Forum: The Legacy of Jacques Derrida

JACQUES DERRIDA'S DEPARTURE FROM THE WORLD IS, AS MANY HAVE SAID in conversation and other exchanges, an unthinkable event. The unthinkable has happened, and even as one knew it was coming, its occurrence bequeaths a practical problem: how will we carry on theoretically without his presence, his steadfast appearance in the ongoing international seminar that was his life? Surely one way to carry on without him will be to adhere to the conviction that theory matters, that it is not dead, that it has a future—indeed, a vital future—which Derrida himself theorized brilliantly.

Derrida's work was a formation in literary studies for my cohort, trained in literature departments in the 1970s and 1980s. He taught us to appreciate the intermediation of literary reading and philosophy, the value of the "live" lecture in the double sense of speaking out and performing the ritual of the reading on its way to becoming a diagnosis of the event. He helped explicate the violent, combustive process by which the future, or its yet-to-be-cognized Idea, breaks into discourse, transgressing (a word much loved in the 1980s) intellectual protocols of logic and naming, traducing humanist pieties held sacrosanct in mainstream belles lettres, and philosophically delegitimating apartheid, inhospitality, and exclusion.

The outpouring of hundreds of signatures to a letter in the *New York Times* by Samuel Weber and Kenneth Reinhard that protested the crude and dishonoring rhetoric of the newspaper's obituary attests to the presence of a very large community bound together by a commitment to theory.[1] Many whose names did not appear on the letter still characterize their work and teaching as a perpetuation of theory's cause—not as sectarian dogma but as interpretive practices and critical paradigms of erasure, *grammè*, dissemination, *brisure*, *différance*, *pharmakon*, supplementarity, de-construction. In committing themselves to the future of theory, and specifically to the *sur-vie* of Derridean thought, many have engaged and will engage the problem of how radical alterity enters the domain of thought. For Derrida, this was often a matter of tracing death in language. Beginning in *Aporias* with the phrase "Il y va d'un certain pas" 'It involves a certain step/not, he goes

along at a certain pace,' Derrida associates the *pas* with a "recumbent corpse" or limit condition between language and that which is other to itself:

> This border of translation does not pass among various languages. It separates translation from itself, it separates translatability within one and the same language. A certain pragmatics thus inscribes this border *in the very inside of the so-called French language*. . . . Condition of the self, such a difference *from* and *with* itself would then be its very thing, the *pragma* of its pragmatics: the stranger at home, the invited or the one who is called. (10)

Derrida's identification of aporia with infinite translatability within language itself suggests that the radically other—death, the idea, intractable difference—enters the world through linguistic pragmatics, a programmed code of life and nonlife decipherable in the grammatology of language.

Looking back over the inaugural chapter of *Of Grammatology*, one encounters with astonishment Derrida's prescient understanding of the relevance of the cybernetic program to theory. Published in 1967 during the high era of cybernetics and biogenetic research, *Of Grammatology* predicts that

> the entire field covered by the cybernetic *program* will be the field of writing. If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts—including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory—which until recently served to separate the machine from man, it must conserve the notion of writing, trace, grammè [written mark], or grapheme, until its own historico-metaphysical character is also exposed. Even before being determined as human (with all the distinctive characteristics that have always been attributed to man and the entire system of significations that they imply) or nonhuman, the *grammè*—or the *grapheme*—would thus name the element. (9; interpolation in orig.)

If here, relatively early on, Derrida imagined language beyond metaphysics as a language of program capable of translating information and genic code, late in his career, with similar acumen, he seized on the relevance of biotechnology to metaphysics in directing the future of theory after 9/11 to the problem of autoimmunity. In "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," a dialogue published in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (2003), Derrida discerned the workings of "an implacable law: the one that regulates every *autoimmunitary process*. As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its 'own' immunity" (94). The idea of a suicide drive programmed within the living organism was of course particularly potent in the immediate aftermath of global disaster. Even if we choose not to interpret this model of the body's catastrophic attack on its own defense system as a transparent allegory of an empire's suicidal foreign policies or as an indirect reference to the breakdown of immunity taking place in the philosopher's own body, Derrida's concept of programmed self-destruction undergirds the guiding metaphors and paradigms of the age: viral and bacteriological spread; the logic of connected dots and vanished front lines common to paranoia, computerized warfare, and conspiracy and world-systems theory; and the trauma of the event as it has yet to be theorized:

> X will have been traumatized (X? Who or what is X? Nothing less than the "world," well beyond the United States, or in any case, the possibility of the "world"), but traumatized not in the present or from the memory of what will have been a past present. No, traumatized from the unpresentable future, from the open threat of an aggression capable one day of striking—for you never know—the *head* of the sovereign nation-state par excellence. (98)

Derrida combined the power of the soothsayer with the lucidity of the philosopher of eschatology in adducing a suicidal drive from the repressive apparatus of civilization. "What will never let itself be forgotten is thus the perverse effect of the autoimmunitary itself. For we now know that repression in both its psychoanalytical sense and its political sense—whether it be through the police, the military, or the economy—ends up producing, reproducing, and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm" (99). The autoimmune complex describes the kind of attack against oneself that remains an inexplicable, irrational drama unless one accepts the logic of death as a preprogrammed call for the life cycle of a body to end. The end of the program is not unforeseen, but the philosophical definition of its afterlife remains a major task

for the future of theory, a task rendered intelligible by Jacques Derrida.

Emily Apter
New York University

Note

[1] See Kandell. The additional signatures to the letter appear on a Web site of the University of California, Irvine: *Remembering Jacques Derrida*.

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First Encounter

The name *Jacques Derrida* first came to me in my cramped office tucked behind the main security desk of Yale University's Branford College in 1969. The tiny space was actually a spatial and relational promotion—during my first year at Yale, my office had been located in one of the bedrooms of the college apartment I shared with my wife, Charlotte Pierce Baker. (Often, after her workday, she would return "home" to find six students on the sofa of her living room, waiting to see me at my office hours.) My new office mate was Joseph Graham, of Yale's French department. He was cosmopolitan in every way that matters to a young academic male: dress, ambition, gustatory predilection, intellect, foreign language fluency—a vernacular cache that consistently produces genuflection in the United States. Joe was a man of European sophistication. At our first meeting, he held a single, unbroken orange peel before me like a rabbit from a magician's hat. He wrinkled his brow in anguished dismay. I had only asked, "So, what are you working on?" Did he, would he, could he answer after such a masterly "French" orange-peeling performance? "Deconstruction. Derridean deconstruction. Jacques Derrida's, uh, *projet*—project. It's an entirely new thing. Not much is translated here." He popped a slice of orange into his mouth, feeling, I am certain, self-satisfied. He then somberly told me the basics of a revolutionary, antimetaphysical "reading practice" that he had absorbed during the same period in Paris when he became competent in the art of the unbroken orange peel. A very Derridean conjuncture, indeed, I later was to learn. (On the order of "I have forgotten my umbrella.")

Learning to peel an orange with European aplomb, I decided, would be far more useful to me in my youthful bid for tenure than attempting to understand even the vocabulary of deconstruction, as Joe Graham articulated it.

God Sends Second Chances

Mark Taylor and I received fellowships to the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, in 1982. Author of a deconstructionist primer, *Erring*, that set his religious studies colleagues on edge, Mark Taylor was *personally* acquainted with "Jacques." They had known each other in France. One afternoon Mark approached me: "People here say we have a lot in common. Why don't you come to my office later for a chat."

Truth? I had not read two-thirds of the books Mark passionately invoked in his two-hour marathon soliloquy that afternoon. He was religiously enamored and fully acquainted with the most antimetaphysical celebrity to grace the studios of French television in years. "Jacques," for Mark, was paradoxically (*mise en abyme*) the "truth that does not exist."

I read *Erring* three times and committed myself to a rigorous low-metaphysics regimen of indeterminacy. I had gotten it.

So what Joe Graham was saying while slicing that orange in our cramped Yale quarters was that God, History, Self, and the Book were outré . . . a scandal. I was, by implication, a retrograde structuralist, a black American critic who seriously needed to lively up his style through new reading

practices. I needed to commit myself to the "post," with its bright, open, difficult, interrogative deconstructive ranges. I had to be a cosmopolitan frontiersman for, well, "theory," no matter what "the race" might dictate.

(But . . . O, my! Who could have anticipated the sentimental, maudlin, pseudo-racial-allegiance sighing and crying at my "apostasy"? In the vernacular, my new reading practice provoked charges that I had abandoned the yam-and-chitlin-eating black critical simplicity of "my people." Who knew? You might have thought an infusion of the best that had been theoretically thought and said was a good thing. I felt that I was lighting out for deconstructive territories that, in the words of B. B. King, were "rocking us in America.")

Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory, the book I produced during my fellowship year in North Carolina, is as antimetaphysically and profoundly indebted to Derrida as anything I have ever written. Some people have sampled it and found it as delectable as a cool slice of a peeled orange on a summer day. Some give all credit and praise to Derrida. But I have to thank Mark Taylor and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for pulling me out of the burning house of structuralism and fending off the cranky EMS, old school "word philosophers" who continue to believe the precipitous edge of the philosophical world is marked by Kant the Immanuel.

The Antifoundational Made Flesh

My wife and I were to share the joys of a School of Criticism and Theory (SCT) summer at Dartmouth College in 1988. I signed a lease on a tin-roof house adjacent to a dysfunctional family blessed with five children. I was told there was absolutely no need for air-conditioning. Wrong.

It was a blistering, droughtlike, all-window-fans-sold-out summer in Hanover, New Hampshire. The neighboring children were always already engaged in high-decibel feuds. Their pint-size, pugnacious dog raucously nipped at my heels every morning as I jogged from our tin-roof sweat lodge into the lush surrounding hills.

That summer I quickly discovered that I should have listened more attentively to my office mate Joe Graham. On the first day of my seminar, I was mightily adept at peeling an orange in a single stroke . . . but I had no idea what the fifteen enrollees seated before me meant by "pharmakon," "belatedness," "split subject," "grammatology"! All I really wanted to convey to them was the protomodernist cast of Jean Toomer's *Cane*, one of the finer narrative texts of the Harlem Renaissance. I was prepared to go "spirit of the age" and "identity politics." But I was not ready for the vocabulary and sites of my poststructuralist, postmodern, deconstructive "students" that summer. Diana Fuss, Valerie Traub, Hal Foster, Mireille Rosello, Susan Mizruchi, and others were, as it turned out, what I had signed on for. They were not at all interested in a spirit of the age, intellectual history, or a "soul food" menu. Bless them: they had read *Blues, Ideology*.

So I once again found myself (blessedly) at a New Hampshire opening that promised to mold me into a more sophisticated Derridean reader of what I considered "my" tradition of black literary and cultural studies. It was "Live free or die," all the way down, in the sweat-soaked labors of that SCT moment.

My most remarkable encounter with Derrida came during that time. He presented a three-hour lecture on Zionism and the Jewish state to our SCT group on a Friday afternoon in an unair-conditioned auditorium. The attentiveness was breathless. He dazzled; he informed. I have since read and come to understand the cast of characters of his marathon performance. The added joy, however, was that my wife and I were invited to attend the dinner after his lecture. The company included Geoffrey Hartman, Barbara Johnson, Marjorie Garber, Dominick LaCapra, Sacvan Bercovitch, Marianne Hirsch. An absolutely astonishing "frontier cast," as it were.

Derrida was singularly gracious—as gentle as an encouraging wind at one's back during a long summer run.

He was unpretentious, yet scintillating.

He talked softly and brilliantly of Algerian and African matters and shared his own calm realization that Afro-American literary and cultural studies might benefit (enormously) from an agon with Western metaphysics. The coup de grâce arrived, however, when Jacques assured my wife that he deeply admired John Coltrane. He chuckled: "People in France ask me, What does *Giant Steps*

mean? I tell them it is like everything else: 'It don't *mean* a thing!'" Arguably, I want to assert that at that moment he pulled out his pipe (which was not, of course, a pipe) and quietly relaxed into his own joyous cosmopolitan sagacity.

Coda

The loss is unspeakable. We are emptied. The last word has been spoken. Denigrations of the amazing openings created by Derrida come from men and women who do not—they really, really do not—appreciate Coltrane, nor do they love the all-inclusive spectral black light of multiplicity or have any capacity to savor bright oranges on a summer day.

Derrida's fellow travelers were sometimes unsavory. That had nothing to do with his words. Geniuses are not ultimately responsible for their disciples or their legacies. In 2004 we surely know that the electorate can surprise us. Peter can receive the most ballots for bravery, and Judas can handily be appointed literary executor. *Qu'est-ce qu'on fait?*

The just and honorable course for those who live after Derrida is to take him at his word, relish his provocations, and freely acknowledge that life after his "transition" will not be easy . . . or nearly as much intellectual fun as it used to be.

Houston A. Baker, Jr.
Duke University

I FIRST LAID EYES ON JACQUES DERRIDA AROUND 1976, when, as a graduate student in Yale University's philosophy department, I found myself one day waiting in line for lunch at Naples Pizza behind Derrida and Paul de Man. I recall Derrida's stunning suit, made of gray-purple velvet, and his shock of gray-silver hair. He seemed totally out of place in a fast-food joint, known for its greasy calzones and pizza slices. Yet Derrida was quite at home, talking to the graduate students hovering around the two masters.

Although studying Hegel, I had decided to keep my distance from Derrida's courses at Yale. Partly the snobbery of philosophers against literature motivated this. Partly my own sense of gravitas, of wanting to save the world through philosophy, made me think that somehow Derrida was frivolous, too much of an aesthete in his impeccable suit. What philosopher dressed that well?

But Derrida was not to be dismissed that easily. We heard from our best undergraduates—among them Judith Butler—that his courses were spectacular, that something new was afoot, a new teacher, a new method of reading had emerged.

Margins of Philosophy was the first text of Derrida's that I seriously grappled with. These brilliant disquisitions on commodification, Aristotle, and Marx inspired awe. Then came the translation *Of Grammatology* by Gayatri Spivak. Suddenly, Derrida's discourse about the sign, the signature, and the text had a political face, one that left us breathless. What had seemed at best a version of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, all of a sudden appeared as a philosophical methodology—deconstruction or *Destruktion*—situated at the epochal challenge to reason and the Enlightenment posed by the non-Western, non-Eurocentric world—by the "Other." Deconstruction was not frivolous but deadly serious.

I remained unconvinced: first, the anti-Eurocentrism of this discourse was politically naive and dangerous, I thought; second, it was unclear whether Derrida's philosophy of language went beyond the best insights of Peirce and John Searle. The concept of the "performative" made linguistic utterances almost magically responsible for their own communicative effects. How in fact could we do things with words? What made a listener accept the illocutionary force of utterances? The indeterminacy of the performative made any critique of the validity conditions of speech acts irrelevant. And this was erroneous.

Ironically, Derrida's work became really compelling for me just as many of his erstwhile admirers abandoned him after the scandal over Paul de Man's fascist past and Derrida's apologia for his friend. Increasingly confronted with the question of ethics *and* deconstruction, and the ethics *of* deconstruction, in the late 1980s Derrida wrote a number of illuminating texts: "Force of Law," a subtle reading of Montaigne and Walter Benjamin that permitted him to dwell on deconstruction and justice; the book translated into English as *Politics of Friendship*, which finally addressed

Carl Schmitt and the political implications of deconstruction; last, a short but marvelous essay, "The Declarations of Independence," which Derrida delivered on the bicentennial of the American Revolution. The pluralization in the title—"Declarations"—heralded the strategy with which Derrida would approach this foundational text.

Derrida deconstructs the famous lines "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Are these truths really "self-evident"? What evidence do we have that all men are created equal, when so many facts attest to the contrary? Or are these truths self-evident because we posit them, we declare them to be so? But, then, men are not created equal; they become equal because they create a political order in which they guarantee one another's equality through promises and covenants. But if the equality proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence is a human construction, why appeal to God as guaranteeing it in virtue of being our "Creator"? Or, perish the thought, do we also create our own God through this declaration?

Furthermore, who is the "we" who holds these truths to be self-evident? Is it the signatories of the declaration alone? The representatives of the thirteen colonies? Or Thomas Jefferson? Maybe the declaration does not declare in the name of an already constituted people but constitutes this people in the very process of acting in its name? The "floating signifier," which can never be stabilized through the act of signification, now reveals its subversive force: in questioning the constitution of the we, we can also question the exclusions that this act of creation posits. Who belongs among the people, and who does not? And why is every people constituted through its exclusions as much as through inclusion? Deconstruction shares the ethos of radical democracy.

It is the Derrida of these later years that I have most come to appreciate. Even before Derrida turned to cosmopolitanism and the predicament of "les sans-papiers" in Europe, pleading for the revival of the old Judeo-Christian tradition of "cities of refuge," a text with the impossible title "Prostheses; or, The Ear of the Other" stunned me. The reference to prostheses in this title is still obscure, but the agony of not being able to reach the ear of the other, the inability to communicate, or the surfeit of communication created by the all-too-easy confidence in accomplished communication made me understand Derrida better. Certainly, not in any essentialist sense of seeing the "true Derrida" revealed. Nonetheless, this autobiographical text throws light on the preoccupation with the treachery as well as the beauty of language that haunts Derrida. He recounts how, growing up as a middle-class Algerian Jew, he was "tongueless" with respect to the existential languages most important for him: he did not know Hebrew, beyond liturgical generalities, and he did not know Arabic—the language of the country in which he grew up. Equally removed from both, he became one of the masters of the French language, that language which he loved and appropriated so brilliantly as to become a worldwide philosopher through it. Yet, at the same time, the sense of fragility, equivocation, multivocity, and indeterminacy in a language that was and was not his own never left him. Like Albert Camus, another Algerian-born French intellectual, Jacques Derrida was a stranger in his own land. He translated that sense of estrangement into the seminal discovery of the instability and creative playfulness of all language. Maybe we understand one another because so often we fail to do so.

At a moment in world history when intolerance toward, as well as violent confrontation with, "otherness" ranges rampantly, Derrida's work reminds us of the fragmentation of all identity. The interior is what it is in virtue of excluding from itself the constitutive exterior. Being is always and fundamentally broken from within. This is not just an epistemological or metaphysical proposition but also an ethico-political one, which enjoins us to embrace heterogeneity and plurality through playful, ironic, and at times frustratingly ambiguous exercises of deconstruction.

Seyla Benhabib
Yale University

Note

A shorter version of this text appeared in "Philosophie des Zerbrechlichen," *Die Zeit* 14 Oct. 2004.

Derrida's early work is often quite plausibly thought to be about origins. Indeed, if we wanted to identify an origin for deconstruction itself, we might say that it comes to Derrida with the thought that the origin is irreducibly complex. "Originary synthesis," as the work on Husserl was inclined to say, and soon enough "originary trace." What Derrida calls "metaphysics" tries to lead things back to an origin point that would be simple (call it "presence"); deconstruction involves the claim that in the beginning is a complexity resistant to further analysis in the strict sense and that simple origins are always only retrojected after the fact in the more or less compelling stories or myths that metaphysics recounts. Derrida wants to account for the (undeniable) *effects* of presence by developing a "prior" trace- or text-structure that allows for what looks like presence to emerge while never itself being describable in terms of presence.

But if Derrida's thinking in the beginning was most obviously about beginnings, at the end it was arguably more about ends. Metaphysics, finding itself always in the middle, in complexity ("in a text already," as the *Grammatology* says), tries not only to track that complexity back and then derive it from a simple present origin point but also to put that complexity in the (convergent) perspective of an end point or resolution. Complexity should come from something simple, says metaphysics, and should be headed toward something simple; and that final simplicity often enough involves a kind of recovery of the original simplicity. The deconstruction of the origin, the *arkhē*, entails a concomitant deconstruction of the *telos* and thereby of the whole "archeo-teleological" structure that metaphysics is. What has been perceived as a shift in later Derrida toward more obviously ethico-political concerns might better be described as an often subtle change of emphasis from deconstruction of *arkhē* to deconstruction of *telos*, which was itself there from the beginning.

I think that the origin argument is now reasonably well understood, however difficult some of its implications remain. The ends argument is much less so, and one task Derrida has left us is to think it through a little further and to show how it is not to be separated from the origins argument.

The argument about the *telos* might go something like this. Ends, however noble they appear and however ideal their status, also *end*, close off, terminate, put to death. In a Derridean perspective, the best chance for ends is that they become interminable or endless and that endlessness entails rethinking not just the end (an endless end is no longer quite an end, just as a nonsimple origin is not quite an origin) but the implied directionality or "progress" toward it. Once getting to the end is not clearly just a *good* (because it puts an end to things, including the good itself) and once an even ideal progress toward it thereby becomes problematic, then a number of extraordinarily difficult questions about what we still call politics and ethics open up. In tune with a more familiar deconstructive suspicion of oppositions, this involves nothing less than a rethinking of "good" itself and must lead to an affirmation of a nonoppositional relation between good and evil. The least one can say is that this places an unusual weight of responsibility on the ethico-political appreciation of events as they befall us in their essential unpredictability, but in so doing it should also release us from the burdens of dogmatism and moralism that still encumber, however reassuringly, most efforts to think about these issues.

The recent emphasis on terms such as *culture* and *history* in literary studies seems an unpromising way to respond to this legacy that Derrida has left us. The appeal to history, especially, often provides a comforting way of avoiding the hard questions that the deconstruction of the *telos* should bring with it. This does not imply that philosophers typically do better with such questions than students of literature. Philosophy will in fact remain unable to respond to the challenge of deconstruction until it can do better with the question of *reading*, which is one place in which Derrida's legacy will inevitably be played out in the years to come. Reading is already an issue when we try to think about legacies in general, and it will be the more acute in Derrida's case: if "to be is to inherit," as he asserts in *Spectres de Marx*, if there is no inheritance without some effort of reading, and if reading is thought seriously as precisely not to do with restoring the *arkhē* or promoting the *telos*, then it seems probable that reading itself (prior to any hermeneutic determination whatsoever) might become our central problem, just as we struggle to read Derrida's legacy.

There seems at present to be no philosophical, theoretical, or literary model to account for the complexity of this situation, in which reading is structurally endless. And it seems likely that the current organization of the university will be ill adapted to encourage the most fruitful reflection on it. The deconstructive thinking of origins, ends, legacies, and readings should also provoke us to be more inventive in our academic and institutional arrangements than we usually have been in the past. Attention to the very readability of what we try to read, however unreadable that readability must remain, does not in principle belong to any particular academic discipline and puts pressure on the concept of discipline itself. The quite mysterious fact that I can read what I read (however imperfect that reading remains and whatever difficulties it presents) precedes any particular disciplinary grasp and indeed is intrinsically quite ill disciplined and institutionally troublesome, but it is the only reason for doing what I do.

Geoffrey Bennington
Emory University

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY REMEMBERING A FEW OF Jacques Derrida's words, since, for so many years, his words have been the ones that have made so many of ours possible. In an interview he gave to *Le monde* in August 2004, he asserted that he had never learned to live, because this would have required that he also learn to die—to take mortality into account and to experience life as survival. Even though he reminds us in the same interview that, after Plato, to philosophize has meant to learn to die, he claims to have remained "uneducable" in regard to this axiom. Nevertheless, we know that—although there are, of course, many others—he sought to teach us to read the words *death*, *mourning*, *finitude*, and *survival*. This is why, in a certain sense, we did not need to wait for his death to learn what it could teach us about his and our mortality.

As he so often reminded us, even though we live in relation to ends and loss, life and survival are inscribed within them. In the same interview, he notes that "life is survival." To survive means to continue to live, but also to live after death. "All of the concepts that have helped my work," he goes on to say,

> especially those of the trace or the spectral, were linked to "survival" as a structural dimension. [Survival] constitutes the very structure of what we call existence. We are structurally survivors, marked by the structure of the trace, of the testament. Everything I have said about survival as the complication of the life-death opposition proceeds in me from an unconditional affirmation of life. Survival, this is life after life, life more than life, the most intense life possible.

As we continue to learn from his work, we need to remember these words and lessons, and also because one of his most cherished words, one of the words he thought for us, one of the words he associated with survival, was *memory*. In an interview in 1983, he brought together the threads of memory, loss, and survival and claimed they were at the heart of his work and thought. There he says:

> If there were an experience of loss at the heart of all this, the only loss for which I could never be consoled and that brings together all the others, I would call it loss of memory. The suffering at the origin of writing for me is the suffering from the loss of memory, not only forgetting or amnesia, but the effacement of traces. I would not need to write otherwise; my writing is not in the first place a philosophical writing or that of an artist, even if, in certain cases, it might look like that or take over from these other kinds of writing. My first desire is not to produce a philosophical work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory.

Let us preserve the memory of Jacques Derrida, the memory of which he wrote but also the memory we have of him and his work. It is here, in our memory of the multiple legacies he has left for us, that we can remember several of his other lessons. These lessons—about philosophy, literature, art, architecture, history, politics, religion, economics, ideology, law, rights, nationalism, racism, colonialism, genocide, torture, media technologies, university institutions, capitalist imperialisms of all kinds, rogue states, the war on terror, justice, responsibility, language, life, death, and, again, mourning—are more urgent and necessary than ever before. Together they remain the most significant resources we have to address what is rapidly becoming the signature of our time: the acceleration of violence, economic

oppression, inequality, hunger, war, and ethnic, religious, and cultural conflict that today defines so many instances of suffering and death throughout the world.

If he always sought to do several things in several ways at once, it is because he believed that nothing ever happens in isolation. All his work seeks to understand the nature of relation, to trace the relations preventing the assertion of an identity that would be self-identical to itself, that would refuse its relation to others. This insistence on relation belongs to an ethico-political project that seeks to rethink the axiomatics that support claims for the agency and responsibilities of subjects without reference to the relations in terms of which these subjects are constituted in the first place. As he often reminded us, there can be no ethics or politics that does not begin with this sense and question of relation. Indeed, what compelled him to read and to write was the possibility of transforming the multiple and heterogeneous relations in which we live. We therefore have inherited from him the obligation to think about the nature of inheritance. But we know that we cannot subscribe to an inheritance that does not invent inheritance, that does not move it somewhere else. After Derrida's death, it is our task—our ethical, political, historical, and philosophical task—to carry what he has left for us and move it toward the invention of a future. This is what Derrida's writings mean to us today: the possibility of a future that promises us a world different from the one in which we find ourselves—a world that, because it would remain open, because it would presume the unconditional right to ask critical questions, even about the form and authority of these questions, is still to come.

Let us remember Derrida, armed with the knowledge that he gave us: that mourning "provides the first chance and the terrible condition of all reading." Mourning authorizes reading. It gives us the right to read. It is what makes reading possible, and, now, it is what asks us to continue reading, to continue our mourning through the reading that this impossible experience makes possible. I believe that Derrida would want these acts of reading to open a space in which we might work to come to terms with his absence. Let us continue to read, then, without but always with him, without but always after him, since to speak and read in memory of him is indeed to speak of the future, ours but also his.

Eduardo Cadava
Princeton University

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE WORK OF JACQUES DERrida in the summer of 1968 in Dijon. I had just begun a dissertation on structuralism and spent the summer working through *De la grammatologie*, published the previous year. I was struck then by the remarkable combination in Derrida—unprecedented in my experience—of a fundamental rethinking of, shall we say, the biggest possible picture, his analysis of the tradition of Western philosophy and thought in general as a logocentrism, and a close reading of particular texts that focused on the key role of crucial details: the play of the term *supplément*, for example, which Rousseau uses in discussing writing and also sexual desire. This was close reading that not only attended to details of language, style, and structure but demonstrated the constitutive power of the marginal, how a textual system is made possible by what is set aside. It differed from previous close readings in that it did not take for granted the need to demonstrate the aesthetic unity of the work being studied, the contribution of every detail to an aesthetically satisfying pattern. Remarkably, it gained force and resourcefulness through its freedom from that presupposition of Anglo-American close reading, as it sought to elucidate instead larger discursive systems that exceeded the bounds of any particular work. And of course the attention to the functioning of what readers would have taken to be a particular metaphor, the term *supplément* in Rousseau, revealed a discursive structure, which came to be seen as the logic of supplementarity, with far-reaching consequences for thinking about literary, social, and political issues. By reading texts in their *singularity*—to use a word that would later become central to his thinking—while also identifying ubiquitous logics on which they relied and pervasive systems to which they contributed, Derrida's work gained an extraordinarily exciting power.

I got to know Jacques Derrida in the fall of 1975, when I was a visiting professor at Yale and

he initiated what became an annual teaching stint. Everyone from undergraduates to the most senior professors turned out for his course "La Chose"—Heidegger on Mondays, Ponge on Wednesdays—which gave Yale a communal intellectual excitement unmatched before or since. What was particularly striking then was his extraordinary patience with questioners, even those who manifestly knew nothing about his work or about the philosophical tradition it engaged. This openness, this accessibility, persisted through the years, despite his fame, his charisma, and the immense demands on his time of so many lectures, colloquiums, classes, and students. Except with journalists who felt themselves professionally dispensed from any obligation to read or inform themselves, he would tackle any question, however naive. It is precisely wrong and not a little contemptible that the American media revel in labeling him obscurantist, when he so patiently answered questions after innumerable talks and multiplied, through the years, interviews and contributions to newspapers, so as to become far and away the most accessible of major contemporary philosophers.[1]

The extraordinary intellectual energy that led to the publication of three major books in 1967 did not flag for forty years, as he addressed a vast panoply of subjects—philosophical, literary, theological, artistic, political, and ethical. His increasing attention in recent years to explicitly political questions—the death penalty, racial discrimination, the concept of hospitality and the reception of foreigners in Europe, the spectral legacy of Marxism—was never at the cost of abandoning the scrupulous and resourceful reading of texts or an interrogation of the philosophical tradition for what it could contribute to our thinking about present-day questions. These procedures make his interventions always surprising, complicating, inventive. His incredible intellectual energy and passion for writing have left us with an extraordinary gift: all these texts, especially those of the past decade that have not yet been fully read or assimilated. It is our great good fortune to have so much Derrida to come, and so much Derrida addressing the problems of a world to come.

His death, like those of colleagues he mourned in the essays collected in English as *The Work of Mourning*, in French as *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, is "la fin du monde comme totalité unique, donc irremplaçable, et donc infinie." Death, "the end of the world as unique totality, thus irreplaceable and therefore infinite," nevertheless leaves us this gift.

Jonathan Culler
Cornell University

Note

[1] In addition to the early and very accessible interviews of *Positions*, see *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974–1994* and *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*.

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When a field's prescribed limitations become modes of self-perpetuation separating it from the world, its relevance becomes lost. Psychoanalysis, Derrida argues, must keep abreast of new social formations, "to measure up to all the processes of worldwide-ization underway" ("Psychoanalysis" 249).[1] While Derrida's contributions to the fields of philosophy, literary criticism, and architecture are acknowledged, his contribution to psychoanalytic theory remains, like the promise of psychoanalysis itself, only partially delivered. Addressing the States General of Psychoanalysis in July 2000, Derrida compiles a "register of grievances" of which the discipline "finds cause to complain" (247).[2] His gesture aims at simultaneously "condemning and saving" the profession, since the two undertakings are, as he puts it, "indissociable" (260).

For Derrida, psychoanalysis as a mode of criticism has not succeeded in deconstructing the ontotheological phantasm of sovereignty and the metaphysical axioms of ethics, law, and politics. In his judgment, the salvation of this critical mode proceeds through the identification of a double resistance: the resistance to psychoanalysis in the world and the resistance to the world in psychoanalysis, which ends up resisting itself in an autoimmune fashion (242). The resistance of the world, particularly of the United States, to psychoanalysis can be traced to the triumph of a delusional drive for mastery, hence the use of pharmacological methods and economic realpolitik, among other things. By the same token the resistance of psychoanalysis to the world needs to be carefully examined. Among Derrida's more emphatic positions in the essay is his insistence on scrutinizing the strictly European premises of the discourse, calling into question its lack of developed interaction with Islamic and Asian cultures.[3] He also does not fail to notice social and cultural phenomena that psychoanalysis has been slow to acknowledge, such as the changes in the makeup of the no-longer-so-nuclear family, as well as the "tele-technical" revolution of contemporary science (246). Such substantial mutations in these domains necessitate a response by psychoanalysis; the resistance of psychoanalysis to these mutations likewise necessitates timely interrogation.

To guide his exploration of the psychoanalytic field, he identifies three concepts: cruelty, sovereignty, and resistance. Replete with psychoanalytic dimensions, these concepts themselves might constitute the interface between psychoanalysis and the world, between psychoanalysis and justice or ethics. Even the briefest reflection on how the question of ethics in psychoanalysis has developed helps to clarify the enormity of the task that Derrida sets before the critical community.

In Freud's view, the concern for ethics aligns itself with the forces of repression and resistance, inasmuch as its imperatives constitute the legacy of the Oedipus complex. Freud once characterized ethics, in a celebrated letter to Oskar Pfister, as foreign to him.[4] Freud was generally suspicious of any attempt to be reassuring about the moral value of his profession, and when, on occasion, he made efforts in that direction—through his theory of sublimation, for example—the results tended to be less than satisfying.[5] It may be said that an important limitation of his work is his failure to give any sustained consideration to the operations of ethics as resistance except in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where ethics coincides with civilization and is presented tautologically as both the origin and the consequence of aggression.[6]

Derrida's project in "Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul" of redefining psychoanalysis in terms of being "without alibi" (240), which is to say without justifications or rationales for its own involvement in cruelty, thus may strike readers as daunting yet undeniably urgent.[7] On this score, it is interesting to note that he keeps desire completely out of the discussion. In so doing, he implicitly raises a crucial question: has desire over the years been the alibi of theory to explain or excuse the fact that psychoanalysis, dependent as it is on the notion of the subject (however fragmentary or split), authorizes itself to pay attention only to preeminently egotistical interests? Lacan even goes so far as to formulate a psychoanalytic theory that often mimics desire in being brought to the brink of its own impossibility, as Malcolm Bowie puts it (196).[8]

In its kinship to deconstruction, psychoanalysis for Derrida enacts the responsibility of reaching the world.[9] Of course, this is not to say that he views the discipline as a means to the expression of ethically superior judgments—the condemnation of cruelty and sovereignty from a position above the fray, for example—or to an edifying pedagogy of the spirit. But he does identify a crucial and serious intellectual responsibility with the investigation of the indirect, potential, and discontinuous articulations between analysis, on the one hand, and ethics, law, and politics, on the other. Moreover, he regards cruelty as one of the horizons most proper to the demystifying capacity of psychoanalysis, a territory that ought not to be abandoned to religion and metaphysics and that, today more than ever, needs to be dissociated from notions of good and evil and retributive justice harboring uninterrogated figures of divine and paternal authority.

In his ruminations, Derrida repeatedly poses the question, is there a "beyond" for the death drive and cruelty? Whatever the response, he

wishes to avoid lapsing into the kind of "sobered-up progressivism" exhibited in Freud's philosophy of culture (275). Derrida detects a vacillation by Freud between the pessimism of his belief in the ineradicable persistence of the drives, of cruelty, and so on, and his tacit optimism in affirming an idea of progress that may be achieved through the constant displacement and restriction of the forces of the drives. Derrida argues that Freud's emphasis on the mediation between the subject and the social space ultimately necessitates a "leap" into the ethical, and also juridical and political, domain. This leap cannot be assessed either as a constative act of knowledge or as the result of the mastery of the performative, which succeeds only in neutralizing the alterity of the event it produces. It is in the hiatus between knowledge and performance that we can locate what Derrida defines as the impossible, a dimension with which psychoanalysis must come to terms if it wants not only to survive but to be truly revolutionary. Against Freud's painstaking effort always to integrate ethics, law, and politics into an economy of what is possible and appropriable, Derrida insists on the importance for psychoanalysis of thinking the impossible and in particular of envisioning what lies beyond the pleasure principle, beyond cruelty and sovereignty.

As Derrida made evident in *The Post Card*, his searching examination of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, cruelty in the Freudian corpus is strictly associated with the death drive, which emerges originally coupled to the drive for power (*Bemächtigungstrieb*). For Derrida, the critic's task is to refuse, on either an intellectual or a practical level, to surrender to the cynical awareness that the drives to power and cruelty are irreducible, that no politics will ever eradicate them. In our opinion, this is one of Derrida's most decisive contributions to contemporary culture. As he poignantly puts it, "Psychoanalysis is ineradicable, its revolution is irreversible—and yet it is, as a civilization, mortal" ("Psychoanalysis" 260). Facing its mortal destiny, psychoanalysis according to Derrida has in the end not only something to say but something to do:

> To cross the line of decision, a leap that expels one outside of psychoanalytic knowledge *as such* is necessary. In this hiatus, I would say, the chance or risk of responsible decision is opened up, beyond all knowledge concerning the possible. Is that to say that there is no relation between psychoanalysis and ethics, law, or politics? No, there is, there must be in *indirect* and *discontinuous* consequence: to be sure, psychoanalysis as such does not produce any ethics, any law, any politics, but it belongs to responsibility, in these three domains, to take account of psychoanalytic knowledge. (273)

Patricia Dailey
Columbia University

Alessia Ricciardi
Northwestern University

Notes

[1] As Kamuf notes in her introduction to *Without Alibi*, Derrida marks a difference between the English term *globalization* and its French counterpart *mondialisation*: "In particular, the latter's reference to the world (*monde*) rather than to the globe retains ties to the originally European vision of one world under one God, and above all the Christian God" (303n2).

[2] The States General of Psychoanalysis is an international and historic initiative taken by psychoanalysts, including René Major, to conjoin analysts from around the world, of different schools, to discuss the state of psychoanalysis worldwide. While analysts from North and South America were invited, the representation of analysts from the United States was noticeably inferior, for reasons that may or may not have to do with the isolation of American psychoanalysis from its European counterparts.

[3] This clearly does not mean that psychoanalysis, as an institution, is not present in these countries. Derrida's omission of the psychoanalytic communities in countries such as Japan, India, Korea, and even Algeria can be read in terms of the failure of psychoanalysis as an institution to do anything other than replicate its most conventional form of discourse. On the other hand, this does not mean that exceptions do not exist, which Derrida does not mention. For example, since Derrida's lecture, a new psychoanalytic institute was founded in 2003 in Morocco (La Société Psychanalytique du Maroc). Bennani traces the development and presence of psychoanalysis in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to its postcolonial heritage but also formulates ways for psychoanalysis as an institution to dialogue with, adapt to, and intervene in its cultural context.

[4] Freud writes to Pfister: "mir liegt die Ethik ferne." Guyomard comments on this letter (150).

[5] Laplanche cogently discusses the questions raised by Freud's notion of sublimation.

[6] For more on this topic, see Bersani, *Freudian Body*.

[7] Lacan's position on ethics is even more complicated. His very approach to an "ethics of psychoanalysis" in *Seminar VII* places egotistical desire in the position of a categorical imperative, which he articulates as the provocative question "Have you acted in conformity with your desire?" '*As-tu agi en conformité avec ton désir?*' (*Seminar* 311; *Séminaire* 359). More problematic still, he elaborates the topic in "Kant avec Sade" by investigating the sadistic pleasure of the superego in the subject's ethical endeavors. And at the end of his career, Lacan leaves us in *Television* with the paradoxical undertaking of establishing an ethics of style or, to use his terminology, an "ethic of the Well-Spoken" '*éthique du bien dire*' (*Television* 41; *Télévision* 65).

[8] In his speech to the States General of Psychoanalysis, which addressed Freudian, Lacanian, and post-Freudian psychoanalysts, Derrida makes no sustained reference to Lacan's work but instead seems to privilege Freud. This is partially, one imagines, because of Lacan's formulation on the name of the father (the *nom-du-père*) as sovereign, both within psychoanalysis and outside it. The speech may thus be read as an oblique critique of Lacan, among others. At one point, Derrida even jokingly confesses his preference for very long analytic sessions, surely taking a swipe at Lacan's infamously short *séances* (256).

[9] On the difficulty psychoanalysis has in getting past subjectivity, see Bersani, "Speaking" 157–58.

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Jacques Derrida might have appreciated being invoked in the terms of the French children's song "Frère Jacques." It's uncanny to me, but appropriately so, that Gustav Mahler should have turned the song into a funeral march in the third movement of his Symphony no. 1 in D major, nicknamed *Titan*. After all, the song warns, "Morning bells are ringing." The homophonic connection in the English translation might have made Jacques chuckle. This is, most simply, something learned literarily from him: the historical and intertextual, aural and semantic, serious play of signification.

But to call Derrida a brother would be doing him a disservice, since in *Politiques de l'amitié* (*Politics of Friendship*) he coins the term "phratriarchie" (13), or fratriarchy (viii), noting that sovereign patriarchy's disappearance into France's democratic fraternity in "liberté, égalité, fraternité" only transfers the primitive father's autocracy to the guilt-ridden, carnivorous bonding of the primal horde, leaving phallocracy more or less intact. The father is always already dead, and that is how he wields his power: "what still links democratization, perhaps more today than ever before, to fraternization cannot always necessarily be reduced to patriarchy in which the brothers begin by dreaming of its demise. Patriarchy never stops beginning with this dream. This demise continues endlessly to haunt its principle" (ix). In this way Derrida inflected a certain turn of feminist and psychoanalytic thinking.

So maybe it's *sœur* Jackie instead, the name he changed to one that was, as Derek Attridge and Thomas Baldwin put it, "a more 'correct' French version." Yet we know, from the United States as much as from any other "democracy," that "the fratriarchy may *include* cousins and sisters but . . . including may come to mean neutralizing. Including may dictate forgetting, for example, with 'the best of all intentions,' that the sister will never provide a docile example for the concept of fraternity. . . . What happens when, in taking up the case of the sister, the woman is made a sister? And a sister a case of the brother?" (viii). So he spoke of pluralism in the nation-state.

But "Frère Jacques" is a song about a different kind of brother, a monk, and here is where I want to pause. For many of us who spent our time pondering his living words in the 1970s and 1980s at Yale, Jacques Derrida was like a Zen teacher to whom we brought our foolish student questions and from whom we received mysterious answers that returned our questions to us in estranged form, like koans. He taught us something about pedagogy.

I remember going to his office hours when I was doing a year of research in graduate school at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. I spent hours thinking about what to say in advance. That was when I was reading *Glas*, that deeply mysterious and graphically beautiful book with differently typeset dual columns of prose. So I thought, OK, I will ask Professor Derrida why *Glas* ends (both columns) in the middle of a sentence. I didn't notice then that it also begins that way—or, rather, from my studies of Vergil and the early work of Edward Said in *Beginnings* (he is another whose voice and words haunt this occasion), I was more familiar with, and readier for, the idea that texts begin in medias res.

And so I said, "*Monsieur le professeur*, I have a question: why does *Glas* end in the middle of a sentence?" I think you may have already guessed the answer I received. That familiar bemused smile on his lips, he said, "Do not all books end in the middle of a sentence?" Now, like many lifelong students of a certain kind of Zen, I think I know a little bit more, and a whole lot less, than I did then about what that answer meant.

And I think to myself in that wrong and right way: yes, his book ended in the middle of a sentence . . . and I am still wanting more words.

In this time of mourning, more of those words, now traces, return to me: it was Jacques Derrida who best taught me that we do not want to let go of those we love whom we've lost, and that is why mourning is impossible, for successful mourning kills our love again: "Mourning *must* be impossible. Successful mourning is failed mourning. In successful mourning, I incorporate the one who has died, I assimilate him to myself, I reconcile myself with death, and consequently I deny death and the alterity of the dead other and of death as other. I am therefore unfaithful. Where the introjection of mourning succeeds, mourning annuls the other" (Derrida and Roudinesco 160). Successful mourning is an act of infidelity, he tells us, infidelity in the spirit of faithfulness. And yet we must commit that act of infidelity, or, rather, we do.

He taught me too that when we feel haunted by those loved and lost, it is not always by our own private ghosts ("the crypt from which the ghost comes back belongs to someone else" ["Fors"119n21]). The hungry ghosts of history haunt us too, and we must speak to and with them. Their return is also an arrival, the *re-venant* an *arrivant*, in the unforeseeability of the absolute future to come (*Specters* 175). This is the future Jacques Derrida spoke of so hopefully. It is a future that impels our ethical wishes, a future where we honor unfaithfully the rearrivals his words continue to make possible.

Carla Freccero
University of California, Santa Cruz

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[J]e n'hésiterai pas à dire "nous les Européens."
—Derrida (*Le monde*, 19 Aug. 2004)

An important aspect of Derrida's legacy is his steadfast meditation on Europe: a post-Enlightenment Europe that, he insisted, remains characterized by a self-critique "en permanence."[1] This critique respects the necessity of defining and refining the idea of Europe as it reestablishes itself and gathers momentum after a history of colonialization, two world wars, and the Holocaust. Derrida, clearly, wishes to think of Europe and the West as more than a crime scene.

The importance of defining Europe intensifies during and after the Napoleonic wars. It plays a significant role in Novalis's "Christentum oder Europa" (c. 1800), an essay whose nostalgic religiosity and attack on the Enlightenment's "shameless light" ("das freche Licht") upset some of his more revolutionary friends in the Jena circle. The idea of Europe encompasses an evangelical struggle over what unifying civic creed embodies it, or might do so. Can the creed be secular, or does it involve, inevitably, a return to a political religion, which makes a righteous, colonizing claim of universality? Novalis called himself a "mystical Republican." Derrida, for his part, talks of a new cosmopolitan politics he characterizes as "altermondialiste."

Today the Eurocentric perspective is increasingly attacked for its imperialist past and is internally fragmented or "balkanized" by both nationalisms and antinationalisms centered on ethnic identity politics. Even if a European Community makes sense as an economic union and, perhaps, for the purpose of cooperative educational ventures, can it create a common system of judicial authority in the area of human rights? Derrida, in a moving pamphlet affirming the Abrahamic law of hospitality and elaborating Kant's version of that right, which guarantees everyone a safe dwelling place on the surface of the earth (it is also the foundation of perpetual peace), reflects on the possibility of a new localism that validates the ancient institution of "cities of refuge" (*Cosmopolites*).

Several factors in the struggle for a European identity have emerged clearly. One is the dangerous fallout from a religious or parareligious politics, the enormous losses of lives and communities as ideological imperatives of one kind or another, with apparently irreconcilable beliefs, impose their hegemony. Can the new, now multicultural alliance called "Europe," or Malraux's "Atlantic civilization" (the latter jeopardized by recent American policy), overcome its record of foreign conquest, slave labor, and internal, self-inflicted persecutions?

An old adage comes to mind: "The victors create desolation and call it peace." This desolate peace includes a silencing of dissent: not only of opposition parties but also of heteroglossia generally. The fostering of a genuine multilingualism, of a broad cultural—not only officially consecrated—collective memory, is therefore a *counter-political* necessity.

A further major issue for a thinking that wishes to make a difference is the demise of pacifism and other nonviolent political alternatives. Pacifism has practically disappeared since the second world war. This fact sets a limit to the effectiveness not only of antiwar writing but also of ideals that do not appear, at first glance, related. These are suffering as a form of action and the strange, meditative force within writing—more obscurely, if also more deeply, present in the mixed intellectual and physiological affect of the nonverbal arts. Can the arts, in the long run, contribute to a decisive alteration of consciousness? Can they help to achieve the "parole désarmé" Robert Antelme called for after the Holocaust (68)?[2]

When thinkers like Derrida, with the utmost consistency and by what might be called

an extraordinary-language (in distinction to ordinary-language) philosophy, show that language is not only the vehicle of thought but always also its object—that its power of signification is indefeasibly linked not to transcendence but to its capacity for a critical return upon itself—the journalistic response is to label them abstruse, obscure, obscurantist, even nihilist. Or, with Derrida's passing, the End of the Age of Grand Theory is (once more) announced and a new Age of Modest Thought predicted (see Eakin).

The misleading implication in this is that theory in the human sciences aims not to open up fields of knowledge but to demystify them and gain this way a reputation for intellectual mastery. But theory in Derrida (hence the sense that he is poststructuralist) has no triumphal ambition of this kind. He displays its text dependence, its inextricable involvement with a linguistic texture that makes us question totality claims because we cannot tell with certainty what is within the "work" (*ergon*) or outside its borders (*parergon*). Every text has an indefinite intertextual extension, and any new discourse is necessarily grafted on an older, many-layered palimpsest of formulations. To liberate words, or disseminate a verbal artifact's cultural capital, means first to recognize a massive and intricate historical debt and then to acknowledge, as Foucault also does, that all discourse systems achieve closure by exclusions. This fact must be kept in mind lest what seems natural or definitive proves to be arbitrary.

In the present situation a resilient thinking about art, language, interpretation, the play and free exchange of ideas—all apparently superstructural matters—is more crucial than ever. Often, of course, the force and outreach of such thinking remains stymied by envious infighting among the academic disciplines. It is that which defeats progress, not an intellectually vigorous and necessary contestation. The real battleground remains language itself, or, more precisely, discourses that, even when they require specialized terms of art, should find a way of examining every received statement. They can then return to the colloquial without pandering or dumbing down. Language, with its deceptive presentational powers, is a crucial part of every issue and remains, whatever our sustained reflection touches on, a morally exigent partner.

Despite the unceasing play of consciousness and despite the absence of a transcendental signified, language can express a desire for the peace at the heart of agitation. Once aware of this, we should never forget its jongleur aspect, call it free play or by another name. If there is no transcendence, there is also no closure except death, and this may contribute to the melancholy that hovers over Derrida's work. Thinking, writing, and grieving seem to merge in Derrida; with his death we participate in that merging. Yet though an exceptionally generous life has closed, the Book, as he himself taught us, the ongoing *Livre à venir* he was creating, remains open.

Geoffrey Hartman
Yale University

Notes

[1] The *Le monde* interview of 19 August 2004 contains an eloquent statement on the idea of Europe, not as it exists now but "une Europe à venir, et qui se cherche" ("Jacques Derrida").

[2] Cf. Blanchot: "May words cease to be arms, means of action, means of salvation" (11).

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One day someone may make an inventory of the conferences, symposia, and colloquiums, throughout the world, that were concerned with Derrida's work and at which he was present as an interlocutor. Such events would probably number in the hundreds. Countless, then, would be all those present who had the chance to receive the generosity of his thought when, as so frequently happened, he was called on to engage others in public

discourse. I heard many such exchanges in the last twenty-five years, beginning in the summer of 1980 with a ten-day colloquium at Cerisy-la-Salle, in Normandy, France. There were three more "décades Derrida" at Cerisy—in 1992, 1997, and 2002—which remain a series unprecedented in the history of this legendary conference center. I also attended or participated in numerous other events with him and can now reflect on reasons Derrida was repeatedly sought out in a public forum.

I have mentioned his generosity, an attribute invariably cited to characterize his response to interlocutors. But I believe this recognition arises from the experience of something altogether unlike ordinary ideas of generosity. It was certainly not the experience in the vicinity of the "great man" whose greatness is such he can bestow tokens on lesser mortals without diminishing his own store, indeed while adding to his reputation for generosity. As the greatest thinker today, or in any age, of the paradoxes of the gift, and pitilessly lucid as he was about his own or anyone else's "greatness," Derrida was surely not easily deluded about the endless ruses of the self's calculation. He showed why a gift, if it is possible, must be impossible as the experience of any subject, giver or givee. This is an impossibility, however, that he thought affirmatively—generously—for, as he wrote, "if the gift is another name of the impossible, we still think it, we name it, we desire it. We intend it. . . . Perhaps there is nomination, language, thought, desire, or intention only where there is this movement still for thinking, desiring, naming that which gives itself to be neither known, experienced, nor lived" (*Given Time* 29). His generosity, I would say, expanded the room for this movement of thought, desire, and naming; it happened time and again in all those hundreds of conference rooms when he was there listening, responding, "thinking, desiring, naming." His presence, in other words, was expansive.

Another quality of the man that may have led many to repeat their encounters with him was his gaze. To look him in the eyes was to see someone seeing you see, which sounds a bit dizzying, and perhaps it was, but I would say rather that one had then the physical sensation of trembling in the awareness of being more than one to see. His gaze held yours, did not let it disappear into the merely seen or looked at of an object of perception. Wordlessly his eyes said, You are another, altogether other, looking now at me. This quality of the gaze was neither transfixing nor piercing, but once again expansive and moving. It moved one into the open space where one's own look does not return to itself and can never see itself. In the extraordinary text Derrida wrote for the Louvre in 1990, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, his analysis, which is also a self-portrait, pursues the hypothesis that the central trait of every self-portrait is blindness. The blind man or woman would thus be the supreme figure of the artist. Derrida, whose gaze seemed to see without end, also saw the blind man in or as himself. And that is perhaps what made his gaze so touching, a quality that remains visible or sensible even in many photographs of him. I mean touching not in the weak, sentimental sense but in the sense of the sense of touch, eyes that touched one as if they were fingers. His great text on the sense of touch at the heart of the work of his friend Jean-Luc Nancy begins with just such an image, in the form of a phrase that, he writes, invaded and touched him before he saw it coming: "When our eyes are touching, is it day or is it night?" (*Le toucher* 11). This astonishingly beautiful book, which is an immense deconstructive retouching of the tradition of discourse on the five senses, sets out from the question this image-phrase provokes in the one it has invaded. He asks, "[L]et's see, can eyes ever touch each other, first of all, can they press together like lips?" (12). He who pretends to ask that question would surely have known that, yes, they can—and they did.

I will mention one last trait about the immeasurable radius of Derrida's radiance at the gatherings his work made happen and will doubtless continue to make happen for a long time to come, although—and this is our enormous loss—without his voice or his gaze, and without his laughter. His taste for laughter never seemed to fail him, except perhaps when he addressed those who gathered upon the death of a friend. On all other occasions, and indeed in all his writings, laughter punctuates even the most serious discussions. Laughter was rarely a subject or theme of analysis for him; it was more like a sustaining tone always running in the background. All the public events

with Jacques that I recall, including the weekly seminars I attended in Paris or at the University of California, Irvine, were visited by bursts of laughter, usually provoked by his own exuberant sense of wonderful absurdities and ironies or by his incomparable attention to the surprises of language. With each outburst, one sensed his immense joy in being alive to and with others.

How fortunate are all those with whom he shared that joy. How much we will miss him from now on.

Peggy Kamuf
University of Southern California

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Let me take you back to 1966, when I was a graduate student in French at Yale University. A charismatic assistant professor, Jacques Ehrmann (who tragically died very young), returned with great excitement from the Johns Hopkins University, where he had just attended the conference The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man. He recounted the extraordinary encounter with Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jean Hyppolite, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and a brilliant and as yet unknown young thinker, Jacques Derrida, along with others.[1] The conference happened during a transitional moment when many people were reflecting on the relation of the individual to and within linguistic, philosophical, literary, psychoanalytic, political, and cultural systems. The theoretical explosion of the 1960s in France took off, moving away from the inheritance of nineteenth-century hermeneutics and the existentialist work of Sartre, Camus, and Beauvoir in the wake of World War II, during the "linguistic turn," in which language and writing were analyzed as both a tool and a basis of thought.

Derrida published three major works the following year: *Writing and Difference*, *Voice and Phenomena: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in the Phenomenology of Husserl*, and, most important for me at the time, *Of Grammatology*. I was by then working on a dissertation about Rousseau, puzzling out why critics—searching for influences or thematic unity—disagreed strongly about Rousseau's work and with respect to *The New Heloise* (his novel written between the great social works and the autobiography) found a sense of disorder, even incoherence. With no adequate model for reading this work, sensing it important not to resolve the contradictions too quickly, I was compelled by Derrida's remarkable way of reading Rousseau within the Western tradition. I had a hunch that this complex work would be important to the future of literary studies in North America. Derrida wrote, "Because we are beginning to write, to write *differently*, we must *reread differently*" (87; my emphasis). Derrida's questioning of received assumptions through writing and difference during the turbulent times of the 1960s resonated with those interested in the relation between literature and philosophy. Michel Foucault wrote to Derrida in 1963 that "the first (or fundamental) act of philosophy is undoubtedly for us—and for a long time—the act of reading" (Michaud and Mallet 111).

In a 1979 Montreal conference I coorganized with Claude Lévesque around Derrida's work, Derrida reflected on the term *deconstruction*. At first the word appeared little in his writing: from one word out of many (*trace*, *différance*), within a system it did not command, *deconstruction* had become the much disputed catchword (already then!) for a series of philosophical, literary, and pedagogical questions. The term pointed to a dismantling of systems for the purpose of analyzing structures. Derrida said, "It so happens . . . that this word which I had written only once or twice . . . all of a sudden *jumped* out of the text and was seized by others who have since determined its fate. . . . For me 'deconstruction' was not at all the first or the last word, and certainly not a password or slogan for everything that was to follow" (*Ear* 86). He explained, "When others got involved in it, I tried to determine this concept in my own manner, that is according to what I thought was the right manner, which I did by insisting on the fact that it was not a question of a negative

operation. . . ." He then affirmed how much he cared about the texts he deconstructed "with that impulse of identification which is indispensable for *reading*" (87). Strong identification as well as resistance has also propelled the deconstructive readings of those who have worked with and around Derrida's writing.

While conducting a written interview on feminism with Derrida a few years later, I inscribed questions from long-standing conversations about feminism with my friends Alice Jardine, Nancy K. Miller, and the late Naomi Schor, among others ("Choreographies"). I asked—by way of Emma Goldman's famous critique of the feminist movement: "If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution"—about questioning the ways in which inequalities for women become institutionalized and whether Derrida saw (with Goldman) the need for a more radical restructuring of society. In reflecting on a "'new' concept of woman," Derrida cautioned against taking comfort in the notion of progress for the women's movement and questioned the dualistic thinking that would oppose man to woman; he did not answer the institutional question directly. Yet he addressed larger questions still with us today (despite much progress within institutions): What is the place *of* or *for* women? How does one deal with the tensions and ethical differences between feminists (not all of a piece) and other political groups to create change? And Derrida ends with the *possibility* that vigilant analysis holds out for a different kind of future: one that never lets go fully of the past or fully moves outside the categories inscribed in the tradition, yet remains open to change.

Literature remained a strong force for many thinkers of the 1960s generation, who for all their differences made an impact on many disciplines and areas of thought. What began in France arrived in the United States first at Johns Hopkins, then within French, humanities, and comparative literature departments in the 1960s and 1970s, spreading in translation to English and other fields in the 1980s. The rest is history, as they say, with the changes and many controversies that attended these transfers. The intellectual history of what has widely come to be known as "French poststructuralism" shows how deeply it has affected many disciplines—even reaching the "hard sciences"—especially as the Western millennial turn has continued, widened, and deepened. But those in the humanities will need to forge the conditions of this particular epistemological survival and its continued relevance in a world impatient with complexity and even disdainful of the intellectual.

However controversial Derrida's writing became and remains, as certain articles and obituaries following his death attest, the work inspired others around him to think, to write, and to question. Long-term influence is difficult to predict now, but I believe we can say about Derrida's texts what he said of those he relished deconstructing: their "future . . . will not be exhausted for a long time" (*Ear* 87).

Christie McDonald
Harvard University

Note

[1] Others who participated included René Girard, Charles Morazé, Georges Poulet, Eugenio Donato, Lucien Goldmann, Tzvetan Todorov, Guy Rosolato, Neville Dyson-Hudson, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Nicolas Ruwet. For a report on the conference, see Macksey and Donato.

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One of the strongest Derridean influences on my thinking has been his notion of the "wholly other" (*tout autre*). What Derrida names as "other" is different from what cultural studies usually means by the word. In the latter, "other" names the otherness of the racial, ethnic, gender, or class other. For Derrida, one's neighbor, friend,

or beloved is as much other as any stranger from another country or another culture. The wholly other became more and more a salient motif in Derrida's work.

One way to approach the Derridean wholly other is by way of his distinction between sovereignty and (the word is a neologism in English) "unconditionality." Unconditionality is, for Derrida, a name for the research university's hypothetical freedom from outside interference. Derrida defines the university's unconditionality as the privilege without penalty to put everything in question, even to put in question the right to put everything in question. In the interview with Derek Attridge that forms the first essay in the volume of Derrida's essays on literature that Attridge gathered and called *Acts of Literature*, Derrida defines literature in much the same way as he defines the university in more recent lectures (*Inconditionnalité*; *L'Université*). Those lectures are based on a fundamental distinction between sovereignty and unconditionality.

What is the difference? Sovereignty, says Derrida, is a theologically based "phantasm." It is something that looks like it is there but is not there. Sovereignty has three features: (1) The sovereign is above the law. He or she is free to subvert the law, as in the act of pardon. (2) The concept of sovereignty cannot be dissociated from the idea of the nation-state. (3) The sovereign is God's vicar, appointed by God, authorized by God. Even in a country like the United States, a country that was founded on the principle of the separation of church and state, the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag now defines the United States as "one Nation under God." Such assumptions are a phantasm, a ghost in broad daylight, since no verifiable data exist on which to base them.

Unconditionality has, apparently, no such fraudulent theological basis. Literature is dependent in its modern form on the rise of constitutional democracies in the West from the seventeenth century on and on the unconditional democratic freedom to say anything—that is, to put everything in question. Such a democracy is of course never wholly established. It is always "to come" (Derrida, *Acts* 37).

This definition of literature allows one to understand better the role of the "comme si" or "as if" in *L'Université sans condition*. Literature, or what Derrida here calls "fiction," can always respond (or refuse to respond) by saying, That was I speaking not as myself but as an imaginary personage speaking in a work of fiction, by way of a "comme si." You cannot hold me responsible for my "as ifs."

How can a refusal to take responsibility, a refusal addressed to sovereign state powers, be defined as "perhaps the highest form of responsibility"? To whom or to what else can it have a higher obligation? Derrida's answer to this question goes by way of the new concept of performative language he proposes in "Psyché: L'invention de l'autre" and again as the climax of *L'Université sans condition*. It might seem that literature, conceived by Derrida as an "as if," a free, unconditioned fiction, consists of unconditioned performative speech acts, speech acts based neither on previously existing institutionalized sanctions nor on the authority of the I who utters the speech act. This unconditionality, it might seem, is especially manifested in literary study.

Matters are, however, not quite so simple. In the last section of *L'Université sans condition*, in the seventh summarizing proposition, Derrida makes one further move that undoes all he has said so far about the university's unconditionality. He poses a "hypothesis" that he admits may not be "intelligible" to his Stanford audience (79). What is this strange hypothesis? It is the presupposition that the unconditional independence of thinking in the university depends on a strange and anomalous speech act that brings about what Derrida calls an "event" or "the eventful" (*l'éventuel* [76]). This speech act is anomalous both because it does not depend on preexisting rules, authorities, and contexts, as a felicitous Austinian speech act does, and because it also does not posit freely, autonomously, lawlessly, outside all such preexisting contexts, as, for example, de Manian speech acts seem to do, or as judges do in Austin's surprising and even scandalous formula "As official acts, the judge's ruling makes law" (154).

No, the speech act Derrida has in mind is a response to the call of what Derrida calls "le tout autre," the wholly other. This response is to some degree passive or submissive. It obeys a call or command. All we can do is profess faith in the

call or pledge allegiance to it. Only such a speech act constitutes a genuine "event" that breaks the predetermined course of history. Such an event is "impossible." It is always an uncertain matter of what, Derrida recalls, Nietzsche calls "this dangerous perhaps" (*L'Université* 75). Nevertheless, says Derrida, "seul l'impossible peut arriver," only the impossible can arrive (or, translating etymologically, can make it to shore [74]). That is why Derrida speaks of "le possible événement de l'inconditionnel impossible, le tout autre," the possible happening of the impossible unconditional, the wholly other (76). Derrida is playing here on the root sense of *event* as something that comes, that arrives. It appears of its own accord and in its own good time. We can only say yes or, perhaps, no to it. We cannot call the wholly other. It calls us.

Part of Derrida's permanent legacy is this alternative notion of otherness.

J. Hillis Miller
University of California, Irvine

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Absent from the avalanche of obituaries assessing Derrida's legacy was the realization that, as part of a career-long meditation on writing and death, Derrida had made the obituary into a philosophical genre. Perhaps even the philosophical genre.

In what was to become his final interview, Derrida admitted to a preoccupation with death that defined the entirety of his life: "No, I have never learned to live. Not at all! To learn to live means to learn to die, to take into account, to accept complete mortality (without salvation, resurrection, or redemption—neither for oneself nor for any other person). Since Plato, that's the venerable philosophical injunction: to philosophize is to learn how to die" ("Jacques Derrida"). But if, from the *Phaedo* onward, preparing for the future event of one's death has been philosophy's calling, Derrida would recall us to a different understanding of finitude, to a thinking of death less as something that comes "after" life (as if these terms could ever be discrete) than as an immanent component of life—as an otherness whose structural inherence becomes legible in and as the predicates of writing: "The trace that I leave signifies to me both my death, either to come or already past, and the hope that it will survive me. It's not an ambition of mortality, it's structural. I leave behind a piece of paper, I leave, I die. It's impossible to escape from this structure; it's the constant form of my life. Every time I allow something to go forth, I see my death in the writing."

Death, in other words, does not simply wait for life to end but, as a structural effect of writing's complex temporality, primordially divides the living present from itself. Already in one of his earliest books, Derrida suggested that "my death is structurally necessary to the pronouncing of the I" ("Supplement" 96). If Poe's infamous "I am dead" could become on this basis a necessarily possible utterance, this is because it exemplifies, however weirdly, the "normal situation" of writing. Derrida's more recent works on Marx, Heidegger, and others explored what he called writing's spectrality, its haunting of the limit keeping life and death apart. Between these earlier and later volumes (adjectives that scarcely seem to apply to someone whose thought did not "develop" over time), Derrida's immense corpus has been shadowed by this thought of death and writing, of death in writing. Whether manifest as physical absence, absence of mind, insincerity, unconsciousness, or repetition, death's unassimilable non-self-presence entails that, even while still writing, the author must already have departed: "To write is to produce a mark . . . which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning," Derrida argued in "Signature Event Context." "For a writing to be a writing it must continue to 'act' and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written" (8).

Following the death of Roland Barthes, in 1980, Derrida composed over the next twenty

years a series of extraordinary memorial tributes to friends and colleagues to whom he felt a special closeness as a thinker. Collected recently in *The Work of Mourning* (the French title is far more evocative: *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* 'Each Time Unique, the End of the World'), these moving pieces address publicly what it means to mourn and to acknowledge debt when to do so risks betraying the singularity of the dead in the repetitive generality of memorial conventions. Characteristically, Derrida assumes that risk explicitly throughout the series, bringing to new levels of intensity his reflections on the writing of death. For even though some of the pieces were first delivered orally, all of them are writing in their essence, given that death constitutes at once their subject and their condition. In each act of commemoration in the volume, Derrida attends to the ways that, in writing, singularity and repetition shear each other temporally just as death splits open life. To choose such a subject, for Derrida, is not only to make the obituary into a philosophical genre, though this alone would be more than enough to define a legacy. It is also, perhaps, to make the obituary the only genre possible if the thinking of life and death is to be pursued with the discretion, power, and inventiveness that Derrida brought to it.

Andrew Parker
Amherst College

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What will be the true legacy of Jacques Derrida? Will it be deconstruction, a concept or a method, will it be his impact on all those who shared his style of thinking without constituting a school, or will it be a library, the huge series of his works leading to an archive that we need to explore? For a while, the second option should dominate, personality providing a "way" of writing quite compatible with the "aporias" he was so adept at multiplying. Derrida's impact on scholars disseminated all over the world cannot be taken lightly: the echo his writings found in domains as diverse as architecture, legal studies, political theory, and even clothing fashion is impressive. He did more than the typical French intellectual who discusses glibly everything under the sun. When Derrida broached European or American politics, homelessness and refugees, hospitality and the rise of racism, computerized technology and ghosts in the machine, nationalism and the death penalty, cruelty to animals and justice, fundamentalism and mourning, it was always with a recognizable mixture of prudence and incisiveness that had few equals. One might object that these interests adhere too closely or fashionably to our zeitgeist and that fashion's tenuous fabrics are soon ripped open by more cutting edges. . . .

Will the legacy be deconstruction, then? Derrida wished to preserve this word, even though he paid attention to the danger of pigeonholing or imposing boundaries on a style of thinking that aimed at being constantly on the move. He was wary of any method that would repeat strategies identified with an author's signature. This may have come from the ease with which he could don the mask and become "Derrida" himself. One sees this in a scene of the eponymous film *Derrida*, when the young woman who interviews him asks him to talk about love—Derrida refuses, pleads that he cannot extemporize at will on such topics. She insists, and, yielding, he launches into a typically Derridean lecture on love, love that he shows split between an impossible absolute and phenomenologically concrete effects. This is why the second half of Derrida's career, after the playful texts of the eighties like *Glas*, in part undertook to deconstruct itself, using its own means to prevent anything like a Derridean doctrine from taking shape or reaching stability.

For example, Derrida viewed his institutional success in American universities under the banner of "French theory" with marked ambivalence. Just as he distrusted the word *theory*, he lamented

the fact that deconstruction had turned into rules, procedures, and techniques. He parodied a method that could boil down to systematic reversals of hierarchies: "After having reversed a binary opposition, whatever it may be—speech/writing, man/woman, spirit/matter, signifier/signified, signified/signifier, master/slave, and so on—and having liberated the subjugated and submissive term, one then proceeded to the generalization of this latter in new traits, producing a different concept, for example another concept of writing such as trace, *différance*, gramme, text, and so on." Derrida was not so much deriding wooden applications of his concepts as asserting that deconstruction could only remain deconstructive if it resisted the drift of its own methodology. Refusing the idea of method and instrumentality, deconstruction could not be "offered for didactic transmission, susceptible of acquiring the academic status and dignity of a quasi-interdisciplinary discipline" ("Deconstructions" 19). If the issue is to let the chance of a future open, one has to gamble on an "impossible" that destroys any standardized method. Can this desire be part of his legacy? Can the wish to keep the edge of futurity and impossibility traverse death, its wills, bequests, codicils, rectifications, translations, commentaries, without leaving successors in a double bind, having to be unfaithful in order to remain faithful? This leads me to surmise that deconstruction will not be Derrida's legacy.

What will his legacy be, then? Perhaps, first, the need to meditate on his evolution, a progression from Husserl to Levinas and from Heidegger to Marx (e.g., *Specters*) that dramatized "hauntology," an ontology undermined less by writing and its specific differences than by the specter of hidden ethical issues. This was not a belated reconciliation with Marxism but rather the assertion that a concern with social justice had always been at the heart of deconstruction. The confrontation with Marx initiated the most insistent themes of the later writings, like mourning, justice, ethics, religion. Derrida's last decade saw a spectacular turn to the ethical, the political, and the religious. This turn was not, however, a return to religion but accompanied an autobiographical tone ushered in by "Circumfession." There, to counterpoint Geoffrey Bennington's wonderfully pithy exposition of the entire corpus of his philosophy, Derrida exhibited his body, paraded his circumcision, and called himself a "little black and very Arab Jew" (58). Derrida became an alter ego of Augustine, one of the church's founding fathers but an African before being Christian. Here, perhaps, lies Derrida's true legacy, the subtle way in which he complicated the religious question by suggesting a deep fraternity between Jews and Muslims. This works by a refusal of the apparently Hegelian destiny of the modern world, our globalized post-Christianity spreading "globalatinization" via the domination of American English and technosciences (*Acts* 51). Here is how Derrida came to a truce with Levinas; instead of stressing as he did in "Violence and Metaphysics" that no "Jewish" thinking of otherness could forget its inscription in the "Greek" language of philosophy, he called for a new concept of justice, upholding hope for a "messianicity" without messianism or the Messiah (*Acts* 56). Not that he wanted to bypass the weight of dead texts, signs, and writers that make up a tradition by canceling it with a simple promise of futurity. Derrida's legacy is contained in a movement of reading that forms a deliberately vicious circle, from the regularly misconstrued statement that there is "no outside of the text" (*Of Grammatology* 58) to the accent laid on a critique generalized to all aspects of life, so that ethical and political questions disrupt the boundaries of globalized economies of meaning. His subsequent legacy will be the rigor with which this fundamentally ethical criticism avoided moral sanctimoniousness by taking to heart the need to speak or write in several languages at once.

Jean-Michel Rabaté
University of Pennsylvania

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IT IS LIKELY THAT I WILL NEVER AGAIN IN MY LIFE BE set a more obviously impossible writing assignment. To try to assess Jacques Derrida's legacy is to move into, or, better, find oneself already moving within, an aporia: a place where the path (*poros*) becomes its own blockage, where movement becomes at once impossible and necesssary, unthinkable yet ongoing. The writing hand writes on—it must: nothing is more urgent than the task of assessing this gigantic, multifaceted legacy—but we know in advance how phantasmatic our progress will feel. It is not just that Derrida wrote some seventy books, or that he wrote on such a vast array of writers and topics, or that his writings exerted influence throughout the humanities, the visual arts, and some of the social sciences; it is not just that for decades he was a public figure, a locus of fantasy and obsession, whose name has probably circulated more frequently and widely than that of any other philosopher or critic. If that were all, a brief assessment of his legacy would be no harder to write than any other narrative summary of a large and complex event. But how does one begin to speak adequately of the legacy of a writer whose work—from the beginning, and in any number of ways, and on practically every page—reflects on the complications, uncertainties, and imperatives of legacy, mourning, survival? Who can assess Derrida's legacy except perhaps Derrida, the one who can no longer speak—indeed, the one who, precisely here, could never and will never be able to speak? For no one, by definition, can assess his or her own legacy. Legacy is assessed by the other. The other, the one who comes to judge, will need to have reflected fully upon the Derridean reflection, measured its contours, accounted for its surprises and latencies. Perhaps someday this will occur. In the meantime, one judges and writes as one can.

Derrida's work asks us to understand this predicament as characteristic of any genuinely responsible act. To be ethical, an action must respond to the question, "What should I do?" On the one hand, the response must be "as thoughtful and responsible as possible"; it demands a "questioning without limit." On the other hand, a decision must be made, an act performed, "with the utmost urgency" (296). Reflection will and must be interrupted by action—be it by reflection "itself" as reflective inaction (for "inaction is *already* an action, a decision, an engagement, a responsibility that has been taken" [296]). Hence the Derridean emphasis on the uninsurability of decision, the incalculable risk to which any genuine act of judgment exposes itself. Ethical action is an aporia, an impossibility that, impossibly, we *experience*—a blocked path along which we are always moving. We recall that, as a philosopher, writer, and public intellectual, Derrida intervened in any number of ethical and political contexts—sometimes cagily, sometimes directly, depending on the occasion and its demands. Neither in theory nor in practice is deconstruction (let us affirm that embattled word) an attitude or technology of quiescence, despair, or nihilism, as its detractors so often assert.

Pressed as I am to characterize, almost in a phrase, Derrida's legacy, let me risk the claim that his work has taught us to think and to affirm impossibility as constitutive of experience's possibilities. "Only the impossible arrives," he tells us (374), for without the impossible there is no *event* as such: "when an event . . . is deemed possible, it means that we have already mastered, anticipated, pre-understood, and reduced the eventhood of the event" (194). Death, the unknowability haunting our existence, is another name for the impossible event; others are the trace, *différance*, invention, the gift, friendship, mourning, democracy, hospitality, forgiveness. The list could go on and on; in nearly every text he signed, Derrida found ways to enrich our understanding of the complexities and imperatives of being-in-the-world, and he did so by putting his finger on places where ordinary phrases and habits of thought buckle and crack, revealing an excess, a nonidentity or impossibility, on which they covertly depend. What, for instance, is a gift—a gift as such, in its hypothetical purity—but an excess beyond all acknowledgment? (Any act of acknowledgment, even that of the most flickering and passive gratitude—any *knowledge* of the gift, for that matter—marks the

return of an economy, a pattern of exchange, and thus the beginning of the gift's annulment.) Or: what is forgiveness—once again, forgiveness as such—other than unconditional forgiveness of the unforgiveable? (If one merely forgives the forgiveable, justification mingles with forgiveness; if one adduces conditions, one reintroduces an economy of restitution.) Yet how can one forgive the unforgiveable? Forgiveness unfolds as an aporia: it must be unconditional, but also limited, calculated, distributed with care.

Deconstruction is not a theology and does not celebrate mystery; it remains faithful, after its fashion, to the Socratic task of examining the ideas and presuppositions with which and within which we live—and must continue to live. It proceeds in the name of justice or responsibility, which Derrida affirms as the "undeconstructible" and characterizes as a nonimperative imperative. "Must one do the impossible for forgiveness to arrive as such? Perhaps, but this could never be established as a law, a norm, a rule, or a duty. . . . One forgives, if one forgives, beyond any categorical imperative, beyond debt and obligation. And yet one *should* forgive" (351). A certain "Abrahamic tradition" is affirmed, with and against itself, as aporia: an aporia within and through which, perhaps indeed even thanks to which, impossibly, we live on. Such is Derrida's legacy, and now ours. "Again the possibility of the impossible: a legacy would only be possible where it becomes impossible. This is one of the possible definitions of deconstruction—precisely as legacy" (352).

Marc Redfield
Claremont Graduate University

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It was August in Berkeley. Most of my colleagues were in Europe or Hawaii, and I was wrapping up endless footnotes for *The Telephone Book*, the extensive "Yellow Pages." The phone rang. Someone from the president's office was asking me if I would host the minister of culture from the Republic of China on behalf of the university. Me? Well, no one else is around, and we ran out of options, I was told. Three days? I don't know. It seems like a lot, and I'm not prepared. I'd need to do some research. Besides, I have to finish a book and wash my hair. An hour later the minister greeted me. He expressed delight, offering generous expressions of awe, for I was owed, he said, the respect that only a disciple of Confucius could expect. I was the student of Jacques Derrida! At the time, in the mid-eighties, Berkeley itself was not prepared to embrace Derrida, much less a mutant offspring, or what Derrida himself would come to call his own rogue state or territory (he'd link territory with terror and *terre*, earth, uprooting the concept of nation-state, the *voyou* Avi—he translated my name as saying "for life," as in he was stuck with me for life, *à vie*). For my part, I felt more like an early Christian than a disciple of Confucius.

There was a lot of solitude and theory bashing in those days, a lot of intimidation and punishment. Low salaries and mocking colleagues—assuming one managed to get in or on anyone's payroll. Not only that, but, once inside, Freud was KO'd at least once a month, Lacan was spun out of our orbit, and, with the exception of one or two troublemakers, the theory girrls hadn't even shown up yet on the boy scanners. I was the fastest pun in the West, but that was nothing to boast about in those days. The only one who had some holding power was Foucault, cleaned up, straightened out, and identitarian. So the dispatch, the postcard and *envoi*, came to me from China—the news of the fate of deconstruction. For me the report of its destiny and destination came from an altogether unexpected horizon, and the minister, who became my friend, opened the scene for an alternative "Purloined Letter," pointing to its location right there, in front of my nose yet resolutely invisible. As in a Kafka parable, I received the broadcast of Jacques Derrida's fate as philosopher from a sentinel who held the secret of a genuinely possible and strongly inflected future. As Derrida has taught us, there are many futures and even more returns.

It would be nearly impossible for me to offer a dialectical summation of Jacques Derrida's accomplishment and his influence on the intellectual worlds around which he organized his thought,

always inventively yet responsibly anchored, classically filtered. Some aspects of his influence or invention belong to a subterranean history, or are yet to be placed in a narrative of the alien unsaid. This may sound a bit sci-fi, but in some areas of his work, it is as though Jacques were beaming signals from another region of meaning, speaking from new intelligibilities, as Schlegel might have said, that haven't yet arrived or whose significance has not been cleared for landing. I'm not trying to speak in code. It's just that I assume that his irremissible bearing on legal studies, architecture, art, literature, pedagogy, medical ethics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, historical recounting, and performance has already been recorded.

It's not even a matter of debt. Something incalculable happened to us, something yet to be understood. Like any event, even the happy event, it was traumatic. Derrida: this name marks a catastrophic incursion, an end indistinguishable from a beginning. He was declared dead from the moment he walked in on us. In the university there are still some traces of the stages of anticipatory bereavement—denial, anger, bargaining, periodic punchouts. In the few pages pledged to a statement on his legacy, I want to say one or two things that may not have been covered by other contributors.

I'll track a marginal perspective meant to be metonymized into the bigger picture. One cannot imagine how whited-out the academic corridor was when Derrida arrived on the scene. There was really no room for deviancy, not even for the quaint aberration or psychoanalysis. Besides offering up the luminous works that bore his signature, Derrida cleared spaces that had looked like obstacle courses for anyone who did not fit the professorial profile at the time. He practiced, whether consciously or not, a politics of contamination. His political views, refined and leftist, knew few borders and saturated the most pastoral sites and hallowed grounds of higher learning. Suddenly color was added to the university—color and sassy women, something that would not easily be forgiven. In him Kant reemerged as a morphed and updated historicity, a cosmopolitan force that placed bets on and opened discursive formations to women. Derrida blew into our town-and-gown groves with protofeminist energy, often, and at great cost to philosophical gravity, passing as a woman. My first translation of his work was "Law of Genre," where he reworked the grid to the rhythm of invaginated punctures. Not all the folks at the reception desk were cheering such gender intrusions into linguistic pieties. Nonetheless, Derrida could be said to have quickly developed a substantial following, especially in America—Latin and North America.

The more politically based offshoots would occasionally disavow him. He regularly got it from the left and right, from those who owed him and those who disowned him (often the same constituencies). In some quarters Derrida's thought, whether Kantian or not, became associated with homos and women, and his poetic sparring with paleonymic language got quickly feminized, seemed somehow too girlie and slippery. Based on some of the things that came up, I wrote about the historical backslide of paronomasia, its anal zoning ordinances and the returns, on all counts, to Shakespeare's Bottom. It is interesting how language play spelled trouble. Derrida's language usage, exquisite and replenishing, itself became an offense to the more controlled behaviors and grammars of academic language. Perhaps unavoidably, Derrida, like all breakthrough thinkers and artists, continues to provoke rage and attract death sentences even after his announced death. The resentment that he stokes as he downsizes metaphysical strongholds is clearly also a text to be read—a massive reactivity that belongs to a legacy of a hard-hitting oeuvre. The traumatic impact of his thought—trauma arises from ecstatic opening as well as from catastrophic shutdown—makes it difficult to offer closural solace or to pin down what his work might "represent" for us today.

One of the things that I appreciated about Derrida from the start was the political punch he delivered, often concealed but cannily effective. I missed the sixties but inherited their beat. I'm probably more politically anxious, faster on the trigger, than most of the folks around me; in any case, I look for trouble and aporia in the most downtrodden neighborhoods of thought. Derrida suited my mood at once, though his political investments were more lucid and constrained perhaps than I was looking for, more aligned with Hölderlin's image of Rousseau—on the side of mediation and sober reflection, able to enact the

re-trait of which Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe write. Still, he packed a mighty punch, I thought. He agitated for the poor, the homeless, immigrants, for Nelson Mandela and against apartheid, with the Palestinians, Africa, and for every other conceivable "liberal" cause. He traveled the world like no other thinker. On a more local station, he went on French TV advocating gay marriage, sort of—asking for the abolition of all marriage as a state-sponsored arrangement and the implementation of civil unions for everyone seeking them. Marriage he viewed as a religious institution that can be sanctioned in a church or mosque or synagogue. Years before that, he tried to reform the French educational system by demanding that philosophy be taught early on, beginning in the second or third grade. He instituted the Collège International de Philosophie, which is now the only prestigious institution in France to welcome foreigners. As with the pressure put on the American university, he knocked down the doors and let all sorts of impurities like us in.

By the time he finished his tour of duty, Derrida was respected in France as Aristotle must have been among the ancients. A master teacher, he was seen also to have historacular powers. Still, he never made it to the top of the line—he was denied a professorship at the Collège de France, barred from its premises. Even though I think he was considerably injured by such insults, it belongs to the catalog of what I love about the guy the way he took institutional assaults, stayed modest and generous and open, and continued teaching to the end. When he taught at NYU, his office hours remained accessible to everyone who had an idea to bounce. Now, writing this, I realize that the whole lexicon of his gestures, punts, and attitudes was radically democratic. He held doors open and welcomed nearly anything or anyone (it would be foolish to make a rigorous distinction between the thing and the one, given his work); he was impeccably polite to intruders, hospitable to dissidents of all stripes, and he sheltered the intellectually homeless. The last years were devoted to rethinking democracy, and it cannot be a mere coincidence that the last catastrophic elections in the United States broke the hearts, again, of those who mourn him.

Avital Ronell
New York University

DERRIDA'S WORK IS WRITTEN; IT REMAINS TO BE read. What relations exist between the present tense of these propositions and the claims of memory?

He was among the greatest of the critical philosophers who, since Kant, have made philosophy begin by analyzing its own procedures, viewing them as determined by categories logically prior to it, which it is not free to invent from scratch. For Derrida, of course, philosophy is determined not by transcendental categories but by the material and historical situation in which it is carried out. The founding premises of his work are that this situation is above all textual and that what philosophers do is principally reading and writing.

Such an understanding of philosophy challenges a philosophical ideal of teaching as an effect of the teacher's speech. This ideal, embodied in the method we call Socratic, has haunted the schools of the West throughout their history. In this tradition, the death of the master is the conclusion of the teaching, to which it belongs as the teaching's final and privileged enactment. Derrida's work allows no such consolatory interpretation of his death. Nor does it impose memorialization, transcription, and institutionalization as responsibilities of discipleship. The critique of phonocentrism mounted in his foundational works of the 1960s and 1970s implies a philosophical teaching in which these are the forms of the work itself and not merely its aftermath or its monument. His demonstration that the teaching of, for instance, Saussure, Austin, and Lacan was always already writing, and concerned with writing, might be called a reading against the spirit of these authors. Especially in the cases of Austin and Lacan, it gave rise to a scandalized resistance. Nonetheless, at this date it seems impossible to doubt that Derrida's attention to the letter of these authors' works was generous and that it contributed to their continuing productivity in contemporary thought.

Derrida's writing is characterized by a responsibility to the letter of what he reads. This responsibility led him to modes of study that in the twentieth century lay for the most part outside the field of philosophy: philology, rhetoric, the study of textual history, the analysis of parapraxes. In reading a text, philosophical or otherwise, he understood the borders by which it excludes certain topics or modes of reading as internal to it. The

theorizing of these two responsibilities—to the letter of the text and to the exclusions it incorporates (are they in fact versions of a single responsibility?)—founded Derrida's appeal to scholars of literature. Strikingly, this appeal had most effect in the universities of North America, where it has given rise to a continuing series of excellent translations of his work. In France the relation of early Derrida to literary study was different. His writing had little influence on academic literary criticism; it appeared rather in the field of literature proper, in which he belonged with such figures of the late modernist avant-garde as Maurice Blanchot and Philippe Sollers.

This difference is not an effect of the varying reception of a single work. Rather, Derrida's work is divided by generic and geographic borders. To cross these borders within the work always requires some measure of translation, which, like any translation, risks abuse. There exists a Derridean work addressed to France, another to Europe, and yet another to America. These are not the same work. They all differ from his work on Judaism, and perhaps from others, such as the work on the International. It would be an error to overlook the borders between these works, and still more one to understand any of the works as the original from which the others derive.

Various as it is, Derrida's writing is hard to remember. I feel sure I am not alone in having repeatedly found myself searching his pages for a forgotten citation. Even supposing the possibility of thinking Derrida's work as a whole, the appearance of a given topic in a given text would not be determined by this work's immanent logic. Many of the works explicitly respond to historical or other contingencies. This is so in one sense of the turn to Marx Derrida made in 1993 with *Spectres de Marx*, in another sense of the memorials to friends and colleagues that give a somber hue to the later writings, especially after Paul de Man's death, in 1983. Perhaps when Derrida's work is collected in a uniform format, the collection will be given an index. Such a supplement would be more than an aid to memory; it would itself be the re-membering of a work that might not previously have had a single body.

In spite of the differences among his works, Derrida did once assert an interest that he describes as both *constant* and *primary*. In addressing the jury at his 1980 thesis defense for the French *doctorat d'état*, he said, "I have to remind you, somewhat bluntly and simply, that my most constant interest, coming before my philosophical interest, I would say, if this is possible, was directed toward literature" ("Punctuations" 116). This primary and constant interest is not one that Derrida presumes his auditors have failed to notice; rather, he supposes that they have forgotten it and need reminding. Derrida himself forgot this very citation—or perhaps remembered to forget it—in an interview less than a decade later. When it was quoted to him by Derek Attridge in 1989 with a request for comment, Derrida replied, "What can a 'primary interest' be? I would never dare to say that my primary interest went toward literature rather than toward philosophy. Anamnesis would be risky here, because I'd like to escape my own stereotypes" ("'Strange Institution'" 33–34). Derrida's interest in literature is constant but repeatedly forgotten; it corresponds to what he writes elsewhere of the archive as "that which can never be reduced to *mnēmē* or to *anamnēsis*," being instituted "at the place of originary and structural breakdown of . . . memory" ("Archive Fever" 14).

The archive is not the place for what we remember or for what we repress. It is the opposite of a memorial site, still more of a sacred one. To the extent that it reads literature as an archive, Derrida's work reveals a *secular* literature, to which it also contributes. It does so even as it diagnoses the pain ("mal d'archive") of the forgetting that brings such a literature into existence.

Matthew Rowlinson
University of Western Ontario

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IT'S TOO SOON TO TELL. AND THE IDEA OF LEGACY IS too tied to reproductive heteronormativity. When "heir" is extended to include impersonal bodies such as charities, the norm goes from literal to metaphoric. Even the most literal notion of heir is, however, metaphoric, insofar as a legacy is what in heteronormativity promises an imaginary continuity for an individual, succession, immortality, transcendence. We have a thousand words, so I will put it bluntly, and will be misunderstood (Sharp and expanded arguments are also, and necessarily, misunderstood. That is what it is to be understood. Never mind.): women may inherit differently.

"Freud's Legacy," dating from the late seventies, situates efforts to pass on a movement with a name within performative contradiction. The last sentence of the passage below catches the starkness of a belief in one's legacy: "One . . . gives oneself one's own movement, one inherits from oneself for all time, the provisions are sufficient so that the ghost at least can always step up to the cashier. He will only have to pronounce a name guaranteeing a signature. One thinks" (305). Derrida is careful, in this piece, not to make the choice of deconstruction, sign it with his own name (304, 308, 317, 327). The caution is carried over from the earlier pronouncement in *Of Grammatology*: "Thought is here for us a perfectly neutral name, a textual blank, a necessarily indeterminate index of an epoch of differance to come." (93; trans. modified).

In "Freud's Legacy" he writes of the silent Sophie, the daughter who dies at 26, that "the battle for the 'exclusive possession' of [this] dead daughter (mother) rage[d] on all sides" (330). This is matched by his word on mothers: "the face without face, name without name, of the mother returns, in the end. . . . The mother buries all her own" (333). This thought on mothers is carried through critically in *Glas*, *Ear of the Other*, "Circumfession," accompanied by criticism of a heritage he is obliged to perform. Women may not inherit at all.

The notion of "hauntology" in *Specters* allows for a more direct "performative interpretation" as a kind of ghostly legacy (55).

There is another spin on legacy in his mourning piece on Foucault ("'To Do Justice'"). *Être juste avec*—being fair to, doing justice to—a predecessor with whom one has a deep yet ambivalent relationship. Foucault could not have written without Freud. He should have been *juste* with him. I believe this is the duty Derrida performed toward Heidegger in *Of Spirit*.[1]

Derrida cared that followers should not find in deconstruction the ultimate political correctness. I often quote two exemplary passages: "decenter the subject . . . is easily said. [It] denies the [prior] axiomatics *en bloc* and keeps it going as a survivor, with minor adjustments *de rigueur* and daily compromises lacking in rigor. So coping, so operating at top speed, one accounts and becomes accountable for nothing" ("Mochlos" 11). And the warning against "a community of well-meaning deconstructionists, reassured and reconciled with the world in ethical certainty, good conscience, satisfaction of services rendered, and the consciousness of duty accomplished (or more heroically still, yet to be accomplished)" ("Passions" 15). My own feeling of setting deconstruction to work I put at the end of an appendix:

> [T]he scholarship on Derrida's ethical turn and his relationship to Heidegger as well as on postcolonialism and deconstruction, when in the rare case it risks setting itself to work by breaking its frame, is still not identical with the setting to work of deconstruction altogether outside the formalizing calculus of the academic institution. (*Critique* 431)

This last is hardly a legacy. It is rather "finding proof in unlikely places," proof where the idea of proving is absurd: teleopoiesis—addressing the distant other: "generation by a joint and simultaneous grafting, without a proper body, of the performative and the constative."[2] The obvious connection is to Nietzsche, looking always for his companions, philosophers of the future.[3] But there is also Kant, writing from within the constraints of a theologically hamstrung academy, who thought of the enlightened subject as "a scholar . . . addressing the world of readers" (60–61). From *Glas* on, Derrida made this address part of the performance of his texts.

In *Voyous*, his last published book, Derrida pronounced himself "on the rack," being "broken by the wheel" of two preliminary questions he would not pronounce until 105 pages into the book.[4] Being what he was, he noted that each turn of the wheel put him in a position contrary to the previous. That too was part of the torture. If he uttered the questions, he would not be able to write his book. The first question:

> "to speak democratically of democracy would be on the subject of democracy, to be speaking in an intelligible, univocal, and *sensible* fashion of democracy, to make oneself understood by *whoever can* understand the word or the phrases that one makes with the word." (105)[5]

Not just frustrated academics but, literally, just anyone. Plato had put the archons above the law, Aristotle had not solved the merit-versus-numbers problem, Kant had built *cosmopolitheia* on war, and the United States. . . . Women and rogues were never let in.

The second question "resembles the remorse of having used and abused the expression 'democracy to come'" (107). He starts to read himself, explaining himself, directing the after comer, ending, "Greetings, democracy to come!" (161).[6] And he brings out, once again, the performative-constative imperative, tying knowing and doing again, in a double bind. We can either only say "democracy *is* this," as carefully as possible—constative—or, "I believe in it, I make a promise, . . . I act, I endure at any rate, you do it too" (132)—performative promise. He ties the knot with his earlier work—the "a" of "differance" is the "à" of "à-venir," to come (154). In 1968, the year "Differance" was published, everything was seen as identifiable only insofar as it was different from what it was not, and hence differ-ing (differance) was the (non)name of things; in 2003, democracy is different from itself seen as itself—hence it is always to come. Constative (this is the way things are) grafted to performative (gotta keep working, for democracy is always not yet there). Too soon to tell. As we have seen, this possibility is already there in *Grammatology*. Derrida speaks there of a "differance to come." If this is a legacy, it asks us to face forward.

But who can bear to inherit such torture? Plato avoided it with the archons, Aristotle with the merit-numbers debate, Kant with war. As Lacan told us, the hero leaves no legacy (277). Let us turn to literature, less heroic, thank god, than philosophy.

Derrida's interview on literature in Derek Attridge's book comments on literature as a double-edged sword: "the freedom to say everything is a very powerful political weapon, but one which might immediately let itself be neutralized as a fiction" (*Acts* 38). And then he comments on how literature is "suspended" from reference: "*Suspended* means *suspense*, but also *dependence*, condition, conditionality" (48). We are back again in the double bind: we do not have to be verifiable but we depend on reference. Work that one out. Perhaps that will have been Derrida's legacy: take infinite care to see both sides, and then take a risk, depending on what truth? It's too soon to tell.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
Columbia University

Notes

[1] I have offered this reading in "Responsibilities."

[2] Derrida, *Politics* 32; trans. modified.

[3] See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

[4] 25–39 and passim. Translations from *Voyous* are mine.

[5] I cannot here read the quotation marks and their function in the text.

[6] English cannot render the complexity of the French *salut*, which Derrida has connected to the problematics of democracy.

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