what Derrida emphasized in a text on the secret: “deconstruction, without being anti-systematic, is on the contrary, and nevertheless, not only a search for, but itself a consequence of, the fact that the system *is impossible*,” adding that “it has been a question of showing that the system *does not work*” (TS, 4, my emphasis).
- 5 Kant defines “enlightenment” as the freeing from a state of irresponsibility (*Unmündigkeit*, both immaturity and dependence, not being of age), which he defines as “man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another” (Kant 1988, 462). This delineates an ideal of responsibility as self-responsibility, implying a break with heteronomy, and projecting a horizon of self-appropriation, constitutive of the traditional account of responsibility.
- 6 On this history of responsibility, I take the liberty of referring to my study *The Origins of Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
- 7 In his *Doctrine of Right*, Kant thus explains that a person is “a subject whose actions can be *imputed* to him,” whereas a “thing is that to which nothing can be imputed” (Kant 1999, 378).
- 8 In the “Remark on the Third Antinomy” in the first Critique, Kant explains that the originary capacity of initiating a causal series (transcendental freedom) gives itself as the “ground” of what he terms *Imputabilität*, or imputability. “The transcendental idea of freedom is far from constituting the whole content of the psychological concept of that name, which is for the most part empirical, but constitutes only that of the absolute spontaneity of an action, as the real ground of its imputability; but this idea is nevertheless the real stumbling block for philosophy, which finds insuperable difficulties in admitting this kind of unconditioned causality” (Kant 1998, 486 [A 448/B 476]).

- 9 See, e.g., ON, 15, where Derrida uses the term “responsiveness” in English in the original. Also see GD, 3.
- 10 Derrida, GD, 68. This “scandal” appears in the question: For which other am I responsible, for whom or for what? We know the Levinasian quandary discussed in its aporetic structure by Derrida in *The Gift of Death*: “*Tout autre est tout autre* [Every other is wholly other].” I am obligated to all others insofar as I am obligated to each and every other. How to discriminate between others if I am each time obligated to a singular other and thus bound in this singular responsibility to sacrifice all other others? For this expression, *tout autre est tout autre*, is a way of “linking alterity to singularity” and “signifies that every other is singular, that everyone is a singularity” (GD, 87). And how can one speak of determinable measure when a certain aporia, or sacrifice, seems to impossibilize the ethical experience? As I respond to one singular other, I sacrifice all the other others, and I can only respond ethically by sacrificing or betraying ethics. “I can respond only to the one (or to the One), that is, to the other, by sacrificing the other to that one . . . and I cannot justify this sacrifice” (GD, 70).
- 11 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, trans. François Raffoul and Gregory Recco (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997), cited in TJLN, 299.
- 12 “Death is the possibility of the pure and simple impossibility of Dasein” (Heidegger 2010, 241).
- 13 Derrida identifies two senses of the possible in *Being and Time*; first, “the sense of the virtuality or of the imminence of the future,” and second, the sense “of the possible as that of which I am capable, that for which I have the power, the ability, or the potentiality,” concluding that “these two meanings of possibility co-exist in *die Möglichkeit*” (AP, 62). One might suggest a third sense here (captured in French by the term *passibilité*), which is precisely the opposite of the second sense (possibility as power): for the “I can” in “I can die” designates more a vulnerability or exposure than a power. The possible here takes the sense of a being-exposed (passivity) to the possibility of death. I can die (i.e., am mortal) because I am exposed to death.
- 14 Further, in our coming near death in its anticipation, one does not come near the actuality of death, but its possibility, a “possibility of the possible [that] only becomes ‘greater’” (Heidegger 2010, 251).

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On Faith and the Holy in Heidegger and Derrida

BEN VEDDER AND GERT-JAN VAN DER HEIDEN

In his essay “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida provides us with his most direct and explicit discussion of the phenomenon of religion. Amidst the many themes that he addresses in this analysis, one issue stands out, namely that religion should be understood in the plural. This does not simply mean that multiple particular religions exist. It rather means that the phenomenon of religion cannot be understood out of one origin or source alone. Religion goes back to two sources and two (quasi-)transcendentals, namely, faith and the holy.

One of the important ideas of “Faith and Knowledge” is that faith and knowledge cannot be understood in a simple opposition to each other as if knowledge would not require forms of faith and as if faith would be completely purified of knowledge. Rather, faith and knowledge presuppose and contaminate each other. As a consequence, Derrida also indicates that these two sources of religion are not only at work in religion, but also in science, technology, and philosophical thought.

To a certain extent, this latter idea goes back to Heidegger, at least when it comes to the notion of the holy. Although the holy is usually associated with religion, it plays an important role in Heidegger’s account of the thought of being. At the same time, as Derrida indicates, distinguishing religion from philosophy, Heidegger tends to treat faith as religious faith and thus excludes faith from thinking. In this text, we will analyze how both Heidegger and Derrida think faith and the holy and how, out of their different approaches to these themes, we see a new picture arising concerning the relation of Heidegger and Derrida’s thought on religion, philosophy, faith, and the holy.

1. Heidegger on Faith and Philosophy

In order to get a precise impression of Derrida's interpretation of faith and the holy we start with a presentation of these notions in Heidegger. As Heidegger claims in his essay "Phenomenology and Theology," there is almost no relation between faith and philosophy since it is inconceivable that faith can be understood conceptually. Such inconceivability does not arise from a lack of reason, but from the nature of the *positum* itself; faith is not something to be understood.

Faith means for Heidegger an ontic operation, which is led by a more or less hidden understanding of being. The question of being is not raised in faith. On the other hand, it is not possible to understand the meaning of the cross, of sin, and grace in any other way than in faith. Faith cannot become the criterion of knowledge for the philosophical-ontological question. However, the basic concepts of faith are not completely isolated from philosophical questioning. The explication of basic concepts is never an isolated matter, which, once isolated, can be passed around like coins. How are we to regard this relation between the basic concepts of faith and philosophical questioning?

Heidegger indicates faith as a rebirth. Does this mean that the pre-faithful existence of *Dasein* has disappeared? Heidegger answers:

Though faith does not bring itself about, and though what is revealed in faith can never be founded by way of a rational knowing as exercised by autonomously functioning reason, nevertheless the sense of the Christian occurrence as rebirth is that *Dasein's* pre-faithful, i.e., unbelieving, existence is sublated [*aufgehoben*] therein. (Heidegger 1998a, 51)

This sublating does not mean that pre-faithful existence is removed, but that it is lifted up into a new form, in which it is kept and preserved. The ontological conditions of the pre-faithful human being persist in the faithful human being. In faith pre-Christian existence is mastered at an *existentiell* level as rebirth. Heidegger's use of the term "aufheben" here immediately calls Hegel to mind. Does this association mean that the relation between religion and philosophy must be understood from a Hegelian perspective? Obviously not, since in Hegel religion is regarded as something preserved in the rationality of spirit. The difference between religion and philosophy in Hegel is not considerable because the content of religion and that of philosophy remain one and the same. In Heidegger, on the other hand, continuity exists between the two at an implicit ontological level, yet at the ontic level the difference between them is decisive, as we shall see in what follows. In Heidegger's analysis, what is existential-ontological remains implied within what is religious.

We can see the relation as follows:

Hence we can say that precisely because all basic theological concepts, considered in their fully regional context, include a content that is indeed existentially powerless, i.e.,

ontically sublated, they are ontologically determined by a content that is pre-Christian and that can thus be grasped purely rationally. (Heidegger 1998a, 51)

The believer remains anchored in the ontological presuppositions of *Dasein*. Theological concepts necessarily include an understanding of being that human *Dasein* possesses to the extent that *Dasein* exists. Heidegger adds a key remark on the kinship between theology and philosophy in a footnote in *Being and Time*:

All theological concepts of existence that are centered on faith intend a specific transition of existence, in which pre-Christian and Christian existence are united in their own way. This transitional character is what motivates the multidimensionality of theological concepts. (Heidegger 1962, 365)

The transition characteristic to *Dasein* is obviously distinguished from Christian existence in a particular way. Because of this, theological concepts possess an ambiguity in which one can see pre-Christian (ontological) concepts in and through Christian ones. As a result, the metaphor of rebirth gestures toward the characteristics of the first birth: existentiality.

The concept of sin, for instance, is meaningful only within faith; only the believer can exist as a sinner, since sin in Christianity also presupposes a belief in the revelation of God. However, if one wants to explicate sin in a conceptual way, then it demands a step backward to the concept of guilt. In other words, if one wants to explicate sin, one has to turn to the original ontological existential characteristics of *Dasein*. In these existential characteristics of existence, *Dasein* is determined as guilty. The more originally and appropriately the basic condition of *Dasein* is explicated and brought to light, that is, the more originally and ontologically the concept of guilt is understood, the more this concept of guilt can serve as a guide for the theoretical explication of sin. Sin arises as a concept within the world of faith when the act of the believer is seen in the light of a revealing and forgiving God. It is an interpretation added to what is ontologically experienced as guilt. Sin is the faithful and *existentiell* interpretation of what is existential-ontologically founded in the concept of guilt.

Heidegger presupposes that the theological explication of sin must remain oriented towards the ontological concept of guilt. This orientation does not mean that theology is patronized by philosophy: "For sin, in its essence, is not to be deduced rationally from the concept of guilt" (Heidegger 1998a, 52). Theology needs the ontological concept of guilt from the pre-faithful *Dasein*, which is in turn sublated in faithful *Dasein*. In Hegel, the sublation proceeds from religion to spirit; in Heidegger it goes from philosophy to religion and is not philosophically necessary. If the concepts of faith are to be philosophically explicable, and are not to remain in a specific, yet meaningless, conceptuality, then what is said must be understood from an existential-ontological perspective. The concept of guilt remains silent about sin.

The theological concept of sin as a concept of existence acquires that correction (i.e., codirection) that is necessary for it insofar as the concept of existence has pre-Christian content. But the primary direction (derivation), the source of its Christian content, is given only by faith. Therefore ontology functions only as a corrective to the ontic, and in particular pre-Christian, content of basic theological concepts. (Heidegger 1998a, 52)

The philosopher who wants to understand the concepts of faith has to understand them out of and by means of philosophical concepts. These philosophical concepts are formal concepts, which are always empty not only with respect to religion, but also with respect to all human concerns. Therefore, the question whether theological concepts are right is not for the philosopher to judge.

Heidegger, as we see, uncovers existential structures of *Dasein* from certain religious phenomena and contexts. The world of the believer offers an expression of more fundamental existential structures. In themselves, such structures have nothing to do with religion. This point legitimates Heidegger's entire intention. He does not, however, answer the question of whether the ontological implications of these religious phenomena are meaningful for the validity of faith. It might be true that Heidegger's philosophy of guilt and of the future is essentially developed from out of his interpretation of Christianity, but it is his explicit intention to analyze its philosophical meaning. His project is not about theology, nor Christian faith, nor religion in general; his references to the religious are always oriented toward, and for the sake of, the ontological analysis. For its part, ontological understanding is neutral, atheistic and without religious faith.

The ontologically prior (or a priori) openness, which is given with regard to the other sciences out of *Dasein*, does not apply to theology. It has a *positum* in the revelation of faith that is *sui generis*, a *positum* about which philosophy cannot speak. Therefore, it is not possible to find the content of faith, the Christianness, in the analysis of *Dasein*.

From this understanding of being, philosophy can eventually function as a corrective for the ontic content of the basic concepts of theology, but it cannot speak about its theological content. It is not necessary for philosophy to serve a corrective function with regard to theology. As ontology, philosophy offers the possibility to function as this corrective for theology. If theology wants to belong to the facticity of *Dasein*, then it must stay within the ontology of facticity; without this, it can never be understood from the perspective of an ontology of facticity. This is the reason why Heidegger states early on that the philosophy of religion is only understandable from the perspective of an ontology of facticity. He persists in this conviction: "the very idea of a philosophy of religion (especially if it makes no reference to the facticity of the human being) is pure nonsense" (Heidegger 1992, 393). That theology seeks to answer to this demand to limit itself within the borders of facticity does not originate from philosophy itself, but rather originates from theology, which strives to

understand itself scientifically. Out of itself, philosophy is not aware of a possible meaning for theology because the theological *positum*, the revealed faith, does not belong to its domain.

Against this background Heidegger understands faith as the natural enemy, as it were, of philosophy:

This peculiar relationship does not exclude but rather includes the fact that faith, as a specific possibility of existence, is in its innermost core the mortal enemy of the form of existence that is an essential part of philosophy and that is factually ever-changing. (Heidegger 1998a, 53)

What we see here is the fundamental opposition of two possibilities of existence, which cannot be realized by one person in one and the same moment. Faith as a possibility of existence implies death to philosophy as the possibility of existence. Christian philosophy, therefore, is in Heidegger's view a "square circle" (Heidegger 1998a, 53). This opposition does not mean that the scholars working in each field must behave like enemies: neither side excludes a factual and *existentiell* taking seriously of the other. The *existentiell* opposition between faith, on the one hand, and philosophical self-understanding, on the other, must be actualized in the scientific design and its explications on each side. And the actualization must be done in such a way that each side meets the other with mutual respect.

2. The Holy and the Question of Being in Heidegger

Heidegger himself does not present an extensive phenomenology of the holy as such. Nevertheless, one can ask whether it is possible to find some indications of such a phenomenology in his writings. It is clear that Heidegger does not connect faith and the question of being. But, insofar as he writes about the holy he does so only in relation to the question of being. Thus from the very beginning, faith and the holy are completely different domains in Heidegger's philosophy.

Another question however is whether it is the case that Heidegger finds in his question of being what phenomenology of religion and theology consider to be characteristic of religious thinking, feeling, and acting. In Heidegger the knowledge of the call of being, thanking, and so on, is not a specific religious act. Yet are not notions like "call," "gift," "listening," and so on, religious from the beginning? Can we not say that Heidegger transforms traditional religious and theological notions into his philosophy of being? While the appropriation of these notions may seem to provide thinking with a religious characteristic, for Heidegger these notions are nothing more than characteristics of thinking as such. As we shall see later, these questions are important in relation to Derrida's interpretation of religion.

At first glance, it seems that with the notion of the holy Heidegger formulates a specific domain that is different from thinking. In the “Postscript to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” Heidegger writes that thinking, obedient to the voice of being, seeks from being the word through which the truth of being comes to language.

The saying of the thinker comes from a long-protected speechlessness and from the careful clarifying of the realm thus cleared. Of like provenance is the naming of the poet. Yet because that which is like is so only as difference allows, and because poetizing and thinking are most purely alike in their care of the word, they are at the same time farthest separated in their essence. The thinker says being. The poet names the holy. (Heidegger 1998c, 237)

This kinship and difference make further examination of the relation between being and the holy more urgent. What is the meaning of the holy according to Heidegger’s interpretation? More importantly, given Heidegger’s fundamental question of the meaning of being, what is the relation between the holy and being? When we look further in Heidegger’s work, we find that he connects the notion of the holy with the notion of the “whole.” Immediately, we see that the notion of the holy as an experience of the whole runs counter to what is normal for us in the contemporary age. The holy is introduced with regard to a historical period, the era of the technical world. As long as the night of the world lasts, the intact and unharmed whole of being remains in darkness.

The wholesome and sound withdraws. The world becomes without healing, unholy. Not only does the holy, as the track to the godhead, thereby remain concealed; even the track to the holy, the hale and whole, seems to be effaced. That is, unless there are still some mortals capable of seeing the threat of the unhealable, the unholy, *as such*. (Heidegger 1971, 117)

The hale of the holy remains unmarked in the technological era; this lack of a track to the holy is the biggest threat for human beings. The dimension of the holy remains closed as long as being itself is not opened up. Perhaps the particularity of the current age is that the experience of the whole (*Heile*) is cut off. The trace of the divine as well as that of the holy has become unrecognizable. The holy is not an attribute of the divine, but the dimension in which the godlike can appear. Where there is no experience of the holy, there is no experience of the divine (Heidegger 2000, 46). This means that the experience of the divine becomes more difficult when the trace of the holy becomes less clear. The thinker thinks being, but being has disappeared as a whole. So the connecting word here is the word “whole.” Where do we find this whole in Heidegger’s thinking? The experience of a whole is the possible entrance to and appearing of the holy.

We find the experience of the whole in Heidegger’s descriptions and analyses of anxiety, boredom, and wonder (*Erstaunen*). These so-called emotions are at the level

of the “*Stimmung*,” translated as a state of mind, mood, or disposition: “The mood has already disclosed, in every case, being in the world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something” (Heidegger 1962, 176). Anxiety is an exemplary state of mind, because it discloses *Dasein* as a whole. In anxiety a *horror vacui* appears. In *Being and Time*, the possibility of being a whole is connected to the notion of being towards death. In this analysis the notion of wholeness appears explicitly: “As long as *Dasein* is as an entity, it has never reached its ‘wholeness.’ But if it gains such wholeness, this gain becomes the utter loss of Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1962, 280). In a footnote the translator remarks: “The noun ‘*Gänze*,’ which we shall translate as ‘wholeness,’ is to be distinguished from ‘*Ganze*’ (‘whole,’ or occasionally ‘totality’) and ‘*Ganzheit*’ (‘totality’)” (Heidegger 1962, 280). Totality is a represented whole; it is the totality of things. The notion of wholeness meant here is something that encompasses *Dasein*’s understanding of the world:

All understanding is accompanied by a state-of-mind. *Dasein*’s mood brings it face to face with the thrownness of its “that it is there.” *But the state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from *Dasein*’s ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety.* In this state-of-mind, *Dasein* finds itself face to face with the “nothing” of the possible impossibility of its existence. (Heidegger 1962, 310)

In “What Is Metaphysics?” being is understood more explicitly in reference to the “nothing.” Moreover, when Heidegger wants to think the “nothing,” he starts with an analysis of the way *Dasein* is attuned to wholeness. It may seem as if the experience of a whole were given only in “pessimistic” moods; however, Heidegger adds here: “Another possibility of such manifestation is concealed in our joy in the presence of the *Dasein* – and not simply of the person – of a human being whom we love” (Heidegger 1998b, 87). So it is not just one specific mood that manifests beings as a whole. In anxiety, boredom, or joy – and later on, wonder – beings as a whole are revealed with respect to the “nothing.”

We approach the notion and experience of the holy especially in Heidegger’s interpretations of Hölderlin. And there it is clear that Heidegger thematizes the notion of the holy within the perspective of a basic disposition or mood. As we saw earlier, a basic mood opens a whole domain: that is, not a specific domain in its entirety but the domain of wholeness. Heidegger emphasizes that mood is not just a kind of feeling, but is something that has to be tuned: one has to tune in to an attunement. This tuning in applies also to the voice of saying. The poet speaks out of an attunement (Heidegger 1980, 79). Thus, attunement is not just one mood. In mood as such, Heidegger writes, the openness of being happens (Heidegger 1980, 82).

In the Hymn “Germanien,” the whole basic mood is called holy (Heidegger 1980, 82). It has to do with the basic mood out of which Hölderlin writes his poems. The holy is called the *Uneigennützig*; it is the opposite of self-interest. The holy is something that is beyond the realm of the useful. It is without use. In a certain sense, it

is a mood of indifference (Heidegger 1980, 84). That we are not able to understand the holy against this background is due to the framework of modern thinking in which we live. The holy as the pure lack-of-self-interest is something that happens (Heidegger 1980, 87). So when Hölderlin talks about a holy mourning or holy sorrow he means a basic mood that does not depend on coincidences or vagueness. The sorrow is not directed towards something in particular. This basic mood is not something of a subject or an object (Heidegger 1980, 87–89). The basic mood of the holy brings *Dasein* into a loving indifference. The basic mood in which being as a whole is disclosed is called holy to the extent that it is able to open beings as a whole, that is, beings as they are. This means that the holy for Heidegger plays the role of an entrance to another – that is, other than the onto-theological and technical – experience of being.

In his interpretation of Hölderlin's "As When On a Holiday . . .," Heidegger connects the notion of the holy with the notion of nature. "The poetic naming says what the called itself, from its essence, compels the poet to say. Thus compelled, Hölderlin names nature 'the holy'" (Heidegger 2000, 80). Here, nature is synonymous with being. Nature invites the poet to name being as the holy. The holy is the "from-whence" the poet is called and invited. What he listens to is "nature," which in awakening unveils its own essence as the holy (Heidegger 2000, 80–81). Nature as the holy is more primordial, earlier, and more temporal than the time with which man reckons and calculates. Nature is more temporal than the ages because it clears and opens everything that can appear in it. It is above the gods, not in the sense of an isolated domain of reality, but because in nature as lightening all things can be present. The domain of lightening as a whole is above the gods because the gods can appear in it. Hölderlin names this nature the "holy" because it is older than time and higher than the gods.

Thus "holiness" is in no way a property borrowed from a determinate god. The holy is not holy because it is divine; rather the divine is divine because in its way it is holy . . . the holy is the essence of nature. (Heidegger 2000, 82)

The gods are not on a higher level than the holy, for even they are subjected to its law. A god is not the legislator or the cause of all order; the holy is the law. This claim makes clear that Heidegger is not speaking about a metaphysical god, because here god (or any god) is subjected to the law of the holy. The holy is not a property of god; it is rather the opposite: in its awakening, nature awakes as the holy, and there is no reality that is earlier than the openness of nature.

The holy (*Heilige*) is what is always earlier. It is the primordial, and it remains in itself unbroken and "whole" (*heil*). The holy expressed by the poet concerns what is coming, the coming of being, which is expressed with the words, "But now day breaks." The holy itself comes. Hölderlin's poem says: "But now day breaks! I awaited and saw it come. And what I saw, may the holy be my word" (Heidegger 2000, 94).

The “now” names the coming of the holy. This coming indicates the time in which history decides essentially. One cannot date such a time, and it is not measurable by historical dates and periods. Historical dates are merely a lead for human calculations. They happen at the surface of history, which is an object of research. This history, however, is not the event of occurring itself. The event of occurring is only there when there is a primordial decision on the essence of truth. The poet’s word is now “compelled by the holy,” and because it is so compelled, it is also “sobered by the holy” (Heidegger 2000, 98). This sobriety is the basic mood that is always ready for the holy.

We see that Heidegger brings the religious notion of the holy back to the domain of poetry and thinking, back to the thinking of being. However, he seems to make the religious notion of faith be something that comes from another world. We will see that Derrida does not attribute this otherworldliness to faith.

3. Derrida on Faith and the Holy

Compared to Heidegger, Derrida’s work is marked by a different account of the relation between religion and reason. In particular, the idea that faith is an enemy of philosophy and that faith and philosophy are mutually exclusive possibilities of existence is highly problematic for Derrida. In addition, Heidegger’s reinterpretation of the holy as a primordial unbroken and intact wholeness of being that precedes and elicits thinking, is equally problematic for Derrida. In fact, one might argue that the issues of faith and the holy are typical markers indicating how Derrida and Heidegger differ in their account of both religion and philosophy.

A natural starting point for discussing faith and the holy in Derrida’s work is his essay “Faith and Knowledge.” The essay’s subtitle “The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone” speaks of two sources of religion. Throughout the text, Derrida develops different pairs of concepts that play the role of this twofold source of religion, such as faith and knowledge (FK, 2), the messianic and *khōra* (FK, 17), and (from an etymological point of view) *religare* and *relegere* (FK, 37). Among these pairs, we also find faith and the holy. This pair seems to play a more prominent role than the others. They are not only referred to more often than the others as being the two sources of religion, they are also granted a “quasi-transcendental privilege” (FK, 36) amidst many other distinctions. What does it mean that faith and the holy are sources of religion for Derrida? To answer this question, we shall first turn to the notion of the holy.

When consulting the English translation of “Faith and Knowledge,” the reader often comes across the terms “the holy,” “the unscathed,” and “indemnification.” For Derrida, these notions go back to the French notions of *l’indemne* and *indemnification*. In particular, as Derrida notes, Heidegger’s adjective “heilig” (holy) is often translated in French as “indemne” (FK, 70). Hence, to understand what is at stake

in the question of the holy, we need to know what Derrida exactly means by the unscathed and indemnification:

We will use this word [*indemnification*] here or there to designate both the process of compensation and the restitution, sometimes sacrificial, that reconstitutes purity intact, renders integrity safe and sound, restores cleanliness [*propreté*] and property unimpaired. This is indeed what the word “unscathed” [*indemne*] says: the pure, non-contaminated, untouched, the sacred and holy before all profanation, all wound, all offence, all lesion. (FK, 69–70)

Against the background of Heidegger’s emphasis on the holy as the unbroken, intact wholeness of being that elicits, orients, and motivates thought, the subtle way in which the above quote broaches the notion of the unscathed is telling. Rather than giving the unscathed a primordial status, as if the origin would be something unbroken, pure, and intact, Derrida immediately introduces the notion of indemnification, that is, the process to purify and to *restore* cleanliness and integrity. When purity needs to be restored, it cannot be the point of departure. Rather, that which precedes the process of indemnification and is presupposed by it is contamination, brokenness and a lack of wholeness.

Derrida emphasizes the restoration of the unscathed in a discussion of the return of religion. Such a return implies that religion first somehow withdrew itself from the scene of our society. In relation to the holy, this withdrawal implies that the return of religion requires the restoration of the unscathed. Let us try to understand what caused religion both to withdraw and to return. Derrida describes this return in light of the background of economical, technological, and social changes that occurred due to processes such as globalization. These changes have had the huge impact of uprooting people from their original language, soil, nation, and community. It is this uprooting that caused religion to withdraw itself, but it is also this uprooting to which the return of religion responds in its effort to restore what is proper to a (religious) community, its purity and rootedness.

In “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida captures these economical, technological, and social developments under the heading of *tele-technology*. The logic of tele-technology concerns the repetition that is intrinsic to any technology and which, unlike the existential forms of repetition (*Wiederholung*) as developed by Heidegger (and Kierkegaard), is first and foremost mechanical in nature. This repetition implies the deracination and abstraction from a concrete participation in a tradition, a language, or a community. It is exactly thanks to this uprooting movement that technology has its typical “tele”-character: unbound from its original locus and roots, it is free to reach even those that are foreign to this original locus or world. Basically, Derrida’s reflections on tele-technology repeat his early insights in the structure and the logic of writing: once something is written down, it can be read even by those whom the author did not and could not foresee. As a consequence, these unforeseeable readers

might give an unforeseeable twist to what the author wrote. To call this repetition “mechanical” thus means in the first place that it is not founded in an intention (or in intentionality), a will, or a decision. In addition, the mechanical, non-foreseeable character of telecommunication is marked by the risk of abstraction and deracination. Just as writing threatens the living meaning of the spoken word by distancing it from the speaker, all forms of tele-technology deliver a community, a tradition, and a language over to a process of uprooting and expropriation. Finally, tele-technology and indemnification are complementary in this sense: tele-technology creates the situation of abstraction and uprootedness to which the process of indemnification responds in its effort to re-root and re-appropriate. Tele-technology thus seems to confront us with the unavoidable risk of the loss of community and tradition. Yet, as Derrida maintains here and elsewhere, this *risk* intrinsic to the process of abstraction and deracination is at the same time a *chance* (FK, 47). This process does not only imply the possibility of the loss of community. By unbinding the community from its roots, it is also the process of opening up this community to that which is other than itself. Thus, the process of expropriation is the risk we have to run in order to open our community up the chance of an encounter with the other.

In this context, Derrida understands religion – or, more precisely, indemnification as one of its sources – as the reactive response to the evil of deracination. He does so in a number of ways, but his inquiry into the etymological roots of *religio* is perhaps most illuminating since it shows that the reactive, repetitive movement of religion to restore the unscathed is not only typical for the *return* of religion (as if there were an original religion with an original unscathed community before this return). Rather, as Derrida indicates, this repetitive effort to restore is typical for religion *from the beginning*. Even the etymological source of religion is twofold since two terms, “religare” and “relegere,” are marked as the possible provenance of the word “religion.” Yet, both sources “can be retraced to the same,” as Derrida claims:

In both cases (*re-legere* or *re-ligare*), what is at issue is indeed a persistent bond that bonds itself first and foremost to itself. What is at issue is indeed a reunion <*rassemblement*>, a re-assembling, a re-collecting. A resistance or a reaction to dis-junction. To absolute alterity. (FK, 37)

This quote establishes once more that, where tele-technology is understood as a form of un-binding, religion is, from the beginning, the reactive activity of binding *again*, of re-binding of itself to itself. As a response to the expropriation of telecommunication, religion is itself also a mechanical response to appropriate itself once more, to re-appropriate, to re-enracinate. Derrida calls this even the “proper” of religion:

appropriating religion for the “proper” . . . , appropriating religious indemnification to all forms of property, from the linguistic idiom in its “letter,” to blood and soil, to the family and to the nation. (FK, 46)

In addition, when religion is reactive in the aforementioned sense, the unscathed is never given as unscathed or as non-contaminated. Rather, religion is always already marked by the process of indemnification: to re-assemble, to re-enracinate and to purify from any form of contamination. In this sense, religion seems to be immune for what does not belong to its proper body in the form of the community, tradition, or language that is its own. However, as “a resistance or a reaction to disjunction,” religion presupposes such a disjunction and presupposes the tele-technology it tries to overcome. Religion and tele-technology thus belong together. As a consequence, in the process of indemnification, religion turns out to be immune for something that intrinsically belongs to itself. This is why Derrida describes religion’s response as “auto-immune auto-indemnification” (FK, 42).

These first two elements indicate why the unscathed or the holy form a highly problematic source of religion. In its indemnification, religion brings into play once more the motive of the intact and of the origin as well as the motive of gathering and wholeness. These elements, as we showed in the previous section, belong to Heidegger’s conception of the holy. In response to these elements, Derrida marks that the unscathed is always already contaminated by tele-technology. In this sense, indemnification and the holy are unthinkable without the mechanical, uprooting repetition. Moreover, and more importantly, since the deracination of tele-technology also carries the chance of an encounter with the other, the holy as one of the sources of religion is the source that closes off the chance of an encounter with the other.

Here we find a crucial difference with Heidegger. For Derrida, the whole and wholeness of the holy is not something that is pre-given. It is rather something that is reassembled based on a preceding disjunction and alterity. Similarly, the activity of collecting and gathering, which for Heidegger is always connected to the notions of *legein* and *logos*, is not primordial, but is rather a resistance to a more primordial disjunction. In this perspective, the holy is at best a derivative. In fact, since the holy is only given in relation to a preceding deracination and disjunction, Derrida argues that the a priori for thought and for religion cannot be found in the holy or in a primordial gathering or wholeness. Rather, what comes before me is of the order of the heterogeneous; it is “the heterogeneity of a *pre-*” (SM, 28) and as such disjointure comes before me, before my community, before what is proper to me (cf. Van der Heiden 2010, 226–230.)

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida identifies this preceding heterogeneity with justice, and it also returns under this name in “Faith and Knowledge” where it is brought into play under the heading of the messianic. The figure of the messianic comprises both the risk and the chance of an encounter with the other since it “*exposes itself to absolute surprise*” and by “*exposing itself so abstractly*” it should “*be prepared . . . for the best as for the worst, the one never coming without opening the possibility of the other*” (FK, 17–18, Derrida’s italics). Both in its relation to absolute surprise and to its abstract exposition to the other, the figure of the messianic is opposed to the figure of the unscathed and indemnification. Interestingly enough, the messianic and the

justice that springs from it are connected to the other source of religion, namely faith, as Derrida indicates:

This abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that “founds” all relation to the other in testimony. . . . This justice inscribes itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other.
(FK, 18, Derrida’s italics)

We started this section with an analysis of abstraction and deracination, which are juxtaposed to the process of indemnification. The above quote shows us that the chance of an encounter with the other brings into play exactly the other source of religion since the relation to the other requires a credit and a faith in the testimony of the other. Hence, the encounter cannot take place outside the realm of faith, promise, credit, and belief. Apparently, faith, as the other source of religion and unlike the unscathed, is somehow intrinsically connected to the chance that can be found in the abstraction of tele-technology. Let us therefore turn to this second source of religion.

4. Faith as a Source of Thinking in Derrida

For Heidegger, as we saw, faith does not belong to the realm of thinking because it presupposes credibility. In fact, faith appears as the natural enemy of philosophy. Against this background, Derrida’s comments on faith provide us with an important alternative. First of all, he claims that “*faith has not always been and will not always be identifiable with religion, nor, another point, with theology*” (FK, 8, Derrida’s italics). As we saw above, Heidegger does find a philosophic potential for the religious notion of the holy, but he does not find such a potential in the notion of faith. Derrida’s comments indicate that also faith, as a source of religion, necessarily precedes religion and as such is not always religious in nature. In addition, as an alternative to the opposition between religion and philosophy that still marks Heidegger’s reflections on faith, Derrida argues that “religion and reason have the same source” (FK, 28), namely a certain faith and belief.

To get a clear picture of what Derrida means by faith, let us first consider his critical comments on Heidegger’s understanding of faith. He reminds us of a number of examples in Heidegger’s work to oppose philosophy to faith. Among these examples, Derrida refers to Heidegger’s striking comment from “The Anaximander Fragment.” At the end of this essay, Heidegger raises the question of how to prove that his translation of Anaximander’s fragment is adequate (Heidegger 1977, 372). To deal with this question, he distinguishes his own thoughtful way of translating from a scientific approach as well as from a faith in some sort of authority. It is in this context

that he claims that belief or faith (*Glaube*) has no place in the act of thinking (SOV, 84; FK, 60). According to Derrida, Heidegger does not only dismiss belief as “credulous and orthodox confidence that, closing its eyes, acquiesces and dogmatically sanctions authority” but also claims in this quote from “The Anaximander Fragment” that “belief *in general* has no place in the experience or the act of thinking *in general*” (FK, 60).

In light of our discussion of Heidegger, this latter conclusion is not justified. Heidegger discusses the notion of faith and belief always in relation to religion and theology; in this sense, he never uses these terms in the same generality as Derrida does since for Derrida “belief *in general*” also comprises a faith and a belief that is not religious or theological in nature. However, it is not difficult to understand what Derrida’s concern is: why has Heidegger not developed a conception of faith and credibility on a pre-Christian, ontological level? This question is motivated by three striking examples from Heidegger’s own work where the issues of faith, credibility, and trustworthiness seem to impose themselves on us but are not discussed as such by Heidegger. Derrida points out the issues of *Zusage* (“accord, acquiescing, trust, confidence”), of *Bezeugung* (attestation), and of the *Faktum* (fact) of the understanding of being (*Seinsverständnis*).

Let us for now focus on the latter example, which stems from the first pages of *Being and Time* where Heidegger introduces the *Faktum* of *Dasein*’s “vague average understanding of Being” (Heidegger 1962, 25). This example is not only mentioned at the end of “Faith and Knowledge” where Derrida discusses the aforementioned three examples, but already plays a role in the very first pages. When wondering how to speak on religion, Derrida notes that we “*believe in the minimal trustworthiness of this word,*” that is, we believe that we know how to use it and how to speak our own language. Belief and trustworthiness are thus intrinsically at work in our effort to think and to philosophize about religion. He adds:

Like Heidegger, concerning what he calls the Faktum of the vocabulary of being (at the beginning of Sein und Zeit), we believe (or believe it is obligatory that) we pre-understand the meaning of this word, if only to be able to question and in order to interrogate ourselves on this subject. Well – we will have to return to this much later – nothing is less pre-assured than such a Faktum. (FK, 3, Derrida’s italics)

The fact of our vague understanding of being, which is the point of departure for Heidegger’s interrogation of *Dasein*’s mode of being, is marked by a lack of assurance. Due to this lack, the analysis of *Being and Time* is not of the order of (scientific) knowledge. Yet, we are dealing here with an account of *Dasein*’s *understanding* and not with an account of religious faith. It is at the heart of this understanding, which prefigures our capacity to understand our own mode of being, that Derrida finds the phenomenon of faith in the form of credibility and trustworthiness of both Heidegger’s testimony and the phenomenon of this vague average understanding of

being. Hence, the beginning of thinking necessarily involves such an act of faith, as Derrida emphasizes later on:

This *Faktum* is not an empirical fact. Each time Heidegger employs this word, we are necessarily led back to a zone where acquiescence is *de rigueur*. Whether this is formulated or not, it remains a requirement prior to and in view of every possible question, and hence prior to all philosophy, all theology, all science, all critique, all reason, etc. (FK, 62)

The implications of the remark that the fact of understanding is not an empirical fact but rather requires an affirmation and confirmation of the credibility of this fact are far-reaching. For instance, it implies that the phenomenological manifestness of this fact of understanding is unthinkable without a form of faith. In addition, it shows how the hermeneutical dimension of Heidegger's phenomenology which concerns the importance of understanding and interpretation for *Dasein's* relation to the world as well as the importance of articulation and language as the locus in which the phenomena become manifest, finds in faith a source that it *shares* with religion.

Especially in relation to the second aspect of this hermeneutical dimension of Heidegger's thought, we arrive at the kernel of what faith and belief mean for Derrida. He compares the appeal to believe to the belief that is intrinsic to the phenomena of testimony and oath. For testimony we rely on what the other, the witness, says about an event that took place because we have no other access to this event than through his or her testimony: if another access would be available, we would not need such a testimony. Therefore, the phenomenon of witnessing always brings into play an absolute inaccessibility: the witness is unique and irreplaceable in what he or she witnessed. Consequently, the witness promises or even swears to tell the truth and the listener confirms and believes this testimony. This testimonial pledge and its implicit promise are not only the "common resource" of religion and reason (FK, 28), but they are at work in every address to the other. The confirmation for which the Heideggerian text asks when it introduces the notion of the *Faktum*, and the confirmation that lies at the heart of every testimony, is thus: "I promise to tell you the truth beyond all proof and theoretical demonstration, believe me, etc." (FK, 44). For Derrida, belief, faith, and fidelity are therefore first and foremost forms of "acquiescing to the testimony of the other – of the *utterly other* who is inaccessible in its absolute source" (FK, 33). Bringing it to its most radical formulation, Derrida writes:

It amounts to saying: "Believe what I say as one believes a miracle." . . . *Pure* attestation, if there is such a thing, pertains to the experience of faith and of the miracle. Implied in every "social bond," however ordinary, it also renders itself indispensable to Science no less than to Philosophy and Religion. (FK, 63–64)

Faith is thus the phenomenon that establishes a social bond in the first place. Consequently, communication and all forms of intersubjectivity presuppose such a belief

or affirmation of what the other has to say. There is no understanding, no knowledge, no science, and no philosophy without faith. In this sense, Derrida has to reject the alternative between faith and philosophy that Heidegger adheres to.

5. Concluding Remarks

Despite the differences between Heidegger and Derrida's account of faith and the holy we discussed, it is also clear that their thoughts share one motive: they show how certain notions that we tend to understand as thoroughly religious cannot be left to religion alone since they play a fundamental role in their understanding of what they call philosophy and thinking. Our exploration of the pair "faith" and "the holy" is all the more interesting since it is exactly this pair that shows in which respect Heidegger's and Derrida's accounts are complementary in their effort to find in the vocabulary of religion riches that can be used to reassess and reinterpret what it means to think. For Derrida, it is faith that opens up the chance for thinking to relate to what is other than philosophy. For Heidegger, the holy is a figure of thought of that which approaches without ever being grasped. As such, the holy represents for him a chance for an encounter with and an opening up to another beginning than the first beginning of Western philosophy.

Of course, it remains to be seen why Heidegger refuses so strongly to integrate a concept of faith in his reinterpretation of both understanding and thinking. One might wonder whether it is not due to his experience with theology and certain theologians that he places thinking and believing in such an opposition that it is impossible to bridge the gap between them. Similarly, we might wonder why Derrida insists so strongly to approach the holy in terms of indemnification, that is, in terms of giving purity, wholeness and intactness *back* to what is contaminated. As long as a thought insists on thinking the chance of opening up towards what is other, as Derrida does, this other – for as far as it has not yet been said, phrased, thought, or touched – is indeed as yet untouched. Might we not argue with Heidegger that it is exactly as such an untouched that otherness attracts and motivates us? Such a motive can also be traced in Derrida's own work. What to think, for instance, of Derrida's description of the desire to translate? When invoking how "the passion for translation" tries to touch the foreign word, he writes:

approaching as closely as possible while refusing at the last moment to threaten or to reduce, to consume or to consummate, leaving the other body intact but not without causing the other to appear – on the very brink of this refusal or withdrawal. (WRT, 175)

Can one think this "leaving the other body intact" and this "causing the other to appear – on the very brink of this refusal or withdrawal" without a Heideggerian account of the holy, the whole, and the intact? At any rate, this quote suggests a

conception of the intact that is not brought into play as an effort to restore intactness, but to leave intactness to what has not yet been thought. Of course these issues cannot be solved here, but they do indicate that the meaning for thinking of both figures of thought – faith as well as the holy – remains an issue for thought after Heidegger and after Derrida.

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“Safe, Intact”: Derrida, Nancy, and the “Deconstruction of Christianity”

KAS SAGHAFI

It is a safe bet to say that whenever there is a discussion of “the unscathed” in Derrida’s work, the terms “safe” and “intact” almost always accompany each other, while in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy they are held apart.¹ An exploration of the occurrence of the words “safe” and “intact” in the writings of Derrida and Nancy, I would like to suggest, allows us to catch a glimpse of some of the fundamental differences between the late work of these two thinkers as well as to distinguish the most salient features of their divergent interpretations of deconstruction.

Since his heart transplant in the early 1990s Jean-Luc Nancy seems to have had a new lease on life. He has been an extremely prolific thinker and writer, publishing a healthy number of texts on a variety of subjects – democracy, justice, love, sleep, identity, the city, art – at an enviable pace (Nancy 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b). Arguably, many of his major texts have been authored after his transplant and the ensuing illness caused by an antirejection drug. In a number of these works, Nancy has been vigorously engaged in the project of the “deconstruction of Christianity,” which to date includes two books, *Dis-Enclosure*, *Adoration*, and other related publications. As well as being a thinker of extraordinary caliber in his own right, Jean-Luc Nancy, as an interlocutor and friend of Jacques Derrida for decades, has been at the vanguard of deconstruction, such that after Derrida’s death he has been treated as the main inheritor of and spokesperson for deconstruction. While Derrida and Nancy’s relationship is extremely complex and interwoven and would require several volumes to carefully explicate, it is worthwhile to make an attempt, however modest, to differentiate their projects and their approaches to deconstruction. It is true that a cluster of shared themes, terms, motifs, and methodologies link the two thinkers, and for any attentive reader of their work, their disagreements regarding

certain themes – like community, fraternity, democracy, generosity, faith, and belief – will not be new. Their abiding friendship also speaks to the fact that neither views friendship as the necessity to always be in agreement. What marks out the singularity of each thinker, I would like to argue, is the way each understands the meaning of deconstruction.

Over the decades that they knew each other, Derrida and Nancy collaborated on a variety of projects. After Derrida's first visit to Strasbourg in 1970, Nancy and his colleague Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe participated in Derrida's seminars at the École Normale Supérieure in the early 1970s. All three were involved in GREPH (Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement philosophique), which lobbied for the earlier instruction of philosophy in the French educational system (resulting in the publication of a collective volume in 1977) and in editing the book series "La philosophie en effet" with Sarah Kofman, initially for the publisher Flammarion in 1975 and then for Galilée starting in 1985. In 1980 Nancy, with Lacoue-Labarthe, also organized the first Cerisy conference devoted to Derrida's work, "Les fins de l'homme," and at the invitation of Derrida both formed the Centre de recherches philosophiques sur la politique at the École Normale, lasting from 1980 to 1984, producing two volumes investigating the relationship between deconstruction and the political. In the later years, Derrida and Nancy often appeared together at countless conferences. Their long friendship, however, did not prevent Derrida from expressing his philosophical disagreements with Nancy, which are given voice in *Politics of Friendship* (regarding the question of community and fraternity), *On Touching* (concerning the prominence and privilege bestowed upon the sense of touch since philosophy's inception), and *Rogues* (in particular, on the subject of freedom). This chapter will not focus on the well-documented early exchanges between the two thinkers, but will concentrate on the intersection of the later writings of Derrida and Nancy concerning the general topic of "religion." What is of particular interest is the significant role that the interpretation of the term *salut* – which in French has two meanings "greeting, salutation" as well as "salvation" – plays in this interaction.²

In broad outlines, for Derrida, the goal of "religion," if it can be said to have one, is to keep the living – the adherents of "religion" – safe, unscathed, and intact. The "unscathed (*indemne*)" – the untouched, the uncontaminated, *heilig*, safe and sound – is that which has not suffered damage. It can also refer to either a virgin state that once existed, in which no damage was suffered, or to a state where things will be restored as unharmed. "Religion" thus functions to indemnify: to prevent and secure against hurt or damage and to restore purity, as well as to compensate for any loss that is incurred. Derrida writes of "the necessity for every religion or all sacralization also to involve healing" or the promise of a cure (FK, 74 n. 30). The role of religion, then, is to heal, to restore as unscathed. Yet that which desires to be intact (unscathed, untouched) cannot sustain its goal. It cannot remain whole nor have perfect integrity because unwittingly it is in-tact, in touch. Its auto-immunity means that what desires to be safe, cannot ensure its safety.

Conversely, in Nancy’s view, it is only the deceased that is intact. What is safe is that which remains whole, unscathed, and intact. And it is only the dead one that is safe, intact, out of reach. The deceased is untouchable in its death. What death can “offer” is to touch – a touch *without contact* – or to greet the intact. *Salut*, according to Nancy, is thus not a wish to save but an address, an invitation that wishes safety for its addressee. A salutation declares: Be safe, be whole, intact in death. It touches the intact, the untouchable, but without any *contact*. While reserve and restraint are appropriate only for the dead one in Nancy’s view, in Derrida’s assessment, as we will see, it is the living who have the right to respect and restraint, since it is the task of “religion” to save the living as intact.

1. The Unscathed – Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge”

Derrida lays out the core of his views on “religion” in a series of dense, elliptic paragraphs in “Faith and Knowledge,” which are by now familiar and often cited.³ Derrida writes that a discourse on “religion” cannot be dissociated from a discourse on salvation [*salut*], that is, “to save, be saved, save oneself” (FK, 2, paragraph 2). Early in the text, he asks whether “the unscathed [*indemne*]” is not “the very matter – the thing itself [*la chose même*] – of religion” (FK, 23, paragraph 27). By the unscathed, Derrida explains in a footnote, he is referring to “that which has not suffered damage or prejudice, *damnum*” (FK, 69–70 n. 16). Thus the word “unscathed” speaks of “the unimpaired”: “the pure, non-contaminated, untouched, the sacred and the holy before all profanation, all wound, all offence, all lesion” (FK, 69–70).

He also notes that the French word *indemne* has often been used to translate *heilig* (“sacred, safe and sound [*sain et sauf*], intact”) in Heidegger (FK, 70 n. 16). In the footnote mentioned above he further elucidates that *damnum* gives the French language the word *dam*, which among other things is tied to the sacrifice offered to the gods as ritual compensation. Thus, a discussion of the unscathed will also involve *indemnification*, “the process of compensation and the restitution, sometimes sacrificial, that reconstitutes purity intact, renders integrity safe and sound, restores cleanliness and property unimpaired” (FK, 69–70 n. 16).

In the footnote, Derrida informs us that throughout “Faith and Knowledge” he will regularly associate the words “unscathed,” “indemnity,” “indemnification” with the words “immune,” “immunity,” “immunization,” and above all “auto-immune” (FK, 69–70 n. 16, paragraph 27). It should be noted that the inclusion of the notion of auto-immunity here, and its association with the unscathed, indicates that the unscathed or the intact is by no means that which remains or can remain whole with perfect integrity, but that which, in the drive to remain whole and unscathed, in order to protect itself, harms itself. In another important footnote on auto-immunity, Derrida observes that while immunity designates freedom or exemption from charges and obligations, as well as the inviolability of the asylum sought in the

Christian church, auto-immunity refers to a living organism protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system (FK, 72 n. 27, paragraph 37). If the goal of “religion” is defined as the desire to remain unscathed, its association with the auto-immune suggests that this desire for absolute immunity is a structurally untenable phantasm: whatever seeks to be auto-immune cannot be kept intact, for it is vulnerable to self-harm and to sacrificial self-destruction.

Later in the same text Derrida speculates that the religious is in fact bound up with the convergence of two experiences. The two strata or two sources of “religion” are the experience of *belief* [*croyance*] and the experience of the unscathed, of *sacredness* [*sacralité*] or of *holiness* [*sainteté*] (FK, 33). In French *sainteté* means “saintliness” or “holiness” as well as “sanctity.” This allows Derrida to refer later to the “sacro-sanct” (derived from Lat. *sacrosanctus*, from *sacer* “sacred” and *sanctus* “holy,” “worthy of veneration”; also bearing the ironic modern meaning of “untouchable, taboo”). Benveniste glosses the two terms that compose the compound word: what distinguishes *sacer* from *sanctus* is the difference between “implicit” and “explicit” sacredness. What is *sacer* has its own proper value by itself whereas *sanctus* is “a state resulting from a prohibition for which men are responsible, from an injunction supported by law” (Benveniste 1973, 455). Thus, *sacrosanctus* is “what is *sanctus* by a *sacrum*: what is defended by a veritable sacrament.” In the second part of his essay entitled “. . . and pomegranates” Derrida states that all the values associated with “sacro-sanctity (*heilig*, holy, safe and sound, unscathed, intact, immune, free, vital, fecund, fertile, strong, and above all . . . ‘swollen’),” or what he calls “the semantic genealogy of the unscathed,” have to be thought together with the “machine-like [*machinique*]” (FK, 48, paragraph 38).

Speaking of this “drive to be unscathed [*la pulsion de l'indemne*], on the part of that which is allergic to contamination, *save by itself*, *auto-immunely* [*sauf par soi-même, auto-immunément*]” (FK, 25, paragraph 28) Derrida further explains:

We are here in a space where all self-protection of the unscathed, of the safe and sound [*sain(t) et sauf*], of the sacred (*heilig*, holy) must protect itself against its own protection, its own police, its own power of rejection, in short, against its own, which is to say against its own immunity. It is this terrifying but fatal logic of *the auto-immunity of the unscathed* that will always associate Science and Religion. (FK, 44, paragraph 37)

Drawing on Benveniste’s “rich chapter” on “the Sacred [*Le sacré*]” in *Indo-European Language and Society*, Derrida notes that the holy and sacred character is also defined through a notion of exuberant and fecund force (FK, 74 n. 30). Even though Benveniste does not note this fact in his discussion, Derrida adds that there is a necessity for

(. . . every religion or all sacralization also to be healing [*guérison*] – *heilen*, *healing* [*in English*] – health, *salut*, or promise of a cure – *cura*, *Sorge* – horizon of redemption, of

the restoration of unscathed, of *indemnification*). The same must also be said for the English “holy,” neighbor of “whole” (“entire, intact,” therefore “safe, saved, unscathed in its integrity, immune”) . . . Whoever possesses *le “salut,”* that is, whose physical integrity is intact, is also capable of conferring *le “salut.”* “To be intact” is the luck that one wishes, predicts or expects. It is natural to have seen in such perfect “integrity” a divine grace, a sacred meaning. By its very nature, divinity possesses the gift of integrity, of *salut*, of luck, and can impart it to human beings. (FK, 74–75 n. 25, paragraph 39, citing Benveniste 1973, 451–452)

Thus, the “absolute imperative” or the “law of salvation [*loi du salut*]” is “saving the living as intact, the unscathed, the safe [*le sauf*] (*heilig*), which has the right to absolute respect, restraint [*retenue*], modesty” (FK, 49, paragraph 40). This sets up the necessity of an enormous task: reconstituting the chain of analogous motifs in what Derrida calls

the sacro-sanctifying attitude or intentionality, in relation to that which is, should remain or should be allowed to be what it is (*heilig*, living, strong and fertile, erect and fecund: safe, whole, unscathed, immune, sacred, holy [*saint*] and so on). Salvation and health [*Salut et santé*]” (FK, 49)

This intentional attitude, Derrida continues, bears several names belonging to the same family: respect, modesty, restraint, inhibition, *Achtung* (Kant), *Scheu*, *Verhaltenheit*, *Gelassenheit* (Heidegger)” all of which mark a restraint or holding back [*halte*] in general, constituting “a sort of universal structure of religiosity” (FK, 49, paragraph 40). These terms open the possibility of the religious, a possibility that itself remains divided. On the one hand, it involves “respectful or inhibited abstention before what remains sacred mystery, and what ought to remain intact or inaccessible, like the mystical immunity of a secret.” On the other hand, this holding back “opens an access without mediation or representation” to what remains unscathed, but “not without an intuitive violence” (FK, 49). All (of the above) “stop short of that which must or should remain safe and sound, intact, unscathed, before what must be allowed to be what it ought to be, sometimes even at the cost of sacrificing itself and in prayer: the other” (FK, 50, paragraph 40).

2. Tact and Touch: Derrida’s *On Touching* – Jean-Luc Nancy

In *On Touching* – Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida’s monumental book on touch, touching, the *sense* of touch in the history of philosophy, and Nancy’s body of work, the entirety of which is referred to as an “immense philosophic treatise of touch” (TJLN, 107), Derrida turns to what links “religion,” specifically Christianity, to touching.⁴ At the beginning, Derrida comments on a 1978 essay by Nancy entitled “Psyche,” written on a phrase from Freud (“Psyche ist ausgedehnt: weiss nichts davon”).

Derrida writes of an impassive, untouchable, and intact Psyche (“Psyche the untouchable, Psyche the intact”). Even though Psyche (or in other words, soul or thought) is “extended,” this is an extension that is untouchable. This Psyche is a Psyche that does not touch anything. It has an intangible body, which is also intangible to itself.

Derrida remarks on the Aristotelian legacy that any thought on touching has to concern itself with both the tangible and the intangible. In ch. IV entitled “The Untouchable, or the Vow of Abstinence,” he discusses what he calls “the law of tact.” He suggests that the law is the untouchable prior to all the ritual prohibitions imposed on touching by religion or culture. The law enjoins us to respect, which commands us to keep a distance, to not touch. At the origin of law, thus, there is tact and the law (of tact) commands to touch *without* touching. After all, what is tact but “knowing [how] to touch *without* touching, without touching *too much*” (TJLN, 67). There is the law of tact. As Derrida writes, approaching “the *figure* of touching,” touching touches what it does not touch. It “brings into contact (without contact) contact *and* noncontact” (TJLN, 75).

There must be some “touchable-untouchable” (TJLN, 78 n. 17). We must think, Derrida states, “the logic of an untouchable that remains right at, right on [*reste à même*], if we can say, the touchable” (ibid.). The touchable-untouchable is not someone and should not be confused with what in certain cultures is called an “untouchable.”⁵ The untouchable could not be named and identified, Derrida writes, except insofar as “there is some touchable-untouchable in general, before every religion, cult or prohibition” (ibid.). In fact, every vow of abstinence “experiments with the touchable *as* untouchable” (ibid.).

Derrida sets up his analysis of Christianity’s relation to touch in “Tender,” the following chapter. The Gospels, he writes, present the Christic body as a “*touching* body as much as *touched*, as a touching-touched flesh. Between life and death” (TJLN, 100). As Derrida suggests “one can take the Gospels as a *general haptics*. Salvation [*le salut*] saves by touching, and the savior, that is, the one who touches, is also the touched: saved, safe, unscathed. Touched by grace” (TJLN, 100). Derrida provides examples from the Gospels of salvation by touching: “Jesus the Savior is ‘touching,’ he is the One who touches, and most often with his hand, and most often in order to purify, heal, or resuscitate. To save [*Sauver*], in a word. He heals or purifies the leper by touching him” (Matt. 8:3). He “heals Peter’s mother-in-law by touching her hand with his hand” (Matt. 8:15); “heals the blind by touching their eyes” (Matt. 9:29–30); “cures the deaf and the mute” (Mark 7:32–36); “heals and saves from fear” (Matt. 17:7–8); “he even cures death itself by touching a coffin” (Luke 7:13–15). Often (vulnerable and innocent) children are touched by Jesus (Luke 18:15–17). Jesus touches, having been touched to the heart, where he is “first moved and touched” (TJLN, 100–101).

However, Jesus is not only touching,

the one who Touches, but he is also the Touched . . . he is “*to be touched*, he can and must be touched. This is the condition for salvation. To be safe and sound, to attain immunity, *touch*, to touch him [le toucher, *le toucher*], Him. Or better, to touch, without touching that which would come into contact with his body, that is, like a fetish, or the origin of fetishism, his garment, his cloak and thus what saves is not touching, but the faith that this touching signifies and attests to. (TJLN, 101)

Derrida notes that it appears that the “literal allusions to touching are more rare, almost absent in the Gospel according to John” (TJLN, 102). This may be because “Jesus becomes for a moment untouchable” and “the ‘Touch me not’ (*noli me tangere, me mou haptou*) addressed to Mary Magdalene at the moment when, still in tears near the grave, she has just recognized him” is reported by John (TJLN, 102). Moreover, Derrida adds, the motif and the lexicon of touching in the Epistles (in Corinthians, Colossians, Timothy, Hebrews) are commonly associated with “a prohibition: do not touch, so that it remains untouchable” (TJLN, 103 n. 23).

What comes to pass when one has to touch the untouchable? This theme gets broached in Nancy’s text *The Experience of Freedom* published in 1988. There Nancy employs “the figure of touch” in relation to the limit: by being led to the limit, philosophy has touched the limit (TJLN, 103). On the one hand, Derrida explains, no one has ever touched such an abstract thing as a limit, but on the other hand, one only touches a limit – to touch is to touch a limit. This limit, which philosophy will have thus touched (upon), finds itself to be at the same time touchable and untouchable. Thus, there can only be “a *figure* of touch”; for one “only touches by way of a figure,” as the touchable is what is impossible to touch. “History of the untouchable, therefore, of immunity, of the unscathed, of the safe [*du sauf*]. Save, safe – touching [*Sauf* – le toucher]” (TJLN, 104). However, Derrida expresses a reservation regarding this *figure* of touch: what is the logical or rhetorical legitimacy, the phenomenological status of that which one cannot “without trepidation” call “the *figure* of ‘touch’” (TJLN, 106)?

Has the entire tradition of Western philosophy not been a “haptology” or, what Derrida calls, a “haptocentric metaphysics?” Even though touching, for Nancy, is a resistance to all forms of idealism and subjectivism, does it still not function as “the motif of a kind of absolute realism” (TJLN, 46)? Does not this thinking of the body with its connotations of immanence, immediacy, and intuitionism imply an almost seamless relation between that which touches and what is touched? In *On Touching* Derrida seeks to show the theological foundations of a thinking of the body, its propriety and its integrity; a thinking that privileges the notion of touch as a kind of contact. This thinking, with roots in Christian thought and in the Christian conception of incarnation, where spirit is made flesh in the body of Christ, demonstrates the belonging together of Western philosophy and Christian theology, of phenomenological thought and a doctrine of incarnation. Derrida labels Nancy’s appeal to

and recuperation of touch, a “*quasi*-hyper-transcendental-ontologization of tact” (TJLN, 292).

3. Do Not Wish to Touch Me: *Noli Me Tangere*

Prompted by Derrida’s *On Touching*, Nancy’s *Noli Me Tangere* may be read as a response to what Nancy calls Derrida’s “rabbinical skepticism,” a riposte, an impassioned corrective regarding the question of touch, and an innovative reworking of the notion of resurrection (Nancy 2008a, 25–26 n. 4). Devoted to an analysis of exemplary representations of the life of Jesus by artists such as Rembrandt, Dürer, Titian, Pontorno, Cano Alonso, Bronzino, and Correggio, *Noli Me Tangere* takes the form of meditations on specific episodes or scenes from the Bible. In this short book Nancy takes up Christ’s relation to touching, while presenting a new interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus. This text is also Nancy’s most extensive meditation on the notion or concept of resurrection in general.⁶

In Christian and post-Christian iconography, moments of the account or narrative of Jesus (an account that is presented as a succession of scenes) have been taken up as motifs by painters and sculptors. If the life of Jesus, Nancy explains, is “a representation of the truth that he claims himself to be,” then this life is identical to “the truth that appears in being represented” (2008a, 4). Thus, underscoring the identity of the truth and its figures (2008a, 5), the *logos* cannot be taken as “distinct from the figure or the image” (2008a, 4).

Nancy writes that the phrase *Noli me tangere* has made touching “a major stake in taboo as the constitutive structure of sacrality” (2008a, 13). “The *untouchable*,” whose most striking example is the Hindu figure of the pariah, Nancy remarks, is “everywhere present wherever there is the sacred, that is, [wherever there is] withdrawal, distinction, and the incommensurable” (2008a, 13–14).⁷ However, in Christianity, Nancy contends, nothing and no one is untouchable, particularly because “the very body of God is given to be eaten and drunk” (2008a, 14). One could even say that “Christianity will have been the invention of the religion of touch, of the sensible, of presence that is immediate to the body and to the heart” (*ibid.*). This would thus render the famous scene of *Noli me tangere*, mentioned by Derrida and the subject of Nancy’s book, an exception (*ibid.*).

Nancy’s proposal is to think together the two sayings *Noli me tangere* and *Hoc est corpus meum* “in an oxymoronic or paradoxical mode” (*ibid.*). What is paradoxical and exceptional about the *Noli* scene, he claims, is that “Christ expressly rules out the touching of his resurrected body” (*ibid.*). While the resurrected body is “tangible,” here “it does not present itself as such” (*ibid.*). This is the only time that Christ does not want to be touched, Nancy makes clear, only because he “does not want to be held back, for he is departing” (2008a, 15).

Nancy presents a nonreligious meaning of "resurrection" as "the departing into which presence actually withdraws . . . Just as it comes, so it goes: that is to say, it is not" (ibid.). Resurrection is thus "the uprising, the sudden appearance of the unavailable, of the other and of the disappearing *in the body itself and as the body*" (ibid.). This is because "He dies indefinitely," he is the one who does not "cease to depart" (2008a, 16). The one who says "Do not touch me" is the one whose "presence is that of a disappearance indefinitely renewed or prolonged" (ibid.). It is as if, Nancy writes, he is saying "*I am already going away; I am only in this departure; I am the parting of this departure*" (ibid.; Nancy's emphasis). This Nancy calls "a stance before death" (2008a, 18), "a standing upright before and in death" (ibid.). What is affirmed is "the stance (thus also the reserve, restraint) of an untouchable, of an inaccessible" (ibid.). If touching (him) indicates "the immediacy of a presence," then Christ is "the untouchable who holds himself beyond reach" and is not touched by Mary Magdalene (2008a, 21).

According to Nancy's analysis of the pictorial representation of the resurrection, painters generally depict an episode that is not given to be seen. In the "textual scenes" where the resurrected one appears, however, Jesus invites the disciples to touch him to assure them that he is there in flesh and blood (2008a, 22). What this demonstrates for Nancy is that "faith [*la foi*]," in contrast to belief [*croyance*], "consists of seeing and hearing *without tampering*" (ibid.). In Nancy's assessment, the *Noli* is to be read as "Don't touch me, for I'm touching you, and this touch is such that it holds you at a distance" (2008a, 36). Later in the chapter entitled "The Hands," Nancy qualifies this by adding that *Noli me tangere* does not simply say "Do not touch me" but also "Do not wish to touch me" (2008a, 37).

In Nancy's estimation, resurrection is not a return to life or a process of regeneration (2008a, 17). As he writes in *Noli me tangere*, "the resurrection [of Christ] is not a resuscitation [*réanimation*]: it is the infinite continuation of death that displaces and dismantles all the values of presence and absence, of animate and inanimate, of body and soul" (2008a, 44, trans. modified). He is careful to stress that "this raising [*levée*] of the body is not a 'relève' in the sense given to this word by Derrida to translate the Hegelian *Aufhebung*" (2008a, 18), not a dialecticization or a mediation of death. There is no passage into another life (ibid.). In addition, *anastasis* does not come from the self; it comes to the self from the other (2008a, 19). For Nancy, the statement "I am resurrected" does not signify the accomplishment of an I but rather a passivity. This is why he claims that "I am dead" and "I am resurrected" say the same thing (ibid.). Resurrection, Nancy writes, "designates the singularity of existence": "everyone resurrects, one by one and body for body" (2008a, 46).

That Nancy is bent on presenting resurrection as a "more discreet," mundane, "familiar," rather than "spectacular" affair (2008a, 22), with a "less flamboyant," "natural" character rather than a "supernatural" one, can be discerned from his descriptions, as well as from the negative valence he gives to terms such as "a spectral body" (he tells us that the resurrected body is not a spectral or phantasmagoric body

but a tangible one) (2008a, 15); “supernatural magic” (2008a, 25); “fantastic film” (the episode of Lazarus is not a fantastic film, we are informed) (2008a, 18); “magical trick” (2008a, 15); “apparition” (2008a, 45); and “miracle” (the episode of Thomas is not at all miraculous, he tells us (2008a, 22 n. 36)).⁸

A summary of Nancy’s views on resurrection, and other related concepts such as “eternal life,” highlights the differences between Derrida and Nancy. Rather than a return to life, resurrection, for Nancy, signifies a reconfiguration of death and dying. He underscores the importance of a notion of death in his analysis when he remarks in *Noli Me Tangere* that “without death there would only be contact, contiguity, and contagion, a cancerous propagation of life that would as a consequence no longer be life” (2008a, 45). In addition, belief is linked to the spectacular, whereas faith consists of seeing and hearing where there is nothing exceptional for the eyes and ears (2008a, 22). Faith knows to see and hear without touching. Further, the living (or the adherents of religion) have no desire to be intact. Since Christianity can correctly be described as the religion of touch, it is only the departing body of the resurrected Christ that is untouchable. Therefore, the prescription “Noli me tangere” is to be understood as an exception or an anomaly.

4. Intact: Nancy’s “Consolation, désolation” and “Salut à toi”

Nancy returns to Derrida’s previous comments on a couple of occasions before and after Derrida’s passing away, where he takes up Derrida’s objections to his portrayal of resurrection. It is worth pointing out that the word “intact” occurs on a number of occasions. In the yet to be translated three-page “Foreword” to *Chaque fois unique* (published in October 2003), Derrida directly addresses Nancy’s uptake of resurrection (AVP, 9–11). Resisting any reworking of resurrection in whatever shape or form, no matter how radical, Derrida contrasts it with what he calls “the end of the world.” Writing in the French edition of what first appeared as a book of farewells in English as *The Work of Mourning*, a collection of pieces written after the death of friends and colleagues, Derrida observes that each death and each farewell is unique (and thus resists being compared to another and, perhaps, to being gathered together in a collection). Each farewell, he tells the reader, is the farewell of a salutation that is resigned to greet the possibility and necessity that it be not returned and to greet the end of the world as the end of every resurrection, thus putting an end to all resurrection. For, however different it may be from “classical resurrection,” *anastasis* will continue to console, a consolation that contains some grain of cruelty. *Anastasis*, for Derrida, “postulates the existence of some God and assures that the end of a world will not be the end of the world. Each death spells the end of the world. The world has gone away; there can be no world – and this end leaves no room for resurrection (AVP, 11).

The dead one is safe and intact, and what is intact is out of reach, not to be touched. This is what Nancy declares in “Consolation, désolation,” an essay written for a special issue of *Magazine Littéraire* devoted to Jacques Derrida (Nancy 2004a). In this brief piece Nancy relates what is intact to what is dead. In contrast to Derrida’s view, for Nancy it is not the adherents of religion who wish to be safe, but safety is reserved for the dead one, who is greeted. As Nancy explains: “the noun ‘*salut*’ denotes address, invitation or injunction with a view to being safe” (2004a, 58). Discussing the double valences of the word *salut*, Nancy attempts to distinguish that which is “safe [*sauf*]” from “the saved [*le sauvé*].” Safe (*salvus*), he explains, is what remains whole, unscathed, intact. While “the saved” refers to what has “escaped from the injury or the blemish that it had suffered from,” safe is “that (or that one, he/she) [*cela (ou celui, celle)*] which remains intact, out of reach. In other words, it is “that which has never been touched” (ibid.).

In this way the dead carry off with them, as we say, the unique and sole world each of them was. They thus carry off the entire world, for never is the world a world if not unique, alone, and entirely intact. *Solus, salvus*: there is salvation only of the sole [*il n’y a de salut que du seul*]. (Nancy 2004a, 59)

Nancy clarifies that “to console,” signaled in the title of his essay and referred to by Derrida in his “Foreword” to *Chaque fois unique*, is never to comfort, to soothe the pain, or to restore the life of the dead. “*Solor*, to comfort, is foreign to *solus*” but “fortif[ies] desolation,” makes “its harshness inflexible and untouchable” (2004a, 58). The deceased, whose death is untouchable, thus “disappears in the absolute isolation” of his or her death (2004a, 59). “The salutation desolates [the name] as it desolates itself” (ibid.). And before this isolation, “I am alone, each time absolutely alone” (ibid.). What death “offers us,” Nancy writes, is to “touch the intact” (2004a, 58). However, no contact (whether sensible, intelligible, or imaginary) with the intact is possible. For, “the salutation touches the untouchable,” but it does so in the form of an address “that confirms for him his death (2004a, 58–59). This salutation (*le salut*) “salutes the other in the untouchable intactness of his or her insignificant propriety or ownness” (ibid.).

Taking issue with Derrida’s suspicion or refusal of any salvation while referring to the 16 deceased figures eulogized in *Chaque fois unique*, Nancy writes that “Derrida’s *salut*” “still saves no matter what” (2004a, 59). “It does not save anything from the abyss” but it “salutes the abyss saved” (ibid.). “To save [*sauver*],” Nancy claims, “is not ‘to heal’” (2008b, 27). Moreover, saving is not a “process, and it is not aimed toward an ultimate ‘health’ (*salvus* and *sanus* are not the same word). It is a unique and instantaneous act by which the one who is already in the abyss is held back or recovered” (ibid.). Saving, then, “does not annul the abyss” but “takes place in it” (ibid.). Glossing the notion of resurrection discussed in his previous essays, Nancy

writes that *anastasis* would designate nothing other than “redress [*redressement*] (*anastasis*),” a “raising up [*levée*] (and not sublation [*‘relève’*])” (2004a, 59). There is only salutation “for there is nothing to save” (*ibid.*). In his or her dying, “each one is saluted by himself, inasmuch as this ‘himself’ is desolated, intact, and does not and will not come back to us or to himself” (*ibid.*).

In his first item of writing on Derrida penned in October 2004 immediately following his death, a brief homage called “Salut à toi, salut aux aveugles que nous devenons,” Nancy responds to the notion of *salut* developed in a number of places by Derrida (Nancy 2004b). Sending Derrida a salutation, Nancy wishes him safety: “salve, be safe! [*salve, sois sauf!*].” Extending this notion to safety in death and as death, Nancy wishes for Derrida to “be safe not from death but in it, or else if you allow, if it is allowed, be safe as death [*sois sauf comme la mort*]. Immortal like it [death].” Safety, then, is what is wished for, and reserved for, the dead, not the living.

5. There’s Deconstruction and There’s Deconstruction⁹

In a piece entitled “Deconstruction of Christianity,” first delivered as a lecture in 1995, published as an article before appearing as a chapter in *Dis-Enclosure*, Nancy claims that “Christianity is the very thing – *the thing itself* [*la chose même*] – that has to be thought.”¹⁰ This claim is of course a gloss on, and a kind of response to, Derrida’s insistence in “Faith and Knowledge,” quoted above, that the unscathed is “the very matter, the thing itself” to be thought about religion. Since the appearance of the original article, Nancy has made good on the promise of continuing to pursue a project of the deconstruction of Christianity, which to date spans two books, *Dis-Enclosure* and *Adoration*, and other related publications. It would be impossible to make definitive judgments regarding Nancy’s project, which is ongoing and constantly being amended and supplemented by new writings. We will restrict our discussion of this ever-expanding enterprise to the features that distinguish Nancy’s sense of deconstruction from that of Derrida.

Writing of “the deconstruction of Christianity” in *On Touching*, Derrida claims that at a time when there is a *doxa* spreading powerfully on the subject of “*globalization*,” at a time when Christian discourse informs in a confused but sure way all the import of this *doxa*, a *doxa* that carries with it the “world [*monde*],” with its vague equivalents globe, universe, earth, or *cosmos* (in its Pauline usage), Nancy’s remarks may be intersecting with a strand of the Heideggerian project: “to dechristianize the thinking of the world, [of] the ‘globalization of the world’ [*mondialisation du monde*], of the world insofar as it worldifies or worldizes (*weltet*) itself” (TJLN, 54). Nancy’s stated project of the deconstruction of Christianity, Derrida writes, “will be the test of a dechristianization of the world.” This dechristianization, however, “will be a Christian victory” (TJLN, 54). In a number of places in *On Touching*, Derrida “speculates,” in his own words, “rather freely” about Nancy’s project even though, by his own

admission, he has only been familiar with the title of the project (TJLN, 54 n. 31). The deconstruction of Christianity, he comments later in the text, "appears to be a task so difficult, so paradoxical, almost impossible, always in danger of being exposed as a Christian hyperbole" (TJLN, 220).

In *Rogues* Derrida details the dissimilarities between deconstruction as he sees it and other similar projects, among which one could include Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity. In addition to pointing out the contrast between deconstruction and critique, Derrida summarizes these other differences as consisting of four features.

(1) The status of *logos*: Compared to deconstruction, Heideggerian *Destruktion* proceeded in the name of a more "originary" reinterpretation of *logos*. In contrast to deconstruction, it never really opposed logocentrism and was never against *logos* (ROG, 150 n. 14).

(2) The role of diagnosis: Derrida's deconstruction, distinct from the one practiced by Heidegger, never took "the objectifying form of a knowledge as 'diagnosis'" (ROG, 150 n. 14). Derridean deconstruction is "inscribed, undertaken, and understood in the very element of the language it calls into question" (ibid.). Moreover, it never associated itself with themes such as "after" or "post," death (of philosophy, of metaphysics, etc.), "completion," "surpassing," "overcoming (*Überwindung*)" or the end (ibid.). For deconstruction, it was never a matter of "the end of metaphysics" and that its closure did not signify the end. For, the closure of metaphysics does not surround or enclose something like "Metaphysics" in general and in the singular.

(3) The role of Luther: One should not only say "*Luther qui genuit Pascal*," Derrida remarks, but perhaps also "*Luther qui genuit Heidegger*" (ibid.). Derrida refers to the Lutheran legacy (*destructio*) of Heideggerian deconstruction in *On Touching* by cautioning that if "we do not want to mix up all the 'deconstructions' of our time," we should "never forget this Christian (Lutheran, Pascalian, Hegelian, Kierkegaardian, Marxian, etc.) memory" of Heideggerian deconstruction (*Destruktion*), which will never leave us when reading Heidegger (ibid.). In Theses 19 and 20 of *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), discussing the difference between Aristotelian Scholasticism's *theologia gloriae* and Paul's *theologia crucis*, Luther translates the Pauline term "destroy [*apolo*]" from *I Corinthians 1* into Latin as *destruere*, "to pull down, to dismantle, to destroy" (see Luther 1957). Heidegger first used the term *Destruktion* in his winter semester 1919/20 lecture course, when referring to Luther's *destructio* of Aristotle (van Buren 1994).

"A 'deconstruction of Christianity,' if it is ever possible," Derrida cautions us, "should therefore begin by untying itself from a Christian tradition of *destructio*" (TJLN, 60). He adds that "the theme and word *Destruktion* designated in Luther a desedimentation of instituted theology (one could also say ontotheology) in the service of a more originary truth of Scripture." Despite his great respect for this tradition, Derrida explains, "the deconstruction that concerns me does not belong, in any way, and this is more than obvious, to the same filiation" (ROG, 150 n. 14).¹¹

(4) *Aporia*: While giving credit to what his thought owes to Aristotelian *aporia* and the Kantian antinomies, Derrida acknowledges “the privilege” that the deconstruction he favors grants to “aporetic thought” (ROG, 150 n. 14).

In the Ninth and Tenth Sessions of the first year of the recently published *La peine de mort* [*Death Penalty*] seminars (1999–2000) Derrida distinguishes Nancy’s venture from the mode of reading that, since the 1960s, he has named deconstruction. Linking the overarching themes of his seminar, perjury and pardon, Derrida notes that Christianity is the religion that calls itself and is in its very essence the “religion of a forgiveness of sins” (SPM, 333). This singularity of a religion of forgiveness, he points out, is indissociably linked to “the Passion, thus the death of God, of the son of God, of God the Father made man as sacrifice and redemption of sins” (ibid.). Derrida notes that it is difficult to dissociate this idea of forgiveness from some death of God (the death of God, of course being “a Christian theme par excellence”) from his resurrection and redemption (SPM, 334).

Thus Nancy’s project of the deconstruction of Christianity, Derrida writes, is “the very thing [*la chose même*], business, and initiative of Christianity” (ibid.). For, what is a deconstruction that “overcomes itself as it is carried out, that sublates itself” (using Nancy’s own description in “The Deconstruction of Christianity”) but “a Christian deconstruction.” Derrida states that by “the other deconstruction,” the deconstruction that overcomes itself, we must understand a Christian deconstruction, pointing out its Lutheran legacy, a legacy also shared by Heideggerian *Destruktion* (ibid.). After all, Christianity, for Nancy, is what has been in a state of self-overcoming, a state that belongs to its very inner logic.

But one can, perhaps, Derrida suggests, think another deconstruction, “a deconstruction without sublation of this deconstruction,” in other words, a deconstruction that does not sublimate or overcome itself, what in a parenthetical remark during the session he calls “a radically non-Christian deconstruction” (SPM, 334n.). The question still remains, Derrida wonders rhetorically, whether or not “to self-deconstruct” amounts to the same thing as “‘to ask forgiveness’ or to pass through the ordeal of forgiveness” (SPM, 334). In the seminar, the indemnity of the unscathed, posed as the question of “religion” in “Faith and Knowledge,” also emerges as the question of the death penalty. What both religion and the death penalty share, Derrida states, is a similar concern: “to come out *unscathed* [*sortir indemne*]” (ibid.). In the seminar Derrida deems “a deconstruction of death” to be insufficient since it involves a pre-understanding of the meaning of death, which itself must rest on the determination of the instant of death, the supposedly objective knowledge of what separates life and death. For Derrida, it is not enough to deconstruct death in order to assure one’s salvation. As a result of this deconstruction, nothing (neither life nor death) “comes out unscathed [*ne sort pas indemne*]” (SPM, 328).

But what does “to come out unscathed” mean? In Session Ten, Derrida explains that indemnity – providing a further gloss on a crucial term in “Faith and Knowledge” – can

either mean “*being-unscathed* (that is, safe, sound, intact, virgin, unhurt, *heilig*, undamaged, holy)” or “*being-indemnified*, that is, being rendered once again unscathed, made unscathed, that is, paid, reimbursed by the payment of a compensation, redemption, by the payment of a debt” (SPM, 334). Derrida equates the death penalty’s fantasy of a “calculating decision that attempts to put an end to finitude, to master the future, and to protect itself against the irruption of the other,” with “what is called religion” (SPM, 349). But this “phantasm of the end of finitude” is the “other side of an infinitization,” an infinite survival (*ibid.*). In other words, we desire to give ourselves death and to infinitize ourselves by giving ourselves death in a calculable, calculated, decidable fashion. This “phantasm of infinitization at the heart of finitude, an infinitization of survival assured by calculation,” he states, “is at one with God” or “with belief in God, the experience of God, relation with God, faith or religion” (SPM, 350).

What religion and the death penalty have in common, then, is that in the desire to come out unscathed, they wish to master finitude and put an end to it. Since according to Nancy the trajectory of Western philosophical thought is inseparable from Christianity’s trajectory and since the closure of metaphysics entails its own self-overcoming, it is Christianity, and its major tenets such as resurrection, incarnation, creation, and eternal life that require further thought and deconstruction. Yet Derrida’s later writings on the topic of “religion” demonstrate that the very thing to be thought is not simply Christianity but rather the unscathed. Further, Derrida shows that the desire for being unscathed, safe, and intact – religion’s desire – is bound to fail: for what desires to be safe and intact (the follower of a religion and not the dead one) is irreducibly auto-immune.

Notes

- 1 Due to changes in “fair use” (copyright) laws the three epigraphs chosen for this chapter were removed, since all epigraphs require permission and the publisher did not wish to obtain permission for them. I have thus reproduced the epigraphs below in this note. It is highly ironic that epigraphs have been excised or their use not permitted in a volume devoted to Derrida. After all, more than any thinker, it was Derrida who questioned the “proper” boundaries of a text, making the *exergue*, the *parergon*, the *outwork*, the *footnote*, etc. – the list of these terms is endless – the very subject of his writings.

The spoilsport, killjoy [*Le trouble-fête*] that I have remained . . . like an incorrigible choirboy, and Jewish no less (TJLN, 59).

In the end, I would prefer a real classical resurrection (Jacques Derrida, quoted in Nancy 2004c, x).

intact adj. – Lat. *intactus*, from negational prefix *in* + *tactus*, past participle of *tangere* “to touch.” *Le Petit Robert: Dictionnaire de la langue française*: intact adj. – 1. “A quoi l’on n’a pas

touché" (1835), "Qui n'a pas subi d'altération, de dommage" = entier 2. Vierge 3. Sauf. *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*: intact adj. 1. untouched, especially by anything that harms or diminishes: entire; uninjured.

- 2 References to the two aspects of *salut* in Derrida date back at least to "Avances" (1995), further developed in a number of texts since 1996: CIR; GD; FK; AEL; DFT; TJLN.
- 3 See Naas's exemplary analysis in Naas (2012).
- 4 For informative treatments of *On Touching*, see Miller (2009, 245–305), Bennington (2010), and McQuillan (2008, 2009).
- 5 See note 8 for Nancy's comments on the untouchable precisely in relation to culture.
- 6 For other discussions of resurrection by Nancy not discussed here, see "Blanchot's Resurrection" in Nancy (2008b).
- 7 The Untouchables (*Dalit*): "ground," "suppressed," "crushed," "broken to pieces" (Sanskrit). First used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, historically associated with Hindus, the term Dalit refers to those who pursued activities and held occupations considered as "polluting" and ritually impure among the Hindus, such as those involving butchering, leatherwork, removal of refuse, animal carcasses, and waste. They were segregated and banned from full participation in Hindu social life and consigned to work as manual laborers cleaning streets, latrines, and sewers.
- 8 Interestingly the description that Nancy provides in *Noli me tangere* of a dead person uncannily fits Derrida's description of a specter. At first, Mary Magdalene does not recognize Christ, for a dead person (*un mort*), as Nancy explains, "no longer properly appears" (2008a, 28). It is "the appearing of an *appeared and disappeared*" (28). I discuss Nancy's reading of Blanchot in Saghafi (2012).
- 9 This is a modification of the phrase "For there is deconstruction and deconstruction" (TJLN, 60). McQuillan (2008) refers to this phrase in his analysis of the relation between Derrida and Nancy.
- 10 Nancy (1998); I have used the English version of the essay, which subsequently appeared in Nancy (2008b).
- 11 As a rejoinder, Nancy (2008b, 189) calls for a "closer examination" of the uses of the term *destructio* in Luther before an eventual revisiting of the employment of *Destruktion/Zerstörung/Abbau* in Heidegger and of *Abbau* in Husserl.

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Derrida and the Trace of Religion

JOHN D. CAPUTO

The question of Derrida and religion may be thought of in three stages. When Derrida's work made its first appearance, the common assumption was that he was a secular and atheistic thinker and no friend of religion. Later on, in a fascinating semi-autobiographical text, Derrida surprisingly spoke of "my religion about which nobody understands anything" with the result that he had been "read less and less well over almost twenty years" (CIR, 154–155). That semi-autobiographical text proved to be a touchstone that set off a widespread reassessment of the question in the broader setting of what has been described as the "theological turn" in continental philosophy. But by the turn of the century, under the impact of Badiou and Žižek, another mood had taken hold among the philosophers, this one aggressively materialistic and atheistic, antagonistic to both postmodernism and religion. I want to address these three stages by arguing that when early on Derrida undertakes a deconstruction of ontotheology we ought not to be too quick to say that he is not a man of religion, and when later on when he speaks of his religion we must understand this religion is also without religion. Finally, and with all that in mind, I want to assess Derrida's fortunes amidst the current renewal of anti-religion.

1. The Trace (of) "God"

From the start, for all his seeming godlessness, there was the trace of theology in what Derrida was saying, a ghost that constantly haunted him and disturbed his readers. When he wrote that *différance* is neither a word nor a concept, neither

sensible nor supersensible, neither this nor that, that sounded like Meister Eckhart and other negative theologians (MP, 5–6). So early on Derrida faced the accusation, unless it were a congratulation, that this is not the godlessness it seems to be but really a negative theology, and *différance* is its hidden God, the *deus absconditus*. Of course, that “hidden God” was not true, but in deconstruction one learns how not to say “of course” and, of course, how not to say it too easily. One learns not to feel too secure about the difference between an accusation and a congratulation, or even about standard-form distinctions like philosophy and theology, or faith and reason.

But, of course, Derrida is an atheist and *différance* is not the God of negative theology, not the *hyperousios*, not the omnipotent creator of heaven and earth. Nothing could be more obvious. One way to put this is to say that *différance* is not transcendent but transcendental, and so it is not a word or a concept, a being or a hyper-being, just because it is the condition of tracing under which all such “effects” are “constituted,” to use the usual language of transcendental philosophy. But then, of course, this transcendental is not the business as usual of transcendental thinking. *Différance* is not transcendental consciousness, not a transcendental subject of any sort, but the very difference between conscious and non-conscious, subject and object, and even more to the point, the very space between transcendent and transcendental. Accordingly, *différance* is not God because it is the difference between God and creatures, comparable to the difference between signifiers in linguistics. But *différance* is also not language or transcendental linguisticity, which is why Derrida settled on “trace” and scuttled “signifier.” It is also not transcendental for the very good reason that it does not prescribe a fixed set of conditions under which something is made possible. On the contrary, the conditions under which something is made possible in deconstruction are also the conditions under which it is impossible, like a proper name. The very thing that makes a name possible, repeatability, make it impossible for it to be purely proper. Nothing can be purely proper, or purely improper, or properly pure or impure. *Différance* spaces, but then again it does not “do” anything, like spacing, which would require that it be an agent, whereas agents are one of the things constituted in *différance*. That is why Derrida says it is best to think of it in the middle voice, as the condition under which things – anything, subjects or objects, agents or patients, creators or creatures – get themselves spaced. Far from the God beyond Being of Christian Neoplatonism, *différance* is more like the *khōra* of Plato’s *Timaeus*.

So, of course, *différance* is not the hidden God, not even the most hidden of all hidden gods, *but* – there is always a “but” in deconstruction, the necessity for which might be another candidate for its least bad definition – the resources of negative theology, the brilliance of its “detours, locutions, and syntax,” the infinite sensitivity to learning how not to speak, the deftness with which it goes about erasing its own traces, are indispensable to something we are describing by constantly saying what it is not. So true is this claim that Derrida does not trust anything that is not “contaminated with negative theology” (DNG, 309–310). The way the negative

theologians speak of “God” is exemplary of the way in which everything, whether it is about God or not, whether we are negative theologians or not, should be said – under erasure, saying it and unsaying it, writing it and striking it out, both at once. What we say is a “contingent unity,” provisionally stitched together, “forged” (with all of the ambiguity of that word) in a particular context and under determinate conditions, subject to change in the next moment. This contingent unity is – and this is the word that caught on – “deconstructible,” that is, recontextualizable, revisable, reformable, and transformable, for better or for worse. Nothing guarantees that the revision will not be a disaster, deconstructibility being the condition of both the best and the worst.

“God” for Derrida is not *différance*, but the effect of *différance*, an effect of the “play of traces.” That does not erase God for deconstruction but puts it on the tracks or in the trace (of) “God.” “God” is not an infinite being for Derrida but an inexhaustible example of the sort of thing that *différance* is always doing, or rather, of what was always getting itself done under the conditions of *différance*. For whatever else it is, the name (of) “God” is a name, and a fascinating example, for example, of a proper name, at least in the religions of the Book, where “God” functions as a proper name, of the one and only God, in the upper case. That is the result of capitalizing (on) a common noun, god and the gods, and the matrix of a terrible and endless politics. When he first met Hélène Cixous back in the 1960s, the two young atheistic Jewish emigrants from Algeria began corresponding about her first book, *Le prénom de Dieu*: is “God” a first name or a last, a family name or a surname? (Cixous 2011). As a name, it admits of endless recontextualizability, let us say, of endless midrash, of strange and exotic commentary, which deprives it of its propriety. Indeed, “God” provides the occasion of an infinite repeatability that cannot be contained within the limits of theism or monotheism or even excluded from atheism. Might there not be a “religion” without God, or a God without “theism?” Recontextualizability means that you can never say “never.” You cannot say that “green is or” can never make sense. Maybe even, in virtue of this repeatability, after the death of God, the name of God can be resurrected and live on (*survie*). The name of God is superlative example of something excessive, *hyper*, *supra*, *au-delà*, something that drives language, thought, and practice to their limits, arguably the best example of the play of traces, which in German is itself a play on words (*zum Beispiel*). So there are numerous places in the 1960s and 1970s in which Derrida, atheist that he is, evidently to his devilish delight, enters into this play, like the treatment of the name of God as the trickster in a scatological history in the essay on Artaud (WD, 182), which belongs to the best traditions of a dissonant and dissident midrash by an impudent and heretical rabbi.

However, the most famous and intimidating example of the name of God is precisely to arrest the very play which that name exemplifies and incites, to put that play to rest and to organize everything else around itself as the stable and stabilizing center, the signifier to end all signifiers, the last word and the first, outside the text

(OGC, 71). That is “God” as a “transcendental signifier,” at the sound of which every knee shall bend and every dance shall stop. Enter “theology” as the police of thought sent in to keep the peace, to put down the right to ask any question. That is the example of “God” that comes under attack in *Of Grammatology*, against which all the aphoristic energies of *différance* are lined up, which fills in the meaning of Derrida’s “atheism.” Against this God deconstruction poses a relentless exposure of the contingencies of our beliefs and practices, of the earthly provenance of things that pass themselves off as having dropped from the sky. The most famous things Derrida had to say about God and classical theology early on revolve around this self-appointed center. All the resources in deconstruction are called upon to displace and decenter this pretender to the throne which is trying to confine the energy of *différance*. So Derrida will sometimes identify the “theological” function, as if there were just one, as the very idea of founding, grounding, centering, in a word, “onto-theo-logic,” a compound word coined by Kant and made famous by Heidegger, which meant the grounding of all beings on a first and unshakeable being. That center is not only the place of God, but the place God holds, which means that God can be replaced by other ontotheological place-holders, like Ego, Spirit, Will-to-Power, Matter, or even the State, the Party, or Capital, which Žižek likes to call, following Lacan, the Big Other, anything that keeps the peace (and on which we can make a profit). But Derrida considers that the peace of death, eternal rest, *requiescat in pace*. Pure peace is pure death; pure life is pure death. Deconstruction has to do with the endless restless play of traces in which we forge such factual unities as we need to get ourselves through the day, with an acute sense of the contingency of it all, of the open-endedness of the future. That of course is risky business, and it may not end well, but that’s life, or rather life/death, this *vita mortalis*, as Augustine called it, in which all the risk and flavor and dangerous joys of life are concentrated.

Of course, Jacques Derrida was an atheist. But deconstruction deals with ghosts and traces, with undecidable fluctuations and crossovers; it does not deal with stable categories and well-formed binaries like “theism” and “atheism,” and so we do not close the books by him on religion repeating this well-known biographical fact. The uniquely grammatological effect would be to warn us that any possible theism is haunted by atheism, even as any possible atheism is haunted by theism, which means that both theism and atheism are unstable categories exposed to an event that they cannot see coming. That is why Derrida warned us about the dogmatic theologians of atheistic metaphysics (OGC, 323 n. 3) while saying of himself only, “I quite rightly pass for an atheist” (CIR, 155), meaning that this is what they say and “they” are “right.” But when “they” say something “right” that is shorthand and a contraction of something more complex and multifarious, for the unbeliever in him is disturbed by the ghost of faith and so never has any peace. But neither is there any peace for the “believers,” who are kept up at night by the ghosts and demons of unbelief. The believers can at best rightly pass for Christians, Jews, or Muslims, while never being identical with themselves. In virtue of everything deconstruction stands

for, one cannot say I am, *je suis, c'est moi*, this or that, say, an atheist. Johannes Climacus understood this very well by declining to say he is a Christian; at best he is trying to become one. Whenever we are emboldened to say *je suis*, according to Derrida, we are also inadvertently conceding that we are following (*suivre*) something else (A), following the trace of something that solicits us, something *je ne sais quoi*.

So what is the upshot for “religion” in all this? Grammatology deals with the energy of the trace. In the sphere of the trace, the trace of a faith, *foi*, or a faith in the trace, is unavoidable. How else could one be related to a trace except by faith? By the same token, what else can faith be except faith in a trace? Deconstruction takes place in and as the space of the trace and therefore of faith. But if religion turns on faith, might there not be a religion that turns on a trace while standing free of the very God sent in to arrest the play of the trace? However unnerving such faith may be to the true believers, as it was, it is no less unnerving to the true unbelievers, which explains why the unbelievers would later on be surprised to hear Derrida talking about his religion. Either way, this faith cannot be contracted to the endless wars between believers and unbelievers, between the opposing *croyances* of the believers and the unbelievers (FK, 7–8). These are simply opposing “positions,” ham-fisted and distracting binary oppositions of what one rightly passes for, both of which beg to be displaced, in virtue of a deeper “affirmation” or faith.

That explains why, from very early on, many of those who knew something about faith and traces in religion and theology were taken by deconstruction (Detweiler 1982; Mackey 1983), while those who knew little or nothing about such things thought that, of course, deconstruction is a straight out and simple dismissal of religion and theology. But anyone who knows anything about deconstruction, which deals in traces, knows it is not “straight out” or “simple” or a “dismissive” of anything, including “God.” Even though the negative theologians were always singing the praises of non-knowing, one thing they knew very well was that we should be infinitely reluctant to use the name of God with any sense of closure. They knew without knowing or putting it this way that the name of God is an effect of the play of traces. It is a name “forged” in the fires of language, time, history, and culture, in gendered and political circumstances, in which something is getting itself said and done, for better and for worse, the problem being we do not know what.

2. “My Religion, About Which Nobody Understands Anything”

The first quick impression that Derrida created during the heyday of deconstruction in the 1960s and 1970s, at least among those who based their judgments upon academic gossip and what they could gather in conference hotel bars, was one of skeptical relativism and an indecisive apoliticism. But the more considered import of the work that Derrida was doing in those days is best described as disseminative,

multiplicative but always affirmative, of which his early interest in James Joyce would be illustrative. He was not saying no; he was saying yes, and repeating it, *oui, oui*. He was interested in something that Joyce called the “chaosmic,” in maintaining the precisely calibrated tension between order and chaos that is the condition of novelty, not in spreading chaos pure and simple. He sought a kind of productive ambiguity not simple confusion, something destabilizing not disabling. He was interested in keeping things open-ended, just sufficiently unstable and mobile to remain exposed to their future. Because giving things a future is the most genuine way of all to preserve a tradition, he once said, with a twinkle in his eye, that he was a genuinely conservative person (DNS, 8), even as deconstruction was regarded as poison by conservatives, both cultural and religious. Deconstruction does not destroy things but affirms them by giving them a chance. This chance exposes them to risk but that risk is their only chance.

One thing Derrida never said in the 1960s and 1970s is that anything is or can be “undeconstructible.” The first time he did say such a thing, as far as I can determine, was in 1989, in response to a challenge coming from Drucilla Cornell, on which he took the occasion to respond to this growing distortion of his work. Cornell asked him to address the question of “deconstruction and the possibility of justice” before the audience of the Cordova Law School, an apt audience, since deconstruction had the look of something like an outlaw and Cornell’s “and” had the look of a dare: How can you dare speak in the same breath of this infamous deconstruction *and* justice? To which of course, Derrida famously replied, that deconstruction is justice (*et/est*), and that justice in itself, if there is such a thing, is not deconstructible, while the law is deconstructible (FL, 14–15). The deconstructibility of the law – its revisability, repealability, recontextualizability – depends upon the undeconstructibility of justice. The escape hatch in this text, which looks at first like a headlong retreat to Platonism, is the “*s’il y en a*,” “if there is such a thing,” and of course there *is* not. Then perhaps justice is an inexistent Regulative Idea in the Kantian sense? Not so, because that would require an essentialist ideal of justice, approached asymptotically although never reached empirically. It is just in virtue of *différance* that there can be no universal essences, but only so many effects of the trace, so many provisional inscriptions and temporary formations meant to get us through our works and days, like laws, which are deconstructible.

But if this is neither Plato nor Kant, who or what is it? What “is” justice and what can it mean to say that it is “undeconstructible?” The answer is that justice is an injunction or an imperative, a call or a solicitation. Justice calls, we respond. Justice solicits, we answer. Justice pipes, we dance. Justice happens, opens up in the gap between justice in itself, if there is such a thing, and the law. The gap is structural; it cannot be closed, and that makes justice both possible and impossible. The law is written in the language of universality (repeatability), which is to say that the law is written to begin with, while justice has to do with the singularity of the situation in which justice happens. Justice happens, if it happens, in the singular, in the

moment of justice, when justice is called for, when we do our best (or our least worst) to respond to what the singular situation demands. We can never say that a nation or a law or a person or even a deed “is” just. That would represent a kind of freeze-framing and hence injustice and idolatry. The most we can say is that justice happens, if it happens, in the blink of the eye, in the moment of singularity. Justice indeed rules but it can never be contracted to a rule; it must always suspend the rule in order to invent the rule that it follows in an undecidable situation, and justice is urgently needed now even though it never arrives. These “aporias” of justice make justice impossible but in so doing they provide the only conditions under which justice is possible (FL, 22–29).

This all sounds familiar to a theologically tuned ear. We have heard these aporias before, when Johannes de Silentio itemized the “problemata” besetting ethics (Kierkegaard 1983, 54–121). The ethical is the universal but the religious is singular, which make ethics (like the “law”) a “temptation,” something we lapse into in order to escape responsibility. So the critics have it only half right: deconstruction is indeed the exception to the ethical (to the rule, to the universal), but it is not the aesthetic exception, which tries to fly beneath the radar of the law and to avoid decision at any cost, but the religious exception, which passes through the universal in order to endure the ordeal of deciding the undecidable. If we have heard this before, it was not in Plato or Kant. This is father Abraham, and deconstruction is not the aesthete trying to evade the principle of contradiction but the knight of faith. This is more midrash from Reb Derrida, another telling of the binding of Isaac (the Akedah), another performance, or per-ver-formance, of the famous story from Genesis. Derrida repeats but alters Kierkegaard’s staging (who is repeating Paul’s): “Abraham” holds the place of the subject of responsibility, “God” holds the place of the Other (the neighbor or the stranger) who demands justice, and Isaac is left holding the bag, that is, the place of the “other others” whose interests will inevitably be sacrificed. In meeting our responsibility to the Other one in the madness of the moment of decision, that very decision produces an incision, so that when justice happens, justice is also divided against itself. Undecidability is not indecision but the condition of (im)possibility of decision-cum-incision, comparable to the ordeal by which Abraham is tested in Genesis. The “paradox” of Abraham becomes the “paradigm” of ethical singularity (GD, 58–73).

Justice, then, is neither a Platonic form nor a Kantian ideal but a quasi-Abrahamic call. Justice “is” not, which means that it can only be the object of a “faith” that wants to make it come true. As such, Derrida further dares to call it a desire, a dream, and even a “prayer,” which are the stock in trade of a “religion.” It is a desire beyond desire (GT, 30), beyond the day to day economic desires for things that are plausible and possible, a desire of “the” impossible, which is the only thing we can truly desire (CIR, 3), all other desires being unworthy of the name. *By* “the” impossible, he says, everything begins (GT, 6). We get started by the impossible, are set in motion by it. We desire justice, we dream of justice, of the impossible, which visits itself upon us

like a voice that startles us in the night. He is always dreaming of and desiring the impossible, praying and weeping over *the* impossible, which is not a simple logical contradiction but a hope beyond hope, something we love, for which pray and weep. The impossible – one of the best-known names of God – is a matter for prayer and now he tells that he is a man of prayer, that he has been praying all his life and that if we understood this about him, we would understand everything (CIR, 40, 183), and the failure to realize this is the source of all this misunderstanding of his work over the last 20 years. Every night, he says, he kisses his tallith, and he will not take it with him on the road for fear it will be lost or stolen (AR, 326–328).

Here the religious analogue is Augustine, not (Kierkegaard's) Abraham, and this time he per(ver)forms deconstruction as a religion by restaging the *Confessions* (CIR). Once again the reader comes upon a man at prayer, whose back is turned to us as he addresses someone else. The speaker (Augustine/Jackie – he has confessed his real name to us), an emigrant from North Africa (Numidia/Algeria) who has emigrated to the Big Apple (Rome/Paris) to make his career, is praying to “you” (God/Geoffrey, his mother, us, and many others), while their mother (Monica/Georgette) lies dying on the northern shores of the Mediterranean (Ostia/Nice). But how can he be praying if he does not believe in God, if he rightly passes for an atheist? But the real question is, how can he not be praying? How can he be doing anything other than pray? If, as Jean-Louis Chrétien says, prayer is a wounded word (Chrétien 2000), whose word is more wounded than someone who does not know to whom he is praying, or if his prayer will be heard, or if there is anyone to pray to? Prayer is a marvelous example of *the* impossible, where the very impossibility of prayer is what sets prayer in motion, requiring us to do what we cannot do, to give what we do not have. That is why every prayer is prefaced by a prayer to be able to pray. Lord, we pray you, teach us how to pray. If he knew to whom he was praying, he would know everything and then he would not need to pray.

Derrida's atheism, then, is no obstacle to his prayer or his faith or his religion, which, to borrow his own expression is a “religion without religion.” That means it “repeats” religion without the dogmas, creeds, rituals, prayer books, candles and buildings of a concrete and historical religion (GT, 49), whether that be the Jewish one he grew up with, the Christian one by which he was surrounded and harassed as a child, or the lost Islamic one back among his Algerian ancestors. Thus, far from constituting an obstacle to his religion, Derrida's atheism is a crucial ingredient in it, a precious non-knowing and non-believing that isolates the very structure of faith. If he believed in the God of the great monotheisms, that would ruin his religion; it would ruin everything. It would arrest the play of the event that takes place in the name of God, of what is stirring there, haunting and soliciting us from a time immemorial and from an unforeseeable future. The trace (of) “God” is infinitely precious, even if, especially if, it does not pick out a fact of the matter or correspond to a being out there or up there somewhere. The name of God is the trace of a memory and a promise, a promise that is not undermined but made all the most promissory by the

fact that we do not know who is making the promise, that we have absolutely no assurance that it will be kept or that we will be saved. On the contrary, faith is only faith if it lacks every assurance that we are saved, only if we are exposed by it to the worst risk.

Everything happens *by* the impossible. Hospitality is hospitable not when we invite our friends (the “same”) to our homes where they are welcome, but when we welcome the unwelcome, when we are visited unexpectedly in the night by the other, by the stranger about whom we have no assurance at all that he has not come to harm us. Forgiveness is forgiveness when we forgive not the forgivable, those who are sorry and make amends, but the unforgiveable, the impenitent who reject our offer. Hope is hope when we hope against hope, when hope is lost. Love is love when we love the unlovable (the enemy). Faith is faith when it is impossible to believe. Deconstruction is structured like a religion. Deconstruction retraces the movements of a passion that we call in Christian Latin “religion,” repeating the movements of what Augustine called at the very beginning of the *Confessions* our restless heart (*inquietum est cor nostrum*), which is very close to the heart of deconstruction, which has a heart, an “open heart” turned toward the event (PF, 29–30). The open heart of deconstruction begins by an impossible mourning, by a loss that cannot be repaired, which Benjamin called a weak messianic, weak because the lives of the dead were ruined beyond repair. Deconstruction begins by a hope for the coming or the in-coming of the other (*l’invention de l’autre*), of an other we cannot see coming (PSY1). The religion whose movements are repeated in deconstruction turns on a faith in the future, not the future present (*le futur*) that we can plan for and reasonably expect, a poor and futureless future, but *l’à venir*, the “to come,” the very structure of hope and expectation that the future will always be better. But sometimes it is not. Of course it is not, and that is what demands faith, which is the stuff of things that are seen not and that may visit upon us the worst violence, so that our faith exposes us, structurally and inescapably, to evil, which is what Derrida means by radical evil. That is all to say that faith and hope and love are risky business and not for the faint of heart.

Derrida’s religion turns on an underlying faith (*foi*) that cannot be contracted to a determinate belief, a *croissance*, be that “belief” a confessional religion or a professional anti-religion, a theism or an atheism. That is why there is not the least inconsistency between Derrida’s religion and his “secularity” (*laïceté*), no more than there is between a tax collector and a knight of faith (Naas 2008, 62–80). The difference that makes a difference in deconstruction is not between religious belief and secular disbelief, theism and atheism, differences that are completely indifferent to faith and of no consequence in deconstruction, but the difference between a structure that is closed to the future and one that is not, one that maintains its exposure to the future and puts itself at risk and one that does not. That is difference between deconstruction and what resists deconstruction. A *croissance* is a circle that threatens to close in upon itself and attempts to keep itself safe from the future, that keeps itself secure

on every side, secure in its belief or disbelief from the approach of the other, which shuts down the risky business of faith in what we cannot see coming. Of course, “faith” and “belief” are not two ships passing each other in the night. Deconstruction is not just serving up one more rigid binary of its own. On the contrary, the confessional faiths are constantly being haunted by this deeper, more uncertain and spectral faith, which is why confessional theologians often find themselves in trouble with the powers that be in their own confession. They dig so deeply that they tap into the subversive and underlying *foi* which seeps into their work. Then they find themselves confessing, circum-fessing, that we do not know who we are, or to whom we are praying, or for what, or even if there is anyone to whom to pray, that we do not know what we say or what we pray when we invoke the name of God. Then they also find themselves out of a job.

Make no mistake. Derrida is not talking about a supernatural faith in an eternal destiny offering everlasting redemption. All that, to employ the language of Bultmann, has been “demythologized” in Derrida. But the result is not a “religion within the limits of reason” (of pure reason) but rather what Derrida calls, in a remarkable passage in *Rogues* (ROG, xiv–xv) “an act of messianic faith – irreligious and without messianism,” inscribed in “khōra.” Khōra is a Platonic trope drawn from the depths of the *Timaeus* not from the heights of the *agathon* of the *Republic*. Derrida employs it as a nickname for *différance* in order to signify its function as the irreducible medium in which all our beliefs and practices are “inscribed” or “constructed,” thereby rendering them deconstructible, and this precisely in virtue of what is undeconstructible, the impossible, in which we have a certain faith. This faith is not exactly in “history,” which is too reassuring, too teleological, and too metaphysical a name for him (NEG, 362), but in the absolute future, in the unforeseeable “to come” of whatever order or register is under discussion, be it politics, ethics, or the law, be it art, science, or religion. Importantly the subject matter of the to-come under discussion in *Rogues* is a messianic faith in the future of reason and of democracy, in the “weak force” of reason and democracy (elsewhere it is justice, the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, etc.) which solicits us but has no army to back them up.

On the surface of this khoral plane a “call” arises, “the call for the thinking of the event.” The call says “come” (*viens*), yes, to the coming (*invention*) of the event (*événement*) and it comes in response to the call that the event first makes upon us like a stranger in the night (ATON, 164). Yes, yes, *viens, oui, oui*. The call calls *to* and *from* and *for* the “to come” (*à venir*). Deconstruction may be seen as the grammar of an infinitive, the grammatology of the infinitival event of the to-come. As an infinitival structure the pure messianic lacks a (de)finite proper name, as opposed to the concrete messianisms which deal precisely in proper names, with God as a proper name, which pick out a (de)finite entity, a first being. The call “bears every hope” although it remains “without hope.” It thus has the same structure as Paul’s “hope against hope” (Romans 4:18) while also being separated by an abyss from Paul. Paul thinks that the God of Israel will intervene at just this point of hopelessness, while Derrida

entertains no such hope. Derrida's hope is hopeless, meaning he does not think that there is some being out there somewhere who is coming to save us (Žižek's no-Big-Other). Nothing assures us of our safety, so this faith and hope are structurally exposed to the worst violence. His hope is not in a (de)finite entity but in the infinitival "to come" itself, in the very structure of hope and expectation itself, if there is such a thing, a certain hope in hope as such, not in any entity who can save us, which is not far from Tillich's point that to treat God as an existent entity, a (de)finite being, is to render God finite, a form of atheism! The hope of the concrete messianisms, which is funded by a proper name, turns on what Derrida calls the "teleology" of hopefulness, or what in theology is called the "history of salvation" and even more tellingly "the economy of salvation." This economy or teleology means the good deal promised by the Good News, in which a flickering faith, now through a veil darkly, is redeemable upon delivery at death for unveiled eternal vision then. That is a foreseeable salvation underwritten by an identifiable (de)finite God, which thinks "revelation" means it stands free of khōra/*différance* and makes contact with some kind of absolute warrantor of hope. Derrida's more austere hope and faith in the weak force of the to-come is foreign to any strong and robust economy of salvation, but it is not foreign to salvation as such, to *salut* as the salutation to the coming of the other. Such faith and hope are foreign to the God (*Dieu*) of the concrete messianisms but not to the event hailed in the name of God, *à Dieu*, that is, *adieu*, "the 'come' or 'go' in peace," in the face of the wholly other (Levinas), where, as Derrida famously added, every other is wholly other, thereby profoundly transforming Levinas.

We can now see more clearly the difference between the religion of Augustine in the *Confessions* and that of Jackie in "Circumfession." The difference is not, as the confessional "faithful" are inclined to view it, that Augustine is engaged in a true prayer in a serious religion while Derrida is an atheist whose prayer is phony and whose religion makes a mockery of a true religion. The difference is not between a true man of prayer and an impostor. The difference is that Augustine knows the name of the one to whom he prays, and knows the name of what he is praying for, and he enjoys the confidence that the one on the other end cannot fail in the end, while Derrida's prayer lacks every such assurance. Augustine's prayers are filled with proper names while Derrida prays an anchorite prayer in a desert khōra in a community without community (PF, 35, 42). But the difference is *not* a matter of true prayer and true religion versus a phony prayer in a phony religion. Indeed one could argue, if one wanted to start another religious war, that Derrida's prayer is more purely prayer, a still more wounded word according to Chrétien's idea of prayer, more wounded than the *Confessions*, since Augustine has all the comforts of the universal, as Johannes Climacus said – the tradition, the community, the liturgy, the "centuries" – whereas Derrida is really hanging on by a prayer.

Derrida thus produces a remarkable portrait of a more radical religion, composing a kind of post-phenomenology of a more radical experience of the to-come, and in particular of the events of faith and hope and prayer for the to-come that undermines

the classical distinctions between faith and reason, theism and atheism, religious and secular. He displaces these received distinctions by following the traces of an underlying call or solicitation by which everything we do is driven, in politics, ethics and the law, in science, art and religion, by which everything is solicited, in response to which they rise up. He shocks the sensibilities of the faithful with his heretical atheistic quasi-Jewish even slightly Arabic Augustinianism, while also managing to scandalize the secularists by exposing himself to the contamination of “faith” and “prayer.” He brazenly dines with sinners, outcasts, and lepers on either side of the standard divide, whether they are guilty of the sins of secularism denounced by religion or the contagion of religion denounced by secularism. Depending on the strategic needs of the situation, one might call what he does a religion without religion, a theology more radical than confessional theology, or an atheology more radical than the business as usual of atheism, all of which reminds us of the lesson of *Glas*, that deconstruction does not answer to any classical bell. It answers only to the ringing of “the call for a thinking of the event *to come*.”

3. The Return of Anti-Religion

With the death of Derrida in 2004, the last of the *soixante-huitaires* was gone and the new millennium was underway, bringing it with still a third phase, a reaction against the so-called “theological turn” or the “return to religion.” The religious turn had gained a footing with the growing interest in Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion along with the fascinating texts of Derrida from the 1980s and 1990s we have just discussed. But under the impact of Badiou and Žižek a generation of younger thinkers emerged, seeking a return to the modern and its critique of religion. They have called for a new materialism and a new realism, a restoration of the purity of reason and mathematical science. They affirm the original Copernican Revolution, not the devious one devised by Kant which effectively undermined science for the subsequent history of continental philosophy. In their hands, “postmodernism” becomes a term of abuse employed in a drive-by shooting of a complex body of work, which unhappily has included Derrida. The theological turn becomes a *reductio ad absurdum* of continental thought: if that is where it leads us, something is seriously wrong. Postmodernism is used as a synonym for undermining truth with fiction, political decision making with an anemic political correctness, and objectivity and certainty with subjectivistic relativism. Interestingly, this attack from a secular left found a friend in theology as well, in the “Radical Orthodoxy” of John Milbank and his circle (Žižek and Milbank 2009). Whatever their differences with atheists, theologians are more comfortable with straight-up dogmatic certitudes than with Derrida’s exquisitely delicate readings of the undecidabilities that interrupt dogmatic thinking at every turn.

Žižek is a good case in point. His taunting of deconstruction in this regard may be charitably read as partly rhetorical, since he credits Derrida with being an emancipatory force early on in his life growing up under the heel of the Party. As I pointed out above, what Žižek is arguing in his recent excursion into “death of God” theology as the death of the Big Other is interestingly close to Derrida’s religion without religion, which was pointed out 30 years ago by the theologians (Altizer et al. 1982; Taylor 1984). Furthermore, Derrida’s conception of a faith inscribed in *khōra* that runs deeper than either theism or atheism takes account of the groundlessness ground beneath us while avoiding Žižek’s grim sense of the void. This would all have to be sorted out carefully. But, unfortunately, Žižek’s bombastic prose obscures the points on which his views and Derrida’s converge and it only serves to whip up widespread antagonism against deconstruction as “boring,” to use what he seems to regard as a reliable philosophical category.

A movement of younger thinkers marching under the flag of “speculative realism” has been galvanized by Quentin Meillassoux (2008), a student of Badiou’s, who brings two charges against the continental tradition from Kant to the present and both have a direct bearing on Derrida today. He accuses this tradition of “correlationism,” a kind of subjective idealism which reduces the world to a correlate of consciousness, going so far as to claim that thinkers like Foucault and Derrida are “creationists,” who do not think the world existed before human consciousness. While there are passages in Husserl that might suggest subjective idealism, this cannot be sustained by a careful reading of his texts (Zahavi 2003). The charge is still more perplexing when made against the post-Husserlians, since the history of phenomenology after Husserl was a series of positions that distanced themselves from Husserl on precisely that point. When this kind of objection was made to Derrida, he replied that everything he has to say about the coming of the other “is put forward *in the name of the real*,” that nothing is more realist than deconstruction (NEG, 367). But if “correlationism” is a red herring, Meillassoux’s second charge, “fideism,” aimed specifically at the “theological turn,” is more on the mark. By fideism, Meillassoux means that postmodern theory has been put to work in a Kantian way, delimiting knowledge and reason in order to make room for classical religious faith. Postmodernism becomes a skepticism about reason that allows theology in the back door. I have argued that this is true of some versions of postmodern theory (Caputo 2012), but it has no purchase in deconstruction, once you distinguish faith and belief. If anything, deconstruction should be seen as delimiting religious beliefs and certainties, that is, the *croyances* of the confessional religions, in order to make room for a deeper *foi* in the future, which includes the future of reason (*Rogues*) and the hope for a “new Enlightenment.” That is why Radical Orthodox theologians criticize Derrida’s religion without religion as a modernist religion within the limits of “pure reason”! Once again, the Derridean strategy seems superior to all the alternatives, not to resuscitate the old war between faith and reason, but to excavate the deeper sense of *foi* that keeps both a rationalist reason and

confessional beliefs from closing in upon themselves while conceding that faith does not insure our safety.

Of course, if you can't beat them, it is always possible to join them. That is the strategy of a recent work that offers a re-reading of Derrida as himself a kind of proto-speculative realist (Hägglund 2008). This has the advantage of offsetting the distortions of deconstruction that circulate through the new materialism but it comes at a high cost. In a closely argued book, Martin Hägglund contends that since *différance* is spacing-timing, it is perfectly cut to fit materialism. This is carried out by way of an aggressive re-reading of Derrida – philosophizing with a hammer, he says – which enforces quite a harsh logic upon deconstruction. Deconstruction is said to run in neutral, conducted in a completely “descriptive” mode, having erased every trace of ethical normativity and religious aspiration (Hägglund 2008, 31). Read this way deconstruction is shrunk down to a series of warnings about the unpredictability of the future and the logic of the double bind, since whatever is done in time is done under conditions that will see to it that it comes undone. Hägglund is insightful about the logical conundrums of deconstruction and there are long stretches in the book which helpfully spell out what Derrida is doing. But the descriptive hypothesis puts him at odds with every major commentator in the literature and, more importantly, as he is often forced to concede, with Derrida himself.

Hägglund's argument against ethics is that deconstruction is not an ethics of coming of the other since the other who is coming might well be evil and so cannot be regarded as the “good as such.” Consequently Derrida's texts on the coming of the other are neutral descriptions of the hazards of running into the other. Derrida saw that objection coming and explicitly warned against drawing such a conclusion.

The openness of the future is worth more; that is the axiom of deconstruction, that on the basis of which it has always set itself in motion and which links it, as with the future itself, to otherness, to the priceless dignity of otherness, that is to say, to justice . . . Someone might say to you: “Sometimes it is better for this or that not to arrive. Justice demands that one prevent certain events (certain ‘*arrivants*’) from arriving. The event is not good in itself, and the future is not unconditionally preferable.” Certainly, but one can always show that what one is opposing, when one conditionally prefers that this or that not happen, is something one takes, rightly or wrongly, as blocking the horizon . . . for the absolute coming of the altogether other, for the future. (NEG, 105, 94)

Deconstruction, Derrida is saying, is the hyper-affirmation of the infinitival “to come,” not the simple affirmation of this or that (de)finite other one. Deconstruction is “against ethics,” but that means it resists proposing a set of norms or prescriptions, including a rule to “always welcome the other,” which would be just one more rule relieving us of the need to make a decision in the singular situation. Ethics is for Derrida what it is for Johannes de Silentio, a “temptation,” because the recourse to

norms and prescriptions is the abdication of “responsibility.” True, the other is not the good as such because deconstruction is not the thought of the good but the thought of the event, which is the occasion of responsibility. Deconstruction is the affirmation that the future is always worth more, not as a matter of fact but as a matter of faith and hope. Deconstruction is not less than ethics (descriptive), as Häggglund claims, but more than ethics or what Derrida call hyper-ethics (AR, 248; GT, 71), and it takes place not in a neutral space but in the appellatory, messianic, vocative, charged, and hyper-valORIZED space of the call.

With respect to the question of religion, Häggglund argues that the condition under which religion promises more life – after time, the afterlife – represents the loss of life, death, no more time, no more life, so not only does Derrida deny that God exists (garden variety atheism) but further that he denies that we can even “desire” that God exist (radical atheism). The argument fails on every level. As regards classical theology, the argument is circular and simply assumes that there cannot be a sphere of being outside space and time, forcing Häggglund at one point to actually declare *différance* to be a principle of being not of experience. It is true that *différance* has to do with space and time, but for that very reason, if there is an argument against being outside space and time, it is not found in deconstruction. About such a possibility, Derrida says deconstruction has no leverage and it should not have (EF, 39). As regards the history of religion, the argument is innocent of the many versions of God and religion which entertain no such idea of life outside space and time. Finally, as regards Derrida’s religion, the argument is at best a missed opportunity. While excavating the conundrums of a mortal life, while seeing that for Derrida life is not undermined but made all the more precious by its mortality, Häggglund fails to see how deeply such “atheism” enters into Derrida’s “religion” and how it becomes a moment in the more profound and more profoundly risky faith and hope and “desire beyond desire” described above. Our mortal life is the very stuff of what Derrida calls “my religion about which nobody understands anything,” with the result that he is “read less and less well.”

Because the ghosts of deconstruction haunt every dogma, be it religious or secular, theistic or atheistic, Derrida’s equal-opportunity hauntology invites attack from both the left and right, both the secular and religious. If deconstruction started out spooking religion, it has lately been spooking secularism, too, which goes to show it is spooky business, all about the holy and unholy ghosts that haunt our works and days. Deconstruction, we must admit, believes in ghosts.

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Derrida and Islamic Mysticism: An Undecidable Relationship

RECEP ALPYAĞIL

In this chapter, I describe the place of Islam in Jacques Derrida's writings and emphasize its quasi-centrality for deconstruction. This would give us rhizomatic traces for a comparative investigation between the Islamic negative theology and deconstruction. I propose to read some of the mystical texts in Islam with an eye of deconstruction. In this way, I will point to a different kind of negative theology which can accompany Derrida's deconstruction.

It is well known that Derrida's relation with negative theology is bidirectional: he is charged by resifiting the procedures of negative theology in his detours, locutions, and syntax (see MP, 6). In the discussion that came after the original 1968 presentation of "Différance," an interlocutor said that "[*différance*] is the source of everything and one cannot know it: it is the God of negative theology." Derrida responded: "It is and it is not" (Wood 1988, 84). Derrida accepts that he is fascinated by the syntactical strategies and discursive resources of negative theology; but, he also criticized it since it reserves a positive predication beyond all negations. In other words, the language of negative theology has an affirmative dimension, and all negations are used as an exaggeration. So, despite all "syntactical" affinities between negative theology and deconstruction, there is a deep "semantic" divide between them. Similarly, in Islam, there is a mystical tradition, exemplified by M. Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1239 CE), which does not rely on negative theology alone because of the same trap. This tradition considers the negative language about God without the positive one and the positive language without the negative one to be equally problematic. Thus, to prefer one over the other does not offer any solution. The right attitude to describe God and everything else is to use both types of language together at the same time

and space, like saying “He/not He,” “yes and no.” As the main point of this chapter, I will show that there is a correspondence between Derridean deconstruction and Ibn ‘Arabi’s mysticism in Islam.

1. “Islam, This Particular One and Not Islam in General”

Derrida refers to Islam many times in his writings, especially in his confessions. His life begins in a Muslim country, Algeria (FWT, 144). He describes himself as “a little black and very Arab Jew” (CIR, 58). This period of time, if we say with Derridean words, *given time/debt*, had haunted him in his texts.

Derrida is very sensitive when he uses the word *Islam*, “this particular one and not Islam in general (if such a thing exists)” (ROG, 31). This phrase, “if such a thing exists,” is a very similar idiom to “deconstruction if such a thing exists.” He emphasizes that “Islam does not mean Islamism, and we should never forget it, but the latter operates in the name of the former, and thus emerges the grave question of the name” (FK, 6). On this question, the question of the name and of naming, some say Derrida spent his entire academic life.

Derrida includes Islam in *the history* of the “so-called Western tradition (Jewish, Greek, Christian, Roman, Islamic)” (NEG, 38). For him, without a new kind of historical investigation about what happened with Islam during the last five centuries, it is impossible to understand what is going on today (TRN, 8). His relationship with Islam is even deeper. Derrida says,

It’s true that everything I do, everything I do, is haunted by this question of Judaism, Christianity . . . and Islam, and Islam. I try again and again not to forget Islam in these texts – “Faith and Knowledge”, for instance. And if I may, if I may refer to this: there will be a book of “mine”, so to speak, because it’s made up of various texts of mine with an introduction by a young friend named Gil Anidjar who, in his introduction, insists upon precisely the couple Judaism/Islam no less than the couple Judaism/Christianity. So, it’s very complicated. The simplest answer would be, “Yes,” I’m constantly trying to discover – this is not original – I am constantly trying to understand, or stabilize what happened between Judaism and Christianity and Islam. (FT, 46)

The importance of Anidjar’s introduction lies in his usage of the term “Abrahamic” (AR, Editor’s Introduction, 11). This term takes a quasi-central place in deconstruction. Most of the Derridean quasi-concepts such as *justice*, *hospitality*, *forgiveness*, *faith*, *messianism*, *gift*, *sacrifice* take their roots from the Abrahamic tradition. “The filiations of these concepts are Abrahamic – that is, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim” (WA, 74). For example, when Derrida refers to “forgiveness,” he says,

As enigmatic as the concept of forgiveness remains, it is the case that the scene, the figure, the language which one tries to adapt to it belong to a religious heritage (let’s

call it Abrahamic, in order to bring together Judaism, the Christianities, and the Islams). This tradition – complex and differentiated, even conflictual . . . (CF, 27–28)

Actually, deconstruction acquires its value mainly from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions of these concepts. In this regard, to follow a vein of the Abrahamic tradition means that Islam is also a part of this tradition:

Now if the type of deconstruction that I try is, let's say, Abrahamic – Jewish, Christian, Islamic – this would imply that it's a part of this tradition, it's the memory of this tradition, and also that it affects this tradition in an unpredictable way. (EF, 33)

The notion of the “Abrahamic” appears as a path from deconstruction to Islam; but some people will say that Islam and deconstruction still seem to be an odd conjunction. Indeed, this conjunction, “Islam and deconstruction,” is very complicated. Still, without this “and,” deconstruction is alone. Derrida reminds us that “If only you knew how independent deconstruction is, how alone, so alone, all alone” (EC, 282)! *And, deconstruction would always go with, together with something else.* It always needs an “AND . . .” In this regard, “Islam and deconstruction” is just another “and” in the series of ideas, concepts, and thoughts with which Derrida has placed deconstruction in conjunction: such as “deconstruction and literature,” “deconstruction and history,” “deconstruction and architecture,” “deconstruction and Christianity,” and so on. “Islam and deconstruction” might be another example of the logic of *supplement*. It is possible to extend Derrida's deconstruction through new directions like Islamic tradition. But this extension does not mean that I am going to translate deconstruction into a completely Islamic context. Both sides in this conjunction, deconstruction and Islam, will affect each other in unpredictable ways.

Derrida provides some examples through which we are able to understand the *nature* of the relationship between Islam and deconstruction. He draws our attention to different interpretations of Islam: “One of our responsibilities is also to be attentive to this multiplicity and to demand constantly that not everything be confused” (NEG, 115). He suggests not only to look at the diversities, but also to increase them. To develop freely different readings of both the exegetical and political side of Islam responds best to an anti-Islamism tainted with racism (NEG, 122). In *Rogues*, Derrida himself gives a very good example of being attentive to this multiplicity. One of the two tasks of theoretical or hermeneutic knowledge, he writes,

would consist in an enormous, urgent, and thorough historical study of everything that does and does not authorize, in different readings of the Koranic heritage, and in its own language, the translation of a properly democratic paradigm. But it would also be essential to study and take seriously into account (something for which I have neither the time nor the competence), beginning with the Greece of Plato and Aristotle, with the political history and discourse of Athens but also of Sparta, of Hellenism and

Neoplatonism, what gets passed on, transferred, translated from Europe *by* pre- and post-Koranic “Arabic,” as well as by Rome. I don’t know how much weight to give in this whole story to the rather troubling fact that Aristotle’s *Politics*, by a curious exception, was absent in the Islamic importation, reception, translation, and mediation of Greek philosophy, particularly in Ibn Ruchd (Averroes), who incorporated into his Islamic political discourse only the *Nicomachean Ethics* or, like al-Farabi . . . (ROG, 31)

Different readings of the Koranic heritage imply the multiplicity of hermeneutic readings of the sacred texts. There is no single interpretation that represents Islam exclusively. Deconstruction itself can be another reading of the many readings of the Koran. In the above quotation, Derrida uses very special phrases: “the Islamic importation,” “reception,” “translation,” and “mediation.” These phrases address the *plasticity* of Islamic thought. Namely, there are always different kinds of genres, ways, potentialities, in Islam. We can see this dimension of Islam better if we look from the perspective of deconstruction. Ibn Ruchd or al-Farabi’s affinities with Greek philosophy were the *appearance* of this plasticity. In the next part of this article, I hope to reveal this plasticity in a more detailed way through the mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabi. Within his mysticism, we could really see the *plasticity* of thinking in Islam.

2. Islamic Mysticism: Theological Engagement with Deconstruction

In contemporary Derrida studies, we see a growing interest in his writings on Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart, and Angelus Silesius. One of the main issues in these studies is negative theology. There is a huge literature about the relationship between negative theology and deconstruction especially from Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist points of view. However, very little is written about Islamic negative theology and deconstruction. Thus, why do we not see any book about Islamic negative theology and deconstruction? Why does Islamic negative theology seem to have a place without place? We can see some clues for the answer in Derrida. He says:

I had therefore decided *not to speak* of negativity or apophatic movements in the Jewish or Arab traditions. For example. To leave this immense place empty, and above everything that might connect the name of God with the name of the Place, to remain thus on the threshold – is this not the most consistent apophysis possible? What one cannot speak of, is it not best to pass it over in silence? (PSY2, 186)

The reader may be tempted to answer Derrida’s question with a “Yes, it is!” Namely, it is best to pass over in silence that of which one cannot speak. But, this silence cannot be the answer of deconstruction. There should be other reasons to be silent in this immense place. In his famous article, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” Derrida writes about Islamic negative theology:

Three stages or, in any case, three places to avoid speaking of a question that I will be unable to discuss, so as to deny it in some way, or so as to speak of it without speaking of it, in a negative mode: what of negative theology and its ghosts in a tradition of thought that is neither Greek nor Christian? In other words, what of Jewish and Arab thought in this regard? For example – and in everything I will say – a certain void, the place of an internal desert, will perhaps allow this question to resonate. (PSY2, 167)

Derrida confesses that he did not speak about the Islamic side of the issue. It is very interesting that this citation occurs at the end of the discussion of Dionysius. Some may ask: “Why did he avoid talking about Judaism and Islam whereas he extensively discussed Greek and Christian traditions?” Derrida seems to respond to this question via another question: What of Jewish and Islamic thought in this regard? This is a question we should ask to ourselves: Why does this question resonate in his texts? Derrida was well aware that he did not take account of the Islamic side of the negative theology. He already accepted this: “to say nothing, once again, of the mysticisms or theologies in the Jewish, Islamic, or other traditions” (PSY2, 189). Derrida’s confession of silence about Islamic theology and mysticism leaves the door open for theologians and Muslim mystic philosophers to ponder on deconstruction’s relation to Islamic mystical theology. Today, there are a lot of studies in Jewish negative theology and deconstruction, in contrast to the little work on the Islamic side of this tradition. However, a different kind of negative theology could be derived from Islamic mystical theology.

It is well known that Derrida’s main criticism concerning negative theology is *hyperessentiality* (a being beyond Being). That is, negative theology presumes a positive predication beyond all negations. It is always on the track of something hyper-present, hyper-real, or sur-real. The language of negative theology implies affirmation, and negations have been used as an exaggeration. When Meister Eckhart seeks to go beyond these determinations, the movement that he sketches seems to remain enclosed in ontic transcendence.

“When I said that God was not a Being and was above Being, I did not thereby contest his Being, but on the contrary attributed to him a more elevated Being” (Quasi Stella matutina . . .). This negative theology is still a theology and, in its literality at least, it is concerned with liberating and acknowledging the ineffable transcendence of an infinite existent, “Being above Being and superessential negation.” (WD, 183)

The ontological wager of hyperessentiality is at work both in Dionysius and in Eckhart (PSY2, 143). Derrida asserts that this hyperessentiality pertains across the whole history of negative theology. Here, the deconstructive movement is directed toward the promise of presence given to intuition. The promise of such a presence often accompanies the apophatic voyage. The vision of a dark light, it is still the immediacy of a presence (PSY2, 144).

In this stage we should ask: What is the situation of Islamic negative theology with respect to Eckhart or Christian forms of negative theology? First, the idiom, what is called “negative theology” is a discourse, and Derrida himself accepts that it says both too much and too little (ON, 61). Therefore, how can we speak suitably of “Islamic negative theology”? Is there a negative theology, as Islamic negative theology? A single one? A regulative model for the others? Can one adapt a discourse to it? Is there some discourse that measures up to it? Is there ever anything other than a “negative theology” of “negative theology” (PSY2, 152)? These deconstructive questions open up ways to speak about the Islamic negative theology. In Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist traditions, there is a way that cannot be reduced to negative theology.

[T]he expression “negative theology” names most often a discursive experience that is situated at one of the angles formed by the crossing of these two lines. Even if one line is then always *crossed*, this line is situated in that place. Whatever the translations, analogies, transpositions, transferences, metaphors, never has any discourse expressly given itself this title (negative theology, apophatic method, *via negativa*) in the thoughts of Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist culture. (ON, 63)

The term, “Islamic negative theology” should be crossed out or written under erasure as ~~Islamic negative theology~~, because it fails to embrace the plurality within Islam; indeed, “Islamic mysticism” is the name that accommodates best that irreducible multiplicity.

Second, there are many types of mystical theology or “non-negative theology” in the Islamic mystical tradition. Due to the limits of this paper, we can consider only one thinker, Ibn ‘Arabi. He lived in Spain, and he is known as one of the greatest masters (*Shaykh al-akbar*) in the Muslim world. His philosophical insights are still alive. In “Three Questions about *Tombeau of Ibn ‘Arabi*,” Jean-Luc Nancy presents him as “the Arab, wandering, neither from the east, nor from the west” (Nancy 2010, 113).

If we look at Ibn ‘Arabi’s texts from a deconstructive point of view, we see a slightly different gesture from Christian negative theologians. Derrida’s main criticism concerning negative theology was *hyperessentiality* (a being beyond Being). Negative theology presupposes a positive predication, *hyperessentiality*, beyond all negations. That is, the language of negative theology eventually leads to affirmation. Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas are parallel to those of Derrida, when he declares that the apophatic language that we aim at God restricts him.

For those who [truly] know the divine Realities, the doctrine of transcendence imposes a *restriction and a limitation* [on the Reality], for he who asserts that God is [purely] transcendent is *either a fool or a rogue, even if he be a professed believer*. For, if he maintains that God is [purely] transcendent and excludes all other considerations, he *acts mischievously and misrepresents the Reality* and all the apostles, albeit unwittingly. He imagines

that he has hit on the truth, *while he has [completely] missed the mark*, being like those who believe in part and deny in part. (Ibn 'Arabi 1980, 73, emphasis added)

Ibn 'Arabi's assessment for the language of negation, as a kind of limitation seems very similar to Derrida's view. For Ibn 'Arabi, the negation is a limitation because it limits God with a "non-limitation." One who is distinguished from what is limited is himself limited because he is not that thing; to deny all possibility of limitation is itself a limitation, the Absolute being in a sense limited by His Own Absoluteness (Ibn 'Arabi 1980, 135).

If this is the case, how can we refer to God, or can we still refer to God? Which way (*via*), if there is any way, is correct? Ibn 'Arabi suggests a way *otherwise than being*. He invents a language which makes it possible to speak beyond the dichotomies of negative theology.

If you insist only on His transcendence, you restrict Him./ And if you insist only on His immanence you limit Him. If you maintain both aspects you are right./ An Imam and a master in the spiritual sciences. Whoso would say He is two things is a polytheist./ While the one who isolates Him tries to regulate Him. Beware of comparing Him if you profess duality./ And, if unity, beware of making Him transcendent. *You are not He and you are He . . .* (Ibn 'Arabi 1980, 75, emphasis added)

Negation and affirmation are two aspects of the same thing for Ibn 'Arabi. Thus, he does not prefer negation to affirmation or negative theology to kataphatic theology. He does not use the hyperbolic language, which reserves *hyperessentiality* beyond all negations. The right attitude, if there is any, is to see the One in the Many and the Many in the One, or rather to see the Many as One and the One as Many. "He" is not the name of God alone; "he" is the name of everything else as well. The right attitude to describe God and everything is "yes and no," or, "He/not He." To say *He/not He* protects Ibn 'Arabi from falling into some artificial synthesis. This quasi-word, "He/not He," deconstructs the hidden positive side of negative theology. And also, it seems very close to Derridean idioms like *double science*, *double bind*, *double injunction*. Ibn 'Arabi seems to anticipate Derrida's own reasons for his objections to binary thought (Almond 2004, 24). Ibn 'Arabi's mysticism deconstructs the grammar of any positive or negative theology.

From a deconstructive perspective, Ibn 'Arabi's insistence on the simultaneity of everything, *He/not He*, acknowledges the illusion of the dualism, the fundamental mistake of believing God to be either "this" or "that," transcendent or immanent, "out there" or "in here." Both Ibn 'Arabi and Derrida reject binary thought as illusory and, at worst, as potentially tyrannical. If Derrida rejects binary oppositions because they veil an absence, Ibn 'Arabi rejects dualisms because they veil a presence in the Derridean sense (Almond 2004, 25). Ibn 'Arabi's mysticism remains *absolutely* independent, detached, perhaps redeemed, from the idea of redemption (ON, 71). Through

experiencing the unveiling of the divine self-disclosures, they understand the legitimacy of every belief and the wisdom behind every knot tied in the fabric of Reality, every possibility of ontological and epistemological delimitation represented by human subjects (Chittick 1994, 152–154).

3. An Undecidable Relationship

Derrida's connection with Islam is double-sided. The first side is, some say, negative because Derrida makes few references to Islam. Almond says,

Islam, it has to be said, stands on the periphery of Derrida's thought. For a writer who spent the formative years of his life in a Muslim country (Algeria), Islam has never really received any significant attention in his work. Out of the vast library of the Derridean corpus, barely half a dozen texts make some passing mention of Islam. (Almond 2007, 42)

Is the situation as bad as Almond presents? He may be right in a certain sense; but, this does not mean that the case of Islam in Derrida's texts is *phonocentric*. It could be suggested that Islam is the weak side of deconstruction; however, the economy of the weak is actually the economy of the strong for deconstruction. This is the double bind between the *ergon* and *parergon*. The constant parergal movements are barriers in ascribing only negative views to Derrida. If we want to understand the Islamic mysticism of Ibn 'Arabi in terms of deconstruction, we need to look at both sides. We have to read Derrida in the same way he reads others: by paying attention to *the tiny details, metonymies, or subtle tropes and connections*. Arguably, a particular discourse of Derrida might appear to be anti-Judaic, anti-Christian, or anti-Islamic, but it is also hyper-Judaic, hyper-Christian, or hyper-Islamic (NEG, 226). This brings us to the second and positive side of the relationship between Islam and deconstruction.

Derrida himself had encouraged attempts to establish a connection between deconstruction and Islam. He says:

I can imagine Buddhist, Jewish, or Muslim Theologians saying to me, "Deconstruction – we've known that for centuries." People have come to me from far Eastern cultures telling me just that. And I'm sure there are Jewish theologians and probably Muslim theologians who would say the same thing. (EF, 33)

Derrida's strategy, here, is very interesting: when he prefers to say "I'm sure" for Jewish theologians, for Muslim theologians he prefers to say "probably." I think the word "probably" is the more exact word for deconstruction rather than "sure." And, this very dangerous word "probably/perhaps" is a more essential word than any kind of "sure" for it. Perhaps, we should use deconstruction against deconstruction for

the deconstruction of deconstruction, if we want to speak about other traditions. *Surely*, we should use “perhaps” more often instead of “sure.”

Derrida always highlights that deconstruction is an open and ongoing process. So, if there is a relationship between deconstruction and Islamic mysticism, it will be open and ongoing. We have a very good example of this open and ongoing process in Ibn ‘Arabi and Derrida. Ibn ‘Arabi himself narrates his encounter with Averroes (1126–1198 CE):

Averroes was eager to meet me, because of what he had heard and what had reached him concerning what God had opened up for me in my retreat. . . . I was still a youth. My face had not yet put forth a beard, and my mustache had not yet grown. – When I entered in upon him, he stood up in his place out of love and respect. He embraced me and said, “Yes.” I said, “Yes.” His joy increased because I had understood him. Then I realized why he had rejoiced at that, so I said, “No.” His joy disappeared and his color changed, and he doubted what he possessed in himself. He said, “How did you find the situation in unveiling and divine effusion? Is it what rational consideration gives to us?” I replied, “Yes and no. Between the yes and the no spirits fly from their matter and heads from their bodies.” His color turned pale and he began to tremble. . . . since he had understood my allusion. (Chittick 1994, xiii–xiv)

Today, Derrida seems very glad to reciprocate in similar kind:

– Yes, and as the signature of a proper name is always a *yes*, an affirmation that promises to repeat itself, to confirm and countersign itself, therefore both to recall and forget itself in order to re-sign each time the first and the only time (*yes and yes, and yes*) . . .

– yes and no, then! Otherwise, and without no a yes would never be possible. Yes, you say, but also no, no?

– yes, yes. And yes . . . (EC, 301)

In conclusion, if there is any conclusion for deconstruction, these undecidable words, “yes and no,” point out the intersection between Ibn ‘Arabi’s mysticism and deconstruction that go beyond the limits of negative theology.

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Derrida and Education

SAMIR HADDAD

Derrida lived almost his entire life attached to educational institutions, his work was received across the globe predominantly in the academy, and he was politically and philosophically preoccupied with issues related to teaching and educational institutions for a decade (around a quarter of his publishing career). Nonetheless, education remains one of the least investigated themes in his oeuvre. Only a handful of monographs focus on the topic (Ulmer 1985; Trifonas 2000; Wortham 2006; Orchard 2011), and it is rarely discussed or even mentioned in the many introductory books devoted to Derrida's writings. Education thus remains an untapped resource for investigations, critiques, and extensions of Derrida's philosophy.

The majority of Derrida's writings on education are collected in *Du droit à la philosophie* (1990), translated into English as two volumes in 2002 and 2004, *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1* and *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. Apart from the book's introduction and a government report in its appendix (written in 1990 and 1989 respectively), the 20 or so texts it contains date from 1975 to 1985. This was a time when Derrida was intensely involved in public, political debates on the role and place of philosophy in the French education system. As a result, these writings remain heavily marked by the events surrounding the context of their production. In one sense this does not distinguish Derrida's work on education from his other publications. Derrida sometimes remarked that he almost always wrote in response to a particular event or invitation, and he rarely effaced the signs signaling the occasion of his texts' first delivery. However, this practice is heightened in his education writings, since, as befits the subject, Derrida spends significant time in them drawing attention to and analyzing the immediate pedagogical and

institutional contexts in which he is speaking and writing. In addition, many of these texts have a partial or incomplete character, taking the first steps in more comprehensive analyses that are not taken up elsewhere in Derrida's published oeuvre. "Education" thus does not refer to a single concept that can be easily abstracted from Derrida's corpus, as one might say of terms such as "the gift," "responsibility," or "hospitality," just a few of the notions he submits to deconstruction. Rather, education names a cluster of politically motivated reflections and investigations on a number of issues connected to teacher–student relations, educational institutions in France and the United States, philosophical research, and the nature of philosophy itself.

Two main public events orient Derrida's work on education – the proposed Haby reforms to French high school education in the mid-1970s, and the establishment of the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris in the early 1980s. The Haby reforms outlined a number of significant changes to the French school curriculum, among them making philosophy optional for the baccalaureate. This threat galvanized the Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement philosophique (GREPH), an organization committed to conducting research on teaching and learning in philosophy, which was formed a year earlier in response to drastic reductions in available teaching posts in the discipline. While GREPH aimed to instantiate an open and non-hierarchical structure, and at its peak had 600 members (Orchard 2011, 48), as one of its founders and its most prominent member Derrida was strongly identified with it in the public eye. It seems that the formation of GREPH and the Haby reforms prompted the explicit examination of education in Derrida's work, and his education writings of the 1970s all engage with issues closely connected to the organization's activities. A line can be traced from GREPH to the founding of the Collège International in 1983, an independent, non-diploma-granting institution supported by the French state that aimed to promote philosophical research in areas marginalized in existing academic institutions. Derrida was one of four philosophers charged with designing the Collège's structure, and he was its Director for its first year of operation. While some of Derrida's writings on education in the early 1980s were first delivered in North America, many of the philosophical issues he explores in them can be linked to the Collège's inception.

In this essay I use these two events to organize my presentation of the main themes in Derrida's discussions of education. What follows is by no means exhaustive, and is rather intended as an introductory map to guide future research.

1. Haby, GREPH, and Derrida's Turn to Education

In 1975, René Haby, the French Minister of Education, floated proposals for comprehensive reforms to the national school curriculum. As Vivienne Orchard discusses in *Jacques Derrida and the Institution of Philosophy* (2011), a remarkable work that stands alone as a comprehensive account of Derrida's and GREPH's activities in the

1970s and early 1980s, these reforms were presented as an effort to democratize and modernize French education. The system had remained relatively unchanged for around 100 years, and Haby aimed to update it by instituting a uniform education for all children up to the age of 14, introduce the new social sciences into the curriculum, and create greater student choice in their final years of schooling. However, the introduction of the new required a modification of the old, and one part of the old system targeted was philosophy. Up to that point, philosophy had been compulsory in the final year of high school (*la Terminale*) for boys more or less continuously since 1809 (the teaching of philosophy was suspended between 1852 and 1863, and was introduced for girls in 1925: Orchard 2011, 32, 44 n. 126). The proposed changes to philosophy were twofold: to introduce a compulsory three hours a week of philosophy into *la Première* (the second last year of high school), and to change the status of the eight hours a week of philosophy classes in *la Terminale* from compulsory to optional.

These changes were likely to have resulted in a large reduction in the number of students taking philosophy, with a corresponding reduction in the demand for teachers (Orchard 2011, 51–53). It was thus no surprise that when word of the reforms spread, a vigorous defense was mounted by the philosophical establishment. The discourse of this defense continued a venerable tradition going back to the late nineteenth century, in which the teaching of philosophy in high school was presented as a unique space of freedom threatened by an external authoritarian rule. This freedom was first located in the person of the professor. Unlike every other subject, the content of the philosophy curriculum was relatively undetermined, with the teacher organizing the class guided only by a list of general topics. Philosophy professors were thus idealized as free thinkers, “the author of their own discourse, the oral discourse of their *cours* ... they were now philosophers, each with his own personal style” (Orchard 2011, 35). And this understanding of the teacher implied an understanding of the teaching. Not being simple transmitters of doctrine, many in the profession saw themselves to be teaching freedom itself, developing the reflective and critical capacities of the minds of their students. This view fits well with an older trope also invoked by the discipline’s defenders (dating to Victor Cousin’s discourse in the mid-nineteenth century), which cast philosophy as the crowning achievement of the French education system. Already schooled in the other disciplines, in their final year students were now ready to receive this special instruction in freedom, an instruction that gave coherence to their education as a whole (Orchard 2011, 31). With France’s uniqueness in making philosophy compulsory in mass education, and the inscription of freedom in its national character, it was a short step to claim philosophy as responsible for the nation’s glory. Very few of philosophy’s traditional defenders resisted taking this step.

The firm opposition between the government reformers on the one hand, and the philosophical establishment on the other, is crucial to understanding the position that GREPH and Derrida took. They opposed claims made by both parties, resisting

the attack and the traditional defense. That is, they aimed to protect philosophy from the reforms, without lending support to those who wished to maintain the status quo. Part of their motivation can be traced to the marginal position within the university system occupied by many of GREPH's members. Derrida himself had held the somewhat lowly post of *maître-assistant* (the equivalent of Lecturer in the UK, or Assistant Professor in the US) at the École Normale Supérieure for the previous 10 years, despite having made a strong impact on the Paris intellectual scene with the publication of several important books. At the École his primary duties were to teach as an *agrégé-répétiteur*, a “repeater” responsible for preparing students for the *agrégation*. The *agrégation* was the most important teaching qualification in the French system, and Derrida's job was to transmit canonical interpretations of individuals and topics in the history of philosophy in order to maximize his students' chances of passing. Having no influence on the curriculum and unable to supervise research, Derrida had no academic power, as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus* (1988). More broadly, in contrast to the cuts of the early 1970s, the 1960s had seen a large expansion in the number of low-level teaching posts in the secondary and tertiary levels of the education system, driven by massive increases in student enrollments in the universities. But as noted in Bourdieu's earlier co-authored work *Reproduction*, this growth in enrollment was not accompanied by a corresponding growth of positions further up the academic ladder, such as professorial chairs (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 136–137 n. 25). A whole generation of young academics was now destined to remain in the bottom ranks of the teaching body, without hope of advancing. Derrida and many other members of GREPH thus had a special interest in transforming the academic structure of philosophy, something they had sought to do with little success since the events of May 1968.

With two opponents, themselves opposed, GREPH and Derrida thus had a double task – to prevent the particular reforms from coming to pass, while developing alternative reforms in their place. This required the invention of a new discourse for the defense of philosophy, and new understandings of the discipline and its relation to pedagogy. In what follows I examine Derrida's pursuit of this double task by focusing on his re-articulation of three themes, each one central to the traditional view: the role of the teacher; the age of the student, and philosophy's relation to a national language.

A. *The Role of the Teacher*

In his first publication focused explicitly on education, “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How it Ends,” Derrida challenges the image of the philosophy professor presupposed on each side of the debate over the reforms. He makes this challenge by questioning the coherence of the teaching body, in three ways. First, Derrida exploits the ambiguity in the phrase “teaching body [*corps enseignant*].” More commonly referring to the faculty as a whole, Derrida uses it to speak also of a professor's

physical body, and he suggests that the inability to decide the proper referent between these two uses follows from the teacher's representative function. He makes this point by discussing his own position in the system:

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. . . . With his students he must therefore make himself the representative of a system of reproduction. (WP, 75)

In its ideal, the *répétiteur's* sole job is to transmit philosophical knowledge generated elsewhere in the system. Lying at the bottom of the educational hierarchy, his individual body is irrelevant, fully absorbed into this structure of representation (and I use the male pronoun here to mark the fact that while there were female philosophy teachers at the time, the ideal remained male, something that Derrida here does not call into question). However, in a move resembling his early strategy of deconstruction, Derrida elevates this marginal figure to stand for all professors in the system. He argues that traditionally understood, all teaching functions according to a classical logic of signification, being the transmission of signified content by means of signifiers. All teachers are thus "repeaters" of a sort, even those supposedly the source of new philosophical knowledge. Further, Derrida displaces the traditional opposition by challenging the view that the individual teacher's body is fully absent from the scene. Rather, he speaks of this body's "erasure" and "withdrawal." Both present and absent, the individual teacher retains a measure of sovereignty (at the end of the essay Derrida speaks of his body as "glorious," evoking the Sun-king [WP, 90]), and so his body resists disappearing fully into the workings of the system. That is, no repeater ever purely repeats, for as an individual body he is always the site of an alternative teaching. The reference of the "teaching body" thus remains indeterminate, reducible to neither the individual nor the system.

Second, Derrida destabilizes the dominant understandings of the philosophy professor by arguing that there is a further division at work in the individual *répétiteur's* body. This division arises from the fact that teacher is charged with transmitting material he no longer believes in, content he has criticized at length in his research, and with dispensing "technical advice in the name of a jury and canons that in his eyes have been discredited." Derrida argues that this double structure carries over to the seminars the *répétiteur* teaches at the *École*, since there "he tries to help the 'candidates,' all the while 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" (WP, 77). In addition, the students themselves frequently share the same attitude, believing that the material they must study for the test is already outdated. At best, Derrida suggests, the two "exchange complicit winks" (WP, 76), agreeing to play by the rules of a suspect system in order to succeed.

Third, Derrida also questions the standard views by highlighting the indeterminacy between the teaching body, considered as the faculty or collective body of professors, and what is usually seen as its outside. While the faculty's power is "relatively autonomous . . . itself appointing the juries of its competitive examinations or theses, its commissions or advisory committees" (WP, 76), it is also the case, Derrida notes, that the State plays a role in these appointments. The president of the jury for the *agrégation*, for example, is named by the Minister of Education, thus allowing the State to "determine who (and what) will determine, in a decisive and absolutely authoritarian fashion, the program and the filtering and coding mechanisms of all teaching." Further, Derrida expands such "outside" forces to include "networks of tradition or repetition . . . which have perpetuated themselves since the beginning of sophistry and philosophy." I place "outside" in scare quotes to mark the immanent conception of power here supposed, for Derrida argues that this power only comes to be in the pedagogic scene itself. He thus resists conceiving of "a teaching without power, free from teaching's own power effects or liberated from all power outside of or higher than itself" (WP, 78–79). These remarks are relatively brief, but relate to Derrida's later, more detailed discussion of philosophy's relation to censorship and the State, which I discuss below.

In these three ways Derrida challenges the conceptions of the professor presupposed by his double opposition. The government reformers held the teacher to be purely representative, while the academic establishment idolized him as the embodiment of independent freedom. For Derrida, the philosophy professor fits neither of these images cleanly, being an impure combination of both sides of this coin.

B. *The Age of the Student*

In addition to teachers, the Haby reforms also concerned students. The proposed reduction in hours implied that an in-depth study of philosophy was inappropriate for students of a high school age. Arguing against this, the philosophical establishment clung to the traditional view, maintaining that in *la Terminale* the student was old enough to have been schooled in other disciplines, yet young enough to be open to philosophical instruction. Here too Derrida opposed both sides of the debate. While in favor of introducing philosophy into the primary school curriculum, his efforts focused on the teaching of philosophy in high school. (Others in GREPH explored teaching in primary schools, and extensive notes and transcripts from experimental philosophy classes taught in the fifth and sixth grades are contained in the collective 1977 volume *Qui a peur de la philosophie?*) The current system, Derrida argued, was woefully inadequate. Eight months was insufficient to advance in this subject being encountered in a certain way for the first time. But this was not to say that philosophy was wholly absent in a student's prior education. For Derrida also claimed that students were learning philosophy well before *la Terminale*, since "the 'philosophy' of the dominant social forces has already done its work through the other disciplines."

Waiting until the final year was thus too late, and in Derrida's eyes the philosophy being taught implicitly throughout high school was an "ideological impregnation" (WP, 161).

As a response, Derrida thus advocated extending the official teaching of philosophy across the final three years of high school. He supported his position by interrogating traditional assumptions on the role of age in philosophical education. This took place primarily in the 1977 essay "The Age of Hegel." Here Derrida analyzes Hegel's 1822 report to the Prussian State concerning the adequate preparation for students studying philosophy in the University. Hegel argues that in the Gymnasium students should study neither philosophy proper ("metaphysics") nor the history of philosophy. Instead classics, dogmatic religion, empirical psychology, and formal logic are the appropriate preparatory training. This sequence matches Hegel's own philosophy, a properly adult achievement that builds on these other fields. Hegel thus proposes that intellectual development follows a natural progression, an order he thinks is mirrored in the development of philosophy itself.

Derrida acknowledges the complexity of Hegel's position, noting in particular that he sought to resist the State's promotion of national character in education, and its emphasis on training for the professions and civil service. This resistance Derrida shares. Nonetheless, he is wary of Hegel's proposed alternative endorsing the teaching of "general culture," since such a notion "always remains highly determined in the contents it inculcates. Other forces of civil society manifest themselves here, and any analysis must be extremely vigilant in this regard" (WP, 144). Further, Derrida remains opposed to Hegel's overall position, since his particular understanding of progress in philosophical education "puts in place the very structure against which we are struggling. One could say that it excludes all access to the practice of philosophy before the University" (WP, 145–146). That is, Derrida argues that Hegel's view ultimately accords with the one advanced in the Haby reforms.

However, while opposing Hegel's position on the age appropriate to the study of philosophy, Derrida also criticizes what seems to be an obvious alternative, that of Victor Cousin. Cousin argued in 1844 in favor of teaching metaphysics in schools, a view grounded in a belief in natural truths that are accessible to all by the God-given gift of human reason. And as mentioned above, Cousin's discourse was used by those high in the French university hierarchy to oppose the Haby reforms. It is the recourse to nature, something Cousin shares with Hegel, which particularly concerns Derrida: "it is always by insisting upon the 'natural,' by naturalizing the content or the forms of instruction, that one 'inculcates' precisely what one wishes to exempt from criticism" (WP, 121). Further, Cousin agrees with the Hegelian view of philosophy as crowning the other disciplines (even as he rejects the need for a program of non-philosophical preparatory study), something Derrida also opposes.

Thus Derrida's challenge is to justify the teaching of philosophy across the final three years of high school, without falling into the trap of an appeal to nature, or of seeing philosophy as the ultimate achievement of education as a whole. He does so

by invoking a kind of progress in philosophy teaching, one “taken for granted in other disciplines,” as a “provisional strategic argument, borrowed from the logic of the adversary” (WP, 145). This is developed somewhat in “Philosophy and Its Classes,” a short article first appearing in 1975 in *Le Monde de l'éducation*. Here Derrida similarly invokes “the principle of a calculated *progressivity*,” and also aims to displace philosophy’s crowning position in proposing a reorganization of its relation to other disciplines. In particular, Derrida advocates bringing the discipline of philosophy into contact with the specific philosophies “*already* being taught through French literature, the languages, history, and even the sciences” (WP, 162). But these suggestions are brief and somewhat vague, and it should also be noted that Derrida soon switched to the language of “extension” rather than “progressivity,” in order to avoid some of the traditional connotations of the latter (WP, 112, 171).

It is only much later that a proposal to expand the teaching of philosophy is articulated in detail, in what can be seen as Derrida’s own report to the State, the 1989 “Report of the Committee on Philosophy and Epistemology.” This report was authored by a committee co-chaired by Derrida and Jacques Bouveresse, itself subordinate to a broader committee headed by Pierre Bourdieu and François Gros and commissioned by Lionel Jospin, then the French Minister of Education, to examine the contents of teaching across the entire education system. The report advocates treating philosophy “like every basic discipline,” and argues that it be taught over several years in a “cycle of *introduction, training, and specialization*” (EU, 251). The period of introduction begins in *la Première*, involving two mandatory hours of class per week. The main innovation here is to break this class up into distinct modules, organized by the philosophy professor “in collaboration with teachers representing three groups of disciplines: philosophy/sciences (mathematics, physics, and biology), philosophy/social sciences (sociology, history, geography, economics), philosophy/languages/arts and literatures” (EU, 251). The period of training is reserved for *la Terminale*, which should at the very least maintain its current number of hours. And the period of specialization occurs in the first two years of university, in all degree programs, “not only in literary, but also scientific, legal, medical, and other studies” (EU, 252). In this way a kind of progress in philosophical education is maintained, but one that rejects the view that philosophy is the superior discipline. “The teaching of philosophy must be conceived no longer as a final crowning, *but as a series of constitutive moments indispensable for all intellectual development starting from a certain level of knowledge and culture*” (EU, 255). Philosophy should accompany other disciplines without commanding them, a constant companion on a student’s intellectual path.

The 1989 report met with strong opposition from the main associations of philosophy professors, and was shelved without implementation (Peeters 2013, 410). However, while never institutionally realized, Derrida’s rethinking of the role of age in philosophical instruction remains one of the most substantial positive proposals he developed in his work on education.

C. *Philosophy's Relation to a National Language*

A third theme in the debate over the Haby reforms was that of philosophy's relation to the French national character, which Derrida addressed by focusing on language. In "The Crisis in the Teaching of Philosophy," first delivered in 1978 in Benin, Derrida proposes an opposition between philosophical language, which "retains in itself an irreducible connection to a so-called natural (or mother) language," and scientific language, which tends "toward a growing formalization" (WP, 105). While Derrida does not state it, these two poles can be aligned with the two alternatives being resisted – the traditional defenders emphasizing philosophy's special connection with France and the French language, and the Haby reforms promoting scientific language in the attempt to replace the discipline with the social sciences. Derrida's own view affirms and denies elements of both of these alternatives. He agrees that philosophy always takes place in a national language, yet he maintains that this language is itself a multiplicity, both in its many idioms and in its relations to foreign languages. At the same time, he argues that the universal impulse of scientific language is already internal to philosophy, even as this goal can never be realized. For Derrida, philosophy's language is thus natural and scientific, yet never fully or solely the one or the other.

Derrida develops this view further in the first two of a series of talks delivered in Toronto in 1984 entitled "Languages and Institutions of Philosophy." Here he focuses on Descartes's decision to write the *Discourse on Method* in French rather than Latin, a choice generally interpreted as a rebellious move against the schools as well as an affirmation of French identity. While not denying this interpretation, Derrida complicates it by exploring the historical background of Descartes's choice. A century earlier François I had decreed French to be the language of legal judgments, as a part of a broader imposition of French over both Latin and provincial dialects, which also involved promoting its use in literature and philosophy. Thus Derrida argues that Descartes's recourse to French

is not simply revolutionary, even if it seems relatively singular in the order of philosophy and if it looks something like a rupture. Though he in fact departs from a certain practice and renounces a dominant usage . . . he nevertheless follows the tendency of the monarchist State; one might say that he goes in the direction of power and reinforces the establishing of French law. (EU, 17)

In this way Derrida challenges the link between the French language and France. This link is not natural, but the result of a deliberate decision establishing the monarchy as the State, a decision Descartes's choice both profits from and reinforces.

Further, Derrida questions in several ways the importance placed on Descartes's choice of French. First, Derrida suggests that the *Discourse* can be read as a kind of translation of Descartes's earlier unpublished Latin text, the *Rules for the Direction of*

the Mind, since the two works share much in common. This threatens the originality of the *Discourse's* French. Second, Derrida argues that Descartes's decision is motivated less by a love of French than by its instrumental value, in particular in its pedagogical function of making his arguments accessible to weak minds and women. "Language, especially that of the written text, thus remains secondary in Descartes' eyes" (EU, 26). Finally, Derrida examines Descartes's belief in the possibility of a universal language that would follow the natural order of reason. This belief also undermines the view that Descartes was particularly attached to French. At the same time, Derrida notes that Descartes warned against hoping that such a language could ever be implemented, implying that philosophy must remain tied to the particularity of a natural language.

Thus Derrida reads Descartes, a thinker of unparalleled importance in the teaching of philosophy in France, to show that an exclusive link between philosophy, the French language, and the French nation cannot be maintained. In this way Derrida resists the discourse of the traditional defenders who tie philosophy to the glory of the nation. There is no special connection between studying philosophy and being French. Simultaneously, Descartes's pessimism in the success of a universal language also supports Derrida's position against the Haby reforms, with their attempt to remove philosophy and install the social sciences. The dream of a purely scientific language detached from all cultural origins remains equally an illusion. On the question of language, as with the role of the teacher and the age of the student, Derrida again fights two opponents at once, attempting to rethink this question in a manner anew.

2. The Institution of the Collège International de Philosophie

In response to the widespread outcry, the government postponed implementing the Haby reforms until 1981. The threat merely deferred, Derrida and GREPH maintained their opposition, and their activities reached a high point in 1979 with the États Généraux de la Philosophie. This meeting was not officially organized by GREPH, but many of the group's concerns were raised across the three days of discussion (Orchard 2011, 110–111), which 1200 people of all philosophical persuasions attended. In his discourse at the meeting Derrida reiterated his earlier views, particularly with respect to the extension of philosophical education, and also argued that the increased visibility of philosophy in the media (an allusion to the "New Philosophers") warranted particular analysis in the light of the attacks on the discipline (WP, 180–184).

The situation changed with the election of François Mitterrand as President in 1981. The threat of the Haby reforms was now eliminated, and during the campaign Mitterrand had even promised to extend the teaching of philosophy in high school. Mitterrand in fact did not keep his promise. But another opportunity arose for the expansion of philosophy with the request in May 1982 by Jean-Pierre Chevènement,

the Minister of Research and Technology, that Derrida, François Châtelet, Jean-Pierre Faye, and Dominique Lecourt write a report studying “the conditions for the creation of an international College of philosophy, center of research and education in interscientific research” (Châtelet et al. 1998, 2). The four philosophers circulated a letter nationally and internationally calling for advice and proposals for the Collège, to which 750 replies were received. The resulting document, known as *Le rapport bleu*, outlined various principles, ideas, and structures for the Collège. While not determining its precise form, in broad terms the report called for an institution focused on philosophical research marginalized in or absent from existing academic institutions, and for this research to be in constant contact and exchange with other disciplines and fields, ranging from the hard sciences to the performing arts. Its membership was to differ from other research institutions in France by maintaining an international character, as well as including a substantial representation of French high school philosophy teachers. There would be no permanent positions, to encourage fluidity in focus and a horizontal power structure. The report also placed specific emphasis on research concerning the nature of philosophy itself and on issues related to philosophical education.

While co-authored, much of the report bears the mark of Derrida’s thinking, especially as it had developed in his involvement with GREPH. Derrida was also appointed the Collège’s Director for its first year. He thus played an important role in the material realization of the institution. After this initial period, while Derrida participated in various events of the Collège over the next 20 years, he was never again active in the its day-to-day existence. Nonetheless, the substantial work Derrida did to found the Collège left its mark on his oeuvre, with the development of three new themes in his writings on education: the links between the State, censorship, and ends-oriented research; the nature of responsibility; and philosophy’s engagement with other disciplines.

A. *The State, Censorship, and Ends-Oriented Research*

Given the Collège International’s dependence on the French government for funding and recognition, it is not surprising that the relation between philosophical institutions and the State became a prominent theme in Derrida’s work at this time. The key text for Derrida’s thinking on this topic, and indeed for all of the themes discussed in his education writings of the early 1980s, is Kant’s “The Conflict of the Faculties” (1996). Derrida argues that Kant’s text was central in the debates preceding the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1810, and that this institution was the model for the modern university across Europe and North America. Kant’s essay thus presented itself as an appropriate point of reference as Derrida’s focus shifted from secondary to tertiary education.

In “The Conflict of the Faculties,” Kant articulates a particular relation between the State and the faculties of the university. Kant’s position was motivated by his own

entanglement with the State, having been the subject of a royal proclamation condemning the publication of *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason*. The issue of State censorship is thus central to the essay. Kant argues that the teaching of the higher faculties – theology, law, and medicine – should be subject to State control, since the government has an interest in promoting in its citizens “the *eternal* well-being of each, then his *civil* well-being as a member of society, and finally his *physical* well-being (a long life and health)” (Kant 1996, 7:22). By contrast, the lower faculty of philosophy (by which Kant refers to all of the arts and sciences, although he sometimes uses it in a more narrow sense approximating our contemporary understanding) is concerned only with the search for truth, and so should remain free from all interference. Further, Kant argues that since it is guided by Reason, the lower faculty has the right to judge the teachings of the higher faculties (and thereby the State), but not vice versa. And while Kant is adamant that philosophy remain powerless to enforce the results of its judgments, he does suggest that the lower faculty’s counsel should be heeded. “The government may find the freedom of the philosophy faculty, and the increased insight gained from this freedom, a better means for achieving its ends than its own absolute authority” (Kant 1996, 7:35).

Derrida’s first engagement with Kant’s text predates his involvement with the Collège International, in “Mochlos, or the Conflict of the Faculties.” Delivered in 1980 at the centenary of the founding of Columbia University’s Graduate School, Derrida here challenges the strict division Kant draws between the higher and lower faculties. This division is premised, Derrida argues, on a distinction “between two languages, that of truth and that of action, that of theoretical statements and that of performatives (especially of commands)” (EU, 98). Alluding to his earlier analysis of performatives in “Signature, Event, Context,” Derrida argues for a contamination between theoretical (or constative) and performative speech acts. This contamination suggests that philosophy’s criticism of the higher faculties and thereby of the State will never be free from performative force, challenging the innocence Kant appeals to in order to justify philosophy’s freedom from control. Philosophy’s power of critique is thus affirmed by Derrida, and he will always insist on its right to criticize the State. But one can see the problems this raises for philosophy’s relation to the State. As another and potentially rival site of power, philosophy cannot expect the State to refrain from attempting to control its discourse.

Derrida pursues the theme of censorship in other publications of the early 1980s. In the third lecture in the series at Toronto in 1984, “Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery, Magisteriality,” Derrida provides a more detailed reading of Kant’s texts on this question. And in “The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils,” given at Cornell University in 1983, the analysis of censorship becomes more complex and contemporary. Here the frame of reference expands beyond the State, and Derrida discusses the ways that other entities and forces – “multinational military-industrial complexes or techno-economic networks” – support and influence university research. A key term in Derrida’s analysis is “end-orientation

[*finalisation*]: “‘End-oriented’ research is research that is programmed, focused, organized in an authoritarian fashion *in view of* its utilization” (EU, 141). This is research designed to serve a practical end, even if that end is temporarily unknown or deferred. A contrast is traditionally drawn between this kind of research and “fundamental” or “basic” research, the domain of pure disciplines such as philosophy, in which one would be free to pursue the dictates of reason and truth without predetermined ends. But Derrida argues that this distinction is no longer tenable, in part because one can no longer distinguish between the technological and the theoretical, but also because there can be unforeseen uses arising from the most esoteric of investigations. Such randomness is programmed into calculations and strategies of investment, drawing basic research into the logic of end-orientation. As a result, censorship operates more subtly today than in Kant’s time. No longer expressed through direct prohibition, limitations are placed on research through the regulation and adjustment of funding determined within broader calculations of profitability by organizations seemingly external to the university.

The themes of censorship and end-orientation recur throughout *Le rapport bleu*. While acknowledging its dependence on a State that is promoting investment in ends-oriented research, the Collège is nonetheless imagined to be autonomous and operating at the margins of such research. In the chapter “Sendoffs,” authored by Derrida alone, he argues that this paradoxical position should be further investigated. More broadly, all the paths of inquiry that Derrida here proposes appear under the sub-heading “Destinations” (EU, 220–246). Within philosophy and in its engagement with other disciplines, especially the sciences, Derrida argues that the assumed ends of research, and the very assumption that research has an end, should be the subject of research pursued once the Collège is established. Of course, this does not mean that the Collège will avoid participating in censorship. As Derrida writes in “Vacant Chair”:

At every moment, forces are suppressed, limited, repressed, marginalized, made minor, according to the most diverse ruses . . . [The Collège] will be involved in transactions with the state of the system in place; hence with a certain censoring apparatus, a certain relationship of power between the censored and the censoring, that is, sometimes, a certain relationship of self-censorship. (EU, 47)

It is thus not a question of avoiding all censorship, since “For a teacher, or for a finite being, there is never any lifting of censorship, only a strategic calculation: censorship against censorship” (EU, 63).

B. Responsibility

Kant’s “The Conflict of the Faculties” also provides Derrida with a contrasting point of reference on the question of responsibility in education. In “Mochlos” Derrida

speaks of the nostalgia one might feel when reading Kant's justification of his writings, in which the terms of responsibility can be clearly defined.

One could at least pretend to know whom one was addressing, and where to situate power; a debate on the topics of teaching, knowledge, and philosophy could at least be posed in terms of responsibility. The instances invoked – the State, the sovereign, the people, knowledge, action, truth, the university – held a place in discourse that was guaranteed, decidable . . . and a common code could guarantee, at least on faith, a minimum of translatability for any possible discourse in such a context. (EU, 87)

Today, Derrida argues, such a code is lacking, to the point where he doubts whether “we could say ‘we’ and debate together, in a common language, about the general forms of responsibility in this area” (ibid.). Derrida's doubt concerns not whether consensus can be achieved on what responsibility is in today's university, but whether there exists the minimal conditions of commonality and agreement necessary to even first discuss the issue.

This doubt colors Derrida's remarks on responsibility in the university, which remain tentative and preliminary. His main concern is to call for a new thinking of responsibility. Since the terms of the present situation are uncertain, such a concept cannot be determined in advance, and doing so would be to pretend that one did know one's conditions and the present state of affairs. But this does not lead Derrida to say nothing about this new concept. He suggests that responsibility should be thought of “as no longer passing, in the last instance, through an ego, the ‘I think,’ intention, the subject, the ideal of decidability,” and that it might consist instead in thinking “the ground, in the history of the West, on which the juridico-egological values of responsibility were determined” (EU, 91). That is, Derrida proposes that a responsible action in today's university is to examine the foundations upon which traditional responsibility stands. And he takes a first step in this direction by discussing the concept of foundation itself. Rather than see foundation as an event happening at a single moment in the past, Derrida instead argues that every act undertaken in the university can be characterized as founding. “For example . . . the interpretation of a theorem, poem, philosopheme, or theologeme is only produced by simultaneously proposing an institutional model, either by consolidating an existing one that enables the interpretation, or by constituting a new one in accordance with this interpretation” (EU, 100–101). Anticipating in certain respects the analysis that will appear several years later in “Force of Law,” Derrida here describes a structure of ongoing foundation taking place within the university, as scholarly communities are continually inaugurated in the performative acts of scholarly work. These communities will be multiple, and in them, Derrida suggests, lie the responsibilities of the scholar.

Derrida is clear that such a system offers no guarantees, opening itself to “every imaginable ruse and strategic ploy” (EU, 101). If scholarly communities are founded

at every moment, then they are marked by ongoing political negotiations whose outcome is not assured. In response Derrida calls for a vigilance in action, and argues that

the minimal responsibility and in any case the most interesting one, the most novel and strongest responsibility, for someone belonging to a research or teaching institution, is perhaps to make such a political implication, its system and its aporias, as clear and thematic as possible. (EU, 102)

This appeal to what he describes as the “classical norms” of clarity and thematization demonstrate how Derrida’s new concept of responsibility is still linked to the old. And they guide Derrida as he further develops his understanding of this concept. Thus in “The Principle of Reason,” Derrida pursues “this new responsibility” by discussing whether the university should be responsible for professional training. He does this staying true to the call to interrogate traditional foundations, examining (albeit briefly) responses to this question found in the work of Kant, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (EU, 151–153). More broadly, *Le rapport bleu* is marked by repeated attempts to make apparent and suspend its own philosophical and metaphysical presuppositions. This concern with removing all presuppositions is done in the name of a responsibility to the novelty of the Collège International, at the same time as it is acknowledged that “the absolute neutralization of all preinterpretation would ultimately be unobtainable and absurd: it would make this very discourse irresponsible” (EU, 202). Responsibility in this context is thus characterized as an attempt to make clear and thematize the aporia that inhabits the concept of responsibility itself.

C. Philosophy’s Engagement with Other Disciplines

The Collège International also provided the occasion for Derrida to think further on philosophy’s engagement with other disciplines. As discussed above, this had first arisen in GREPH’s work on high school teaching, with Derrida placing particular emphasis on the way philosophy is already present in the teaching of other subjects. But it is only with the founding of the Collège that there arose a genuine opportunity to institute this engagement in a new way.

Central to Derrida’s thinking on this issue is a resistance to the term “interdisciplinarity.” This is described in *Le rapport bleu* as a conservative concept, naming the “programmed cooperation between the representatives of the established sciences that would study a common object, itself already identified in its contours, with the help of different methods and complementary approaches” (EU, 209). Several projected features of the Collège suggested the need to avoid such an approach. First, interdisciplinarity remains determined by the traditional structure of the university, where disciplinary boundaries are in place and coordinated to form an organic whole. Instituting this structure thus risks repeating the marginalization of the very

research that the Collège sought to promote, namely, that research not supported in existing academic institutions. Second, in a discussion on the Collège with Geoffrey Bennington in 1985, Derrida notes that refusing established disciplinary categories is part of the broader resistance to end-oriented research (CP, 213–214). The implication here is that pre-established regions of inquiry make so-called basic research more open to being coopted to serve predetermined ends. Finally, speaking of interdisciplinarity assumes that philosophy is a discipline like any other, with clearly defined limits that are transgressed when encountering other subjects. But as Derrida argues in the 1990 Introduction to *Du droit à la philosophie*, philosophy is distinguished from other disciplines in having no horizon, “if the horizon is, as its name indicates, a limit, . . . a line that encircles or delimits a perspective” (WP, 16). An interdisciplinary framework would thus be here inappropriate.

For these reasons, while making central the presence of other disciplines in the teaching and research of the Collège, it was necessary to find other ways of thinking how this presence could be realized. But as with the other themes connected to the Collège in Derrida’s work, and consistent with his emphasis on avoiding predetermination, just what shape this presence should take remains somewhat vague. *Le rapport bleu* relies on a term from Einstein, “interscience,” to speak of “the zones of instability” outside of stable departments in which the Collège would operate (EU, 205–206). But it is likely this term was not Derrida’s, since he does not use it elsewhere (and note also that it figures prominently in Jean-Pierre Faye’s single-authored contribution to the volume, suggesting that he might be its source, see Châtelet et al. 1998, 131–139). When the Collège was established, the attempt to think beyond interdisciplinarity was primarily instituted by classifying seminars under multidisciplinary headings, such as “Philosophy/Arts and Literature,” “Philosophy/Psychoanalysis,” “Philosophy/Law,” “Philosophy/Politics,” “Philosophy/Social Sciences,” and so on. (And every semester there have also been seminars grouped under the heading “Philosophy/Philosophy,” underlining the importance of self-reflection and criticism that has marked the Collège from the very start.) Of course, while it attempts to challenge traditional thinking, this multidisciplinary structure retains philosophy as its organizing principle. Derrida defends this by arguing that

As soon as you give up philosophy, or the word philosophy, what happens is not something new or beyond philosophy, what happens is that some old hidden philosophies under other names – for instance the name of literary theory or psychology or anthropology and so on – go on dominating the research in a dogmatic or implicit way. And when you want to make this implicit philosophy as clear and as explicit as possible, you have to go on philosophising. (CP, 218)

This serves as a reminder that even as Derrida called into question the teaching and learning of the subject in so many ways, he remained always, in his own words, “true to philosophy” (CP, 218).

3. Conclusion: A Call for New Work

This survey of Derrida's work on education is partial. I have not examined all the themes raised and philosophers read in *Du droit à la philosophie*, nor have I spoken of education as it appears elsewhere in Derrida's oeuvre. Most notably concerning the latter, for reasons of space I have omitted discussion of "The University Without Condition," a talk first delivered at Stanford University in 1998 that engages some of the topics above through recourse to three concepts prominent in Derrida's later work, the "as if," "unconditionality," and "the event." Further, I have not pursued an alternative approach that the recent publication of Derrida's seminars has opened up. With three of these now available, and many more to come, one might soon be able to analyze at length not so much what Derrida says about education, but the actual methods and practices of his teaching. What I hope to have shown, however, is that we need not wait for new material to be published in order to conduct new research on Derrida and education. For while nearly 40 years have passed since Derrida's first essay on education appeared in print, this body of work remains mostly unread. It thus already calls for the renewed attention of both students and teachers.

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Part III

Areas of Investigation

A Philosophy of Touching Between the Human and the Animal: The Animal Ethics of Jacques Derrida

PATRICK LLORED

Before explaining what we understand by the philosophy of touching in the thought of Jacques Derrida, it is perhaps necessary to say that Derrida's thought presents at its core one of the last great philosophies of the animal, namely, of non-human life. Our thesis is that there can be no question that Derridean deconstruction is a philosophy that concerns the animal, that is, it is a thought that not only reflects on the animal, but which more originally is reflected in it. What in many places Derrida called "the question of the animal" occupies, for us, the center of Derridean deconstruction. One can even go as far as saying that this question is the kernel of deconstruction inasmuch as it animates the principal concepts that breathe life into this philosophy of the living prior to every metaphysics of life. It is this massive presence of animal figures that confers on the major Derridean concepts such as *différance*, the trace, the supplement, the *pharmakon* and, finally, touch [*le toucher*], their primary meaning. In fact, they can only be interpreted and understood in the light of the problem of animality. Moreover, Derrida's whole ethics, which is expressed through the concepts of forgiveness, hospitality, promise and justice – all of which gesture toward the idea of unconditionality – thus takes on the dimensions of an animal ethics of a new kind, the stakes of which, which we shall develop here, distinguish it radically from the diverse animal ethics that have been developed in the Anglo-American context. The question of touch certainly represents one of the last known orientations of Derrida's work on the question of the animal, and thus turns deconstruction into a kind of knowledge that is likely to nourish a number of applied fields of research that have the care for animals as their concern. Such is our bet, which tends to defend the wish that a new domain of philosophical knowledge will be developed that could be formulated by the expression "animal studies."

Why do we think that touch [*le toucher*] has such an importance in the encounter between the human and the animal? Is the sense of touch a sense like all the others? Is it not rather the existential condition for all of the others? Or, perhaps more fundamentally, is it not the sense of vital necessity, and so the sense of the life of the living? The thesis (which is rather radical) that we would like to defend, by means of Derrida's philosophy of the animal, is that the sense of touch is not properly speaking a sense. Or more precisely, it is the sense of the senses [*le sens des sens*]. We thereby provide this expression (and perhaps a bit too easily) with all of its depth, as paradoxical as this might appear when it is a matter of evoking the supposed sense of the surface and of contact with the exterior. But, as we shall see, for Derrida the traditional oppositions between the inside and the outside lose their relevance. When I say touch or the philosophy of touch, one must understand touch such as it is lived by the animal and no longer only by the human. In fact, one must know that the philosophy of touch has a very long history that has developed throughout Western philosophy, but that this tradition shelters in reality an anthropocentric philosophy. This hidden anthropocentric philosophy explains why Derrida names this tradition with a term that orients us well toward the difficulty there is in speaking of this haptical philosophy, even though the haptical philosophy is only secondarily interested in the kind of touching that is present in the animal world, in the zoological sense of the word. There we find the heart of the problem and it is called, following Derrida's vocabulary, "haptocentrism." The heart of the problem is in fact the privilege granted to the human hand in touching, a privilege from which the most violent consequence flows: the exclusion of the animal from a possible participation in the community of living beings. Derrida's entire work consists in deconstructing this haptocentrism in order to give the animal the possibility of being integrated into this thought of touch, and to transform this sense into the one that binds together all living beings to life, humans and non-humans alike.

In other words, the Western philosophies that have actually given the animal this right are rare. Needless to say, I will not address this immense haptical tradition, the historical and philosophical stakes of which have been analyzed elsewhere. But there exist some rare philosophers who have reflected on the question of animal touch, such as Aristotle, whose interest in this question we must explain since without it one could not understand Derrida's contributions to this debate. If the Aristotelian philosophy of the living being cannot be understood outside of a biological naturalism that fundamentally reduces touch to a primordial physiological function, it is no less important to emphasize that touch plays a central role in Aristotle's animal philosophy. Touch is the only sense that is indispensable for the existence of the living being as such. Here is what Aristotle has to say on the subject in his major work *De anima*:

It is evident, therefore, that the loss of this one sense [touch] alone must bring about the death of an animal. For as on the one hand nothing which is not an animal can

have this sense, so on the other it is the only one which is indispensably necessary to what is an animal. (Aristotle 1984, 692 [435b4–7])

Aristotle's thesis (and perhaps we have still not today determined all of its consequences for a reconsidered ethology as well as for an applied animal ethics) is so radical since it makes touch the only sense that is indispensable for a living being's existence. The thesis is based on the crucial distinction between the existence and the well-being of the animal, or, more explicitly, between the existence of its being as such and the modalities of its well-being. In other words, touch cannot be considered as one sense among the others insofar as it is like the transcendental condition of animal being. As a result it is far from the naïve question of knowing how this sense can be part of the living being's well-being: touch has to do with the animal's being and not its well-being! Aristotle tells us that the animal's being, on which touch depends, can only be thought if one takes touch into account as the existential condition of the animal, which makes the consideration of the well-being of the animal into only a minor aspect of the problem. Reducing the question of touch to the sole dimension of animal well-being can even prove to be the supreme obstacle to a truly serious consideration of the interests of animals.

As a consequence, touch is a vital necessity for the animal; its life would be put into question if it were deprived of touch. This association between the animal's life and touch explains why Aristotle emphasizes (and Derrida deepens this emphasis) the thin line no longer only between touch and the animal's life, but also, more tragically, between touch and the animal's death. If touch makes up the life of the living being, if there is, as Derrida claims (taking up a key expression of Aristotle), a "coextensivity" of life and touch (life being understood here as that which opposes death), then Aristotle's major discovery is to have put animal touch to the "test of death," that is, he turns touch into nothing less than a question of life and death. In *De anima*, Aristotle shows that if an animal is deprived of sight or hearing, it does not die. However, if it is deprived of touch, it dies immediately. On the other hand, Aristotle also claims that an excess of touch will result in the animal dying (*De anima*, 435b). On the basis of Aristotle's claims, Derrida asks, "Couldn't one say that this *measure*, this moderation of touch, remains at the service of life to the sole *extent*, precisely, that some kind of reserve holds it on the brink of exaggeration" (TJLN, 47)? Therefore, one cannot understand the importance of touch independently of the paradox according to which it is measured. If, at the same time, and, so to speak, at the same place, animal life is necessarily dependent on touch, then death itself can result from touch, particularly when touch becomes dominant in the form of an "excessive intensity." This "hyperbole" of the sensible then, which is lodged in the very heart of this sense, can give rise to an auto-immune process that risks turning against the animal itself. We will not hesitate to speak of suicide in order to evoke this life that destroys itself. This auto-immunity is why one may say that, unlike any other sense, touch conforms to the logic of the pharmakon (this is what we would like to

understand here), a central concept in Derrida's animal philosophy that inseparably makes this sense be the bearer of life and death at one and the same time. Touch is therefore the sense that permanently institutes the life-death of the animal, and which calls for an ethics founded on the concept of "reserve." An ethics finds its source in this concept. Ethics must not be based on formal rules that would be exterior to it, but rather it must be based on and starting from the very body of the animal thus understood in the light of a pharmacological reading of life. Indeed, the pharmacological reading of life is what defines the singularity of Derrida's philosophy of the animal, the consequences of which are considerable for taking the interests of animals into account.

1. Animal Touch According to Derrida

Touch appears to us to be the sense through which all living beings have something like an encounter. Touch allows each living being to place itself in a space where the borders between the "self" and the "non-self" are elaborated, on the basis of which contact can become possible. As Aristotle shows, the haptical, unlike other senses, is coextensive with the living body. In relation to this Aristotelian claim, Derrida raises the question of eating and internalization or incorporation. If eating and incorporation are forms of touching, then what does incorporation mean? When we incorporate, even in mourning, are we making the intangible tangible or are we make the tangible intangible, a materialization or a spiritualization? For Derrida, this question of touch, being at once a process of making tangible and intangible, leads to the question of the world, finitude, and the limit (TJLN, 53). The problem then is precisely this Aristotelian idea of the "coextensivity" of touch and the living body, whether it is human or non-human. What does this idea fundamentally teach us? What does it teach us about touch, but also about the body and the life of the animal? To what extent is it capable of renewing our knowledge [*connaissance*] of non-human life and of generating an animal ethics reconceived from top to bottom? If touching is coextensive with the living body, that implies not only that we place the haptical question at the center of reflection on the animal, but also that we take into account the consequence that is most disruptive for us today: a reconsideration of our relation to the animal through the question of touch and everything that it involves, as much from the side of what I will call the politics of animality as from the side of our ethical relation to animals. In other words, the question of touch must be able to transform everything we have understood until now about the animal, beginning with our power over it.

If consequently this coextensivity of touching with the animal body can change the human-animal relation, it is no less the case that it has a different meaning for us today in relation to what Aristotle made of it. Now it takes on a political dimension that leads us to rethink our relation to non-human living beings. This political

dimension is precisely what leads Derrida to give to this concept of coextensivity its most profound signification. Indeed, while Aristotle separated life and death in order to fundamentally oppose them, Derrida investigates this concept in order to find that which determines the living animal being as a being that, by touch and thanks to touch, is no longer linked only with life, but more essentially with death, whether this death is its own or that of the animal other or human other. The animal is perhaps the being that, through touch, permanently establishes the limits of its relation with life-death, which can be interpreted, following Derrida, according to a double movement of interiorization and expulsion. By interiorization, as a process that is carried out by touch, one must also hear the fact that for the animal touch becomes a self-touching: touching is firstly a being touched by oneself. The animal is this living being whose touch is firstly a vital self-touching. Through this transitive operation of the living being with regard to itself, self-touching makes the living being be and exist. No existence would be possible for it without this vital necessity of “touching oneself,” the paradox of which comes into full view, since it can only be a touching the other than oneself at the same time. Thus we find an openness of touch toward what Derrida calls an “expulsion.”

What should we hear by “expulsion” from this moment of life that is touch? By “expulsion,” one should probably hear the fact that the animal also owes its life, so to speak, to the necessity that pushes it to exteriorize its touch to continue to exist, all the while protecting itself permanently from the inherent risks of this operation of leaving itself. This process gives rise to the “tangible becoming” that signals the heart of the problem of touch, the question of the untouchable. It is precisely this term, “untouchable,” that here designates the whole aporia to which the question of animal touch is as it were subjected. Here is the aporia in all of its difficulty, which indicates that this question is everything but simple: if the animal only exists through touch (whether this touch is a self-touching or a touching of the other), we easily understand that this opening to the other, in the touching, can be a permanent threat that lies at the heart of touch as a sense. But it is paradoxically this risk that is the condition of what Derrida calls here, with a complex and forceful expression, a “spiritualization” of animal life capable of producing “a becoming intangible of the tactile body,” of the touching and of the touched. Spiritualization is “this becoming intangible of the tactile body.” It is this paradox constitutive of every animal life, according to which the animal, by touch, is fundamentally created as a body, the life of which is to be permanently threatened by the other of touch. The lived body [*le corps propre*] of the animal passes through the contact with the other’s body [*le corps d’autrui*] that tends to make it into a tactile body with regard to which it cannot be reduced without disappearing. In both cases, whether one is placed on the side of interiorization, producer of a becoming tangible of the untouchable, or on the side of spiritualization, producer of a becoming intangible of a tactile body, this double movement, which does not leave the touching and the touched in their respective places, is precisely that which gives rise to the creation of the world for the animal

regardless of whether it is human or not (although this distinction between human or non-human loses all signification here).

It is this aporia constitutive of touch that it is necessary to think from now on. This aporia results in the fact that the animal is a living being that, in order to exist, is only able to touch itself, but which at the same time is a living being that must create a limit between its inside and its outside (a limit that we will not hesitate to call spiritual). This spiritual limit is that by which the animal is set in front of its finite existence, that is, over and against its finitude, but also over and against the other's finitude. The finite existence of the animal is made possible by touch, just as it makes possible the other's finite existence, which becomes the touched-touching. Touch as the sense of finitude is therefore the one without which the animal would not have access to its very own life (the limits of which it "knows" fundamentally), but also to the life of the other whose own limits teach to it its existence. But more fundamentally still, and this is the most decisive point of this animal philosophy of touch such as Derrida offers to us, it is in this tactile finitude that the animal encounters this limit that results in the fact that the other becomes other in relation to itself. The encounter can only come about through touch since only this sense that is not one sense is the creator of limits. In other words, touching traces the limit between me and the other, whether this me is an animal or an human; here these distinctions lose all of their ontological validity. We must therefore speak of auto-affection since it is this phenomenon that allows the living being to welcome the other in this movement of auto-affection constitutive of the life-world.

This limit is the possibility of the "spacing" [*espacement*] internal to touch, which is disseminated in relation to the other senses and in relation to everything that could come to "space" or extend this limit. Fundamentally, the limit established by touch lives only and by this spacing. Moreover, as the finite possibility of this spacing, it is capable of opening and of being opened on to everything that would come to enlarge it, but always subjected to the law of coextensivity (TJLN, 119). Spacing is the other name of this particular sense that touch is insofar as it is the instigator of the limit starting from which and in which the encounter can be produced. The touching between the human and animal is the condition of their encounter even though the encounter does not transform itself into a relation based on their fusion and identification. Indeed, fusion and identification are translations of the illusion of immediacy, or as Derrida more precisely calls it, the illusion of "immediate contiguity." As a result, nothing would be more dangerous than to forget that it is touch itself that is the generator of this spacing, which is disseminated in all of the other senses. Touch anticipates the constant mortal risk of the fusion-like encounter that would be the negation of that which therefore generates the very existence of the animal – not only of the animal that is thus badly touched (passive) but also of the touching animal (active) that touches the other badly. Therefore a kind of pathology comes into existence originating from a sense of touch that would badly touch since it negates this necessary limit that is the creator of the sensible world of living beings.

In this way, we have the illusion of all immediacy in the consideration of touch, an illusion, Derrida warns us, that contaminates common sense as much as philosophy itself. “Dissociate touching from immediacy” (TJLN, 119): this deconstructive motto deeply animates Derrida’s philosophy of touch that orders us to break as much with common sense as with philosophical sense, affected as they both are by the belief according to which touch would only be an empirical manifestation of immediate sensibility. Yet, there is no immediacy in haptical sensibility for there is simply nothing that could be subsumed under the concept “tactile sensibility” insofar as that would mean that, in order to gain access to touching as a phenomenon, it would be enough to empirically describe its sensible forms and its varied manifestations made available then to exterior or objective observation. Touch does not let itself be touched by observation, whether this observation originates from common sense or, more worrisome perhaps, from a kind of knowledge that would claim to collect and enclose touch within itself, including – this is what happens with phenomenology – when this kind of knowledge claims to penetrate phenomena in order to reduce them to their essential characteristics. Touch, as Derrida understands it, no longer therefore lets itself be interpreted by the phenomenological method that proceeds by the “reduction” with a view to bracketing all of the empirical manifestations that would come between the phenomenon and the phenomenologist. If Derrida’s prohibition of immediacy plays an important role in his thought of touch, it only exists in order to warn against certain risks that would transform touch into a sense like any other. These are the risks one needs to avoid if one wants to gain access to something that one could call “the law of touch,” a law that is capable of going beyond the distinctions that have previously prohibited the founding of an animal philosophy of touch. These distinctions have opposed, for example, nature and culture; they are intended to separate ontologically the world into two realities in which touching is subsumed either under a natural determinism or under a cultural contextualism.

2. The Law of Animal Touch

It is therefore a matter of going beyond, by means of the “law” of touch, the animality/humanity distinction, which still grounds many of our reflections on the question of the animal. Indeed, if there is a law of touch that comes precisely to interrupt the contact between living beings without being able to renounce the contact completely, this law took place well prior to the metaphysical separation between the human and the animal, among other dualisms that are just as harmful to the possibility of an interspecies encounter. For Derrida, we must think of tact as a law prior to all laws and right. In a way, this priority would make it natural, prior to all distinctions between being and the living. Yet, the law must be a commandment that interrupts the continuity with nature. Tact again would be a holding back from what is natural.

The law would be even unnatural. And if the law is not natural, then every traditional opposition would be fundamentally discredited: nature/culture, nature/mind or consciousness, *physis/nomos*, *thesis* or *technē*, animality/humanity, and so forth (TJLN, 68).

Indeed, the immediacy of our relation to the question of touch tends to turn touch into a problem implying a natural body, that is, subjected to laws that regulate what one could call its physiological or zoological functioning. Touch would consequently have to do with the physical body of the animal. Yet, as contrary to common sense as this may be, touch is not a bodily question that could thus satisfy certain scientific rules. If touch were reduced to the natural phenomenon that it gives the illusion of being, then a kind of objective knowledge would quickly overcome touch by turning it into a sense that is purely physical; then touch would seem to be a sense that is interpretable within the framework of a supposed nature dictating its rules to all living beings. Yet, this kind of knowledge is impossible since it never takes into account or is incapable of taking into account what in touch is not reducible to touch; it cannot take into account what within touch escapes its manifestation. In other words, this kind of knowledge is incapable of taking into account the fact that, in order for there to be touch, it is necessary that there is non-touch at the same time and in the same space. For there to be touch, there must be something that is untouchable. Therefore, touch is at once this paradoxical sense that is permanently open and closed to the other: touch only lives from the possibility of not touching the other. Touch is a sense that carries in itself at once its affirmation and its negation, a sense that exteriorizes itself while interiorizing itself. More precisely, the exteriority of touch never truly delivers itself over to the other; or inversely, the interiority of touch always has to open itself up onto the heterogeneous. In other words, what designates touch as touch is this auto-affection that regulates its own life, and thanks to which its own, so to speak, “law” consists in never submitting to a supposed nature. More fundamentally, the law that animates touch consists in not submitting to nature, in exiting, in emancipating itself from nature, if one understands by nature the reign of bare life. Therefore, touch is the sense that contains in itself a law that emancipates it from nature. It puts nature at a distance with the goal precisely of being able to liberate itself from nature, even to free itself from it. It is precisely this emancipating or liberating law of touch that forces us to rethink the humanity/animality distinction in regard to touch as the creator of the question of the world common to animals and to humans. The radical consequence of this law is to put these categories into question and to make the problem of touch into a non-natural phenomenon. Touch, and more precisely the encounter between the human and the animal that it allows, in no case depends on nature. In other words, it is never the case that two bodies encounter one another, but instead two ways of laying out a relationship between themselves in space and time that passes through touch. This encounter makes sense only because it exists prior to an entire series of oppositions that are at the origin of dualisms that are harmful and contrary to this peaceful

relation between humans and animals that Derrida tries to create. No nature dictates its law to animal touch since it is, as we have seen, in and by touch that the animal is emancipated from nature understood here as a kind of determinism. Nevertheless, this emancipation from determinism does not mean that we have to renounce the scientific knowledge of touch; it just means that touch exists only from the viewpoint of being a sort of exit from all naturalistic determinism. Nature must lose some of its sovereignty in order to be able to understand touch and, consequently, in order to be able to understand the encounter that touch authorizes between the human and the animal. This claim also implies the equal necessity of not turning touch into an operation translatable by a “who” and a “what,” that is, by a subject and an object. The anteriority of touch puts the categories of “subject” and “object” into question, that is, the anteriority of touch puts the “who” and the “what” in a continuity that is at once tangible and non-tangible. The touched animal is at once subject and object, “who” and “what.” Touch thus confirms its deconstructive objective, namely, the objective of the dis-identification of the individualities present to one another.

In touch, the touching and the touched are no longer distinguishable because the “who” and the “what” no longer count. The one who touches becomes as much the touching as the touched, whether it is human or animal. Thus we cannot speak of some essence in general of touch that is prior to the “who” or the “what.” We cannot speak of a verb that is then completed by a subject or a complement (that is, what touches whom or what, who touches whom or what) (TJLN, 68–69). It is necessary to begin putting into question the beliefs arising as much from common sense as from philosophical sense (which here intersect) if one wants to understand that which is played out in and through this sense. To say that there is no touch involves considering that there is fundamentally only singularity in this phenomenon, which blurs the expectations of the ones present and doing the action. They can no longer be thought according to the classical categories of subject and object. Consequently, the human must be able to lose its dominant and sovereign position expressed in the category of “subject,” turning it thereby into a subject touching an animal who has too often been reduced to an object touched or to be touched. The question of touch is important because it leads us to accept finding ourselves in the position of the object or of the “what.” We thus lose a supposed identity when the animal becomes the one touching. It is this impossible possibility, it is this unprecedented and unheard of configuration that must be taken into account in its singularity as an event if one wants to claim to rethink the encounter between the human and the animal through the act of touching itself. One must no longer conceive touch between the human and the animal according to the logic of the subject and the object. The only logic at work in this event is the deconstruction of the identities present to one another: touching comes to destabilize the subjectivities that confront one another.

A consequence of this destabilization of the subjects is that the order of discourse is also affected, for touch desubjectivizes language itself according to a logic of dissemination. This logic is transmitted to every discourse that all too quickly

mechanically reintroduces these linguistic categories of intersubjectivity, which sovereignly establish the active touching in the category of the subject and the passive touched into that of the object. As Derrida says,

When I speak to you, I touch you, and you touch me when I hear you, from however far off it comes to me, and even if it is by telephone, the recollection of a voice's inflection on the phone, or by letter or e-mail, too. But of course, in order for me to be touched in this way by you, I have to be able to touch *myself*. In the "self-touching-you," the "self" is as indispensable as you. A being incapable of touching itself could not bend itself to that which absolutely unfolds it, to the totally other who, as totally other/like all others [*comme tout autre*], inhabits my heart as a stranger. (TJLN, 291)

Language then belongs, or more precisely perhaps, depends on touch. But the condition for it to be able to touch the other is not the transmission of a sense or a signification carried by words, but instead the possibility that the other can be touched by itself. Only inasmuch as I can be touched by myself can I be touched by the other. Only inasmuch as I touch myself do others have available the possibility of touching me. In other words, if the other, through some words or through its words, through the words of the other, if the other to whom I address myself is not considered or seen or perceived as "a being touched by itself," that is, if the other is not seen as a body whose self-relation passes through touch, through the "being touched by itself" – then no event could occur in the encounter between it or him or her and me. Through the "fact" of touching it (because the "it" that is touched can touch itself), the encounter can be produced, and the encounter then turns the words or the signs that are being used (or even more we should say here "the instruments" being used), it turns them into "indicators" of something that exists earlier, that is, indicators of the law of touch. Thus, in this encounter, something is able to unfold itself whose touching is not in reality the manifestation but the genuine condition.

"There isn't any anthropological limit here, and this should be valid for all 'animal' or 'divine' *life*" (TJLN, 291). Touch as contact, or still more precisely as tact, that is, as an event consisting in deconstructing the identities present to one another and consequently consisting in undoing every communitarian identity, remains therefore the only event capable of escaping what Derrida calls "the absolute reflection of self-presence." Here "reflection" must of course be understood not in the sense of an intellectual operation, but more profoundly as the self-reference of one's own being under the supposed auspices of a correspondence between me and myself. Consequently, one has to recognize in touch such as it is established between the human and the animal a force of subversion. This force leads us to mark the permanent difference created between the lived-self as origin and the self thus affected or touched that incessantly differs from this supposed origin. Therefore, thanks to touch, the "living present" is traversed by a dehiscence that leads the touching and just as much the touched to be discovered as other in relation to itself. Self-presence, whether it

touches human living beings or non-human living beings, cannot exit unscathed from this relation that lives from the interrogation of what Derrida calls “the innocent undividedness [*indivision*] of the originary absolute,” that is, the absolute that is supposed to be embodied in individual sovereignty. Touch definitively puts in question the metaphysics of presence, the metaphysics that conceives the sovereign subject as in perfect harmony with its supposed originary ego, the metaphysics that constitutes the subject as a living being always present to itself, located in a “living present” as auto-foundation of itself, that is, as a living being reducing itself to being a communitarian mechanism.

Touch thus takes on the question of the unconditional welcome of the other into the heart of a community. The force of the ethical concept of hospitality enlarges the community with living beings and entirely decenters it. Through touch, the other or the animal welcomes me, but always under the law of the separation which is the law that institutes a community through touch and, we will say, for touch. The question of touch thus becomes the question of the possibility of making a community with animals. And this question is even prior to, and perhaps the condition of, the controversial problem of the rights [*droits*] to grant to animals. In Derrida, the idea of right [*droit*] necessarily involves the idea that every community, including therefore the one tying together human living beings and non-human living beings, is originally contact, that is, “co-tact” *with (cum)* the self and with the other, contact with the self because it is contact with the wholly other that the animal is (TJLN, 115).

Making a community with animals through touch is perhaps the means by which to elaborate a unique animal ethics, one that involves this law of separation that could seemingly come to contradict this co-belonging. Yet, it is just the opposite that occurs inasmuch as this community can only exist as such if it is capable of opening up to this wholly other, if this “living together” is never truly formed, and if, consequently, it is never closed upon itself. Nothing must come to contain this togetherness; nothing must come to exhaust it. It must not be restrained within some kind of natural, organic, or still less, some kind of juridico-institutional totality. But that togetherness is not sufficient to invent an ethics open to non-human living beings, for the togetherness or community would risk letting itself be overcome by moral and juridical norms that have for the moment precisely prohibited this openness to the absolute singularity of the wholly other. It seems then that only the inscription of the human-animal relation in a logic wholly other than that of interest can be capable of making touch precisely a gift to the animal, provided that we remove the anthropocentric dimension from touch.

3. An Ethics of Animal Touch in Derrida?

Derridean animal ethics aims at a deconstruction of the presuppositions that guide the Western philosophical tradition. The philosophical tradition’s interest in touch

involves a privileging of the human hand as the privilege of man. Deconstructing this tradition involves recognizing that one cannot think animal touch according to the dominant haptocentric model. The haptocentric model is a veritable *pharmakon* of Western thought, for it is susceptible, as Derrida warns us in a critical way, to a risk of the production of violence:

If one begs the other to take in the gift of an offering, and therefore to touch it by taking it on, by keeping it in or near oneself, in the closest possible proximity, in oneself or within reach of one's hand, it is because, as always (irresistible tendency) one thinks first of all, and too much, about *hands*, that is, about the *manual*, the *manner*, *maneuver*, or *manipulation*: seizure, comprehension, prehension, captation, acceptance, reception – a plea [*prière*] that something be received that begins to seem like an order: “Tiens!” do take it, do touch. Hence, this “tender extending” may sometimes become violence itself – not even to mention the striking twist [*coup*] in the language that displaces the “Tiens!” (Take this!) of a gift to the “Tiens!” (Take that!) of a blow [*coup*]. . . . But this gift is not a present, then; it shouldn't be – so one thinks, at least – and an offering even less. (TJLN, 95)

Touch therefore deeply obeys a pharmacological logic that constitutes touch as a veritable *pharmakon*, as the carrier of the poison as well as the antidote. And to think touch in the logic of the gift allows nothing to escape from this violence. More precisely, touch is a gift that permanently risks being transformed into violence as soon as it lets itself be determined by what it is inclined toward or by its haptical tropism. Touch then falls into the haptocentrism that is the privilege granted to the hand in the hierarchized relation between the human and the animal. The privilege of the hand is one that haunts the human who can thus be considered as the living being whose touch is in reality an act of appropriation of the other, in this case, the appropriation of the animal. Touch then becomes an order addressed to the non-human living being that is thus subjected to a force that can become, as Derrida explicitly says, a formula in which the entire paradox of touch is concentrated: “hence, this ‘tender extending’ may sometimes become violence itself.” This obsession [*hantise*] of touch is explained by the fact that touch is incapable of untying itself from this haptical or haptocentric logic, which turned it into the sense of the human's appropriation of the animal. But the most important point here is perhaps not to say that, fundamentally, touch is a privilege that the human is always granted. No, it is more fundamentally a matter of thinking the following aporia: even touch as a gift becomes a present produced by violence to the extent that the touching aims at appropriating the other by its gesture. It is as if the touching gesture were incapable of deconstructing the haptical tropism that inhabits it, a tropism that thus turns it into an interested gift precisely by means of its appropriation of the animal. And we even have to include here the gesture in the form of the caress.

The ethical question therefore lies in knowing how this gift of touch is able or could be able to not be reduced to a present, that is, not be reduced to the fact of giving something in exchange for something else. Giving is here what generates the difficulty, indeed, the impossibility, of the gift. Whatever the present may be, whether it belongs to language or not, it limits this gift to being a present. In other words, it reduces the gift to a relation that can only be established by the illusion or by the immediacy of presence, presence here designating the act by which, in touch, I aim at an immediate effect on the present of the animal, thus turning the gift into a gesture in which the search for a response is the law, that is, the search for a response has the force of law. Yet, to make this donation into an act calling for a response is to prohibit not only the gratuity of the present, but, more originally, so to speak, it is to claim to act on a given, here something touched in view of a possible effect, and consequently to undermine the possibility that an event happens in the encounter between the human and the animal, or inversely, the problem proving itself to be symmetrical, namely, to prohibit animal touch from exiting out of the vicious circle of the effect or the cause, or better still, of the consequence. In other words, the animal cannot escape from a donation regulated by the laws of practical, social, or even cultural causality.

A touch worthy of its name can therefore only be, as Derrida says, a touch that would contain in itself a “withdrawal of the gift,” that is, the withdrawal of “the being-present of the gift” insofar as this being-present of the gift is the manifestation of an intention whose effects always consist in reducing the touching of the animal to an operation governed by the laws of interest. The gift as an offering is therefore a touch that would be capable of bracketing the expectations and the conditions of the expectation of the gift itself. Outstripping the horizon of expectations, being virtually “beyond being,” touching is really a gift without being. That is, touch is an offering that must not wait for anything, especially not for recognition, since recognition would negate the offering itself, which in order to be an offering must exist outside of all exchange. Touch excludes every logic of exchange between two subjectivities that would quickly come to appropriate the touching-touched. Everything that would come to contaminate this offering, namely, recognition, the propriety of the proper, or else economics, risks being turned into violence as soon as the offering disappears under the law of the gift as a present awaiting a return. It is really therefore a law of self-disappropriation that touch allows us to have, insofar as touch teaches us throughout its very structure to detach ourselves from the idea of a self-presence that would alone be capable of encountering the other – here the wholly other being every animal is. Indeed, it is precisely the opposite of such a self-presence that the offering of touch offers insofar as it aims, as much from the side of the human as from the side of the animal, to make the encounter allow us to abandon, even temporarily, this logic of the “propriety of the proper,” by which my sovereignty will try to turn the animal into a pretext for something

other than itself. This is why it is fundamentally difficult to truly touch the other, for what is at stake is the suspension of that which makes contact with the ego [*la suspension de ce qui touche au moi comme propriété*], of that which makes contact with the ego as the source of communitarian identity. The offering of touch, when it takes place, deconstructs the feeling of propriety that still grounds the encounter between the human and the animal. The offering of touch offers the extraordinary possibility of remaking a world in which an event can occur, without the event being able to be made the object of an expectation, of a projection, or even the object of some sort of hope. One could go as far as saying that in this peculiar kind of ethics, the touching and the touched, having lost all identity, recreate somehow a co-belonging to a world that they no longer control and the future of which no longer depends on them. In other words, this would be a world that not only knew how to suspend the risks inherent to every kind of power, but more essentially still to every kind of knowledge, a world in which the caress as offering is that which allows the encounter between the human and the animal as an event. These risks explain why no neutrality, which is another illusion of immediacy and self-presence, can exist in touch, for touch excludes the very idea that it exists independently of this movement of auto-affection, which is the welcome made to the other and the condition for the existence of what is called a common world without being communitarian.

4. Conclusion: The Three Illusions of Touch

The entire Derridean philosophy of touch aims at struggling against the three philosophies of touch at the origin of illusions hardly suitable for new relations with animals: the theoretical touch that aims at objectivity and of which science, no matter which its domain, privileges. We have tried to show that it is impossible to come to know the sense of touch without taking into account at the same time this law of touch that comes down to the concept of the untouchable. This law throws off course all positivism: touching in order to know is not touching. This theoretical illusion represents the dominant tradition of touch. Perhaps today we have to establish some distance between the dominant tradition of touch and the ethical relation that we have the duty to create with animals. At the other end of the problem, there is another conception of touch that gives rise to another illusion: that of a touch preceding every “driving engagement” [*engagement pulsionnel*]. This illusion ignores the fact that touch as such does not exist. Consequently, there are only forms or manifestations of touch, of which the caress and the blow are supposed to be the apparently antinomial forms. Finally, the last illusion is the one represented by phenomenology, for which touch can be reduced to a “phenomenological neutralization” (also called the “reduction”). Up until now, the reduction has bracketed all of the intentional modalities of touch when touch involves the human and

the animal. Is not the Derridean deconstruction of animal phenomenology fundamentally a critique of the haptocentrism that still nourishes many of phenomenology's successors?

(Translated from the French by Daniel Palumbo)

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Poetry, Animality, Derrida

NICHOLAS ROYLE

1. Pad

I begin with an aleatory preamble. There has to be chance. Everything that Jacques Derrida writes might be traced through that necessity. What is called “deconstruction” is, among other things, openness to the future as to what is absolutely chancy, unforeseeable, incalculable, unprogrammable. The “affirmation of chance,” as Derrida observes, “do[es] not always happen” (AL, 245), but the kind of writing that we call poetry is perhaps especially concerned with such affirmation. It is in this context that Mallarmé’s great scattered line, “A throw of the dice will never abolish chance (*Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*)” rolls across and around Derrida’s work. This affirmation of chance in Mallarmé’s poetry is intimately entwined with the play of the letter, the chance effects of a word or of bits of words. Thinking about poetry must proceed, as Derrida notes in “The Double Session,” from an acknowledgment that “the word cannot be a complete system or a body proper” (DIS, 256). I start, then, with something aleatory and fragmentary. “Poetry, Animality, Derrida”: this title is traced by a play of the letter, by the chance of an acronym: “pad.” I did not see this acronym in advance: it emerged like the sort of “anagrammatical hallucination” (DIS, 276 n. 73) that Derrida talks about in the poetry of Mallarmé. This *pad* – the random drawing up of these three letters, *p*, *a*, *d* – is perhaps untranslatable. As such, it might bear witness to Derrida’s memorable remark about poetry, translation, and the materiality of words: “The materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language. Materiality is precisely that which translation

relinquishes. To relinquish materiality: such is the driving force of translation. And when that materiality is reinstated, translation becomes poetry” (WD, 210).

Everything might be sorted (and I emphasize this “sort” for its links with the Latin *sortire*, “to draw lots,” and with related figures of “hap,” “fate,” and “destiny”) through the strange felicity of this little word, “pad.” This preamble might, in truth, last a lifetime. As a noun, the first “pad” recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is as a synonym for a toad or frog: the phrase “pad in the straw” signifies a lurking or hidden danger. *Pad*, as a word of obscure origin (possibly related to “pod”), also has the sense of “the foot or paw of an animal” as well as “a print made by an animal’s foot or paw” (*OED* pad n. 2, sense 7a). “Pad” thus combines what prints with what is printed, as if the track of this “animal” were, imprinted in the homonymy, the “animal” itself, as if this “animal” were nothing more than the mark it leaves behind. We should trace our steps here carefully. In another form, as a verb related to the Dutch *pad*, meaning “a path,” to pad means to walk on foot, especially to walk quietly. Walking quietly, being close to the earth, humble – as Derrida emphasizes in *Specters of Marx* (1993) when he talks about the animal “as low as possible to the earth” (SM, 93).

Under another of the entries for “pad” as a noun, in the august pages of the *OED*, we find: “The sound of soft steady footsteps; a similar sound made by an animal; a light footstep, etc., making such a sound” (*OED*, pad, n. 6). In this brief definition, the *OED* indicates the depth and heaviness of what is, in effect, among the most constant objects of Derrida’s suspicion, questioning, and deconstructive analysis, namely anthropocentrism. “The sound of soft steady footsteps,” says the *OED*, where “footsteps” are assumed to be human, and then, following a semi-colon, “a similar sound made by an animal.” In keeping with its practice elsewhere, the world authority on the English language refers to “an animal” and means by this a *non-human* animal. The heavy step or imprint of anthropocentrism is all over the place. By contrast, we may recall from *Of Grammatology* (1967), *différance* or the trace has “no weight” (OGC, 93) and is not unique to the human. As Derrida observes, “The trace must be thought before the entity.” It is prior to “all levels of animal organization” (OGC, 47). It is this argument that leads Geoffrey Bennington to contend that “there is nothing specifically ‘human’ ... about meaning” (Bennington 1994, 32). This conception of the trace is closely linked to Derrida’s expanded or generalized notion of “writing,” according to which, as he says in an interview in 1982, “There is no society without writing (without genealogical mark, accounting, archivalization), not even any so-called animal society without territorial mark. To be convinced of this, one need merely give up privileging a certain model of writing” (PTS, 84). “Pad” would here then would not necessarily presuppose any marked distinction between the human and non-human animal. Derrida’s work alerts us to an experience of this strangeness and uncertainty in new and unprecedented ways.

Here are just two other pathways that “pad” might lead us off down – for everything will have been about finding oneself led astray (seduction and the passion of

the poem), about following, padding after. You see already, perhaps, how the pad and path cross one another, cross into one another. As Derrida writes in “Che cos’è la poesia?” (1988), the experience of “the poetic” has to do with “the aleatory rambling of a trek,” “a single trek with several tracks” (PTS, 291). Additionally, then, as an inanimate object, a pad is something soft, used to prevent friction, pressure or injury. Thus the pad might protect from injury, though it might also protect an injury – as in a protective covering for a wound. Chance or accident and wounding come together here. Despite (or perhaps in part because of) its brevity, “Che cos’è la poesia?” is one of Derrida’s richest and most haunting meditations on such issues. As he writes there: “No poem without accident, no poem that does not open itself like a wound, but no poem that is not also just as wounding” (PTS, 297). In this respect, we might be inclined to suppose that a critical essay on poetry is, at least in some measure, padding: it dresses a wound, even as it addresses the experience of being wounded. Literary criticism – at least according to a certain traditional conception and practice – protects us from poetry or, at any rate, from the sort of shattering, catastrophic conception of the poetic that Derrida talks about, in “Che cos’è la poesia?” and elsewhere.

Finally, a pad can of course be something for writing on, as in that “mystic writing-pad” in Freud that is the launch-pad for Derrida’s “Freud and the Scene of Writing” (1966). It is this pad that Freud sees as a model for “the structure of the perceptual apparatus of the mind” (Freud 2001, 229). It is a means of both keeping and erasing memory. As he puts it: “the Pad provides not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been written, like an ordinary paper pad” (2001, 230). And it is this pad that leads Derrida to question and complicate the notions of writing, trace, and erasure that Freud draws on in his account of the workings of perception, consciousness, and memory. Thus Derrida comes to view this Freudian “note” as “perform[ing] . . . a scene of writing,” and concludes: “we must think of this scene in other terms than those of individual or collective psychology, or even of anthropology” (WD, 229). Again what is proposed is a thinking of the trace as coming, in Derrida’s words, “before the distinction between man and animal” (WD, 197). If the mystic writing-pad of Freud’s day has given way today to the iPad, there is perhaps another thinking of the “pad,” more ancient than knowledge, as Derrida might say – not “I” pad but entirely other pad.

Everything might be mobilized, then, in the force of this tiny word, this “minuscopule” (TOJ, 16): *pad*. W.B. Yeats ends a poem entitled “He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven” with the plea: “Tread softly because you tread on my dreams” (Yeats 1990, 81). Every poem or instance of the poetic is perhaps vulnerable in this way. We might recall here Hélène Cixous’s remark that Jacques Derrida is “the dreamer philosopher, the only one” (Cixous 2004, 39). In this context the hardly proper, scarcely audible “pad” might say: tread softly because you tread on the dreams of all the living and the dead. What animals are we in our dreams? Let us keep that question in suspense for now.

2. What Would You Like to Be?

“Poetry,” “animality,” “Derrida”: what a crazy trinity! How or where would one begin? Looking back over Derrida’s extraordinary oeuvre, noting the titles and formulating a sense of the trajectories of his work from that perspective, it would seem that the so-called “animal question” was a special or central concern in his late work. This would be evident from *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (dating from the Cerisy conference on “The Autobiographical Animal” in 1997, posthumously edited by Marie-Louise Mallet and first published in French in 2006 and in English in 2008) and from the seminars given in Paris from the autumn of 2001 through to the spring of 2003 on *The Beast and the Sovereign* (published in French in two volumes, in French in 2008 and 2010, and in English in 2009 and 2011). Derrida’s work – or these texts by Derrida – might thus be viewed as playing a significant role in what has been called “the animal turn,” in other words the remarkable proliferation of books and essays, especially in the areas of philosophy and literary theory, concerned with the question of the animal and with the relations between human and non-human animals. This “turn” is seen as beginning in the 1990s and it continues to unfold. And this “turn” is, in turn, also integrally bound up with the question of the environment, ecology, and ecocriticism. (For two notable recent publications in this context, see Clark 2010 and 2012.) But as I hope might have been evident from my padding if not plodding preamble, the so-called “animal question” is at the heart of Derrida’s work from the 1960s onwards; at the heart of his work in a sense and strength of “heart” that we will come back to shortly. Of “the question of the living and of the living animal,” Derrida declares in 1997: “For me that will always have been the most important and decisive question” (A, 34).

“Poetry,” “animality,” “Derrida”: at first glance, perhaps, two familiar common nouns and a proper name. But it is not so simple. As Derrida has repeatedly demonstrated, the proper name is irrevocably prone to becoming a common noun or, more precisely perhaps, its properness is never purely proper, it is always subject to play, it is structured by ex-propriation. So, for example, he observes that “the only possibility of loving a name is that it not be yours” (AIWD, 219). Or as he puts it in *The Ear of the Other*: “playing with one’s own name, putting it in play, is, in effect, what is always going on . . . [T]his is not something one can decide: one doesn’t disseminate or play with one’s name. The very structure of the proper name sets this process in operation” (EO, 76). Derrida can and does disappear, for example, behind the curtain (*derrière le rideau*): “At work, naturally, in the desire – the apparent desire – to lose one’s name by disarticulating it, disseminating it, is the inverse movement . . . The more I lose, the more I gain by conceiving my proper name as the common noun ‘*derrière le rideau*’” (EO, 76–77).

Thinking about poetry and animality in Derrida’s work involves thinking about the deconstitution of the proper name (yours and mine, for example) and about a

kind of apocalypse of naming in general – starting with the names of animals and the question “what is this thing called poetry?” (or, in Italian, “Che cos’è la poesia?”). In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* Derrida asks: Are there only “crimes against humanity” and not also “against animals”? Does “every transgression of the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ concern only man” (A, 48)? These questions involve thinking about what he calls the *animot*, a neologism that alerts us to the presumption that man (or woman) can speak of “all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal” (a presumption that Derrida describes as precisely “a crime”) and to the presumption that “[t]he animal would in the last instance be deprived of the word, of the word that one names a noun or name” (A, 48). Thus he goes on: “It would not be a matter of ‘giving speech back’ to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation” (A, 48). It would be “risky,” he says, a grappling with what he elsewhere refers to as “[his] chances” (see “My Chances/*Mes chances*,” in PSY1), precisely as if one could give the trace a name, as if it could assume “the title of an autobiographical animal” (A, 48).

The deconstitution of the proper name, the experience of ex-propiation, losing one’s name are part of what it is to be the animal that Derrida is, or the animal he dreams of being. And all of this is intimately concerned with poetry – with what he calls poetic thinking, the poetic and (in another neologism that we will come to in a moment) the poematic. As he observes in the opening pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: “For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. It is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking” (A, 7). He says this apropos that little text we are slowly moving towards or around here, “Che cos’è la poesia?” – a text that discusses the question “what is poetry?” in terms of a hedgehog. As Derrida recalls in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, this “hedgehog [*hérisson*] . . . bears in its quills, among other things, the heritage [*l’héritage*] of a piece of my name” (A, 36). He has inscribed his name, transplanted a bit of “Derrida” into this *hérisson* and into the question of inheritance (*héritage*; cf. “inherited” [*héritait*], A, 7). I humbly confess to an embroiling of my own in the aleatory opening of this essay: just as a text never comes back to me (cf. EO, 156), so the aleatory is scattered.

How to inherit a Derridedgehog? Poetry, for Derrida, would seem to be inseparable not only from the wound (as we have noted), but also from the proper name and signature. They go together. Thus his lapidary formulation in *Glas* (1974): “The signature is a wound and there is no other origin of the work of art” (GL, 184). And it is in *Glas*, too, that he contends that “the great stake [*enjeu*] of literary discourse” is “the patient, crafty, quasi animal or vegetable . . . transformation of [the] proper name, *rebus*, into things, into the name of things” (GL, 5). We might also think of *Signéponge* (dating from 1975), Derrida’s dazzling and bizarre meditation on the

poetry of Francis Ponge, with its obsessive, fascinated attention to the ways in which Ponge's poems stage and put into the abyss so many effects of the proper name and signature, a practice and a reading apparently endlessly renewing itself like the filling up and emptying out of that strange zoophyte called a sponge. Ponge's poetry is signed "Ponge," *signéponge*, a signsponging. And this "spongy thing," as Derrida says, "loses and as easily recovers its form, which is neither proper nor improper, neither simply a thing, nor simply vegetal, nor simply animal" (SIG, 70).

In an interview in 1992 Jacques Derrida is asked "What would you like to be?" and he replies: "A poet" (quoted in Peeters 2013, 417). This is an intriguing confession and affirmation: he is not a poet but he would like to be one. If there is an unease here around the sense that he could not imagine himself worthy of the name "poet," there is perhaps also a wariness regarding the kinds of "innocence," "irresponsibility," and "impotence" he elsewhere associates with literary writing more generally (see AL, 39). And there is, as always with Derrida, an affirmation of non-belonging, a rebelliousness to all fixing and classifying, a circumspection with regard to all "the codes we cast like nets over time and space – in order to master differences, to arrest them, determine them" (AL, 419). And yet, he would like to be a poet: he wants to affirm and keep the promise of a poetry to come. It is part of his dream, the dream (as he evokes it in *Monolingualism of the Other*) that he might "make something happen to [the French] language" (MLO, 51) and, beyond that of course, happen in the world, *to* the world. And if he aligns himself rather with philosophy, in order to try to give poetry "the political seriousness and consequentiality it requires" (to recall his phrasing regarding the question of literature: see AL, 39), he keeps watch, he maintains a loving vigilance for everything in poetry that is a making (*poiesis*) or "letting come" (HCFL, 79), he remains faithful, perhaps above all, to poetry, to the poetic and its promise. Hence his commitment to what he calls the "poetico-literary" when he suggests, in "This Strange Institution Called Literature," that his work is impelled by the desire or need

to give space for singular events, to invent something new in the form of acts of writing which no longer consist in a theoretical knowledge, in new constative statements, to give oneself to a poetico-literary performativity at least analogous to that of promises, orders, or acts of constitution or legislation which do not only change language, or which, in changing language, change more than language. (AL, 55)

What would it mean to give oneself to a poetico-literary performativity? Let us explore this question by turning elsewhere, to the example of a letter.

3. Distracted Apocalypse

One wintry Sunday in February 1919, in Mountain Cottage, Middleton by Wirksworth, Derbyshire, D.H. Lawrence writes to Katherine Mansfield. Here is an extract:

It is marvellous weather – brilliant sunshine on the snow, clear as summer, slightly golden sun, distance lit up. But it is immensely cold. – everything frozen solid – milk, mustard everything. Yesterday I went out for a real walk – I’ve had a cold and been in bed. I climbed with my niece to the bare top of the hills. Wonderful is to see the footmarks in the snow – beautiful ropes of rabbit prints, trailing away over the brows; heavy hare marks; a fox so sharp and dainty, going over the wall; birds with two feet that hop; very splendid straight advance of a pheasant; wood-pigeons that are clumsy and move in flocks; splendid little leaping marks of weasels, coming along like a necklace chain of berries; odd little filigree of the field-mice; the trail of a mole – it is astounding what a world of wild creatures one feels round one, on the hills in the snow. From the height it is very beautiful. The upland is naked, white like silver, and moving far into the distance, strange and muscular, with gleams like skin. Only the wind surprises one, invisibly cold; the sun lies bright on a field, like the movement of a sleeper. It is strange how insignificant, in all this, life seems. Two men, tiny as dots, move from a farm on a snow-slope, carrying hay to the beast. Every moment, they seem to melt like insignificant spots of dust. The sheer, living, muscular white of the uplands absorbs everything. Only there is a tiny clump of trees bare on the hill-top – small beeches – writhing like iron in the blue sky. – I wish one could cease to be a human being, and be a demon. (Lawrence 1984, 328)

This is an astonishing passage and a powerful instance of how letter-writing itself might be thought about in terms of poetico-literary performativity. Not generally acknowledged as such, Lawrence’s letters are, I believe, among his greatest texts. When Derrida is asked to respond to the question “what is poetry?” he does so in the form of a letter. As he notes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, “Che cos’è la poesia?” is “a letter written in the first person” (A, 36; and cf. PTS, 302). As in the post cards of the “Envois” (in PC) and “Telepathy” (in PSY1), writing a letter (or reading it) is figured as exposure to chance. You don’t know what you’re going to say. You don’t know who is reading. You don’t know what your writing might do to the reader or to you. Such is the scenario in which, as Derrida describes it in “Telepathy,” the addressee (but also the addressor) “would let her/himself be produced by the letter” (PSY1, 228). This recalls the figure of the *pad* discussed earlier, and what Derrida refers to as “a science of chance (*alea*) putting its subject into play” (SIG, 116).

Nearly a hundred years after Lawrence wrote this paragraph, who today would have the knowledge or patience to observe and document all these animal tracks and traces, even if (with the environmental degradation and impoverishment of so-called “wildlife species” that have been inflicted in this desperately short century) it were still possible to witness such variety? Lawrence evokes “a real walk,” up on the hills of Derbyshire in the snow, immediately introducing a strangeness in the word “footmarks,” a word that might refer to the human or might not. “Wonderful is to see the footmarks in the snow” – scarcely grammatical, a blurrily grammatical formulation (the “it” one might expect, as in “wonderful it is,” provokingly missing) – is followed by a dash – as if the white of the page is marked, like a trace in the snow, in turn.

These footmarks in the snow – are they human or not? And in the tingling precision of the proliferation that follows Lawrence seems to lose his footing, or invites the reader to lose track of what is “footmark” (“prints,” “marks,” or “trail”) and what is “foot” (“birds with two feet that hop,” the “straight advance” of the pheasant); what is literal and what is figurative; what is human and what is not.

What is the language proper to describing non-human animals? Or rather, given that there is no “body proper” of language, even of a word (common or proper name), and given that, as Derrida suggests, thinking concerning the non-human animal begins with a radical disarming of everything that is “proper to man” (A, 14), what marks is one to make, what wounded register? Is “dainty” or “clumsy,” in Lawrence’s paragraph, any more or less anthropomorphic than “ropes”? Or “fili-gree” than “brows”? And how is the question of sexual difference at work here, as everywhere else? (On this immense topic, let us at least note, in the padded cell of parentheses, Derrida’s affirmation of what he calls “polysexual signatures” [PTS, 107], and recall his consistent critical wariness concerning the ways in which “the desire for the proper” may be “joined with the most utterly assumed phallogocentrism” [see SIG, 60 and SPR, 109ff.].) Like the weasels, Lawrence seems impelled by a desire to offer his own “little leaping marks” – a fictive or poetic passion, as if marks themselves could be leaping – becoming “a necklace chain of berries.” Lawrence’s language and syntax inscribe the strangeness and insignificance not only of the human – people “tiny as dots,” “spots of dust” – but of the language in which this is figured or perceived. The evocation of the snowy landscape as “muscular,” “like skin,” with the sun lying “bright on a field, like the movement of a sleeper,” is undecidably gendered, uncertainly anthropomorphic and surreal, dreamily moving, up to the small beech trees “writhing like iron in the blue sky.” And then another dash: “– I wish one could cease to be a human being, and be a demon.” (Demon full stop or demon *dot*.) The “I” is no longer speaking only for itself, if it ever was: the wish or fantasy of becoming a demon is to be shared. “One” is also the reader, from Katherine Mansfield to you and beyond.

“Demon” is one of the words, as chance would have it, at the heart of Derrida’s “Che cos’è la poesia?” along with “heart” itself. He says that his text is a letter in the first person but it is also, strikingly, addressed to “you” in the intimate form (“*tu*” in French). It is a letter that engages a kind of delirium: it does something different to you, makes you different every time you read it. You get derailed, led astray, you lose yourself. “Che cos’è la poesia?” is about the desire to keep, to learn by heart, to take something inside oneself and keep it, as if it could be encrypted, padded, and protected. It is not so much about the love of a specific poem or passage of poetry – the desire to learn by heart an elegy by Emily Dickinson or a certain speech in Shakespeare. That is why Derrida’s text is in a sense so dangerous, inflammatory, catastrophic. “Set fire to the library of poetics” (PTS, 295), it cries. You are going to be torn to pieces. His concern is not with the poem in any literary historical context or with any sort of “work” that might become logged as “literary poetry” (297). It is a

concern with something that “does not hold still within names, nor even within words,” with a “thing beyond languages, even if it sometimes happens that it recalls itself in language” (293). It has to do with what “invents the heart” (295), less poem than “poematic experience,” the experience of “a single trait” (295) as precisely *experience of the impossible*, “a certain passion of the singular mark” (297).

Insofar as there is poetry, or some poem, some trace left of the poematic experience, it does not belong, it is not proper to anyone, it is never signed by a subject or “I,” for, as Derrida puts it, “the *I* is only at the coming of this desire: to learn by heart” (299). What is entailed, in short, is a demon. Derrida writes: “This ‘demon of the heart’ never gathers itself together, rather it loses itself and gets off the track (delirium or mania), it exposes itself to chance, it would rather let itself be torn to pieces by what bears down upon it” (299). It is “a-human,” “a catachrestic *hérisson*” that figures a “name beyond a name” (297). And this passion to keep can never keep still: “Filiation, token of election confided as legacy [*héritage*], it can attach itself to any word at all, to the thing, living or not, to the name of *hérisson*, for example, between life and death, at nightfall or at daybreak, distracted apocalypse, proper and common, public and secret” (299).

Apocalypse distracted [*apocalypse distraite*] (PTS, 298): deranged, absent-minded, diverted apocalypse. Not in some merely maniacal or else nihilistic manner: it is necessary to reckon, as always in Derrida’s writing, with the workings of deconstruction as what he calls a “strange strategy without finality” (MP, 7), with “distracted apocalypse” as a figure of that. From the very start, indeed, there will have been this veering away from what he refers to (at the end of “*Che cos’è la poesia?*”) as the “other catastrophe,” namely “the disappearance of the poem” and the lamentable logo-phono-anthropocentrism of “prose” (PTS, 299). Legacy (*héritage*), finally, once again: it is to read, affirm, love, to want to learn by heart, to set fire to the library of poetics, to share the dream or delirium of the you and of the hedgehog “named thus” and “so arbitrarily” (PTS, 299).

“I am like a child ready for the apocalypse” (A, 12). This is how Derrida describes himself, in July 1997, in the opening pages of what became (after his death) *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. With this strange, faintly comical but also terrifying remark, he gestures towards how he feels, what he wants to say, what he will have dreamed of saying, crying or singing from the very beginning, and through everything he wrote. It has to do with what he calls “the wound without a name: that of having *been given a name*” (A, 19). This wound, as he shows in his meticulous reading of the naming of the animals in Genesis, is not only about the violence of *that* naming, but also about the name of man and names given to him. Making himself dizzy, Derrida is ready for the apocalypse of the name. It is a matter, as we saw earlier, not of “‘giving speech back’ to animals,” but rather of “acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation” (A, 48). It has to do with the poetic or poematic as “experience of the impossible” (to recall what

he considers “the least bad definition of deconstruction”: see AFT, 200). And this is the place of dream, for as he puts it in “Fichus” (2001): “The possibility of the impossible can only be dreamed” (PM, 168). Thus he writes, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, of “dreaming through the dream of the animal” (A, 63), and reminisces on the dreaming that preceded the writing of that text

I was dreaming of inventing an unheard-of grammar and music in order to create a scene that was neither human, nor divine, nor animal, with a view to denouncing all discourses on the so-called animal, all the anthro-po-theomorphic or anthro-po-theo-centric logics and axiomatics, philosophy, religion, politics, law, ethics . . . (A, 64)

4. Final Cut

With the necessity of chance, perhaps, goes that of cutting, of finding oneself cut. If Derrida is, as Cixous suggests, the first “dreamer-philosopher,” he is perhaps also the first thinker of philosophy as traumatology, that is, as a work and theory of wounds. As he observes in the interview entitled “The Truth That Wounds” (2004): “The signature of a poem, like that of any text, is a wound. What opens, what does not heal, the hiatus, is indeed a mouth that speaks there where *it is wounded*” (SOV, 166). There is always, as he declares in the beautiful essay on Paul Celan entitled “Rams,” the disseminal experience of “an interruption . . . an inaugural cut or opening,” and this “marks in the poem the hiatus of a wound whose lips will never close, will never draw together” (SOV, 152–153). Lawrence’s letter to Katherine Mansfield was violently extracted. I cut it at the word “demon” and the dot or full stop following it. What follows is the typographical cut of another dash and two final words, ending his paragraph: “– Allzu Menschlich” (Lawrence 1984, 328). *All too human*. We might, in conclusion, try to relate Lawrence’s citation of this famous phrase from Nietzsche to Derrida’s equally elliptical, poetic echoing of it when, at one moment in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, he is discussing Emmanuel Levinas’s response to a question from John Llewelyn: “I don’t know if a snake has a face,” says Levinas, “I can’t answer that question” (see A, 108). We might link this Levinasian “response in the form of a nonresponse” – one that Derrida calls precisely “all too human” (A, 109) – to Lawrence’s great poem “Snake” (written at Taormina, in Sicily, and first published in 1921), and to Derrida’s resonant and provoking reading of that poem in the Ninth Session (February 27, 2002) of *The Beast and the Sovereign* (BS1, 236–246). In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* Derrida suggests that Levinas’s remark amounts to saying that he “doesn’t know . . . what a face is,” and that this “response in the form of a nonresponse” thus “call[s] into question the whole legitimacy of the discourse and ethics of the ‘face’ of the other [in Levinas’s work]” (A, 109). Does a snake have a face? This is, for Derrida, the “serious, poetic question” (BS1, 238) prompted by Lawrence’s poem.

“Snake” is a finely winding, intricately enfolding poem that recounts how “A snake came to my water-trough / On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat, / To drink there” (Lawrence 1971, 349). The poet or speaker – “the signatory of the poem” (BS1, 242) as Derrida calls him – lets the snake go first. He confesses how he “liked” the snake and “How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough” (Lawrence 1971, 350). But “voices” in him say he should kill it, “take a stick,” “break,” wound, cut him, “finish him off” (ibid.). The poet-speaker knows that, here “in Sicily,” the “black snakes” are “innocent” but “the gold are venomous” (ibid.). The man watches till the “earth-golden” snake has “dr[u]nk enough” and begun to “climb” back into the “black hole” in the wall: only now, as the snake is “withdrawing,” with “his back . . . turned,” does the speaker pick up and throw “a clumsy log” (Lawrence 1971, 349–351). Suddenly “convulsed in undignified haste,” the snake “was gone . . . into the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front” (Lawrence 1971, 351). The speaker does not believe the log in fact hit the snake but regrets what he did: “how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!” (ibid.). He wishes that the snake (now called “my snake”) would return (ibid.):

For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
Of life.
And I have something to expiate;
A pettiness.

Derrida’s commentary on Lawrence’s poem is too rich and suggestive to be readily summarized. He stresses the motifs of hospitality and guest, and “respect for the other” (BS1, 238); the sense of regret or remorse (especially in relation to the commandment “Thou shalt not kill”); the sense of exile and the uncanny (*unheimlich*); the force of the poem as “an ironic or perverse translation of the Garden of Eden” (BS1, 246); and the corresponding “perversity” of the poet’s desire to speak to the snake. (As the “I” of the poem recalls: “Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?” See Lawrence 1971, 350.) And, above all perhaps, Derrida stresses the subtlety and complexity of the poem as an account of “the beast and the sovereign”: “The beast becomes the sovereign, the king, ‘Uncrowned’, but waiting for the crown, on the way to being crowned” (BS1, 243). The snake is only “like” a king, Derrida notes: what is uncanny is this sense of a creature, a “[s]omeone” (Lawrence 1971, 349), who is “not a king but ‘like a king’,” but also “like a king who is not a king” – a king “in exile,” “without power,” “dethroned in a sense” (BS1, 246). Correspondingly, we might add, the poem is also a drama of wounding and being wounded, a poem about *missing one’s chance*. It speaks, wounded, of the haunting of a chance missed, a

missed encounter with the beast and the sovereign: “And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords / Of life.”

Derrida does not in fact explicitly elaborate, in the Ninth Session, on the question of the face. What is perhaps additionally uncanny about Lawrence’s poem, however, is the way in which it strangely does *not* refer to the snake as having a face and yet at the same time gives this creature so many features that might lead us to construe a face: the snake has a “throat,” “mouth,” “gums,” “head,” the ability to “look at me,” “tongue,” “lips,” even “shoulders” (Lawrence 1971, 349–351). It is not that Lawrence elsewhere also avoids attributing a face to a non-human animal. On the contrary, in other poems written around the same period he speaks of the “face” of a “baby tortoise” (1971, 353), “the pensive face” (1971, 379) of an ass, the “wooden blank” (1971, 384) of a she-goat’s face, the “beautiful slender face” (1971, 393) of a kangaroo, the “face, bright as frost” (1971, 402) of a freshly killed mountain lion, and so on. The absence of the word or name “face” for the snake, in the poem “Snake,” seems to constitute a markedly different response, the voicing of another, more spectral kind of response from the Levinasian “nonresponse.” The poem invites us to reckon with the uncanniness of the question “what is a face?” in a quite other tone and register.

As in many of his other poems about non-human animals, Lawrence is acutely alert to the fact and the effects of the other animal *looking at us*. As Derrida suggests, in one of the best-known formulations in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” (A, 29). “Snake” is about responding to this animal that Lawrence is *not*. (Intriguingly, the phrase “the animal that I am,” today often identified with Derrida, also occurs in one of Lawrence’s letters, in 1929: see Lawrence 1993, 294. We are all autobiographical animals, and as Derrida liked to say: “*tout autre est tout autre* [every other is every (bit) other]”: see, e.g., GD2, 82ff.) Lawrence’s poem generates a haunting, enduring impression of the snake as, in Derrida’s phrase, an “unsubstitutable singularity” (A, 9). We are given to apprehend a sense of this snake as “wholly other” (A, 11), a creature that “refuses to be conceptualized” (A, 9). What we think, what we make of this snake having a face might be compared, finally, in another quite different poetic register, to the madness of the Cheshire-Cat in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. “A cat may look at a king” (Carroll 1992, 68), as Alice recalls from the proverb. But does this grinning cat have a face? Can there be “a grin without a cat” (Carroll 1992, 53)?

5. Postscript: In the Burrow

I would have liked to write about the haunting of Derrida’s hedgehog and of the entire text of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* by Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books. In the thought of this last possibility I am no doubt sharing Derrida’s own desire – and

sharing, of course, is also cutting. As he declares, near the beginning of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: “Although I don’t have time to do so, I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact you can’t be certain that I am not doing that, for better or for worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing” (A, 7). That, in any case, might be one of the ways in which to think about the hole or burrow [*le terrier*] in which Derrida dreams and writes, writes dreaming. As he cryptically observes in the present tense, at the heart of his autobiographical animal discourse: “I am dreaming, therefore, in the depths of an undiscoverable burrow to come” (A, 63; see also A, 167 n. 9).

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On Forgiveness and the Possibility of Reconciliation

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Recent decades have witnessed an increasing interest in restorative justice and in those various measures that might be taken to promote the healing and restoration of community in the wake of violence. As examples, one can think of recent apologies to indigenous peoples by the Prime Ministers of Canada and Australia. Only months apart, these public apologies are strikingly similar. On June 11, 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized in the Canadian House of Commons for the removal of thousands of Indian, Inuit, and Metis children, who were ripped from their families and placed in boarding schools, frequently to become victims of abuse. Just months earlier, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had gone before parliament on February 13, 2008 to apologize for the grief, suffering, and loss inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families through policies of forcible removal that were in effect through the early and mid-twentieth century.

Between 1909 and 1969, tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, known as the Stolen Generations, were forcibly taken from their families. A lengthy report, entitled *Bringing Them Home*, was published in 1997. It chronicled the longstanding effects of the policies of forcible removal on Aboriginal communities, and indicted the “gross violations of human rights” enacted by the policies, claiming they were tantamount to genocide. Over a decade later, Rudd’s speech acknowledges the indignity and degradation enacted by the policies and offers an apology for them. Significantly, the speech also gestures to the hope that the apology will be received in a particular manner, with an eye to the future: “We the parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit

in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.” Rudd’s public apology seems to suggest forgiveness as its counterpart. He understood his apology as an attempt to address “unfinished business,” to remove a “great stain” from the soul of the nation “in the spirit of reconciliation.” Toward the end of the apology, however, Rudd insists that the apology is offered “without qualification” on behalf of his office, the government, and the parliament.

Derrida at one point claimed that he thought such an apology would be appropriate (QG, 64), but he did not live to see it. Still, Rudd’s comments are demonstrative of a paradox that was of interest to Derrida across all of his writings on forgiveness: on the one hand, the apology is offered “without qualification;” on the other, Rudd requests that the apology be received in the “spirit of reconciliation.” This tension between a qualified and strategic attempt at reconciliation and an absolute and unconditional idea of forgiveness is at the heart of Derrida’s writings on this theme. Apart from public apologies such as those described above, Derrida is similarly interested in the proliferation of truth and reconciliation commissions on a global scale. Organized by Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu to address the violence of Apartheid, the South African truth and reconciliation commission is widely heralded as the model of such commissions. Similar commissions have been formed to deal with historical atrocity in dozens of nations, including Argentina, Chile, Peru, South Korea, the United States, Liberia, Morocco, Kenya, and East Timor. It is the amplified visibility of such attempts at reconciliation that concerns Derrida, who does not contest the importance and benefit of these measures so much as ask us to consider whether they qualify as instances of forgiveness in the truest sense of that word. Importantly, his thoughts on forgiveness are situated in reference to what he takes to be the “multiplication,” “proliferation,” and “amplification” of various public gestures of apology, pardon, amnesty, and reconciliation (CF, 28). These concerns ground Derrida’s work on this topic, from his earlier discussions of the pardon in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (1992), to his comment presented under the title “To Forgive” at a conference at Villanova University in 1999 and published in the volume *Questioning God* (2001), through to his essay “On Forgiveness,” which was published in the short text *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001).

Before exploring Derrida’s account of forgiveness in detail, it is helpful to underline one aspect of his account that importantly circumscribes his analysis. This is Derrida’s appreciation of the role of silence in the discussion of forgiveness. Indeed, Derrida’s contributions to a philosophical discourse on forgiveness are noteworthy as much for what they refuse to say as for what they do positively contribute. This respect for the limits of discourse is a hallmark of Derrida’s philosophy. Consider Derrida’s remarks from an earlier essay “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” (1989) where he references an injunction: “how not to speak, and which speech to avoid, in order to speak well? ‘How to avoid speaking’ thus means, at once or successively: How must one not speak? How is it necessary to speak?” (HAS, 15). These comments on the negative space of discourse, on silence and the secret, are vital to consider

alongside Derrida's deconstruction of forgiveness. Indeed, it is fair to say that Derrida's preoccupation with silence in this context is particularly meaningful because there is a sense in which absolute and true forgiveness are preserved only in silence, and undone once they are made present or spoken. "We can imagine, and accept, the someone would never forgive, even after a process of acquittal or amnesty. The secret of this experience remains. It must remain intact, inaccessible to law, to politics, even to morals: absolute" (CF, 55). In the aftermath of violence, there may be an injunction to speak, but Derrida's approach is one that acknowledges the integrity of silence in the face of the unspeakable. To be sure, this is not to claim that Derrida was a quietist. It is instead to gesture toward the structure that subtends all of his work on forgiveness, namely the concern that when it is made present, announced, or recognized, it is contaminated and annulled. This self-annulling feature of forgiveness is not an incidental characteristic; it constitutes forgiveness as such.

The silences that pervade Derrida's discourse on forgiveness are worth attending to, since Derrida's refusal to speak to certain issues surrounding forgiveness is all too deliberate. Indeed, his discourse on forgiveness does not address several of the more popular motifs that other discussions of historical justice and the politics of memory tend to address. Among these would be the debate surrounding whether remembering or forgetting is the most productive – and least divisive – strategy for the collective overcoming of historical atrocity. Do apologies enact a kind of collective remembrance, or do they aim to suture wounds with the hope of moving on? Some critics have recently emphasized the importance and legitimacy of ongoing resentment in the aftermath of violence. Others object that amnesty and forgiveness are morally unjust strategies in the wake of mass violence. For his part, Derrida has little to say about these debates and discussions. His silence is instructive; the questions that he refuses to answer tell us as much or more about how he understands forgiveness as those for which he has a more positive or prescriptive response.

1. "On the Way to Globalization"

Derrida's discourse on forgiveness is importantly a discourse on heritage. More precisely, he is interested in our split inheritance of this concept and what this inheritance implies. Of concern to Derrida is the link that he draws between our Abrahamic religious inheritance and the proliferation of various therapeutic discourses in the political realm. On Derrida's account, the Abrahamic tradition has bequeathed to us two contradictory conceptions of forgiveness, one of them conditional, the other unconditional. Unconditional forgiveness is described as "gracious," "infinite," and "aneconomic": it is granted even to the unrepentant, to those who do not seek forgiveness (CF, 34). Conditional forgiveness, in contrast, is realized in an economy (juridical, political, psychological) of recognition, one which hones the desire for penance and which weighs the propriety of forgiveness in reference to particular

instances of moral trespass. Derrida describes these two orders of forgiveness as absolutely heterogeneous and also indissociable (CF, 44). It is with the understanding of these two orders as heterogeneous and also indissociable that Derrida turns to contemporary instances of political forgiveness and claims that what happens there – these various attempts at healing, reconciliation, apology, and amnesty – is not forgiveness in truth. Absolute forgiveness should be devoid of any attempt to “heal or reconcile,” “save or redeem” (QG, 57).

In the opening pages of “On Forgiveness,” Derrida describes the proliferation of these scenes of political reconciliation and apology as akin to a kind of ideological colonization or expansion. This judgment is made in reference to the Abrahamic language in which these discussions are cast, irrespective of whether or not the culture in which the public ritual of reconciliation or apology is taking place is historically bound in any meaningful sense to the Abrahamic traditions themselves. In describing the Abrahamic language of forgiveness as the “universal idiom of law, of politics, of the economy” (CF, 28), Derrida notes that the traffic in this language is at once the “agent and symptom” of the internationalization of a certain theology of forgiveness. Together with the institutionalization of the juridical concept of “crimes against humanity,” the Abrahamic vernacular structures a theatrical space in which these scenes of repentance and apology play out globally.

Derrida describes the globalization of these scenes as a “grand convulsion” or a “frenetic compulsion”; he also claims to find these scenes inherently theatrical. They are described as spectacles. His skepticism regarding the sincerity of these various scenes certainly indicates reticence surrounding their legitimacy. Readers are reminded of the hypocritical, calculative, and parasitic relation that these scenes bear to absolute, unconditional forgiveness – but still Derrida insists that these scenes respond to “a ‘good’ movement” (CF, 29). The tension here between the acknowledgment of the usefulness and even necessity of these gestures and the recognition of their derivative and parasitic status persists throughout Derrida’s writings on forgiveness. That Derrida would place the word that nominates the normative force of the movement in quotations – the movement is not good, but “good” – signals his skepticism.

One misreads “On Forgiveness” if one reads it as a cautionary tale regarding only the inadequacy of governmental apologies and truth and reconciliation commissions in reference to some impossible regulative ideal of absolute, unconditional forgiveness. The next section will discuss the way in which impossibility is implicit in the meaning of forgiveness. Here it suffices to note that Derrida’s circumspect tone regards not only the various scenes of political reconciliation, repentance, and apology themselves, but also the globalization of these scenes. The precise concern is not only with the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a prime minister’s apology, for instance, but also with the global expansion and multiplication of these scenes themselves. For Derrida, it is more than anything an investment in redressing “crimes against humanity” – themselves defined in reference to the idea of the sacredness of

humanity in the Abrahamic and especially Christian traditions – that has motivated the movement he diagnoses. He describes the globalization of forgiveness as “an immense scene of confession in progress, thus a virtually Christian convulsion-conversion-confession, a process of Christianization which has no more need for the Christian church” (CF, 31). Derrida’s concern lies with the scope and valence of this movement – its global and Abrahamic (especially Christian) character – as much or more so than it does with any judgment regarding the legitimacy or lack thereof of concrete instances of pardon, amnesty, and reconciliation themselves.

2. How to Make Sense of Forgiveness?

In “On Forgiveness,” Derrida notes certain tendencies that hinder one’s ability to approach this topic with clarity, among them the fact that forgiveness is often “confounded” or confused with other themes, namely amnesty, excuse, and regret. More crucially, Derrida insists that forgiveness is heterogeneous, and irreducible to, various prescriptive and penal measures that fall under the law. His claim is that when one speaks of amnesty, reconciliation, or apology, what one imagines is not true forgiveness, but derivative and lesser figures. While never disputing the necessity of turning to the past and acknowledging the possibility of forgiveness, Derrida is nonetheless concerned with the sincerity of these attempts. All attempts at forgiveness are plagued by the chance, and even tendency, for “the simulacra, the automatic ritual, hypocrisy, calculation or mimicry” to contaminate and nullify forgiveness itself (CF, 29). Above all, Derrida is concerned with what he variably renders as an “equivocation,” “conflation,” or “confounding” of unconditional forgiveness with conditional, concrete instantiations of pardon, amnesty, reconciliation, and so on. While Derrida does not contest the importance of various concrete efforts at forgiveness, such as truth commissions, apologies, and pardons, he insists that what is accomplished in these gestures is not absolute forgiveness, but something else. His main concern is that an illegitimate equivocation is at play when forgiveness is understood as something that is reducible to the realm of concrete politics, which is to say that Derrida balks at the idea that the various commissions, speeches, and public apologies that populate the political landscape today are actually true instances of forgiveness. So while Derrida is interested in the proliferation of various contemporary political discourses and institutions that claim forgiveness as their aim and end, he worries that as these institutions multiply, the true meaning of forgiveness is eroded.

Derrida’s deconstruction of forgiveness turns on his understanding of what is in fact unforgivable, of those deeds that are so horrendous that it is inconceivable or unthinkable that forgiveness would be granted. Derrida is in sympathy with the claim made by Vladimir Jankélévitch in his work “Should We Pardon Them?” (1971; English trans. 1996) – echoing Hannah Arendt’s work in *The Human Condition* (1958) – that the horrors of the Holocaust are not forgivable. While Derrida is

amenable to this claim, he chooses to reconfigure the impasse it presents as a new starting point for discussion instead of the termination of any hope for forgiveness. While Jankélévich insists that it is impossible to forgive unforgivable horror, Derrida suggests that

we would have to ask ourselves, as far as we are concerned, if, on the contrary . . . if forgiveness must not free itself from its correlate of expiation and if its possibility is not called forth precisely and only where it seems to be impossible before the unforgivable, and possible only when grappling with the im-possible. (QG, 35)

His strategy is to isolate an aporia that lies at the heart of forgiveness, namely the idea that “forgiveness only becomes possible from the moment it appears impossible” (CF, 37).

Without question, Derrida’s discussions of forgiveness evidence the predilection for paradox and aporia that pervades his entire oeuvre. Aporetic logic dictates that forgiveness “should not present itself” as such; to acknowledge forgiveness – to announce its presence – is to nullify it. Derrida claims that absolute forgiveness is nonsense, makes no sense, has no sense. He insists that forgiveness itself is not (nor should it be) “normal, normative, normalizing” (CF, 32). When forgiveness is thought as such, when it is recognized, when it presents itself, it is annulled as it enters an economy of exchange and is corrupted. There is an excess in absolute forgiveness that is incapable of being domesticated by various orders of knowledge or confined by any political economy. This justifies Derrida’s insistence that we can have no knowledge of it. By definition, absolute forgiveness cannot present itself as such and is irreducible to conditional forgiveness. He acknowledges outright that he does not know what forgiveness means or how to make sense of it (QG, 53). Derrida’s avowal of his ignorance in this context is neither disingenuous nor indulgent.

While Derrida does not dispute the utility or nobility of concrete attempts at reconciliation or repentance, he urges recognition of the fact that these instances of conditional forgiveness are only that. Where other forms of reconciliation are a possibility, true forgiveness is not at stake, since it is the unforgivable that grants forgiveness meaning, that summons forgiveness, or calls it into existence (CF, 32). What is reconcilable by other means does not call for forgiveness. Derrida is doing more here than arguing that unconditional forgiveness, as the “essence” of forgiveness, is true, while conditional forgiveness is compromised by virtue of its insertion in a psychic, political, or juridical economy. Derrida renders unconditional forgiveness as “mad,” “impossible,” “without meaning,” language that marks unconditional forgiveness as hyperbolic and excessive, even nonsensical, resulting in Derrida’s claim that “pure unconditional forgiveness, in order to have meaning, must have no ‘meaning’, no finality, even no intelligibility” (CF, 45). The aporetic logic that Derrida favors dictates that absolute and true forgiveness – by its very definition – would be an affront to

sense. “Forgiveness should not present itself” (QG, 53), and “if forgiveness happens, if it happens, it should exceed the order of presence, the order of being, the order of consciousness, and happen in the night. The night is its element” (QG, 53).

Crucially, Derrida insists that the impossibility of forgiveness not be read as a negative limitation on forgiveness so much as the originary possibility, and even sense, of forgiveness itself. The contamination of the unconditional by the conditional does not amount to the privation of forgiveness or its eradication. On the contrary, the contamination of the two orders of discourse serves as the condition for the possibility of forgiveness itself. Impossibility is intrinsic to the meaning of forgiveness. Absolute forgiveness is not an unattainable – but somehow still imaginable and desirable – regulative ideal. The necessity of contamination is the condition for the possibility of forgiveness and not its privation. Without the contamination or corruption of unconditional forgiveness, the notion would cease to make sense.

The mechanism of corruption is ubiquitous in Derrida’s writings, and one might argue that the importance of Derrida’s account of forgiveness is not to be sought in reference to its uniqueness in relation to the rest of his corpus; indeed, his deconstruction of forgiveness and his insistence on its aporetic structure firmly mirrors his deconstruction of the gift or of hospitality, for instance. That said, what emerges as one singular feature of the deconstruction of forgiveness is an unusually bald assessment of the “hypocrisy” of conditional forgiveness. On the whole, the corruption of the absolute by the conditional is not typically described as a good or a bad thing. The mechanism of corruption is non-normative. It serves as an intrinsic and even transcendental feature of presence, and so of experience. With this in mind, Derrida’s assessments of the “hypocrisy,” hollowness and “theatricality” of forgiveness are interesting. The contamination or corruption of the unconditional by the conditional may be necessary – indeed it is described as the condition for the possibility of forgiveness itself – but the discussion of forgiveness is somewhat unique in that Derrida does not evidence his usual restraint when it comes to considering the normative weight of this constitutive corruptibility. In the case of forgiveness, there is little that Derrida seems to find redemptive in the necessity of this structure. He freely cites the appropriation of forgiveness by juridical power as a kind of “political abuse” of the concept (QG, 58).

Derrida suggests that it is an injustice when the word “forgiveness” is used in certain contexts, as it demonstrates a lack of respect for the sense (*sens*) of the word “forgiveness” itself given the “non-negotiable, aneconomic, apolitical, non-strategic, unconditionality that it prescribes” (CF, 50). It is not just the subordination of forgiveness to the law that is at stake, however, for Derrida is cognizant of the fact that “all sorts of strategic ruses can hide themselves abusively behind a ‘rhetoric’ or ‘comedy’ of forgiveness in order to avoid the step of the law” (CF, 51). The relationship between forgiveness and the law is thus doubly perilous; either one risks conflating forgiveness with various legal or punitive measures, or one evades those punitive

measures themselves through disingenuous recourse to therapeutic measures of reconciliation. Claims such as these would seem to leave little question as to Derrida's suspicion – even judgment? – of the political theater of forgiveness. “Perhaps,” Derrida writes, “we will have to get rid of it. Perhaps that is what is going on today on a worldwide scene. On the one hand, forgiveness dominates the whole scene, and on the other hand, it has become hollow, void, attenuated” (QG, 54).

Here Derrida announces a stronger normative judgment regarding the mechanics of contamination than he does in several of his other deconstructive projects. While it is surely the case that contamination – of the absolute and the contingent, the conditional and the unconditional – allows for forgiveness itself, since “forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable,” Derrida's description of the contemporary discourse as “hollow,” “theatrical,” and “insincere” is noteworthy. He makes stronger claims, and voices more overt suspicion regarding the politics of forgiveness than one witnesses in his sibling deconstructive projects. However, Derrida explains his precise worry when he writes that it is not the attempt at healing and reconciliation that is objectionable, but the application of the word “forgiveness” to these attempts:

Speaking of this equivocal use of the word forgiveness, we see that all these political scenes of forgiveness, of asking for forgiveness or repentance, are often strategic calculations made in view of healing away. I have nothing against that. I have something against the use of the word forgiveness to describe these cases. . . . In France, each time the head of state, the prime minister, wants to grant amnesty to erase the crimes of the past, it is in the name of “national reconciliation,” to reconstitute the healthy body of the nation, of the national community. I have nothing against that. But if the word forgiveness is used in view of such an ecology or therapy I would say no, that is not to forgive. It is perhaps a very useful, a very noble strategy, but it is not forgiveness. (QG, 57)

In this same discussion, Derrida goes on to claim that the attribution of the word “forgiveness” to various instances of apology and reconciliation amounts to “empty rhetoric, hypocritical rhetoric” (QG, 57). He asserts that today the idea of forgiveness is subject to “political abuse” (QG, 58). The strong and even visceral nature of these claims make it difficult to state with any assurance that Derrida was an agnostic regarding the expansion of the Abrahamic language in which the contemporary politics of forgiveness are cast. The expansion of Abrahamic discourse and its attendant therapeutic vernacular is consistently rendered by Derrida as a kind of corruption that is variably described as “noble,” and “insincere,” with the latter of these two assessments claiming prominence. In several places, Derrida claims that the American government *should* apologize for slavery, and that the Australian government *should* apologize for the gross persecution of its indigenous peoples, but he is consistent in claiming that the application of the word forgiveness to these instances is disingenuous, hypocritical, and even abusive (QG, 64).

3. Who Forgives? Forgiveness, Sovereignty, and the Gift

By far and away the Derridean project to which the deconstruction of forgiveness is most proximate is Derrida's deconstruction of the gift. This proximity exceeds that which is gestured to by the etymological bond (in French) between the two, *don* and *pardon*, forgiveness and gift. The two are sibling concepts, and the proximity between the two resonates especially in Derrida's discussion of the relationship between the gift, forgiveness, and sovereignty.

While Derrida insists that giving and forgiving are indissociable, he also claims they are irreducible to each other: "Thus, no gift without forgiveness and no forgiveness without gift; but the two are, above all, not the same thing" (QG, 22). The twin deconstructions of the gift and forgiveness emphasize Derrida's familiar predilection for aporia and paradox, to the extent that his deconstruction of both concepts stresses that neither of them is purely present in experience. Indeed, presence nullifies each. The general suspicion of the recourse to presence that marks so much of Derrida's corpus informs his discourse on forgiveness. The suspicion is that there is an implicit conservatism in the mechanism of representation, such that an attempt at reconciliation or forgiveness that was made to conform to the standing mores of various socio-political institutions would never amount to pure forgiveness, for the fact that it would be forced to conform to various understandings of exchange, reciprocity, and responsibility that were already in place. Therefore to recognize forgiveness – either that one forgives or that one has been forgiven – is to corrupt it. Even if I am the one who has been harmed, if I recognize that I have granted forgiveness, and if in so doing I anticipate thanks or gratitude, then this instance of forgiveness is not pure, but conditional. "As soon as the victim understands the criminal, as soon as she exchanges, speaks, agrees with him, the scene of reconciliation has commenced, and with it this ordinary forgiveness which is anything but forgiveness" (CF, 49).

This account of the corruptibility of forgiveness is an heir to, and precisely mirrors, Derrida's account of the corruptibility of the gift in *Given Time*:

The simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it. The simple identification of the passage of the gift as such, that is, of an identifiable thing among some identifiable "one," would be nothing other than the process of the destruction of the gift. It is as if, between the event or the institution of the gift *as such* and its destruction, the distance were meant to be constantly annulled. *At the limit, the gift as gift ought not appear as gift: either to the donee or the donor.* (GT, 14)

Also important for Derrida is the idea that the gift of forgiveness is bound in "odious" ways to the exercise and persistence of various kinds of sovereignty. In Derrida's eyes, one must not only ask forgiveness for not having given enough, but for giving itself. One must ask forgiveness for giving, for what one gives, "which can become a poison,

a weapon, an affirmation of sovereignty, or even omnipotence or an appeal for recognition" (QG, 22). This claim straightforwardly echoes Derrida's earlier discussion of the gift in *Given Time*. When the gift is recognized as such, it becomes available as an instrument of subjugation, a means of exerting one's sovereignty over others, of securing their indebtedness and subordination. The gift can enact injury: "one always takes by giving" (QG, 22). In the context of the discussion of forgiveness, Derrida's suspicion regards who is entitled to grant forgiveness, and in whose name.

That is because it implies that I am able to forgive, that I have the power to forgive, the sovereign power to forgive, which introduces me into the scene of the economy of exchange. You have to recognize that I forgive you . . . which is, of course, the beginning of the destruction of what forgiveness should be. (QG, 53)

For this reason,

one must a priori . . . ask forgiveness for the gift itself, one has to be forgiven the gift, the sovereignty or the desire for sovereignty of the gift. And, pushing it even farther . . . one would have to be forgiven forgiveness, which may itself also include [*comporter*] the irreducible equivocation of an affirmation of sovereignty, indeed of mastery. (QG, 53)

Sovereignty is requisite for forgiveness. The effective exercise of forgiveness seems to presuppose sovereign power, and this could be "the sovereign power of a strong and noble soul, but also a power of State exercising an uncontested legitimacy, the power necessary to organize a trial, an applicable judgment or, eventually, acquittal, amnesty or forgiveness" (QG, 53). If pure forgiveness is best conceived as a radical opening to the other, Derrida's claim is that the various measures of forgiveness and reconciliation that pervade the political landscape are in actuality manifestations of sovereignty or the desire for sovereignty, where again absolute forgiveness is corrupted by political interest.

And since we are speaking of forgiveness, what makes the "I forgive you" sometimes unbearable or odious, even obscene, is the affirmation of sovereignty. It is often addressed from the top down, it confirms its own freedom or assumes for itself the power of forgiving, be it as victim or in the name of the victim. However, it is also necessary to think about an absolute victimization which deprives the victim of life, or the right to speak, or that freedom that force and that power which *authorizes*, which permits the accession to the position of "I forgive." There, the unforgivable would consist of depriving the victim of this right to speech, of speech itself, of the possibility of all manifestation, of all testimony. (CF, 58)

The question of sovereignty also has bearing on the question of whether true forgiveness can only be realized in the (relative) solitude of the face-to-face relation,

that is to say it can only be truly at play between the one who has inflicted the harm and the one who has been made to suffer. What does it mean to conceive of forgiveness as something that might be performed, assumed, inhabited, by a collectivity? The “solitude of two” in the scene of forgiveness would seem to render inauthentic any instance of forgiveness that was sought “in the name of a community, a church, an institution, a profession, a group of anonymous victims, sometimes dead, or their representatives, descendants or survivors” (QG, 25). The necessity of both the singularity and solitude of forgiveness imply its constant resistance to juridical and punitive political mechanisms. Here Derrida appeals to Kant, who himself marks the limitation of the sovereign’s right to impose clemency in a way that interests Derrida and resonates with his own account: the sovereign has no right to grant clemency for crimes between subjects, that is, between those who are for him third parties. The right to grant clemency – the right to pardon – can only be enacted by the sovereign when there is a crime against the sovereign himself. One has no right to forgive what has befallen and been suffered by another. One should never forgive on behalf of another, in his or her name. Yet despite this clear privileging of the face-to-face relation and the singularity of the interaction between perpetrator and victim, Derrida acknowledges that the discourse on forgiveness seems to presuppose the presence of a third party. The scene of forgiveness is one wherein all the possibilities of language, community and heritage abide. It is not a scene of isolation (QG, 64). Pure forgiveness would not be in the purview of a collective politics, but the idea of forgiveness itself seems to imply the existence of a third party in order to make sense. This is yet another instance of the play between the conditional and the unconditional in forgiveness. One can imagine absolute forgiveness between two, but the presence of the third implies economy, politics, language, and representation.

4. Experiencing Forgiveness

In a response to a question posed at a roundtable following his talk on forgiveness at Villanova University in 1999, Derrida narrows his focus to the experience of forgiveness. In many of Derrida’s writings, there is a polemic against presence, or at least against the priority afforded to presence in the phenomenological tradition. In spite of Derrida’s criticisms of phenomenology, he remains relatively attuned to the *experiences* that are implied by his various deconstructive projects. In this respect, his break with phenomenology is ambivalent and not entire. In fact Derrida arguably maintains a more amplified investment in the phenomenological tradition than his French Nietzschean peers, particularly Deleuze and Foucault. This lends his work a decidedly existential edge. Passage between the poles of conditional and unconditional forgiveness is an experience of trial and uncertainty. It is an ordeal or a test (*épreuve*) that one endures. The significance of the existential edge of this analysis should not

be ignored, for it signals Derrida's investment in intensifying the experience of responsibility that inheres in the aporetic structure of forgiveness. Far from nihilistic, Derrida's analysis is invested in the possibility of a hyperbolic and anguishing responsibility that confronts us as we negotiate the various aporia that animate political life, of which forgiveness is one.

Again and again, Derrida claims "the aporia is the experience of responsibility" (QG, 62). It is only by passing through a set of impossible injunctions, by making an impossible choice, that we might be said to be responsible. "It is because these incommensurable poles are indissociable that we have to take responsibility, a difficult responsibility, to negotiate the best response in an impossible situation" (QG, 58). In no way does Derrida sidestep the fact that these experiences are painful and anguishing; they are experiences of profound uncertainty, no less experiences of the imperative to choose in the face of this uncertainty. This is our lot as those who inherit the tradition that we do:

The heritage of the concept of forgiveness is not a given. On the one hand it prescribes unconditional forgiveness and on the other hand it proscribes conditional forgiveness, conditioned by repentance, or by asking for forgiveness, and so on. The heritage is not something I receive. It is something I have to interpret and reinterpret through an active responsibility. (QG, 59)

In the account in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Derrida is invested in the experience of negotiating a possible response to the aporia posed by his analysis of forgiveness. Such a negotiation is not experientially neutral or easy, but rather involves a passage, a test, or a challenge that one endures in the passage between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. What is at stake is the assumption of a "difficult responsibility," an experience that is partially captured in a fairly orthodox existential vernacular that favors the themes of anguish and anxiety. Without the risk and discomfort of reckoning with incompatible injunctions, there is no responsibility. "For the responsible decision to be envisaged or taken, we have to go through pain and aporia, a situation in which I do not know what to do" (QG, 59). Derrida writes that the experience of aporia must be endured, signaling the ambiguities that persist, the abiding failure to know if one has chosen or acted rightly, the inability to know if one can ever truly forgive or ask forgiveness.

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Cosmopolitanism to Come: Derrida's Response to Globalization

FRED EVANS

Cosmopolitanism has ancient roots in the West and the East. It expresses an ethico-political concern for distant as well as proximate others, emphasizing global justice and the well-being of people around the world (Delanty 2009, 20–29; Appiah 2006, xv, 174). The ethico-political bonds it champions stand in stark contrast to the merely expedient or *modus vivendi* relations involved in the economic, information, communication, and other worldwide networks that we call “globalization” (Castells 2000, 1–4, 120–123). More specifically, cosmopolitanism’s advocacy for universal values opposes the negative effects of the current form of globalization and its voracious appetite for the accumulation of capital and the unregulated exploitation of natural and human resources. But cosmopolitanism faces a conceptual problem that complicates its role in ameliorating the harmful side of global capital. Its traditional search for a homogeneous identity or univocal notion of the good is now rivaled by the growing recognition that cultural, ethnic, and other forms of diversity are a value as well as the ethnic-cultural fact they have always been. Indeed, we can refer to the tension between these two political virtues, unity and heterogeneity, as “the dilemma of diversity”: the desire for solidarity threatens to diminish the importance of difference; but the allegiance to pluralism can easily divide us into disparate islands held together by nothing other than the exigencies of mutual fear or commercial trade – ties that by themselves would be cut as soon as any adherent to this arrangement saw a clear opportunity to take over at the expense of the other participants (OHD, 38–39; Appiah 2006, xv; Evans 2008, 3–4; Gutmann 1994, xii; Rawls 2005, xviii; Young 2000, xiii).

To pass through the horns of this dilemma, we have to replace the notion of a unity *imposed* upon difference with the idea of a unity *composed of* and by difference

(Evans 2008, 3–13). But evaluating this idea requires that it first be made clear and concrete. Jacques Derrida offers a political philosophy that seems to fulfill this purpose, at once valorizing heterogeneity and postulating a form of solidarity that decries homogenizing norms or any other principle of sovereignty. But he achieves this paradoxical alliance of unity and difference, this “*Poikilon*” or “multicolored beauty” (ROG, 26), on the basis of a “democracy to come” that he says is “impossible” and yet just for that reason can protect domestic and international democracies from their worse inclinations. Derrida also describes his version of democracy as “quasi-transcendental” and “unconditional.” This unorthodox vision challenges the widely accepted political liberalism or “realistic utopia” proclaimed by Rawls and others who feel that their favored domestic and global societies are both possible and based on conditions that carry no references to even a “quasi” sense of the transcendental (Rawls 1999, 6, 127).

Derrida’s distance from the worldly or purely “immanent” views of liberalism confronts us with a question: does cosmopolitanism require that we reach beyond or stay within the world of conditions if we want to arrive at a norm that valorizes unity and diversity simultaneously – a norm that can also serve as an effective and thus “realistic” guide for world relations? Derrida will defend his view by calling it “reasonable” (ROG, 150–151, 158–159). We will see that his use of this term refers to his idea of the “unconditional.” It therefore differs from the liberal philosophers’ conditional use of reasonableness (cf. Rawls 2005, 48–50; Rawls 1999, 87–88). Does a “reasonable cosmopolitanism,” then, have to reach for the stars or stay on the ground to render itself compelling? A view that appeals to a quasi-transcendental basis for cosmopolitan democracy can seem unacceptably ephemeral; yet a conditional view may amount to no more than a worldwide *modus vivendi* despite its claims to moral bonds of unity. The task ahead of us will be to see how Derrida’s notion of democracy or cosmopolitanism confronts this issue.

1. Globalization and Cosmopolitanism

Contemporary Marxism provides one of the most systematic characterizations and criticisms of the modern form of globalization (Smith 2006). Derrida says that he agrees with the spirit of Marxism, particularly its openness to transformative self-critique and even more to “a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation . . . [or] promise” (SM, 111). But he is careful to rid this affirmation of any “*messianism*” or final salvation and to distance himself from the letter of Marxism, from its “dialectical method” as well as “its fundamental concepts of labor, mode of production, social class, and consequently . . . the whole history of its apparatuses” (SM, 110). Derrida instead would prefer to replace “globalization” with the term “*mondialisation*.” The latter refers to the destructive side of globalization but also to a more favorable promise that this worldwide legacy carries within it. Before turning to that promise,

we will examine Derrida's characterization of globalization and its negative form of sovereignty.

Derrida avoids the Marxist tradition of using dialectical contradiction to characterize globalization. Instead he sees the global panorama as involving two "phenomena." The first consists in the "effects" of "techno-science." These effects include the creation and growth of transportation and telecommunication networks, the circulation of persons, commodities, and modes of production, and socio-political models for regulating the market. The second phenomenon is the "ethico-political decisions and political-economic-military strategies" that concern the opening of borders, international law, allied legislation, and "the limitations and displacements of sovereignty" (NEG, 372–373). In particular, Derrida believes these political decisions and strategies are "homogenized" by a "cultural-linguistic hegemony" that he identifies as "Anglo-American." Poorer countries find it difficult to "fight" back against this "homo-hegemonization" because it provides the techno-science and global networks to which they require continued access (NEG, 372–374).

The negative externalities of globalization also include inequalities in health and technology as well as a deficit in communication. Derrida expresses his outrage against the inequalities in health when he exclaims that "there have never been in the history of humanity, in absolute numbers ... so many cases of malnutrition, ecological disaster, or rampant epidemics" (PT, 121–122). He also points out that verbal and peaceful dialogue is absent despite the worldwide channels of communication. This deficit often leads to the worst "violence" as "the only 'response' to a 'deaf ear'" (PT, 122–123). Indeed, Derrida worries that globalization has transformed the world into "little more than a marketplace, a rationalization in the service of particular interests" (ROG, 158; see also ROG, 155; SM, 106; NEG, 327). He also thinks that the ill effects of the lack of dialogue extend to the response of the United States to the destruction of the World Trade Towers on 9/11/01. In waging a war against at least one of the countries it calls the "axis of evil," and in attempting to curtail the rights of its own citizens, the United States has "come to resemble these enemies, to corrupt itself and threaten itself in order to protect itself against their threats." The United States ends up becoming like the "rogue states" it decries in the name of the same international law it violates (ROG, 40, 96).

Despite these pessimistic pronouncements, Derrida thinks that *mondialisation* (the broader sense of globalization) and its concept of the world promise something better than the inequalities we have just surveyed. More specifically, it "gestures to a history" or "has a memory that distinguishes it from [the concept] of the globe." This historical memory points to "human brotherhood" and to a language "that continues to structure and condition the modern concepts of the rights of man or the crime against humanity" as well as shaping "the horizons of international law" and the idea of "citizens of the world" (NEG, 374–375). The roots of this history involve an "Abrahamic filiation" (Judeo-Christian-Islamic) but also the cosmopolitan tradition shared by Greek/Ciceronian stoicism and Pauline Christianity. These developments

are the precursors of Kant and other Enlightenment figures and certain themes of international politics today: work, forgiveness, peace, and eliminating the death penalty (CF, 18–20; NEG, 375–386; PT, 130).

Although this cosmopolitan tradition reflects the better side of *mondialisation*, it too has a good and bad side. Thus Derrida is quick to note that the genealogy of cosmopolitanism privileges a Euro-Christian heritage burdened by its own versions of homo-hegemonization. In particular, he believes that classical cosmopolitanism has always presupposed an explicit or tacit “theologico-political” version of state sovereignty (PT, 131). Indeed, Kant wanted perpetual peace but also famously thought that Indians, Africans, and Hindus were incapable of moral maturity and therefore should be excluded from leadership roles in any cosmopolitan order. Derrida adds that the “discourse on [universal] human rights and democracy” in the twentieth century is an “obscene alibi” so long as it continues to tolerate the plight of people suffering from extreme poverty, humiliation, and injustice (ROG, 86).

Nonetheless, these abuses distract us from seeing the more favorable demand also inscribed in the history of cosmopolitanism. Derrida refers to this injunction as “democracy to come” and indicates that he is willing to accept the idea of cosmopolitanism or a “world contract” only if it is understood as adhering to this demand (NEG, 339, 376, 385–386). He declares that the injunction of democracy to come goes “beyond the limits of [classical] cosmopolitanism” and “is more in line with what lets singular beings (anyone) ‘live together’” where “they are not yet defined by [state or world] citizenship” (PT, 130). More specifically, he sees this aspect of *mondialisation*, or what we can now call “cosmopolitanism to come,” as a “universalization” that “implements the best memory” of its historical heritage. This memory struggles against its own tendency toward inequality and homo-hegemonization (NEG, 376) and wishes to end the “wearying opposition between Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism” (NEG, 336; cf. Mignolo 2000a, 2000b). It encourages us “to see the coming of a *universal alliance or solidarity* that extends beyond the internationality of nation-states and thus beyond citizenship” (PT, 123–124).

Although Derrida speaks favorably of this universal solidarity, he emphasizes that it involves an “act of faith.” Indeed, he says that it involves an “unconditionality” that makes it “impossible,” an event that is “possible [only] *as impossible*” (NEG, 344, 374, 376). It is this paradoxical impossibility which he charges with the task of challenging sovereignty, itself a universalizing force but inimical to democracy. Indeed, Derrida would include in the destructive side of globalization the “abuse of power” that he says “is constitutive of sovereignty itself.” Because of this intrinsic tendency to abuse, Derrida claims that “a certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty is required a priori” to play its role in the fortunes of democracy (ROG, 102, xiv). To understand the sense in which an impossible cosmopolitanism can valorize both universal solidarity and heterogeneity while at the same time opposing sovereignty, we must clarify “democracy to come,” “autoimmunity,” “reasonableness,” and other notions on which Derrida feels this new world contract must be based. In short,

everything he says about democracy to come and its form of unconditionality and universalization carries over to cosmopolitanism to come.

2. The Call or Voice of Cosmopolitanism to Come

The notion of a “call” plays a pivotal role in Derrida’s analysis of democracy and many of his other ideas. Thus he refers to hermeneutics, the “hermeneutic circle,” and says that if “we did not already have some *idea* of democracy . . . we would never seek to elucidate its meaning or, indeed, call for its advent” (ROG, 9, 18; see also OHD, 77–78). This idea calls to us, and we respond by calling for its coming to be. As we have already seen, this voice from the past, from the legacy of European democracy and cosmopolitanism, is not conservative, not a mere repetition of what has already been said or instituted. Instead, it “gestures toward the past of an inheritance only by remaining to come” (ROG, 9). Moreover, Derrida says of his famous method of deconstruction (a critical approach preventing the fixation of democracy or any other concept), that “a certain appeal to or call by [*appel de*] deconstruction” is “necessary” for it “to get off the ground” (DVA, 27).

The role of the call is even more pronounced when, following and revising Plato, Derrida speaks of what we can consider to be the event of all events, “*khōra*.” *Khōra* is an all-encompassing event because it “comes before everything” and designates the “place” of the legacy of Europe as well as what is intrinsically linked to the latter, “the call for a thinking of the event *to come*, of the democracy *to come*” (ROG, xiv, xv; see also DVA, 27; OHD, 77–78). Though it comes first, the *khōra* does not exist “for itself.” It exists instead as that which makes a place of the legacy of democracy and its “to come.” More generally, it has priority as an event because it always remains as a “to come” for all the other events and their structure as that which is intrinsically “to come.” But this priority of *khōra* also means that it remains “heterogeneous to” and thus not a “part of” its progeny (ROG, xiv). Its aloofness allows Derrida to avoid positing it as teleological or mechanistic account of that to which it gives place and therefore ensures democracy’s and cosmopolitanism’s character of being unfinalizable (of being always to come) in theory and in practice (ROG, 135, 144, 148, 152).

3. Cosmopolitanism to Come and *Différance*

Derrida sometimes suggests that *khōra* can be understood as the universal structure he calls “spacing.” This notion is equivalent to his well-known notion of “*différance*” and constitutes both the spatiality and temporality of democracy to come (ON, 124–125). By analyzing it we can therefore understand both *khōra* and democracy more fully. According to Derrida (and phenomenology), our experience of the present

moment must paradoxically include an absence – the “past” and the “future” – without which it would lose its thickness, its duration, and disappear into nothing. Differing from itself in this way, as both a presence and an absence, the spacing of the present is simultaneously the “becoming-space of time” and the “becoming-time of space.” It is the becoming-*space* of time because the temporal interior of the present and thus of our experience necessarily opens onto an “outside,” their past and future. Spacing is the becoming-*time* of space because it also *defers* the future of the present moment and our experience. That is, the present moment and our experience (and thus the “identity” of what takes place within it) always remains still to come, always deferred, never finalizable.

Furthermore, the event or present moment accomplishes this deferral and thus its own possibility of existence by carrying with it a “trace” of itself as it disappears into the past and opens onto its future. The event, so to speak, sacrifices its being (an impossible pure sameness or univocal identity) in order to be what the event primarily is, a becoming, a “to come” that continuously and intrinsically defers its arrival and thus is always differing from itself (ROG, 35–36; see also POS, 28–29, 33; SP, 85–86). Because democracy is an event and the event spacing, there “can only be but a trace” of it and, given the shared structure, “every trace is a trace of democracy” (ROG, 39; cf. Hägglund 2008, 177). In general, all voices take place, are spoken or heard, in time and therefore suffer the deferral of any final word they may have otherwise uttered on whatever topic. They all exist as traces, as always remaining to come.

Because the legacy of democracy can be recalled by us only within the spacing of the present moment, within its interminable differentiation or *différance*, it too, and thus the closing of the hermeneutic circle we spoke of earlier, is always only to come. More precisely and also repeating what we said earlier, Derrida says the “essence” of democracy to come is inherently “undecidable.” As undecidable, the concept of democracy is “interminable in its incompleteness beyond all determinate forms of incompleteness” (ROG, 38–39). Thus democracy is always and only ahead of us despite its status as also our past, our inheritance. Our legacy is always to come.

But Derrida also goes on to say, at least in his later work, that democracy to come (and hence cosmopolitanism) is also a political force, an “unconditional injunction,” as well as and despite its indecidability. Examining this characteristic of democracy to come will also reveal how it transforms deconstruction into the more specific structure of “autoimmunity” (ROG, 38–39, 89–90, 142; PF, 105, 159).

4. Cosmopolitanism to Come as an Unconditional Injunction

Derrida characterizes democracy as an “unconditional injunction” and a “promise.” As an injunction it is a demand for its fulfillment: we can ignore this call but it still asserts itself as an obligation for those sharing its legacy and ultimately the structure

of spacing (PF, 105–106; OHO, 91–92). Even more startling, Derrida says that this injunction is “*im-possible*” to fulfill by its very nature. It is impossible because it “must remain” outside of the realm of “the theoretical, the descriptive, the constative, and the performative” – of anything that we could possibly achieve in theory or in practice (ROG, 84, 144). In other words, democracy to come is conceptually formal or pure form, “indifferent to any content,” and must not present us with a description of any possible democracy (SM, 74, 91–92).

As a “summons” to make “pure” democracy present and to accept nothing less than it as the final form of democracy, even though this final form is impossible and has no conditional content, democracy to come is more than the mere idealized principle we might assume it to be. Indeed, Derrida says that as a demand it is “real” and “sensible.” He captures this quality by describing what he takes to be our experience of its unconditional status. For example, he says that it is “an unforeseeable coming of the other,” of a law, responsibility, and decision of the other, of “an other in me, an other greater and older than I am” (ROG, 84; see also ROG, 90, 149; SM, 91–92; LD, 242). Moreover, this injunction is unrelenting: it “never leaves me in peace and never lets me put it off until later,” it “comes upon me from on high,” “swoops down upon me and seizes me *here and now* in a nonvirtualizable way, in actuality and not potentiality” (ROG, 84).

Because it is real as this “urgent” demand, Derrida adds that democracy to come is not the same as an *idealized* and “regulative Idea” of, for example, the complete knowledge of reality. Moreover, an Idea of the sort is presented as that which, in theory, could be reached at the end of an infinite history. It would therefore be in the realm of the *possible* and within the theoretical power of someone, of some *ipseity* or “I can,” even though we will never actually reach the end of an infinite duration (ROG, 83–84). But the always “to come” of democracy denies that a regulative Idea can have specific content or even have a univocal sense; it allows that the idea of democracy might diverge from rather than converge upon what is taken or could be taken as its meaning at any time (cf. Hägglund 2008, 211 n. 9). It therefore could never be thought of as reachable even at infinity.

To capture further the temporality of this impossible demand, Derrida says that democracy to come also “must have the structure of a promise” – *and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now*” (ROG, 85–86; SM, 91–92; LD, 240–242). This memory opens onto or “carries” the future here and now, but like no other promise; for what it promises, pure democracy, is in principle “unpresentable.” Therefore “to come” does not mean “a future democracy that one day will be ‘present’,” nor the memory of a past democracy that was once here; instead, “to come” means “exposure” to a demand that “opens itself, that opens us to time, to what comes upon us . . . to the event” or “unforeseeable [and impossible] coming [of pure democracy]” (PT, 120). This demand, therefore, “does not wait for,” is even “beyond,” the future (ROG, 87). In other words, the very impossibility of fulfilling the promise of democracy’s and hence cosmopolitanism’s “to come” ensures

that the unconditional demand for this pure polity is “ineffaceable” and transcends the possible (ROG, 86).

5. Cosmopolitanism to Come and Autoimmunization

Derrida appeals to the notion of autoimmunity to formalize the sense in which he says democracy to come is “impossible.” The characterization of democracy to come we have given thus far might appear to manufacture two separate realms, one unconditional and impossible, the other conditional and possible. However, Derrida links these two realms, ensuring that democracy to come must always be descending from the heaven of the unconditional to the earth of the conditional, from the impossible to the possible. In particular, these two realms are “absolutely heterogeneous” and yet “indissociable” from each other. On the one hand, the democracy of the United States and other possible democracies require the unconditional idea of democracy to come for their “guidance” and “inspiration” (OHO, 79; PF, 104, 106, 134). Indeed, it is as if Derrida agrees with his paraphrase of Rousseau: even if democracy “in the strict sense” could never exist because of its “amorphousness” or “polymorphousness,” “one must, one ought, one cannot not strive toward it with all one’s force” (ROG, 74). On the other hand, pure democracy needs to engage in “conditions of all kinds” in order to “arrive” in its interruptive manner and be other than merely utopian thought, other than “nothing at all.” Only in the gap between these two irreconcilable and indissociable poles, only between a benign oracle and earthly voices, are “decisions and responsibilities” to be taken (CF, 44–45; PT, 130; ROG, 91–92; OHO, 79). Because Derrida combines the unconditioned with the conditioned in this indissociable manner, the transcendental status of the unconditional is more properly referred to as “quasi-transcendental” or “infrastructural” (MS, 254; cf. Gasché 1986, 217). It makes possible the conditional, but at most would be a mere undecidable thought without the latter.

We must now examine some of these quasi-transcendentals to see how their indissociable relation with the earthly conditions for possible democracies brings about autoimmunity and the effects we have indicated. Derrida includes a number of quasi-transcendentals within the “form” of democracy to come (ROG, 86–92, 149–150). For brevity’s sake, we will examine only three of them: unconditional criticism including self-critique, unconditional freedom with the renunciation of sovereignty it implies, and unconditional hospitality or equality. Derrida introduces the first of these by saying that democracy is the only “constitutional paradigm” in which one has “in principle . . . the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy.” He adds that this right of unlimited criticism and questioning makes democracy “the only [constitutional] paradigm that is universalizable” (ROG, 87; see also ROG, 72, 90; PT, 121).

The full extent of what Derrida means by “unlimited” or “universalizable” becomes clear when we consider these terms in relation to the two other quasi-transcendentals we are considering. He equates unconditional freedom with “a freedom of play” and also the “interminable self-criticizability” of the first quasi-transcendental. He adds that this “indetermination” and “essential historicity” is “at the very center of the concept of democracy” and is presupposed by any freedom of the more common sort that involves the “I can” or individual initiative of liberty and license (ROG, 24, 25). But there is more – this unconditional freedom renounces sovereignty absolutely in order both to save itself from the limit such control would place on its own universality and to prevent sovereignty’s intrinsic “abuse of power” (ROG, xiv, 102). In particular, such sovereignty would nullify the responsibility required for democracy by laying down a “determinative knowledge” of a norm or law. Decision making would, like a computer piloted by software, have to follow these rules in advance and would therefore not amount to a true choice or responsibility. Parenthetically, this is yet another reason why democracy to come differs from a regulative Idea and the rule or teleological direction it sets (ROG, 84–85, 158; NEG, 298).

The unconditional questioning of the first quasi-transcendental is complemented by the limitlessness of those who can pose questions and thus the third quasi-transcendental, unconditional hospitality. This quasi-transcendental is particularly important because Derrida thinks ethics is constituted by hospitality to others than ourselves (CF, 16–17; PT, 129–30). These foreign voices include those that are absolutely unlike us; the injunction must be an expression of a “pure ethics” that recognizes the “respectable dignity” of the “unrecognizable” and “exposes itself without limit to the coming of the others, beyond rights and laws.” This “unconditionality,” then, requires “a universal beyond all relativism, culturalism, ethnocentrism, and especially nationalism,” beyond, as we have seen, all sovereignty (ROG, 60, 149; see also ROG, 86). To capture further the idea of these foreign others and the universality of unconditional hospitality, Derrida uses the term “vertical.” The verticality of the other refers not to one who is “simply a worker, or a citizen, or someone easily identifiable,” but to “that which in the other . . . exceeds precisely the horizontality of expectation” (LD, 243; see also OHO, 53, 54, 57, 65, 79–81, 124–125, 147–148, 149; and SM, 81–82).

The notion of autoimmunity comes into play when these three quasi-transcendentals are linked to possible democracies by way of the procedure of voting. Because it involves unconditional hospitality, freedom, and self-critique, democracy to come is an invitation even to those who would argue against democracy and vote it out of existence. The only way to immunize democracy against this possibility is to restrict it to those who uphold this type of political existence. But such a restriction, Derrida believes, would destroy democracy’s call for universal inclusivity and equality and thus immunize democracy against itself, making it suffer a fatal and latent “autoimmunity” (ROG, 40–41, 63, 86–87, 101–102; PT, 128–129). Despite this autoimmunology, we must still follow the injunction of democracy and, in its name,

never mistake any of our possible democracies and their degree of hospitality, freedom, and self-critique as final, as truly democratic (ROG, 86).

Only when our ears are open to the injunction and promise of democracy to come can the voices of the social body engage in democratic dialogue and have the appropriate safeguard against accepting anything less than an impossibly pure democracy as ultimate. In other words, democracy to come, its unconditionality and its character as a guiding injunction, is the necessary and universal condition for the aporia or autoimmunity at the heart of any possible democracy (cf. PF, 159, 165, 232; MS, 253). For without democracy to come as part of democracy, a possible democracy could always be defined in a way that restricted its membership.

Before raising some questions about these claims, we should note the full effect of autoimmunology. Derrida sees it as the basis for politics, ethics, and “reasonableness” as well as for democracy. Autoimmunity makes them possible because it produces the indecidability and the urgency (the refusal of rules that would destroy responsibility for making one’s own decision) that ensures there always must be ethico-political “negotiations” that are endless and irresolvable in principle (NEG, 298–299, 304–306; ROG, xii, 29). Indeed, the indecidability created by autoimmunology – by the tension between democracy as an unconditional injunction and as a conditional or possible polity – means that we must go beyond “rationality” (as the calculation of the best laws and policy judgments) to what exceeds this form of thought and is “preferable” to it, “reasonableness.” More specifically, Derrida defines “reasonableness” as “rationality that takes account of the incalculable so as to give an account of it, there where this appears impossible, so as to account for or reckon *with* it, that is to say, with the event of *what* or *who* comes” (ROG, 158–159). In other words, reasonableness takes into account the incalculable when deciding upon a course of action. In taking account of the incalculable or unconditional, it strives (impossibly but urgently) toward democracy to come in the midst of all the conditions that demand endless negotiation and the invention (rather than following) of “maxims of transaction” (ROG, 150–151, 158–159). It stands up to nation-states, the “homogenizing hegemonies” of capitalist globalization, the classic cosmopolitanisms, and all other limiting sovereignties except that which is (impossibly) “at once indivisible and yet able to be shared,” that is, the anti-sovereignty, democracy to come itself (ROG, 158; see also ROG, 101, 109, 143, 151).

6. Is Democratic Cosmopolitanism Unconditional?

Derrida’s democracy to come provides a response to the dilemma of democracy introduced at the beginning of this essay. Its status as an unconditional injunction can be viewed as a basis for the universal solidarity that we saw Derrida valorize; and the implication of this injunction for unconditional questioning, hospitality, and freedom safeguards heterogeneity. But in the world of conditions these two political

virtues are impossible to obtain and have a laudatory effect only through the autoimmune structure that interrupts and reveals the inescapable inadequacies of those polities that claim to be true democracies. This interruption also constitutes Derrida's response to globalization as the "homogenizing-hegemony" he repudiates.

But is democracy really autoimmune? Derrida indicates that the procedure of voting links the quasi-transcendentals to the conditional world of possible democracies. He holds that this procedure is democratic and that it remains so even when used by Islamists in Algeria, fascist and Nazi regimes in Europe, and other anti-democratic groups. Thus one is anti-democratic if one doesn't recognize the democratic legitimacy of the anti-democratic results brought about by voting and a numerical majority:

There is something paradigmatic in this autoimmune suicide: fascist and Nazi totalitarianisms came into power or ascended to power through formally normal and formally democratic electoral processes. . . . [T]he aporia in its general form has to do with freedom itself: must a democracy leave free and in a position to exercise power those who risk mounting an assault on democratic freedoms and putting an end to democratic freedom in the name of democracy and of the majority that might actually be able to rally around to their cause? . . . When assured of a numerical majority, the worst enemies of democratic freedom can, by a plausible rhetorical simulacrum . . . present themselves as staunch democrats. That is one of the perverse and autoimmune effects of the axiomatic developed already in Plato and Aristotle. (ROG, 33–34; see also ROG, 30–31)

But this claim seems to contradict the force of the quasi-transcendental that concerns unlimited questioning and self-critique. If democracy to come has unlimited criticism at its center, as Derrida says, then any democratic process must be done in the name of such endless critique. This means that the results of any electoral process must preserve what we can call an "open space" for *always further* critical commentary in order to qualify as democratic (see Lefort 1986, 279). In other words, when a "numerical majority" votes out democracy and eliminates the polity's dialogic space, we cannot legitimately say that it is acting democratically. Instead, it is achieving its results only by a formal procedure. It is a mistake to call such a procedure democratic when its aim is anti-democratic, done in the name of some political order other than democracy. More exactly, the procedure is *internal* to democracy only if it is coupled with unlimited questioning and the condition the latter implies: the commitment to maintain a space for rejoinders. When it is not accompanied by this commitment, such a procedure is non-democratic and *external* to democracy. Even if the idea of "open space" is itself characterized by spacing, the questioning of its meaning always requires that it remain open for a rejoinder to any of its proposed translations: the open space mandate always reinserts itself. Democracy, therefore, is susceptible to (not immune to) a possible procedural overthrow from fascist and other non-democratic forces or tendencies; but it is not autoimmune, not destructible by its own hand or in its own name.

If these reflections have weight, then our idea of democracy would be conditional rather than unconditional – conditional on the commitment to maintaining the open space necessary for unlimited questioning, even when it consists in criticism of democracy itself. This would mean that democracy is a conditional rather than an unconditional injunction. Whether correct or not, this criticism coheres with the comments of those who find Derrida's unconditional notion of democracy to come and its variants too abstract or empty (see Mignolo 2000a, and the articles by Aijaz Ahmad, Terry Eagleton, Antonio Negri, and others in Sprinker 1999).

A similar criticism of autoimmunity might arise in the case of spacing (*différance*) itself. If the self-differentiation of the present is life, then one does not necessarily die in the name of life as advocates of autoimmunity might think. If to live is to vocalize one's ideas, feeling, and other dispositions to oneself and others, then there is nothing intrinsically suicidal in that; we will all die, but not necessarily because we speak. Derrida would appear to agree that life is more than just biological existence when he states that there is no "strict opposition" between *zōē* (biological life) and *bios* (cultured life) (ROG, 24). But this link between life and speech is made even more reasonable when we recall Derrida's emphasis upon characterizing *khōra*, deconstruction, and democracy to come as "calls" and when we further note that he often describes himself as not just one but many voices and as the dialogic interplay among them. A brief excursus of this idea may provide a response to those who see his appeal to quasi-transcendentals, to unconditional injunctions indifferent to content, as too abstract, and may constitute another basis besides autoimmunity for guaranteeing the unfinalizability of the idea of democracy.

7. The Primacy of Voices and Cosmopolitanism to Come

Some of Derrida's more direct and innovative uses of "voices" are contained in his response to a question about monological discourse from the French feminist, Hélène Cixous. Derrida says that for himself "a monologism, univocity, a single voice . . . is impossible, and plurivocity is a non-fictional necessity." He adds that in writing a text he often has "to change voices . . . to make several persons speak . . . and that the essential thing comes from another voice in some manner, from another voice in [him] . . . which is the same and not the same" (DTP, 50). In another text, he says that what inspired him to start writing was "the adolescent dream of keeping a trace of all the voices which were traversing [him]," and that "deep down this is still [his] most naïve desire" (AL, 35). Part of this "tracing" takes place when he alludes to his roots in French Algeria and refers to himself as an "over-colonized European hybrid" (OHD, 7).

Derrida reinforces his allegiance to this idea of hybrid voices in his remarks on Husserl and European memory. His work on Husserl provides compelling arguments for the impossibility of the very idea of a univocal voice, of one that is not

immediately open to its other (SP, 85–89). In his claim against Husserl that a pure voice is open to its other, the latter term can be interpreted as “other voices” (cf. Evans 1993, 185–187, 190–191; Evans 2009, 123 and *passim*; Lawlor 2002, ch. 7). Similarly, Derrida says we have a “*duty* to respond to the call of European memory,” to recall “what has been promised under the name Europe.” He is, however, very careful to claim that this Europe is shot through with “other headings” or non-European voices (OHD, 10, 15, 77–78; cf. Gasché 2009, 265–270 (esp.), 284–286, 298, 299–300, and 301). More specifically, Derrida says that we must

make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its identity and . . . assign[s itself] identity from alterity, from the other heading and the other of the heading, from a completely other shore. (NEG, 27–30)

In other words, the lead voice of Europe, its heritage, is so shot through with other voices that we cannot assign it a teleological or other form of strict identity, cannot legitimately make of Europe any of the oracles that have historically claimed or would claim to speak for it. The heritage of Europe, therefore, has built into itself a principle of self-critique and recognition of the alterity that helps to constitute its social body.

We can imagine that each of these voices is always already responding to the rest and that the vocal interplay among them holds them together at the same time as it keeps them separate, forming a dialogic body. We might take Derrida’s remark that each “heading” or voice “assign[s itself] identity from alterity” as meaning that each voice is part of the identity and, at the same time, the other of the rest; that each is what it is through its difference from the rest. Because of this “identity from alterity,” the affirmation of one’s own voice would be immediately the valorization of the others and hence of our unity composed of and by difference. It would also be the simultaneous affirmation of solidarity and heterogeneity, of an identity shared with those who are at the same time our other, and thus the resolution of the dilemma of diversity with which we started this discussion.

Concretely, this affirmation of the voices resounding within our own implies hearing the other voices. In its most profound meaning it signifies a hearing that is more than mere reception or recording, it signifies a willingness to court changes in one’s own discourse on the basis of what the others say, to “really” hear. In other words, it would be cosmopolitan, reaching beyond any national boundaries as well as the boundary between human and non-human voices. It would be hospitality to all “ears” and therefore democratic and quite likely also a form of socialism or communism, one opposed to the “homo-homogeneity” that Derrida repudiates and to other material and spiritual barriers to equal audibility. The affirmation of this dialogic society, of this mutual hearing of one another, also ensures the unfinalizability or indecidability of this cosmopolitanism, of its “to come.” The interplay among these heterogeneous voices would continually produce new ones. Because each voice

is established by its difference from the rest, the creation of each of these new voices would immediately be a change in all the rest, in the same way that a new gender would change the meaning of female and male or a new color that of the rest. This implies that the meaning of this dialogic or multivoiced body would continually change, would always be open to new significations. The becoming-space of time would mean the differences between the voices, each the outside of the other that it also inhabits, their mutual external-internality; and the becoming-time of space would be the continual interplay among them and the metamorphosis of the society this brings about. This “spacing,” then, would bequeath to the meaning of the dialogic body its intrinsic status as always “to come.”

Despite the indecidability of this voice-based cosmopolitanism to come, it poses conditions. Hearing one another is what determines the dialogic body’s production of new voices and hence its indecidability. This implies that all voices must be heard but also that only certain voices could legitimately make governmental policy for the polity at any given time. These policy-making voices would be those whose proposals included an affirmation of the “open space” we discussed above. Therefore, the democracy expressing this dialogic or multivoiced society would be conditional on committing itself to keeping that space permanent. Moreover, the bare hearing of other voices might place some limits on hate speech. The democratic open space would guarantee, however, that the idea of what counts as illegitimate policy-making voices or hate speech would be continuously hospitable to debate and thus to changes in the laws as well as to the possibility that white supremacists, patriarchic groups, or others hostile to universal dialogic exchange might rethink their positions.

This conclusion leaves us with a choice. We can base the indecidability of cosmopolitanism to come on Derrida’s idea of an unconditional injunction and the autoimmunity it involves, that is, on the quasi-transcendental status of cosmopolitanism to come. Or we can establish this indecidability on the implications we have drawn from Derrida’s idea of voices and the dialogic cosmos it might imply. This second view, however, is immanent rather than transcendent, the conditional interplay of voices rather than the unconditionality and content indifference of an injunction that “comes from on high” and is “an other in me, an other greater and older than I am.” Which of these two alternatives better serves the spirit of Derrida’s idea of a global democracy to come and the questioning, freedom, and hospitality it celebrates as well as Derrida’s resistance to the homogenizing-hegemony he detests? Which better supports Derrida’s exhortation for all of us “to hear each other [*nous devons nous entendre*]” in “[each others’] languages” (OHD, 60–61)?

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The Flipside of Violence, or Beyond the Thought of Good Enough

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In one of his earliest and most significant texts, his 1964 “Violence and Metaphysics,” Jacques Derrida says the following. The context for this quotation is Derrida’s discussion of Levinas’s thought of the other in relation to Husserl’s phenomenology of the other. Derrida says:

Every reduction of the other to a *real* moment of *my* life, its reduction to the state of an empirical alter-ego, is a possibility . . . which is called violence; and violence [that is, empirical or real violence] presupposes . . . necessary eidetic relationships. [However,] there is a transcendental . . . violence, an (in general dissymmetry) whose *arche* is the same. . . . This transcendental violence institutes the relationship between two finite ipseities. In effect, the necessity of gaining access to the meaning of the other (in its irreducible alterity) . . . on the basis of an intentional modification of my ego (in general) . . . ; and the necessity of speaking of the other as other, or to the other as other, on the basis of its appearing-for-me-as-what-it-is, that is, as other . . . – this necessity [of appearing or being a phenomenon] from which no discourse can escape, from its earliest origin – this necessity is violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence. (WD, 128)¹

The central idea in this quotation is twofold. On the one hand, Derrida is arguing that empirical or real violence presupposes eidetic or ideal relations such as the other appearing as what it is, as other. On the other hand, and more importantly, Derrida is arguing that these eidetic necessities are themselves violent since they essentially force the other to be the same and no longer to be other: as he says, “there is a transcendental violence whose *arche* (or origin) is the same.” In other words, what is most important about this quotation is that Derrida is arguing that violence is essentially

irreducible. Because violence is essentially irreducible, we cannot, according to Derrida, speak of relations that are “absolutely peaceful.” As we know, Derrida develops the idea of transcendental violence throughout his 40-year career. And, for many of us, Derrida’s idea of transcendental violence (and there are similar ideas in Foucault and Deleuze) has provoked a lot of thought (see Lawlor 2007).² Recently, however, questions have been raised about the imagery of violence that one finds in certain kinds of contemporary philosophical discourses that are commonly called “poststructuralist,” “postmodernist,” or “deconstructive,” that is, discourses in which Derrida was directly involved or which he inspired (Murphy 2012; Gilson 2013; Steiner 2013).

The questions raised seem to consist in three types. The first and most important question goes like this: in the discourses that we commonly call “poststructuralist,” “postmodernist,” or “deconstructive,” in a word, what we call “continental philosophy,” the imagery of violence is so widespread that it is not clear whether those who compose the discourses really know that of which they speak when they use the word “violence.” Obstacles, exclusions, and prohibitions, all of these are described through images of violence. Yet, the question is: is it really the case that these sorts of relationships are violent? Is blood really shed? Do these relations necessarily require the imagery of violence? Or are we who compose this sort of deconstructive discourse just confused? In short, through the charge of rampant confusion, this kind of question challenges the very legitimacy of the discourse (Gilson 2013, 179–180).³ The second type of question raised about the imagery of violence is closely related to the first, and it is perhaps just as important. The question goes like this: when deconstructive discourses adopt the imagery of violence, calling it “originary,” “transcendental,” or “foundational,” it is not clear, as the argument goes, that the deconstructive discourse is “vigilant” enough in regard to what we might call “real,” “physical,” or “historical” violence (Murphy 2012, 117).⁴ The argument continues in this way: even though the sort of philosopher who raises this second type of question about “real” violence acknowledges the necessity of violent imagery in deconstructive discourses, this sort of philosopher demands more vigilance so that the imagery of violence does not give off the impression of a tacit endorsement of “real” violence. Then, there is a third kind of question, which is somewhat different from the first two. Here the question arises because, as we have already noted, the violence is irreducible.⁵ If violence is irreducible (it is “originary,” “transcendental,” or “foundational”), then it seems any attempt to reduce violence is futile. The apparent futility resulting from the irreducibility of violence implies, as the argument goes, that nothing can be done. Consequently, the apparent futility seems to imply that there can be nothing like a moral principle in the strongest sense, which, I think, would have to be something like a categorical imperative, an unconditional imperative of non-violence or peace (Steiner 2013, 131).

I intend to respond to each of these three questions directly in sections 2–4 of this essay. However, before I do that, I think we need to understand the background for

the development of a fundamental discourse colored by imagery of violence. This background, as you probably know, comes from the history of Western philosophy and especially from two landmarks in that history: Plato and Nietzsche. In particular, we must see how Plato and Nietzsche speak about life. Here, however, as we shall see in section 1, it is really Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return that is most important. The eternal return doctrine sets up all the reflections on time in what I have called "the great French philosophy of the sixties" (that is, Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault) (Lawlor 2003, 2011). Then in section 2, which responds to the first type of question, I would like to present a kind of "logic" (based in the structure of time) demonstrating why the imagery of violence is necessary for a transcendental investigation of the conditions for or the genesis of experience. I am going to argue here that the imagery of violence is necessary. However, I am less certain that necessity and appropriateness are identical. In her 1969 book *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt had questioned the transfer of a set of concepts appropriate to one region to another region (Arendt 1969).⁶ Starting therefore from a brief consideration of Arendt's book, I will take up the second kind of question concerning the need for vigilance in section 3. There is no doubt that we need to be vigilant against real, empirical, or physical violence. However, thanks to an insight from Deleuze, I shall argue that we need to be even more vigilant. We need to be vigilant against all the forms of thinking and therefore forms of behavior that confine us, forms in which we have comfortably settled down.

Following this call for even more vigilance, in section 4, which responds to the third kind of question, I shall attempt to turn this fundamental violence around; we shall attempt to reverse it or "flip it over," hence the title of the essay, "The Flipside of Violence." Indeed, as a response to the third kind of question concerning the imagery of violence in deconstructive discourses, the one that calls for a moral principle, I shall try to formulate something like a moral principle. However, unlike the sort of principle that this third kind of question calls for – one that allows for its untroubled application – the principle we find (if we can call it a principle), while unconditional and thus something like a categorical imperative, is unstable and troubling. This imperative makes us promise the impossible. It is this impossibility that makes us stop thinking that "the best guarantee" is "good enough," hence the essay's subtitle, "Beyond the Thought of Good Enough" (Steiner 2013, 154). It is this impossibility that makes us be troubled, almost insanely troubled, by the inescapable images of violence. However, before we reach this near madness, we must consider Plato and Nietzsche.

1. The Soul and Life, Plato and Nietzsche

We begin with Plato for the obvious reason that his dialogues are the first truly philosophical discourse on the soul, but also a discourse with imagery of violence. We shall look at the two most famous discussions of the soul, the great myth of the

Phaedrus and Book IV of the *Republic*. The great myth of the *Phaedrus* presents not a direct discourse on the soul; instead, there Socrates presents a “figure” (*eikon*) of what the soul is (Plato 1982, 246a). According to Socrates, the soul resembles a chariot, with a charioteer and two winged horses. For mixed souls, that is, human souls, the two winged horses are of a different kind, one good, the other evil (*kakos*). The soul is trying through the winged horses to ascend to the banquet of the gods where one can view being or reality. But if the evil horse is not “well trained” (*paidies*), then the ascent is difficult for the charioteer. Moreover, when many mixed souls attempt to ascend, there is rivalry and competition, resulting in many horses becoming lame and losing wings (Plato 1982, 248a). Like the charioteer and two winged horses image of the *Phaedrus*, *Republic* Book IV presents the soul as having what looks to be tripartite composition: the rational part (*logos*); the desiring or appetitive part (*epithumtikon*), which is irrational; and the spirited part (*thymos*). The *Republic*'s psychological discourse is less figurative than that of the *Phaedrus* since, in Book II, Socrates suggests to Glaucon that, in order to investigate justice in the individual, they first investigate justice in something bigger, which is the city (Plato 1968, 368c–369b). Then they will use the “likeness” (*homoiosis*) of the bigger in order to understand the smaller. So, in the *Republic*, Book IV, the discourse on the soul has moved away from the “likeness” of the larger image, the city, to the smaller, to what the soul in the individual really is. However, in Book IV, in order to explain the distinctive nature of the spirited part of the soul, Socrates makes use of a story (Plato 1968, 439d). It is the story of Leontius who, when encountering corpses after an execution, has a strong desire to look at them; but at the same time he feels disgust and makes himself turn away from the vision of the corpses. Eventually however, his desire to look at the corpses “overpowers” (*kratos*) him and he looks. Socrates comments on this story by saying that it “certainly indicates that anger [that is, *thymos*] sometimes makes war [*polemos*] against the desires as one thing against something else” (Plato 1968, 440a).

I would like to stress two points about these two famous Platonic discourses. On the one hand, while the Platonic structure of the soul looks to be tripartite, it is really dualistic: there are the two horses, and then there are the rational part and the irrational part. The image of the charioteer and what is called “*thymos*,” which look to be a third part, in fact function as means of synthesis or unification between the two parts. Yet, and this is my second point, in *Republic*, Book IV, *thymos*, as something like a synthetic third term, appears to be the place of war. And of course, one cannot overlook the imagery of violence in the *Phaedrus* with the so-called “bad horse” requiring “training,” with horses getting injured in the ascent. Thus, over 2000 years before the rise of what we call “deconstructive discourse,” we find violence within the very first psychological discourse in the West. Perhaps, on the basis of this historical fact, we have to conclude that images of violence always accompany every reflection on the soul and therefore on life. Certainly, Nietzsche thought that wherever there is life, there is violence.

We find the identification of life with violence in paragraph 11 of the second essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In paragraph 11, Nietzsche says:

To talk of 'just' and 'unjust' *as such* is meaningless; an act of injury, violence, exploitation or destruction [*Verletzen, Vergewaltigen, Ausbeuten, Vernichten*] cannot be 'unjust' *as such*, because life functions *essentially* in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner, or at least these are its fundamental processes [*Grundfunktionen*] and it cannot be thought of without these characteristics. (Nietzsche 1997, 50)

Here, Nietzsche is describing life itself in terms of opposing forces, trying to take possession of one another. Importantly, in this description, Nietzsche indicates a necessity to life being violence (*Vergewaltigen*), and destruction or annihilation (*Vernichten*): life "cannot be thought of without these characteristics" (my emphasis). In short, Nietzsche is saying that violence is irreducible in life. As in Plato, in Nietzsche, life is fundamentally *polemos*; the opposing forces are brought together, or, so to speak, "synthesized," on a battlefield. Of course, this paragraph (11) and the one that follows it (paragraph 12) in *On the Genealogy of Morals* concern Nietzsche's idea of the will to power. But, we should notice that the "message" (if we can speak this way) of *On the Genealogy of Morals* is that the slaves, the weak, and therefore the powerless, have a sort of power that can undo the masters, the strong, and therefore the powerful. In fact, while the doctrine of the overman remains obscure, it seems that the overman (beyond the forms of thinking, such as those based in resentment, that define man) is someone who has incorporated this weak form of power.

We have mentioned two of the three most famous Nietzschean doctrines. In fact, if we look at the published version of Nietzsche's most important book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we see that, after the prologue which announces the death of God, the first book concerns the overman; the second book concerns the will to power; and the third book concerns the eternal return doctrine (Nietzsche 1968). The order of the three books indicates that the eternal return doctrine is most important; it is the climax of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Indeed, if the order of the books in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* indicates a kind of priority or a movement toward the fundamental, then we have to realize that the eternal return doctrine is the basis for life.⁷ Life is eternal return. In Book Three, in the paragraph called "The Vision and the Riddle," we find the clearest but also the most paradoxical presentation of the eternal return doctrine (Nietzsche 1968, 267–271).

The description of the doctrine and its images are well known, but I would like to draw attention to three points in relation to the description and the images. *First*, Zarathustra stands under an archway called "the moment" (*Augenblick*). That the archway carries this name means not only that the eternal return doctrine concerns time, but also that it concerns a singular moment, in a word, difference. But, *second*, the archway crosses a road that extends endlessly in both directions, which Zarathustra calls "eternity." However, this image of an endless straight road implies that

time does not wind itself into a circle. It does not return to a selfsame identical origin, *arche*, or principle, and thus it does not advance toward a selfsame identical end, *telos*, or principle. Time then is anarchical and a-teleological. *Third*, even though time is eternal in the sense of having no primary origin and no ultimate end, time is still a return or a repetition. The eternal return doctrine does not reduce time to an unlimited series of disconnected points. The return in the doctrine's name is supposed to account for the similarity of moments. This identification of life with time explains why Nietzsche's thought had such a tremendous influence on Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault. All of their reflections on "difference and repetition" flow out of the eternal return doctrine, and in particular out of time conceived as anarchy and a-teleology. Of course, while we are using the word "anarchy" in the literal sense of having no origin or no principle, its popular meaning suggests nothing less than violence.

2. The First Time Is the Last Time⁸

We were just speaking of the tremendous influence of Nietzsche's eternal return doctrine on twentieth-century French thought. However, it is impossible to underestimate the influence that Husserl's phenomenology exerted, directly and indirectly, through its discovery of the structure of time. What Husserl calls the "living present" is the absolute foundation of all experience, all knowledge, all assertions of truth, all relations to objects and others. In his investigation of time-consciousness, Husserl shows that the present that we are actually living is divided between a primary form of memory called "retention" and a primary form of anticipation called "protection."⁹ For Husserl, the primary form of memory and the primary form of anticipation are invariants across all experience. That retention and protection are irreducibly invariant implies that, no matter what experience occurs, there will always be a sense of it repeating something else that has already passed away and there will always be a sense of it anticipating something else that is still to come. In other words, retention generates a repeatable meaning that makes recognition possible, while protection generates a horizon of the same meaning within which recognition occurs. Thanks to this terminology, we can see already that Derrida's claim in "Violence and Metaphysics" is faithful to the phenomenological description of time.¹⁰ No matter what, if I am to have access to anything or anyone other, the other must appear. And insofar as it must appear, it must appear *as something*, as having a meaning. Thus it must appear as fulfilling a repeatable form. In order to have access to the other, the other must appear in the horizon of the same and thus, in order to be what it is, the other is deprived, *necessarily*, of its alterity. In short, the terminology, which is eidetically necessary for us to be able to understand time, implies a violation of the other's alterity. In a word, it implies violence.

Moreover, although Husserl speaks of the primal impression, of the moment that is happening right now, we have to see that this moment is stretched out between

the immediate past and the immediate future. The present moment is differentiated, split apart, tortured by these two opposing movements. Immediate memory and immediate anticipation are irreducibly invariant, which means that all experience, no matter how apparently tranquil, is at bottom warlike. What Husserl calls “the primal impression” is, as we said of Plato’s view of the soul, a battlefield. We need to introduce one more implication of Husserl’s great discovery of the structure of the living present. Because retention and protention are irreducibly invariant across all experience, because these two opposing phases are fundamental or transcendental, because we cannot find anything like a present or a presence that is not contaminated by these two invariants, we cannot speak of an original starting point for the movement of time and we cannot speak of a final ending point for the movement of time. Like Nietzsche’s eternal return doctrine, Husserl’s structure of the living present implies anarchy and a-teleology.

The idea of time as anarchical and a-teleological is hard to understand. We can approach this difficult idea by thinking of artworks and in particular, of theater performances. Theater performances are not technological production, or, more precisely, not technological reproduction. In technological manufacturing, there must always be a model that is first; and on the basis of the model, there are the products that are second. The products, of course, are different from each other – they are individuals or particulars – since I can enumerate them. However, these different products are copies of the model and thus they must resemble or imitate the model as closely as possible. In manufacturing, clearly, no one wants to make products that do not function exactly the same. This maintenance of identity is what manufacturing quality control does: the copies must be identical and function identically. To speak like Deleuze, we can say that technological repetition is a repetition that does *not* make a difference. However, in French, of course, the word “*répétition*” means not only “repetition,” but also “rehearsal,” as in a theater rehearsal. Even the English word “re-hearsal” has the prefix “re” that implies repetition. If we think about theater rehearsals, one has to wonder what is being repeated in the rehearsal. The idea of the rehearsal implies that the rehearsal is a copy or image of something. Yet, what is being rehearsed is nothing that precedes it insofar as what the performers are repeating or practicing in fact comes after the rehearsal: the main performance, “the premiere.” Notice that the word “premiere” literally means “first.” If we speak about a copy or image and the original on which the image is based, then with the rehearsal we have an original that comes second. But we still say, as the prefix “re” implies, that the rehearsal repeats something. If we say that the rehearsal repeats the script, then we have to say that the script refers to the idea that the author had for the performance. But, if we say that the rehearsal repeats the idea, then we also have to say that the idea is realized only in the performance that comes after the rehearsal. So, again we have a repetition which repeats something that comes after. In other words, unlike technological reproduction, a theater performance is a “creative repetition”; here we have a repetition that *indeed* makes a difference. An event such as the

writing of *Hamlet* was based in no determinate model, no exact foundation, and no self-identical origin; therefore its subsequent theater productions, while repetitions, are able to be different from one another. Each performance is not a particular (that could be subsumed under a self-identical concept); each is an event or a singularity.

The idea of creative repetition seems to suggest no violence. However, images of violence are necessary because, *first of all*, creative repetition includes novelties, events, or singularities. Despite the apparent regularity of time (time as it is organized by representations and concepts), time is filled with singularities. As evidence of singularities, we can point to aha-experiences; realizations; surprises; experiences that are intense to the point of pleasure or pain, like a boiling point or a blinding light. Perhaps, the most banal evidence for singularities in time are dates, the date on the calendar isolating the uniqueness of each day. In order to be able to account for these unique dates and unique experiences, we must think that there is something in the structure of time that is always singular, always event-like, and always new. As we saw, Nietzsche called the singularity within time the “moment” (*Augenblick*). How are we to think of the singular moment?

By attempting to answer the question of how to conceive the singular moment, we are explicitly responding to the first kind of question concerning the imagery of violence. In order to avoid confusion in our answer, we must insist on taking the meaning of the terms we are using in the proper sense (PF, 240). We must think of a singular moment properly, as a singularity worthy of that name. The logic that we are now going to lay out consists in four steps. (1) *To begin*, if we conceive singularity in the most proper way possible (as novel, event-like, unique), then, most formally and abstractly, we must describe a singularity as a *first time*. More substantially and concretely, however, we must say that the force of the moment disappoints; its eruption interrupts and disrupts expectations; it fractures them and breaks expectations apart. The moment changes and transforms; but it also deforms and un-forms, it undoes and destroys. The singular moment eats its way in; it intrudes like a guest. (2) *But also*, we have to recognize that, if the moment is properly singular, unique, event-like, and novel, then as a first time a singularity is also and necessarily a last time. We must conceive a first time as a last time. In order properly to be a first time, in order to be *unlike* any other time, there can be no other time like it ever again. If there were another time *like* the first time, then this similarity would impress, depress, and repress the singularity; it would push the singularity away and replace it. Due to this similarity, we would not be able to say that we experienced an event – and perhaps we have to wonder whether we ever truly experience an event, whether it is ever possible to speak of an event since as soon as we speak we engage in generalities. The moment then becomes something lost, imprisoned, entombed, and archived. Indeed, we have to say that the flow of time, *on the one hand*, consists in singularities, *but also* (with this “but also” we are referring to a strange kind of non-unifying synthesis) we have to say that time, *on the other hand*,

consists in generalities. We must say that time also consists in generalities for the following reason. If there is something like a singularity in time, then, as we saw in our discussion of Husserlian temporalization, it cannot not appear without a horizon of expectation formed by past experiences. These past experiences form a horizon of expectation because they retain, from the experience, some feature or trait that is repeatable or iterable. This repeatable feature or iterable trait is a generality. (3) *Here*, we pass from the description of singularities to that of generalities. Again, in order to avoid confusion, we must think of a force of generality worthy of that name. If we think of generality properly, then we must describe generality, most formally and abstractly, as a feature or a trait that endures at all times; it is omni-temporal; it repeats indefinitely, to infinity, even universally. More substantially and concretely, however, we must say that the force of generality expresses and extends; it moves away and goes over; it breaks free and opens; it transcends and transgresses. The generality eats its way out and escapes like a criminal fleeing a prison. (4) *Finally*, we return to our earlier description of creative repetition. The description of generality means that, even as a generality extends its sameness indefinitely, at the same time a generality worthy of its name makes possible or generates more events; and, as they come, these events worthy of the name, at the same time, make possible or generate more generalities.

At the root of this four-part logic, we find the most fundamental reason necessitating the imagery of violence. The imagery of violence is necessitated by the irreducibility of negativity in experience and life. Many philosophers have recognized the irreducibility of negativity in experience.¹¹ But here, thanks to the invariant structure of time, we have a negativity based in the past and future being synthesized but without unity, the strange synthesis we mentioned earlier: the battlefield. In other words, the limit between past and future is porous. This negativity is based on an eidetic, structural, fundamental, or transcendental *inability* to keep out events and on an eidetic, structural, fundamental, or transcendental *inability* to keep in generalities. The first time cannot *not* be a last time, and vice versa. Expressed abstractly and transcendently as a first time and a last time, the fundamental negativity of experience does not mean that every experience is one of bloodshed. We must not be confused on this point. However, the fundamental and irreducible negativity of experience (the in-ability or dis-ability) implies necessarily that every experience contains within it the “*essential possibility*” of what we call real violence (LI, 47–48). *Most simply*, because experience is fundamentally passive and receptive, I am necessarily open to what is coming. I am unable to stop what is coming and coming in. As soon as I open my eyes – and we should notice that even when my eyes are shut during sleep, I am still open since if I were not open I would not be able to be awoken (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 166–167) – something enters in. Because of this openness or non-closedness, because of this porosity, the structure of experience (life itself) essentially includes the possibility of real intrusion, real escape, real violation, and real violence. As Derrida already implied in “Violence and Metaphysics,” the essential

porosity of the limit is the very condition for real violence. Again, we must stress that this logic does not mean that every experience I have is one of bloodshed. Not every experience implies that I have suffered a mortal wound. However, the structure of experience implies that as soon as I am born, I am dying. As soon as I experience, I am open to every possible event that is coming, the most possible of which being my death. Or we can think of this structural death in this way: as soon as I experience, I remember and anticipate, through which a form is generated that is repeatable indefinitely beyond my finite life. I am fundamentally unable to enclose this generality within the time of my life; it survives while I am unable to do so. Because of this survival in the literal sense of going over and beyond life, I am unable to stop what is going and going away, what is taking and being taken away – such as my life.

3. More Vigilance

If there is one claim that truly clarifies the logic that we have just laid out, it is this: within the structure of time, we find the *essential possibility* of real or actual violence. The essential possibility of violence explains why images of violence are necessary in the descriptions of time. Yet, to say this again, the essential possibility of violence, and the images of violence it requires, what we are calling “transcendental violence,” is *not* real violence. Despite this unequivocal assertion, we realize that we must still be vigilant. We must constantly remind ourselves that transcendental violence is not real violence. We must not let the imagery of violence used in transcendental discourse dull us to real violence and bloodshed. However, it seems to me that this kind of call for vigilance in relation to the difference between real violence and transcendental violence (that is, the essential possibility of real or actual violence) is not enough. We really need to be even more vigilant.

Again the demand for vigilance comes from confusion. There is a danger of confusing kinds of discourses, for instance, the confusion of biological discourse with that of political action. In other words, the danger is the importation of imagery and thinking that is appropriate to one region, the region of biology, into another region, the region of human action, in which it is inappropriate. Indeed, this dangerous confusion of biology and political action is the danger that Arendt pointed out in *On Violence* (Arendt 1969, 74, 82). However, beside the confusion of regions of discourse, there is also the danger, which I think might be worse, of confusing the discourse of a founded region with the fundamental discourse of foundation. This is the danger Husserl pointed to early in his career: the danger of a vicious circle between the psychological or empirical with the transcendental or foundational. And Heidegger’s constant reflections on the ontological difference concern the same vicious circle danger. It is Deleuze, however, who gives this dangerous confusion its clearest expression. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze says, “The foundation can never resemble what it founds” (Deleuze 1990, 99). Deleuze’s “principle” for the formulation of a

foundation means that we must never import images into the foundation that originate in founded regions. It is this principle that forbids us from importing life-processes, including images of violence, into the foundation, in this case, into the essential structure of time. Here we must be especially vigilant. While the structure of time that we have laid out requires violent images, we must recognize that those images, imported from a founded region, remain inappropriate to the foundation. The vigilance we are speaking about now is a vigilance to continue to find new and different ways to think. I have deliberately removed the object from this phrase “to think” in order to indicate that the vigilance now required demands that we think beyond any constituted object or given subject, beyond any real fact or ideal essence, beyond anything at all (Heidegger 1998; Foucault 1998). Only through this thinking of nothing (in particular) will we be able to criticize and move beyond the current forms of thinking that confine us. The vigilance we are now speaking about demands of us that we constantly tell ourselves that these formulations, these images, these ideas and concepts are *not good enough*. Only with the recognition of this insufficiency of our current forms of thinking will we be able to find new modes through which we can discover ways to combat real violence and real injustice. This recognition of insufficient thinking brings us to the third kind of question raised about transcendental violence.

4. Conclusion: The Flipside of Violence

As you recall, this third kind of question, in effect, rejects the apparent futility of eliminating violence. Instead, it asks us to return to moral principles, which are themselves based on stable foundations (Steiner 2013, 146, 164, and 210). Let us reexamine the foundation we have been discussing throughout and especially reexamine it in light of Deleuze’s principle of non-resemblance. At the beginning of our investigation, we quoted a long passage from Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics.” In that quotation, Derrida says, “[These] necessities [that is, the eidetic necessities such as the other appearing to me as other] are violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence” (WD, 128). Derrida continues: “supposing ... that it is somehow meaningful to speak of pre-ethical violence. For this transcendental origin, as the irreducible violence of the relation to the other, is *at the same time* non-violence, since it opens the relation to the other” (WD, 128, my emphasis). I would like to stress three aspects of this quotation. (1) *First*, we should notice that here Derrida speaks not only of “this transcendental origin” or of “irreducible violence,” but also of “pre-ethical violence.” That is, the violence of which we are now speaking is not the violence that we normally imagine. In short, it is not violence that is willed. If this violence does not resemble the violence we normally and currently imagine, then how are we to think of it? You can see, I hope, that the foundation (transcendental violence) that Derrida is trying to formulate does not

violate Deleuze's principle of non-resemblance. The non-resemblance between this violence and normal or "real" violence explains why Derrida wonders if pre-ethical violence makes any sense. (2) Then, *second*, we should notice that, after Derrida wonders about pre-ethical violence making any sense, he says "for" (*car*). The explanation for this wonder about the meaningfulness of pre-ethical violence really lies in the following sentence. In fact, the explanation lies in the phrase "at the same time" (*en même temps*). (3) *Third*, "for at the same time," the irreducible violence of the relation to the other is non-violence. So, the foundation or structure that Derrida is formulating for us is self-contradictory, between violence and non-violence. The irreducibly violent relation to the other, Derrida says, "opens [*ouvre*] the relation to the other," the very relation that is non-violent. Being violent and non-violent, this foundation cannot therefore be stable.

However, are we able to generate a principle, even perhaps a moral principle, from this unstable, self-contradictory "foundation"? If we are going to generate a principle from this foundation, minimally it would have to exhibit the same self-contradictory structure of violence and non-violence. However, the self-contradiction expressed in the structure also includes the terms same and other. The opposition between same and other gives us a clue about what the principle might be. Another clue comes to us from the development of Derrida's thinking. Immediately following the quotation from "Violence and Metaphysics" that we have been examining, Derrida says simply that "it is an *economy*," and Derrida highlights the word "economy" (WD, 128).¹² We know that, as Derrida's thinking develops, he becomes more and more interested in the literal meaning of the word "economy," as the law of the home (from the Greek "oikonomia"). The word "economy" then comes to be associated with the problem of hospitality (OHO). However, in 1967 the word "economy," undoubtedly, must be charged with Marxist connotations. It is not until 1993, of course, that Derrida writes a book on Marx, *Specters of Marx*. Near the end of *Specters of Marx*, we find this strange sentence: "tout autre est tout autre" (SM, 217; GD2, 82–83; Lawlor 2002, 221–222).

To conclude, let us investigate this sentence. The key to this sentence lies in the copula, which is both predicative and existential. What is wholly other *is* (the existential copula), and thus since it is *something*, it is not purely wholly other; and yet, what is wholly other *is* (the predicative copula) wholly other and thus asserting itself as wholly other the other is wholly other. In other words, the quality of "wholly-other" is attributed to the wholly other (predicative), and yet the wholly other exists as something (existential). Clearly, the sentence is self-contradictory. We can elaborate on this analysis in the following way. The sentence "tout autre est tout autre" is *first of all* a tautology: "every other is every other." Here, with the tautology, we have an assertion of existential equivalency. There is no difference between anything: "every other is simply the same as every other." With this tautological rephrasing, with this sameness, we have the violence toward the other. The assertion does not respect the other's alterity as such; it represses the other's singularity within the

generality of the “every.” But, there is a *second* way of understanding the tautology: “tout autre est tout autre” could be rendered in English as “wholly other is wholly other.” This rephrasing is still a tautology since on either side of the copula, one finds the same phrase. Nevertheless, despite the apparent tautology, this rephrasing stresses the attribute of wholly otherness. The stress of the copula could even lead us to add an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. Now it would seem to be saying: “Make no mistake! The wholly other is truly, really, unequivocally wholly other!” Rephrased in this way, the sentence provides a clear expression of otherness. Now the sentence says nothing but alterity. It now respects the other’s alterity as such, and the violence of the expression seems to have been removed. Nevertheless, the two versions of “tout autre est tout autre” together confront us with the same self-contradiction we have seen before: between sameness and otherness, between violence and non-violence. Yet, there is a *third* way to render the sentence. “Tout autre est tout autre” could mean that “each and every other is wholly other.” Now, with this third rendering, we approach something like a principle, even a moral principle. If we accept the language of respect for the other introduced already in the interpretations of “tout autre est tout autre,” and if one then accepts the third rendering in which every single other must be considered as wholly other, and finally if one also accepts the addition of the exclamation mark, then we are confronted with an imperative that says the following. The imperative says that every single other – all of them – must be treated with respect. The imperative is unconditional, since the imperative commands that all others, every single one of them, be treated in the same way.¹³ The unconditional status of the imperative even commands us to promise. The imperative commands us, to say this again, to respect every single one. The universality of the commandment includes not just those present, but also those who have already passed away and those still to come. The imperative commands us to promise to remember all the others who have passed away and to anticipate all the others still to come. The imperative says: “Promise that you will treat every single other, all of them, everywhere and at all times, with respect!” The promise is perhaps even the promise of perpetual peace.

The question now is obvious: can this promise be kept? Immediately, one will say “no.” However, the reason for the impossibility of keeping the promise does not lie in the factual conditions of being unable to find every single other. The reason for the impossibility is structural. No one is able to balance the singularity or finitude of experience with its generality or infinitude. I am able to let the other enter into me, but when I do, the opening makes the other the same as me. I am able to let a generality take flight, but that generality will always land in a singularity. In short, there can never be justice. And the impossibility of justice means that something like violence in experience, even in the most non-violent experience, can never be eliminated. The impossibility of eliminating violence should, I hope, destroy any sense of good conscience. It should trouble us. It should not allow us to settle into the smug attitude in which we think that what we have thought, conceived, and done is “good

enough.” It should stop us from becoming comfortable. We must not think that, because we have a stable moral principle by means of which we can decide against violence, we can be done with violence once and for all. No, instead, and this is the aim of deconstruction, I must make myself experience, *acutely*, the imperative of the promise and, I must make myself experience, *acutely*, the impossibility of me keeping the promise. Then, I undergo this mad imagination of violence, the imagination of so much violence being done to every single other that I could not *not* feel insufficient. The *feeling* of insufficiency would then move me.¹⁴ It would move me to force myself to keep trying to keep the promise: eliminate violence of any kind, for every single other, found anywhere in the world or outside the world! This interminable effort to keep the promise is really the flipside of violence.

Notes

- 1 For an important reading of Derrida and violence, see Goddard (2008).
- 2 The idea of transcendental violence has inspired all the work I have done since and including *This Is Not Sufficient* (Lawlor 2007).
- 3 Haddad also makes the accusation of confusion (see Haddad 2013, 92). Haddad’s accusation, however, differs from the one with which I am now concerned. He claims that *This Is Not Sufficient* confuses the senses of the worst in Derrida, between a possibility and an actuality. My more recent work has corrected this confusion. Haddad also makes the accusation that the logic employed in *This Is Not Sufficient* “relies on oppositional structures that [Derrida’s] writings undermine” (2013, 93). It is true that I use “opposition structures” like reversal. However, Derrida’s most classic presentation of deconstruction states that deconstruction begins with a reversal of established and violent hierarchies. There can be no deconstruction without such a reversal of hierarchies. Moreover, Haddad’s resistance to the choice of a lesser violence perhaps indicates that he is himself confused. Undecidability is the experience that one cannot decide – a decision is structurally impossible – and yet the experience demands of one to make a decision, to do the impossible. This experience is the heart of Derrida’s normative thought.
- 4 See also Oksala (2012), in particular ch. 2, “Foundational Violence.” Oksala expresses concerns that foundational violence does not take into account “physical” and “historical” violence: “My central claim is, however, that the investigation of the constitutive role of physical violence must be thoroughly historical and must not rely on any ontologized notion of ordinary violence as such.”
- 5 To be clear, everything I am saying here is opposed to violence, especially in light of violence’s “stupidity,” as James Dodd has called violence (Dodd 2009, 12). For another very careful account of violence in Derrida, see Samir Haddad (2011).
- 6 The second question of violence echoes what Hannah Arendt says in her small book *On Violence* (Arendt 1969), to which I shall return below.
- 7 Even though Steiner recognizes the great influence of Nietzsche on Derrida and Foucault’s thought, he does not take up the role that the eternal return doctrine plays in their thinking.

- 8 SOV, 2; SM, 10.
- 9 At approximately the same time as Husserl, Bergson too is showing that there is a kind of spontaneous memory in all experience that is required to explain experiences like false recognition. Bergson argues that experience immediately reproduces what is seen leading us at times to think that we recognize someone whom we had never seen before. Husserl would add that as soon as we have this flashing moment of recognition, experience also immediately and spontaneously anticipates something else coming. See Bergson (2009).
- 10 These reflections on Husserlian temporalization are based on years of reflection on Derrida's *Voice and Phenomenon* (VP). See Lawlor (2002).
- 11 One immediately thinks of Hegel. But more recently Barbaras has stressed this negativity in his "privative anthropology." See Barbaras (2008, 249).
- 12 By comparing the 1967 version of "Violence and Metaphysics" in *L'écriture et la différence* (the version translated in WD) to the original 1964 version published in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, we see that the sentence "c'est une économie" is a 1967 addition. My thanks always to Robert Bernasconi who did the first real investigation of the differences between the two versions of "Violence and Metaphysics."
- 13 Fred Evans has developed an interesting idea of oracles. An oracle is a voice that is nihilistic; it attempts to repress the voices of others (for example, the fascist voice or the racist voice). Through this notion, he contests the idea of unconditional inclusion. See Evans (2008, 268–274). In other essays, I have connected nihilism to what I call "the problem of the worst" so that the idea of unconditional inclusion, which is a response or solution to the problem, amounts to an attempt to transform the nihilistic voices. But for both of us, these ideas are still being developed.
- 14 Recently, I have tried to develop this feeling through the feeling of shame. It is not the feeling of futility.

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Derrida/Law: A Differend

PIERRE LEGRAND

1. Before Law

In his last recorded interview, Jacques Derrida reiterated to the newspaper, *Le Monde*, his abiding love for the French language (LLF, 22–26, 31–34, 50–52). By then, Derrida had long addressed the “link” between the “irreducible experience of language” and the idea of “commitment” (OHD, 60) such that his oft-renewed pledge of allegiance to French must be received as especially meaningful. Not only did Derrida envisage himself as situated in language – “[m]y own presence to myself has been preceded by a language” (DIS, 340) – but he regarded philosophy as, inevitably, also positioned in language (PTS, 374), a stance he held against the institutional attitude assuming “a transparent translatability and an absolute univocity . . . indifferent . . . to the multiplicity of languages” (LDM, 38). Having declared to his *Le Monde* interlocutor that “[t]he experience of language” is “vital” (LLF, 34), Derrida formulated his devotion to French in compelling terms: “I suppose that . . . I love this language like I love my life, and sometimes more than one or other native French love it . . . All the French of Algeria share this with me” (LLF, 37).

Since Derrida would not regard himself as French (EO, 146), his reference to his North African roots is hardly accidental. In the 1930s and 1940s, to express oneself in French in El Biar, on the outskirts of Algiers, was to speak the language that effectively dominated the local political, economic, and cultural life. As Derrida often explained, it was to use the language of the French colonizers of Algeria, a language that had come from the *métropole*, from the “Capital-City-Mother-Fatherland” (MLO, 41). It was, in effect, to adopt another language. Having famously framed the matter

in aporetic terms – “I have only one language and it is not mine” (MLO, 25) – Derrida admitted that his “attachment to the French language” could be “‘neurotic’” (MLO, 56). For example, he was possessed with a strong compulsion to lose his Algerian accent, which he regarded as a shameful badge of provinciality: “I am not proud of it, I make no doctrine of it, but so it is: an accent – any French accent, but above all a strong southern accent – seems incompatible to me with the intellectual dignity of public speech” (MLO, 46). Though in his work he relentlessly decried every claim to purity and steadfastly maintained that even what seemed pure had always already been tainted, he styled his demand for “pure French” as “inflexible” (MLO, 46–47). Having ascertained that he felt “lost, fallen, and condemned outside the French language” (MLO, 56), Derrida proclaimed: “I only ever write in French and . . . I attach great importance to this fact” (PTS, 416). He added: “I write in a language that I insist on keeping very French” (VB, 9). Having asserted his “monolingual obstinacy” (MLO, 57), his “desire for the idiom” (PC, 360), he made his position clear: “I am very monolingual, very Francophone” (CDD, 111).

Unsurprisingly, for Derrida translation could only ever happen “in the loose sense of the word ‘translation’” (MLO, 56) – a fact that even “[t]he excellence of the translation” could not overcome (SM, 21). Maintaining that “‘Peter’ . . . is not a translation of Pierre” (PSY1, 198), Derrida held that “translation is another name for the impossible” (MLO, 57), “[a] debt that one [cannot] discharge” (PSY1, 199), which is no doubt why he readily referred to “quasi-translations” (WRT, 178) and argued that “for the notion of translation we will have to substitute a notion of transformation” (POS, 19). Ultimately, there could be no dialogue across languages (ALT, 85). Indeed, Derrida saw cross-linguistic incommunicability as unsurpassable and proclaimed that “there are only islands” (BS2, 33). He exclaimed: “What guides me is always untranslatability” (DMV, 26).

Starting, then, from the fact that Derrida emphatically styled himself a French-speaking philosopher, given his decision “[to] try to assume all [his] Francophone responsibilities” (PM, 140) and thus to resist the prevalence of English or Anglobalization (TWJ, 218; OHD, 23), commencing, in other words, from where Derrida was, from where he read and wrote, from the language with which his rapport was “irreducibly idiomatic” (VB, 10), from the hither side of “the idiomatic limit” (OHD, 35), prompts me to enter two related findings as regards his engagement with “law,” which I deem primordial.

First, as he took an interest in matters legal, Derrida would readily have thought in terms of “droit” and “loi,” two French words that may be said, when taken jointly, to approximate, but certainly not replicate, the meaning of the English word “law.” In his first text expressly devoted to law, Derrida thus addressed the Frenchness of the word “loi” (AL, 206). Secondly, to the extent that Derrida was at all concerned with “law,” this English term, as a word that he could “never inhabit” (MLO, 57), could only have been uncanny and thus of limited significance to him. In fact, only through the diffractive prism of the French language could “law” have been open to

Derrida's apprehension. Otherwise said, "law" could only ever have had meaning for him as a declension of "droit" or "loi" or of "droit"-and-"loi."

It is simply not reasonable therefore to assume that an intellectual such as Derrida showing the kind of commitment to being Francophone, that a philosopher steeped in a language where the terms "droit" and "loi" inevitably carry semantic resonances characteristic of the nomothetic legal culture that bred them, would have found himself in a situation allowing him to ascribe unaffected (and unaffected) meaning to "law" as the typical product of an idiographic legal culture such as prevails, say, in England or the United States. In this instance, the French language is shown to act, to quote from Gayatri Spivak writing as Derrida's translator, as much as a "right of way" allowing "law" to reach Derrida-the-Francophone in translation as a "barrier" preventing the English word from getting to its destination unimpeded – the issue of how much of the economy of the English term could ever be rendered in French inevitably remaining a matter of speculation (OGC, "Translator's Introduction," lxxxvi). There is, if you will, an unbridgeable "differend" following from inscription-in-language, which is inscription-in-situation. Lest one accept the co-presence of radically different linguistic singularities and come to them as sites for the exploration of incommensurable dissensus, one risks falling for glib assumptions harking back in one form or another to the specious idea of "universalism" – precisely the kind of highly underwhelming result against which Derrida's work unceasingly seeks to warn us.

To apply oneself to Derrida's comprehension of "law," to probe the connections between Derrida and law, thus raises a seemingly insurmountable challenge for anyone wishing to elucidate what the conjunction masks as it brings not-together the inscription of a proper noun ("Derrida") in the French language and that of a noun ("law") in the English language. To be sure, one cannot speak of a history ("Derrida-and-law"), but only of histories ("Derrida" and "law"). Accordingly, one is summoned to address the discord between two entities that never actually met, that were never fully in one another's co-presence, and that only ever dealt with one another through the French language acting as mediator. Even as they were in contact via French – to be understood as a third space where the negotiation between the protagonists was brokered – the *interpretans* and the *interpretandum* remained "absolutely irreconcilable," no matter how much we as interpreters of Derrida's texts show ourselves willing to "live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy" (WD, 293). In any analysis of Derrida's work on "law," it must be appreciated that the word "law" is very much, as Derrida's translators, Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod, have put it, "compromise English" (TRP, xiv).

2. Then, Law

Derrida acknowledged that the word "law" can point to significance as it issues "from morality, from legality or from politics, even from nature" (AL, 192). Two of

his well-known texts are especially topical as regards the possible range of imperatives or *doxas*, “The Law of Genre” (AL, 221–252) and “Before the Law” (AL, 181–220). But my preoccupation is with “law” in the narrower sense, as it aims to concern itself with “the legal” (Goodrich, Hoffmann, Rosenfeld, and Vismann 2008; Legrand 2009; de Ville 2011).

Most commentators analyzing Derrida’s relationship with law in this specialized meaning have focused on the text of his renowned opening address at Cardozo Law School’s conference on “Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice” delivered in October 1989 as “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” (FL), the French original having subsequently been published in the form of a book, *Force de loi*. However, Derrida himself observed that his work had often foregrounded law (FL, 7). Unwilling to confine his hyper-cognitive desedimentation and dehierarchization practice known as “deconstruction” to a forum that would be its “proper place,” Derrida in fact surmised that “[i]f, hypothetically, it had a proper place,” it would be “more at home in law schools, . . . than in philosophy departments and much more than in the literature departments where it has often been thought to belong” (FL, 8). For him, “architecture, and for similar reasons the law, are the ultimate tests of deconstruction” (CLW, 167). He maintained that “law is essentially deconstructible” (FL, 14), which is to say that he thought that there is nothing more deconstructible than law.

One reason for the special relevance of law to the deconstructive enterprise would have to do with the fact that “[d]econstruction is not, should not be only an analysis of discourses, of philosophical statements or concepts, of a semantics; if it is going to matter, it has to challenge institutions, social and political structures, the most hardened traditions” (PTS, 213). And law, as “a profoundly traditional practice”, as a narrative that “rests upon mountains of inherited tradition, preserved, referred and deferred to by highly developed institutions and practices of tradition-maintenance” (Krygier 1986, 239, 256), as also “that [which] exposes us to our own blindness or the limits of our historicity” (Bruns 1992, 204), is an evident focal point for the deconstructive challenge, which is about exposing what lies within law about which law has lied (even to itself), that which law, for an array of institutional reasons, has “officially” sought to dissimulate or deny, to bury or repress. It is this hidden or other side of law that primarily concerns Derrida and that he means to capture through what I will style an inventive approach. Etymologically, “invention” refers simultaneously to discovery and creation. This notion thus appears least inapt to render the archive process at work as it involves at once disclosive and ascriptive dimensions: the analyst works with the law-texts that are there and reveals their meaning, but it is he who reads those texts in order to make them meaningful.

In the end, Derrida’s goal is to think thoughts that would be more thoughtful than the established thinking that traverses law under the name “positivism,” which, in its various guises, contends that all that counts as law is what has been posited as law, ultimately by the sovereign – “positivists,” the vast majority of legal

academics, being concerned, then, with legal technique and rationalization of legal technique; fostering “legal dogmatics” through the organization of the different rules adopted by the sovereign in the form of an orderly, coherent, and systematic representation; seeking to offer an interpretive commentary of the legal provisions in force that would be judicious and rational, that would explain their reach and potential, that would eliminate or reduce their apparent flaws, obscurities, gaps, or contradictions; pursuing fixity of meaning; and adhering to a brand of writing purporting to offer itself in an unproblematic and unsituated mode, seeking to deny any political commitment or personal investment (thus, wanting to show itself as being simply “there” rather than as having arrived where it is through processes of contestation with alternative practices). Through a strategy of invagination (a folding of law back on itself, as one can do with a glove) and by dint of a careful mode of phenomenological attention allowing for a letting-be of law as world, Derrida seeks to deconstruct the presence of the posited law by uncovering law’s other language, something which will then make it possible for one to hearken to law speaking a different language than the solely descriptive, exclusively propositional language that has consistently been heard by positivists united. Crucially, the other language that is the focus of Derrida’s analysis, which, *pace* positivism’s enclosing juricentrism, reveals the law’s constitutive and exuberant heterogeneity, is not outside the law. It is still emphatically law’s language; indeed, it is arguably more authentically law’s language than the thin or superficial linguistic configuration to which positivism has held law. It is hyper-law rather than counter-law. It is excessively legal.

Note that Derrida’s assertion is therefore that law conceals a difference within in that the possibility of another language-of-law is inscribed within law itself, which means that the other is within the self, that it is present though invisible, not unlike a phantom. Indeed, for Derrida there is a “logic of haunting” at work when it comes to a law-text (SM, 10). Because “[the law] ghosts” (SM, 169), since “it is spectral structure that makes the law” (PM, 89), law’s interpreters have to attest to this otherness and proceed to act differentially. While positivism has promoted law’s autonomy by branding, “metaphysics”-style, everything not pertaining to the positable and posited as “simple exteriority” (OGC, 167), Derrida wishes to account for law as heteronomy. Interpreters are required to make themselves suspicious of anything that would affirm itself along the lines of a pure, detachable, and indeed separate legal identity. Instead of incessantly asking themselves what law “is” (and answering tautologically that it is what is posited as law by the law through the law-making authorities positing the law), law’s interpreters must engage, if only for authenticity’s sake, in an exigent mutation of their thinking having law as its object. They need to elicit what law exists as or writes as or speaks as, that is, to show awareness of law’s constitutive nexus of relations to space, place, and situation, to time also, to reveal attentiveness to law’s embeddedness in a multiplicity of intensities and in a plurality of forces, to law as discourse encumbered with proliferating spatio-temporal

precedence. In other terms, they must abandon ontology and practice “hauntology” (SM, 10), that is, turn themselves into “hauntologists.”

There is at least one other reason why, according to Derrida, deconstruction would spontaneously focus on law. This concerns the fact that lawyers stand at the interface of an array of pivotal tensions whose problematic terms, even as they prove as contradictory as they show themselves to be indissociable, ceaselessly inform legal discourse. Consider the following dyads, which refer to oppositions that lawyers reflexively approach as binary structures not allowing room for the presence of a third term – unless, perhaps, under the auspices of a dialectical resolution à la Hegel – and that they have indeed come to regard as marking “natural” delineations: law/non-law, positive law/natural law, legislative text/judicial decision, interpretation/transformation, certainty/discretion, private/public, equality/individuality, and so forth. Arguably, though, as it frames itself through the various techniques from which it has become inseparable – it is definition, formulation, classification, composition, arbitration, adjudication, legislation – law must contend with a restlessness attendant upon the interaction between concepts or categories that simply does not feature the discrete contours, sharp distinctions, or clear edges that are sought and assumed by lawyers (whether in good faith or not). One of deconstruction’s main messages is precisely that concepts are in effect undelineated and categories unframed, that there are no unquestionable borders. The assumption of foundational alignments, claims Derrida, is at best an instantiation of wishful thinking, an illusion of reassuring certitude in which deconstruction cannot find solace as it denies “the transcendental or logical superhardness of the barrier that marks off the conceptual purity of X from everything that is not-X” (Staten 1986, 18).

Bearing in mind the oft-repeated accusations of nihilism castigating Derrida’s perceived self-indulgence and deconstruction’s assumed whimsy, it is important to note that in Derrida’s work the value of law is “never contested or destroyed . . . but only reinscribed in more powerful, larger, more stratified contexts” (LI, 146). It is not, then, that Derrida’s legal analysis seeks to forget legal tradition, but rather that it proposes through an exacting anamnesis to recall what law-as-tradition has wanted to forget about itself as positivism has been denying all memory of the impurity of its condition while, whether out of arrogance or fear, chasing after the chimera of the distinctively legal.

Pursuing the re-presentation of the presence of law “in the form of a presence adequate to itself” (MP, 80), Derrida argues that “the [law] [is] not reducible . . . to the sensible or visible presence of the graphic or the ‘literal’” (POS, 55), that “[w]hether in the order of spoken discourse or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present” (POS, 23–24), that “[t]his sequence results in each ‘element’ . . . being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system” (POS, 24). Accordingly, there is a built-in dimension to law, a “structural necessity that is marked in the [law]” (DIS, 223), which operates tacitly or at least

in a manner that cannot be graphically visualized in the way the words on a page can be. That “operator” – let us refer to it as “culture” – while not at all as readily conspicuous as expressed words, leaves a range of constitutive traces within law: historical, epistemological, ideological, social, political, economic, psychological, linguistic, and so on, each of them a singular trace, a different trace, all of them ascertainable traces showing that the law is not/cannot be autarkic or “[m]onogenealog[ical]” (OHD, 10), that even as it is said to be founded on an unconditional point of departure, a textual “ground,” law remains but a self-positing, self-authenticating, and therefore contingent event. In effect, a law-text exists as an intricate configuration of traces remaining.

In the way in which he radically complicates law – there is an “excess of signifying possibilities preceding the text” (Johnson 1993, 29), entailing that no reader can ever hope to capture the infinity of law’s constitutive networks – Derrida adopts a resolutely anti-positivist stance. For him, there is infinitely much more to law than its positivity, such that no law can be deemed fully present on account of its positivity alone. Within law, within the positivity of law, as law, as the factual concretion of each law, there is a general economy of traces, “more than one specter” (SM, 24), so that law exists as cultural text, that it is always already plural, that it is unimaginable as anything that would not be plural, that it “has always already been penetrated” (WD, 249), that it features a “non-presence of the other inscribed within the meaning of the present” (OGC, 71). For Derrida, then, law-as-it-exists is haunted by discursive traces forming complex intertwining and, in effect, never-ending semiotic chains, and it is that that law’s-interpreters-as-hauntologists are to invent (etymologically speaking) as they revisit the law with an affirmed concern for its spectrality – all the while challenging received ideas like “presence” (no law is ever all “there” as the positable and the posited because the “graphy” is never all there is to law) or origin and finitude (there is no first or last trace since any trace, itself being constituted of traces, can always be traced further).

Because law is formed of such interconnecting textual networks, it cannot usefully be envisaged as having an ultimate foundation that would allow it to be apprehended as emanating from some vanishing point. Rather, law consists of an “endless multiplication of folds, unfoldings, foldouts, foldures, folders, and manifolds” (DIS, 270). One seeking to account for law cannot therefore usefully re-present it as the distinctively legal, as a pure entity. There is, to borrow from Hillis Miller, the “uncanny inherence” of the trace to the law (Miller 1979, 88). The array of traces haunting law entails that law exists as something other than “only law” or that law can only be law as “not-only-law.” On account of the trace, otherness is inscribed within the legal along the lines of a “virus” (CIR, 91). For a text to exist as law is, indeed, for it to harbor this otherness within (which is not to say that it finds itself submerged in otherness): legality is trace-affected. In fact, the trace is always already at home within its host; it is what Derrida calls “the stranger at home” (AP, 10). Because law exists – that is, writes and speaks – as an interface of heterogeneous traces (it exists

as the social writing/speaking legally, as the political writing/speaking legally, as the economic writing/speaking legally, and so forth – it exists, in sum, as culture writing/speaking legally), the law-text exists as what is spun or woven, which is what the words “textile” and “texture” in effect bring to mind (in Latin, a “textor” is a weaver and “texere” is “to weave”). Over against Hans Kelsen, arguably the most influential modern legal theorist, who claims that “[t]he law [counts] only as positive law” (Kelsen 1967, 56), for Derrida law does not count only as that which is posited and cannot reasonably be taken to be counting only as that which is posited. Derrida’s pressing invitation to lawyers is to re-think law’s “as-ness.”

As it emphasizes the significance of the trace, of that which survives structurally within law, of that which lives on (LO), Derrida’s deconstruction of law is affirmative. Indeed, “always, deconstruction is on the side of the yes, of the affirmation of life” (LLF, 51). As it redraws the space of effectivity of law, as it defends “a quasi-logic of the phantom which, because it is the more forceful one, should be substituted for an ontological logic of presence, absence or representation” (FL, 63–64), Derrida’s deconstruction confirms law in the richness of its texture. His deterritorialization is a reterritorialization. His impugment in the form of an intertextual infinitization disputing a protectionist closure, his challenge substituting an open-texturedness for “an imposition of fundamentally classical limits upon generalized textuality”, can thus legitimately be regarded as a manifesto for law (in the same way as his deconstructive readings of canonical texts can ultimately be regarded as attempts at saving those texts). Specifically, deconstruction is for law in the sense that it purports to salvage law-as-cultural-text, to rehabilitate through a meaning-producing principle of differentiation that which had always already been present (albeit on an alternative understanding of presence) yet which has been marginalized, devalued, discarded, rejected, and, yes, excreted by positivism because it has been deemed not to be genuine law.

3. Law French

Derrida’s lesson in the dismantling of positivism’s hegemonic distortions is powerful. Yet, his reading of law, even as it allows for “the non legal or pre-legal origin of the legal” as a primordial feature of what law exists as (PF, 153) and thus for a certain prioritization of otherness, and even as it manages to surmount the sterile Cartesian dichotomy between subject and object through the notion of (the invention of the) trace, finds itself being simultaneously indebted to some of the central tenets of positivism in significant ways. Perhaps this paradox befits a philosopher having so painstakingly foregrounded the aporia. But there is more. Though Derrida traveled widely, he studied and taught in France for over 50 years, a country where law continues to be framed in uncompromisingly positivist terms; intellectual order is prized above all else; analytical studies towards the realization of an exhaustive and

coherent conceptual system are held in the highest regard; and “critical” work is largely reduced to the exposition of the state’s laws, the dominion of the statute being unceasingly extolled and adjudication, apprehended along the lines of a seemingly necessary evil, almost just as incessantly scorned. On account of a specific mixture of Kelsen’s *Pure Theory of Law*, Roman-inherited *scientia juris*, a centuries-old *mos geometricus* whereby law’s leading exponents aim to put it on an epistemological par with geometry, not to mention a fixation on an uncompromising form of Ramism’s methodological rigorism (after sixteenth-century Paris philosopher, Petrus Ramus), positivism is still the only configuration of the legal deemed worthy of consideration by French jurists.

Whilst Derrida did not train as a French lawyer, it is implausible that his understanding of law, especially as it took shape in the early years of his intellectual life (IJD), would have remained immune to the relentless dogmatism presiding over legal discourse in France. When it came to law, Derrida’s determined Francophone-ism could not have escaped the very long reach of Frenchness-at-Law, no matter how cosmopolitan he was in many other ways. Even allowing for a substantial measure of nomadism, the idea of non-inscription in legal space and, indeed, of non-location in legal time is untenable: to be Derrida-the-Francophone-at-Law was to be Derrida-in-Frenchness-at-Law-in-the-Second-Half-of-the-Twentieth-Century. Without situating Derrida within French intellectual life in France at that time, within French legal culture, within French law, and therefore within French so-called “scientific” positivism, aspects of his understanding of law would become very awkward to justify. As I have mentioned, Derrida’s signal contribution to the hauntology of law, to what law exists as, to the intrinsically heteronomic “as-ness” of law – it exists as culture speaking legally, as a cultural form incorporating a labyrinthine assemblage of traces, of “influences, filiations, or legacies” (PM, 176) – does not prevent him from considering law to be also that which has been authoritatively posited. There are two principal axes aligning a side of Derrida’s thought about law along unmistakably positivist lines, about law-being-law-because-it-has-been-authoritatively-positived-to-be-law – although it must be observed again that, unlike Kelsen, Derrida never lent credence to purity as his “quasi-logic” of spectrality makes clear. Indeed, Derrida refutes “the sphere of pure, immune law, intact, not contaminable by everything we would want to purify it of” (FWT, 150).

The first manifestation of Derrida’s positivism pertains to his distinction between law and justice. Although of ancient lineage, this idea has more recently been prominently expressed by Kelsen who, referring to “the dualism of law and justice”, writes that “justice . . . must be imagined as an order different from . . . the positive law” (Kelsen 1967, 16). Derrida formulates this differentiation in terms idiosyncratically Derridean. His initial motion is to assert both that law is deconstructible and that it must be deconstructed.

For Derrida, law pertains to the realm of the calculable. It is about claim, obligation, and entitlement (FL, 16, 24), all assessed by a third party such as a judge, whose

task is to engage in a commutative/distributive exercise meant to be kept within strictly legal boundaries, within the ambit of an application of law. The deconstructibility of law emerges from the fact of its intrinsic embodiment in an “as” narrative, a constitutive network of traces whose voice has been relentlessly silenced on the altar of upper-case Law as master-signifier, as “the posited” which, thing-like, is deemed to be visibly, ascertainably “out there,” objectively and exclusively identifiable through the deployment of the correct method. The necessity of deconstruction arises on account of this suppression itself, because of the institutionalization of a dominant position not allowing or out-lawing all other voices (that I have subsumed under the label “culture”) – and it does so precisely in the name of the justice that law cannot be, and can never even hope to be, as long as it does not acknowledge at the very least the structural presence of that which is not not-law (that is, the circuits of embedded traces) and the complexity of the interpretive negotiation that must follow from this constitutive fact (FL, 14).

Derrida’s contrapuntal gesture is to insist that justice is undeconstructible – indeed that it is the only concept that is resilient enough to withstand deconstruction (FL, 15). Being “irreducible in its affirmative character”, justice is that which is “owed to the other” in the sense of a “gift without exchange” (FL, 25) – an idea which is partly indebted to the work of Emmanuel Levinas (SM, 26; Levinas 1991, 72, 89). As one acknowledges “the necessity of thinking justice on the basis of the gift” (SM, 32), one observes that “[j]ustice is an experience of the impossible” (FL, 16). More must now be said about the idea of “impossibility.”

If the other was ever present in the sense that access to it were to be possible not just as other but as such, the other would no longer be other since it would find itself deprived of its otherness. A threshold disjuncture or interruption is therefore a necessary condition of possibility of otherness (SM, 25). It follows that any attempt to give justice to the other, to give the other his due, must have always already failed. Even as one must never stop the giving, one must never acquit the debt. The desire for justice (FL, 16), though “indestructible” (WD, 194), must not be assuaged (thus does “[j]ustice ... always ha[ve] an eschatological dimension” [TS, 20]). As a desire for the impossible (GT, 29), it must never be inscribed “under the sign of presence” (SM, 32). There is “a madness” in this, which prompts Derrida to say that “deconstruction is mad about this kind of justice” (FL, 25). Note that for Derrida the impossible is “what is most undeniably real” (ROG, 84), the Lacan-inspired intuition being that the real is what resists symbolization, lies outside imagery, exists beyond language, “exceed[s] the ideation in which it is thought, thought of as more than I can think” (WD, 98). The impossible is the real because it is that which cannot be symbolized or imagined, which is impervious to any form of capture by language. Ultimately, the impossible can only be reached contrapuntally from the standpoint of the possible. It is the im-possible.

Law/justice. There, law as “the calculation of restitution,” “calculable equality,” “the symmetrizing and synchronic accountability or imputability of subjects or

objects ... that would be limited to sanctioning, to restituting, and to making law” (SM, 26). Beyond the realm of the posited, beyond any law, as a kind of meta-law, as a Law of law, as law’s other, justice as that which there is that is not there yet, that is always “to-come” (FL, 27), that is infinitely deferred, and as that which, if it exists, exists in itself, which “as the experience of absolute alterity is unrepresentable” (FL, 28). (On this account, Derrida’s justice distinguishes itself from any idea of “natural law” claiming to precede the posited while purporting to encapsulate both law and justice, that is, to enunciate law as justice and justice as law.)

Having sketched this differentiation between law and justice, Derrida swiftly proceeds, in typical deconstructive fashion, to blunt anything that might come across as too sharp a delineation. Thus, he observes that although heterogeneous to one another, law and justice are not immiscible. Indeed, he claims that their very heterogeneity requires their indissociability. There cannot be justice except through law and thus by way of legal determinations; there is, if you will, “the becoming-law of justice” (Saghafi 2010, 44). And there cannot be any becoming or any perfectibility of law, any transformation of law, that does not call upon an understanding of justice that will nonetheless inevitably exceed it (ROG, 150). For example, in every act of interpretation, even though interpretation depends on the established legal order that it interprets, there is a manifestation of justice suspending the law (and thus suspending the opposition between law and justice), “[t]his moment of suspense ... [being] always full of anxiety” (FL, 20) – which, to refer to the theme of “auto-immunity” that assumed prominence in Derrida’s later work, shows “the contamination at the very heart of law” (FL, 39), that is, how law is haunted by what “always carries beyond the law” (SM, 30), by a self-destructive drive. (Note that, still in contradistinction to the idea of “natural law,” Derrida’s justice neither assumes the effacement of the posited nor an opposition to it.)

The second salient strand of Derrida’s positivism concerns the fact that, aporetically, law and force are structurally imbricated into one another – specifically, force is endogenous to law while being precisely that exogenous threat that law is meant to counter. In Derrida’s words, “law is always an authorized force” (FL, 5). He adds: “[T]here is no such thing as law ... that does not imply in itself, a priori, in the analytic structure of its concept, the possibility of being ... applied by force” (FL, 5). In other words, while force is law’s other, law contains within itself the fact of force: “That which threatens law already belongs to law” (FL, 35). Drawing on a famous statement by Pascal (Pascal 1995, 26), Derrida shows how law cannot usefully be understood apart from the idea of “enforceability” (FL, 5) – a word he keeps in English in his French text.¹ Law cannot operate as law unless it is in force (that is, unless it has come into force) and unless it is enforced in a context where its coming-into-force or its enforcement call upon the mobilization of an institutional machinery pertaining both to the executive and judicial authorities by those who have a monopoly on legitimate/legal force. Derrida’s reference to law as “authorized force” is again reminiscent of Kelsen, who claimed that law cannot subsist without force,

that law is a mode of organization of force (Kelsen 1967, 61). But I propose to address another sense in which, according to Derrida, law is force. This question concerns language. Derrida refers to this form of force as “arche-violence,” the Greek “arche” suggesting primordality (OGC, 112).

Derrida’s basic point regards violence’s inherence to language. It revolves around the very fact of articulation (OGC, 148), which is “appellatio[n],” “classification,” and therefore “differen[tiation]” (OGC, 110). Any articulation, thus, is a determination. Now, any determination is violent given that, as an act of meaning-creation, it operates in a moment of decision that, as is the case with any expression of decidability, proves simultaneously inclusive and exclusive (as I decide to refer to this tree as an oak, I include and exclude certain characteristics). Indeed, only a discourse that would say nothing could eschew violence; but then it would make no sense to talk of that as a discourse (WD, 147). Thus, discourse and violence are to be seen as arising at once as facets of a single event. In Derrida’s words, “[t]he structure of violence is complex and its possibility – writing – no less so” (OGC, 112). This entanglement is emphatically relevant to law (which is not to say that Derrida reduces juridicity to an exclusive interaction between law and violence; as we know, he allows for justice also).

No matter how much law wishes to circumvent violence, it simply cannot proceed only as the inevitable unfolding of a mechanistic process that would deprive it of all articulation. No matter how technical the legal decision to be made, how seemingly automatic, any expression of law represents a determination and, as such, shows itself to be violent. No expression of law can be other than the making of a determination, the taking of a position – which means that, ultimately, no determination can be other than a reassessment of the tradition. Law is, intrinsically, discursive positionality. Paul Ricoeur helpfully makes this point as follows: “[B]etween the least contradicted rule and its application there always remains a hiatus” (Ricoeur 1966, 174). This hiatus must mean that there is always a moment of decidability, however fleeting, during which a course of action is retained and another rejected, even if as being wildly implausible. Though it is asserted as a mere re-enactment of a prior law, the legal determination-as-position cannot escape being a decision against an alternative claim – in other words, it cannot avoid being a denial of an alternative source of meaning. However, the fact is that a legal determination can never appeal to a prior law to hide its constitutive character: there is no guarantor. Any purported restatement of a prior law is, structurally, but an invention of it. Again, the Latin “inventio” is at once discovery and creation: as the antecedent law is discovered, it is created. The inherence of violence to law is aptly summarized in these terms: “All law – unlike justice – is dependent on a positing (*Setzung*), and no positing manages without violence” (Hamacher 1991, 1134). In as much as legal determination is articulation, which it necessarily is, it embodies violence and indeed reiterates it every time that another legal intervention takes place. To paraphrase Derrida, “[a]

[law] without violence would be a [law] which would occur outside the existent” (WD, 147).

Although it is a contrivance of law in every case, the legal determination cannot however be regarded as pure violence. Otherwise, it would amount to the utter obliteration of other horizons of meaning to such an extent that alternative standpoints could not even be recognized as arguments, as that which can be refuted. The holding of different positions would become impossible. Granted that the legal decision “belongs to the structure of fundamental violence” (FL, 38), the violence at work, then, is best understood as an “economy” of violence, that is, as modulated violence (WD, 117).

Crucially, to admit the inescapability of law-as-violence does not leave deconstruction bereft as dismantlement strategy. By calling into question – by putting to the question – the alleged foundations on which law claims to be established, by “interrogati[ng] . . . the origin, grounds and limits of our conceptual, theoretical or normative apparatus” (FL, 20), by lifting the “veil” (DIS, 316), deconstruction shows that law, even law, is discursively bound to the particular horizon of its writers or promoters and, ultimately, tied to the necessary perspectivism of egoity. By claiming that law is constructed out of an intricate “interpretable and transformable” textual configuration (FL, 14), deconstruction seeks to mitigate the violence that law-as-established-discourse would otherwise continue to perpetrate upon repressed voices in the name of its own reiteration. Again, it is not so much that deconstruction seeks to destroy law-as-established-discourse (FL, 56), but that it calls upon it to show responsibility in the face of the question put to it, in the face of others, and in the face of justice. Through deconstruction, law is thus given an opportunity to justify itself, to account for itself in a way that better approximates justice by doing justice to the situation, that is, for instance, to the repressed “others” within the situation, by recognizing them as independent sources of meaning (which is an acknowledgment of the others’ legal-being-in-the-world).

Even as it seeks to minimize violence by countering the aggression of law-as-established-discourse’s totalizing presence, it is the case that deconstruction is itself a form of violence. But it is not rabid rebellion seeking to overthrow law-as-established-discourse for revolution’s sake. It is violence deployed as unfolding, as interruptive reading, in order to avoid the kind of violence that would permanently silence all positions except one. Through a radical questioning of the alleged basis of law-as-established-discourse, deconstruction operationalizes a suspension of law’s programmatic agenda suspending the epistemological relevance of otherness. Thus, deconstruction “assumes the right to contest, and not only theoretically, constitutional protocols, the very charter that governs reading in our culture” (FL, 38). As it ensures that the self-identity of juridicity is neither assured nor reassuring, deconstruction, then, adduces an “infinite demand for justice” (FL, 19). It acts in “an impure, contaminating, negotiated, bastard and violent way” (FL, 56), doing “violence

against violence" (WD, 117), violence as counter-violence, but violence as vigilance. Pure non-violence being impossible (a point that takes us back to discourse necessarily being articulation), deconstruction is that which constantly challenges law in the name of justice for those who are currently marginalized (and never, of course, the kind of "bad violence" that "does not leave room for the other") (TS, 92).

4. Law Other-Wise

Even Derrida's concessions to the posited cannot detract from his main message to the effect that law cannot usefully be confined to law-as-the-posed, to "das Gesetzte" (observe that the German word to render "the posited," "Gesetzte," is so close to that which accounts for "statute," "Gesetz"). In this regard, Derrida's argument is that law inherently exceeds any automation or calculation. It surpasses any possible reduction to a presently posited that would be there as such (in Derrida's words, "[law] transgress[es] the figure of all possible representation": PSY1, 128). There is that within law, as constitutive of law, as law, "which in no case can be 'posed'" (POS, 77), indeed "that by means of which every position is of itself confounded" (POS, 77). What undermines the posited by necessarily overcoming it is the trace, which is the inscription of otherness in law and as law. Now, the instantiation of the trace within the structure of law shows law as situated, located, embedded, factual. And law cannot escape the trace, its "idiomatic here-ness" (AP, 52). The trace is an encrypted imprint of a past that is invisibly and imperceptibly present within law and as law, which positions law. It turns law into a position (even as there are those within law who wish to claim for it a "view-from-nowhere" status). The trace pertains to law "in the analytical structure of its concept" (FL, 6). When it comes to law, then, "there is the writing + something else that would be there in addition . . . something that the law cannot do without" (Legendre 1988, 295). The economy of the trace thus demands an interpretive passage from law-as-"das Gesetzte" to law-as-"die Setzung." In other words, even though finite or posited, law and its meaning is incessantly in movement, which means that any idea of repose is demoted or, indeed, dis-posed of, reflecting a distrust in positing and in positivity and in positivists and in the positivist *Zeitgeist*, which is thus ex-posed as a position on account of the dynamic presence of the traces deposited in the law-text (and de-positing the law-text). In Derrida's own words, "[p]ositive law does not make the law" (PC, 180). As much as the "Gesetzte" is wanted, and as much as it may appear that this is what is on offer, a close examination of law as it exists, of law-as-cultural-text, shows that in effect law can only generate a "Setzung" or, more accurately, "Setzungen," that is, positions.

After Derrida, "die Setzung" haunts "das Gesetzte" as law is shown, as a matter of structure, to exist as a "ghost story" (FL, 44). Derrida's key lesson is thus that, even if it can mark a convenient point of departure for legal interpretation, the

posited cannot constitute a term of arrival for analysis of law. In the process, law is made responsible on account of the recognition of the presence and of the work of the trace that is always already at home within law, so much so in fact that it inheres to law, that law exists as the trace, that the trace is as law. Needless to add, the array of traces makes for a concert of sometimes “disadjusted, disharmonic, disarranged, discordant” voices within law, but then “[i]s not disjuncture the very possibility of the other” (SM, 26)? Clearly, this situation is “difficult to think through, highly unstable and dangerous” (LI, 137). It is so in a way that law and law’s interpretation would not be if they were merely reposing on the posited and incessantly re-posing the posited. Here, Derrida is inviting us to opt for affirmation, that is, assert the “on” (of the trace), the “living on” of the trace (LO), as endless resistance to positivism’s “no” (to otherness), as (inherent) supplement to it. For Derrida, to uphold the trace and attest to spectrality in order to account for law is to defend an “affirmation foreign to all dialectics” (MP, 27), a view of law otherwise and, crucially, other-wise, that is, that shows itself wising towards otherness. Along the way, Derrida does not accept that law would ever be posed in the sense that it would ever be in place, that it would ever be secure. To be secure would be, literally, for law to be without care, to be careless, which, by extension, would mean to be inconsiderate. And Derrida’s rambunctious project of complication as he goes about the task of close reading, his feverish exacerbation of law as interdiscursivity, as dynamic semiosis, his approach to interpretation as feast rather than fast, precisely wants law to care and be considerate. Negativity and affirmation: Derrida is asking one to sojourn in a non-resolution that can only be polyphonical and heterophonical – that, because “[n]o one, however special his point of vantage, can get past all those doorkeepers into the shrine of the single sense” (Kermode 1979, 123), can only listen to different traces and listen differently to traces. Again, though, even if there is no positivity, there is affirmation – and, specifically, affirmation of otherness, of an ethics towards otherness. Derrida’s appreciation of the law-text as heterothesis shows how “no deconstruction is . . . apolitical” (PFI, 212), how deconstruction is, in fact, “hyper-political” (de Ville 2011, 165).

5. For Law

Once one has become aware of how the French specificity of Derrida’s thought on law informs his understanding – in addition to the familiar Husserlian, Heideggerian, or Freudian insights – one can marshal this fact beneficially to animate a post-positivist, indeed a humanist, understanding of the legal. A key insight is supplied by Derrida himself as he observes that “a written sign contains a power of severance from its context” (MP, 377), that it is iterable (MP, 314–321). Aspects of his argument on the constitution of the legal, therefore, can/must be severed from their French moorings. Interestingly, Derrida’s basic guidance is formulated in terms of a

law: “My law, the one to which I try to devote myself or to respond, is the text of the other, its very singularity, its idiom, its appeal” (AL, 66). It is, then, this abiding motion in favor of recognition and respect that justifies the move away from the rendition of the legal in tightly formatted descriptive, propositional, terms – a reductionist narrative acting as an epistemological obstacle that brings to a halt, that silences, the movement of otherness incessantly at work within the law-text – towards an acknowledgment of law as the nexus of relations out of which it emerges, that it exists as. Qualifying his positivism in significant manner as he defends the necessity of thinking at once both the law and the trace, and of resisting thinking the trace as the non-law, Derrida equips us with a strategy allowing for a letting-be of law that is also a letting-emerge-the-world-as-law – “[t]he world [being] utterly, thoroughly legal, as [one] may not know it” (Bernhard 1982, 213). Through the trace, Derrida also shows us that law and place are inextricably enmeshed, that place is not mere static backdrop to legal meaning, but that it is a dynamic constituent of it (which is not to say that law cannot be constitutive of place in its turn). Law proceeds only in and through place, such that there is no aspatial law. For law, any law, to exist “as law,” it must stand forth in terms of an experience of place. It must dwell. Derrida’s claim, in short, is for *Ortung* in contradistinction to the seemingly relentless drive for evermore *Ordnung* being promoted by positivists. To attend to law in this way is to honor one’s debt to the singularity of the law and to the difference across laws that there is. It is to agree to be interpellated by the law-text.

Derrida also heralds the transformation of the objective spectator that positivism claims law’s reader must be, and that it assumes he can wholeheartedly be, into a spectator – a conjuror of phantoms. Not, of course, a spectator who would be governed by a universal or transcendental reason that would somehow exist independently of culture, but one who is firmly emplaced. As I have indicated, the trace, that which ghosts, falls to be invented by its interpreter who, every time, as reader-situated-in-the-world-reading-a-trace-situated-in-the-world, surmounts any purported delineation between “subject” and “object.” In the absence of objectivity, the spectator must assume substantial responsibility for his normative (and fallible) interpretive elections. To accept that he is situated firmly within contingency is for the spectator to begin to take responsibility for his own perspectival appreciations. To refute objectivity is, in the end, the way for the spectator to avoid intellectual complacency – which is precisely what engulfs one when one stops thinking of one’s re-presentation as a re-presentation and begins to see it as being endowed with a transcendental quality that would make it objective (that is, when one turns a provisional private vocabulary into a permanent public one). Allowing for an ethical space – “[t]here is no ethics without the presence of the other” (OGC, 139–140), that is to say, without singularity and difference – Derrida’s thought enhances agency as it compels the spectator to defend his inventiveness in the course of negotiations with other spectators. Derrida’s programmatic challenge for the release of law from the shackles of positivism, then, is to the effect that everything we allege to know

regarding the law manifests itself within a strictly contingent cognitive scheme, indeed within a frame that is doubly contingent on account of the law's situatedness, on the one hand, and of the law's situated interpreter, on the other – a “double bind,” an expression which Derrida presses into service, in English, in a variety of settings.

In core respects, Derrida's deconstruction therefore stands for an extolment of values such as indefiniteness and unmasterability, co-specification and unsynthesizability that positivists reflexively regard as practices of articulation pertaining to a cognitive predicament rather than as supplying propitious signposts for thought. Yet, even as there takes place a tracing of the law, positivism keeps a place, as it does in Derrida's own thinking. Indeed, one's goal cannot be simply to jettison statutes and judicial decisions as if they had nothing to do with law. Rather, the point is to approach them afresh, that is, to come to them obliquely. The idea is that no formulation of the posited law can safely escape a spectral interpretation and that all formulations of the posited law must therefore be envisaged through the traces that haunt the legal. Thus, the act of interpretation is being conducted as a matter of recognition and respect for the law as it exists (rather than as positivism has wanted it to be). In this regard, Derrida is adamant: “[Reading] . . . cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it” (OGC, 158), for there is “the law of the other text, its injunction, its signature” (FPU, 262). And what is arguably one of the most significant features of any tracing exercise is precisely that in so doing the interpreter does not reach beyond the law and therefore does not disqualify himself as someone purporting to ascribe meaning to legal discourse. To be sure, as the traces attest to the instability/interstitiality/interlinearity of the text, as they are taking the text beyond stasis, they can be said to connote a “beyond” of the analytic limits of the hard copy, that is, suggest a hyper-text showing in interconnecting fashion discourses embedded within discourses. Instead of a hardened text, then, we have a fluid text featuring, for instance, flexibility and recursivity. (Observe that fluidity can act as a powerful trope for feminist sensibility and show tracing as a feminization of the law-text.)

Even if one must now contend with the pulverization of the logos, with the clutter of the traces brought into the covenant of significance, with structural discontinuity and ambiguity, with the distress attendant upon the pre-emptive presence of the heterotrope and the heteroclite; even if the unsettling of the alleged onto-epistemological foundations of law through a more strenuous form of interpretation assorted with a new vocabulary must reveal law's duplicity (it does not exist only as the posited that it claims to be and its preference for order cannot enable it to dispense with traces); and even if the large-scale, yet anti-monumental, reorganization of knowledge on offer must lead one to renounce the idea of law's immediacy and force the painful acknowledgment of the dissembling of those who still want us to see in law the promise of an unyieldable absolute, the fact “that the law is deconstructible is not a misfortune” for it grants the law the kind of future – the chance – that can only be reserved for that whose meaning requires incessant negotiation and would

be denied to anything that thought it had arrived, that assumed it had been posed (FL, 14). As it allows us to wrest the legal away from what would be, silo-like, the ontologically closed domain of positivism and attest to law with greater specificity and enhanced integrity, deconstruction cannot, indeed, be regarded as a “misfortune” at all.

Note

- 1 See Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 17–18, and 36.

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