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## A CERTAIN "MADNESS" MUST WATCH OVER THINKING<sup>1</sup>

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EWALD: Let's think about your future biographer. One may imagine that, idly repeating the date on your birth record, he will write: Jacques Derrida was born on July 15, 1930 in El-Biar, near Algiers [Algeria]. With this biological birth, it may be up to you to contrast your true birth, the one which would proceed from this private or public event when you would have really become yourself.

DERRIDA: You are coming on rather strong for a start. You have the nerve to say: "it is up to you" to say when you were born. No, if there is one thing for which I cannot be held responsible,<sup>2</sup> it is precisely that, be it what you call the "biological birth," transferred to the objectivity of the birth certificate, or the "true birth." "I was born," indeed. Here is one of the most singular expressions I know, especially in its French grammatical form ["*je suis né*" literally states: "I am born"]. If the style of this interview lent itself to it, instead of responding directly to your question, I would prefer to begin the interminable analysis of this sentence: "I, I am, I am born [*je, je suis, je suis né*]" — for which no indication of time is given. Concern about this will never abate. For the event thus designated can be announced in me only in the future "I am (not) born (yet)" [*Je (ne) suis (pas encore) né*], but in a future which takes the form of a past to which I shall never have been present, and which, for this reason, always remains promised — and besides also multiple. Who said we were born once only? But how can we deny that through all the promised births, it is a sole and same occurrence, the unique occurrence, which insists and repeats itself forever? This is somewhat what is related in "Circumfession."<sup>3</sup> "I am not born yet" because I was

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1. This article is a translation by Denise Egéa-Kuehne of an interview first published in *Magazine Littéraire* 286 (1991): 18-30. Its full original title, in translation, is "A Certain 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking: Refusing to build a philosophical system, Derrida privileges experience and writes out of 'compulsion.' Dialogue around traces and deconstructions." It is reprinted here with permission. The original text format has been generally respected in its use of italics, underlining, quotation marks, parentheses, and so on. In addition, all French terms appear in italics.

2. The French text is: *il vous revient* (translated here "it is up to you") *de dire quand vous êtes né*. And: *si quelque chose ne peut pas me revenir* (translated here "something for which I cannot be held responsible"), *c'est bien ça* [emphasis added]. *Revenir à* carries several meanings. In his translation of *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), Alan Bass pointed out (cf. Note 5, 100) that the terms chosen by Derrida sometimes "combine several meanings — sometimes antithetical ones — beneath the same signifier.... All of these terms 'inscribe' *différance* within themselves: they are always different from themselves, they always defer any singular grasp of their meaning." (Trans.)

3. Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil — Les Contemporains, 1991). Trans. G. Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). The original French title is "Circonfession," translated by Bennington as "Circumfession." (In French the word for "circumcision" is *circoncision*) (Trans.)

robbed of the moment when my namable identity was decided. Everything is *set out* for it to be so, it is what is called culture. And so through so many relays, one can only try to recover this theft or this institution which could, which *must*, have occurred more than once. But however iterable and divisible it remains, the "once only" stands fast.

EWALD: Do you mean that you do not want to have an identity?

DERRIDA: Indeed I do, like everyone else. But by beating around an impossible thing against which I too probably stand fast, the "I" constitutes the very form of resistance. Every time this identity proclaims itself, every time I am bound by belonging to a context, if I may say so, someone or something cries out: watch out, there's a trap, you are caught. Get free [*dégage*]. Get yourself free [*dégage-toi*]. Your commitment [*engagement*] is elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Not very original, is it?

EWALD: The work you do, is it to recover this identity?

DERRIDA: No doubt [*sans doute*],<sup>5</sup> but the gesture which tries to recover, distances *from itself*, grows ever more distant. It must be possible to formalize the law of this unbridgeable gap. It is somewhat what I always do. Identification is a difference to oneself, a difference from-with [*d'avec*] oneself. Therefore *with*, *without*, and *except with* oneself. The circle which brings one back to birth can only remain open, but all at once as an opportunity, a sign of life, and a wound. It would be death if it closed onto birth, onto a fulfillment of the statement, or of the knowledge which says "I am born."

EWALD: In "Circumfession" you attribute a fundamental place to the fact that you were circumcised. Is this your mystery today?

DERRIDA: Under the name circumcision, I often wonder (and "Circumfession" is also the journey of this question or this claim) whether there is a "real" event which I can attempt, not to remember, of course, but to re-elaborate, to reactivate in some kind of memory without representation — or whether it is a delusion, a simulacrum (but then where from would its privilege come?), a screen destined to the figurative projection of so many other events of the same type, to lead me astray as much as to guide me. Among other things, circumcision signifies a certain mark which, coming from others, and endured in absolute passivity, remains in the body, and visible, undoubtedly undissociable from the proper name also received from the other at that time. It is also the moment of the signature (the other's as much as our own) by which we let ourselves be inscribed in a community or in an unerasable alliance: birth of the subject, as you suggested earlier, rather than "biological" birth, but a body and an irreversible marking are necessary here. Every time this mark and this noun appear (and this is not limited to cultures who practice the so-called "real" circumcision), at least the figure of a circumcision imposes itself to me. What does "figure" mean here? This is what "Circumfession" revolves around.

4. *Engager* carries meanings of to involve, to commit, as well as to engage, to set in motion. By the same token, *gage* is at once a pledge, a token exchanged in an *engagement*, a promise or an agreement. These words are found in many of Derrida's texts, and carry the symbolics of responsibility as well as of debt. [Trans.]

5. *Sans doute* conveys both meanings of "no doubt," and "probably." [Trans.]

EWALD: What relation can be found between this first birth and this other birth which your arrival in France will be, your studies at Louis-le-Grand,<sup>6</sup> *khâgne*, and your inscription in a whole different world?

DERRIDA: Let's say that in Algeria, I had started to "enter" the fields of literature and philosophy. I dreamed of being a writer — and already some models informed my dream, a certain language governed it, as well as some famous figures and names. It is like circumcision, you know, it begins before you do. Very early, I read Gide, Nietzsche, Valéry, in the eighth or ninth grade. Gide probably even earlier: admiration, fascination, cult, and fetishism. I no longer know what's left of that. I remember a young teacher, his hair was red, his name was Lefèvre, he came from the Metropolis [France], which made him a tad ridiculous and naive in the eyes of the young "pieds-noirs"<sup>7</sup> that we were, somewhat bent on being hoodlums. He highly spoke of being in love and of *Les Nourritures Terrestres*.<sup>8</sup> I would have learned this book by heart. Certainly like all adolescents would, I liked his fervor, the lyricism of his declarations of war against religion and families (I have always had to translate "I hated homes, families, any place where humans expect to find peace" into a simple "I don't belong to this family"). For me, it was a manifesto or a bible: at one and the same time religious and neo-Nietzschean, sensualist, immoralist, and mostly very Algerian as you know. I remember the hymn to Sahel, to Blida, and to the fruits of the Essai garden. I read the totality of Gide's works,<sup>9</sup> and the *Immoralist* probably rushed me on to Nietzsche whom I certainly understood very poorly, and strangely enough, Nietzsche oriented me toward Rousseau, the Rousseau of the *Rêveries*.<sup>10</sup> I recall metamorphosing into a theater of the great debate between Nietzsche and Rousseau, and I was the extra ready to assume every part. I just liked what Gide says about Proteus, and I naively identified with him who identified himself, if possible, with Proteus. It was the end of the war (basically, "my" Algeria has been at war almost constantly, since right after World War II the first movements which announced the Algerian war were quelled). When Paris was occupied in 1943-44, the liberated town of Algiers had become a kind of literary capital. Gide was often in Northern Africa, Camus was widely discussed, and literary journals and new publishers proliferated there. All this fascinated me. I was writing nasty little poems which I published in North-African journals, and I kept a "personal diary." But while I withdrew within these solitary readings and activities, well, in a disconnected and juxtaposed way, I also led the life of some sort of young hoodlum involved with a "group" which was

6. Louis-le-Grand is a high school in Paris offering classes called *khâgne*, preparing for the entrance examination to the Ecole Normale Supérieure. (Trans.)

7. French citizens of European origin who were residents of Northern Africa. (Trans.)

8. Novel by André Gide (1897) in which the author expresses the excitement of a young man who sheds all constraints and looks for happiness in the submission to his every desire. (Trans.)

9. André Gide (1869-1951) French writer. His works are about the passion for freedom (*Les Nourritures Terrestres*, 1897) and sincerity (*L'Immoraliste*, 1902), and the delusion of commitment (*Voyage au Congo*, 1927; *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, 1936). He tried to define a modern humanism which could reconcile intelligence with instincts (*Les Caves du Vatican*, 1914; *La Symphonie Pastorale*, 1919; *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, 1926; *Journal*, 1939-1950). He won the Nobel Prize in 1947. (Trans.)

10. *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782). In this novel, Jean-Jacques Rousseau evokes the warmest memories from his past, and the most striking events of his life. (Trans.)

more interested in soccer and tracks than in studying. In the junior and philosophy [senior] years, I started reading Bergson and Sartre, who played a large part in what would be called a philosophical "formation," at least in its beginnings.

EWALD: Was the decision to attend the Ecole Normale yours or your parents'?

DERRIDA: My parents did not know what it was. Me neither, even when I registered for "*hypokhâgne*."<sup>11</sup> When I entered "*khâgne*" at Louis-le-Grand the following year, at the age of nineteen, it was quite simply the first trip in my life. I had never left El Biar, in the suburbs of Algiers. The Parisian boarding school was a harsh experience which I handled with great difficulty. I was constantly ill, or at least fragile, on the verge of a nervous collapse.

EWALD: Until you entered the Ecole Normale?

DERRIDA: Yes. These were the harshest and the most forbidding years. It was due in part to a sort of exile, and for another part to the monstrous torture of the national competitions in the French education system. With competitive admission tests such as the entrance examination to the Ecole Normale or the *Agrégation*,<sup>12</sup> many of those who were in my situation had the feeling that their whole life was at stake in this horrible machine, and that they were awaiting its sentence of life or death. In the case of failure, I was to return to Algiers and to a state of absolute precariousness — and I did not want to return to Algeria definitively (both because I believed that if I lived "at home," I could never "write," and already for political reasons. As early as the early fifties, colonial politics and mostly colonial society had become unbearable for me). Consequently, these years in "*khâgne*" and at the Ecole Normale were trying years (discouragement, despair — failure at the admission tests themselves: nothing there was given to me at first try).

EWALD: Yet you remained at the Ecole Normale for a long time?

DERRIDA: This paradox did not escape your attention, and a lot can probably be read into it. I have always been "school sick," like you would say sea sick. I cried each year on the first day of school way past the age where it is decent to do so. Still today, I cannot cross the threshold of an educational institution (for instance the ENS [Ecole Normale Supérieure] where I taught for twenty years,<sup>13</sup> or the EHESS [Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales] where I have been teaching for 6 years)<sup>14</sup> without physical symptoms (I am talking about my chest and stomach) of discomfort and anxiety. And yet it's true, I never left school in general, and I was at the *Ecole Normale* for a total of about thirty years.<sup>15</sup> I must also be "school sick," this time in the sense of "home sick."

11. Cf. Note 6.

12. Placement examination to recruit teachers for high school and certain disciplines at the university level including law, economy, medicine, and pharmacy. (Trans.)

13. Derrida was invited by Hyppolite and Althusser to teach at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1964, and taught there until 1984. (Trans.)

14. In 1983, Derrida was appointed to the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, director of *Philosophical Institutions* and is still teaching there. (Trans.)

15. This interview was conducted in 1991. (Trans.)

EWALD: Your name is Jackie. Is it you who changed your name?

DERRIDA: You are asking me a question which is basically very serious. Yes, I changed my first name when I started to publish, in fact the moment I entered the space of literary or philosophical legitimization, whose "proprieties" I observed in my own way. As I realized that Jackie was not a possible name for an author, when in a way I chose a semi-pseudonym, certainly close to my real first name, but very French, Christian, simple, I must have erased more things than I could say in a couple of words (it would be necessary to analyze, again endlessly, the conditions in which in the 1930s such a community — Jewish from Algeria — sometimes chose American first names, sometimes those of film stars or heroes, William, Jackie, and so on). But never would I have touched my family name, Derrida, which I have always found very beautiful, don't you think? It has a nice resonance within me — but in fact, precisely like that of another person, and very rare. It is this name which allows me to speak this way, and to speak about it so freely. I would have liked to have invented it, and I must dream of serving it, with unpretentiousness and abnegation, you see what I mean, and out of duty. But I shall refrain from talking about it here on another level. Time is limited.

EWALD: In "Circumfession" you indicate that you had a second name, Elie.

DERRIDA: Which is not on the birth records, I don't know why. I have a few hypotheses. It is a whole other story, the one around which "Circumfession" just about revolves, and I would not know [je ne saurais] how to talk about it here in this mode.<sup>16</sup>

EWALD: This seems to play a prominent role for you.

DERRIDA: Maybe, I don't know, I don't know whether it is true, spontaneous, or whether I gradually reinvented it, whether I fantasized, whether I told myself a story about it, and rather late in my life after all, not prior to these past ten or fifteen years.

EWALD: Your first two books, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (1954) and *The Origin of Geometry* (1962) are about Husserl.<sup>17</sup> Did you have a philosophical project already?

DERRIDA: Already an obsessing thematics was organizing a whole space of questions and interpretations: the thematics of writing, between literature, philosophy, and science. This concern is at the core of the *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry*, a text I had elected to translate precisely because in it Husserl *stumbles* over writing. I had then insisted on the status of the written object in the history of science. Why does the very constitution of ideal objects, and in an exemplary fashion of mathematical objects, require — as Husserl states it without drawing all the possible

16. *Je ne saurais* is also a polite refusal: "I can't, I won't." (Trans.)

17. *Le Problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990). Derrida's 1954 Master's thesis (Trans.) and *Traduction et Introduction à "L'Origine de la géométrie" d'Edmond Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962). The English translation of this latter book comes from the 1974 second revised French edition. *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*. ed. David B. Allison, trans., with a preface, John P. Leavey, Jr. (Stony Brook, N.Y.: Nicolas Hays, 1978). Rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, with a new "Afterword" by the translator. (Trans.)

consequences from it — the incorporation into what he calls the “spiritual body” of writing? Going through Husserl was not merely a digression. But it is true that — unjustly, I am increasingly convinced of this — I also turned away from him. Nevertheless, the texts which followed *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry* and *Voice and Phenomenon* remain oriented by this problematics of writing, as I have, up to a certain point, systematized and formalized it in *Of Grammatology*.<sup>18</sup>

EWALD: Therefore your problem was: what is literature?

DERRIDA: For instance, but in as much as this question extended beyond the meaning that Sartre gave it. I had learned a great deal from *What is Literature?* and from *Situations* which introduced me to works I have never ceased to admire (Ponge, Blanchot, Bataille) but by the early sixties it no longer satisfied me.<sup>19</sup>

EWALD: How did you formulate this question for yourself?

DERRIDA: I find the Sartrean question necessary but insufficient, at once too sociohistorical and too metaphysical, exterior to the specificity of the literary structure which Sartre does not question, or which he pre-interprets from highly defined literary models (for want of knowledge also of some of this century's literary writings, whether he almost never talks about them — Joyce, Artaud — or he talks about them, I believe, very briefly — Mallarmé, Genet — not to mention the three authors I named earlier). In order to give their whole measure to sociopolitical or sociohistorical questions on literature (What is the function of literature? What role does a writer play in society? and so on), literature must be read differently, and another axiomatic must be constructed. Don't ask me which, I could not respond in these conditions, but this is all I try to do elsewhere, in just about every one of my texts.

EWALD: Why did literature constitute such an important object for you?

DERRIDA: What was important for me (but why do you make me talk in the past?) is the act of writing or rather — because it may not exactly be an act — the experience of writing: to leave a trace which does without, even which is destined to do without, the present of its originary inscription, of its “author” as one would say in an insufficient manner. More than ever this makes us think the present and the origin, death, life, and survival. Since a trace is never present without dividing itself and referring to another present, then what does the being-present, the presence of present, mean? The possibility of this trace certainly exceeds what is called art or literature, in any case it exceeds institutions identifiable under this name. Literature is no more an institution among others than philosophy or science are; it is at once institution and counter-institution, placed *at a distance* from the institution, at the angle which the institution makes with itself in order to *distance itself from itself*. And if literature retains here some privilege in my eyes, it is on the one hand because

18. *La Voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967) and *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), trans. G. C. Spivak, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

19. A number of Sartre's political and literary texts are collected in the ten volumes of *Situations* (1947-1976). (Trans.)

of what it thematizes of the writing event, and on the other hand because of what, in its political history, connects it to this principled authorization to "tell all" which relates it in a unique fashion to what is called truth, fiction, simulacrum, science, philosophy, law, right, and democracy.

EWALD: What was at stake in these descriptions?

DERRIDA: Perhaps, among other things, an economical wager in a strategy of formalization — what more of impossible formalization. Perhaps even economy itself was at stake, as well as the limit of all formalization. The challenge was attempting to conceptualize a large prevailing structure within a whole ensemble named philosophy. Why "is" the trace (neither presence nor absence, the beyond of the being [*étant*], therefore, even of the Being [*l'être*] — and it is this whole aspect of negative theologies which has always interested me, especially in "How To Avoid Speaking: Denials" [*Psyché*]<sup>20</sup>) that which sets philosophy in motion, and by the same token, refuses itself to philosophy, and resists *properly ontological, transcendental, or philosophical understanding* in general? Without being foreign to philosophy, this attempt was neither philosophical nor merely theoretical or critical, and it *promised* (it was this very promise), it involved [*engageait*] new bodies of writing, the pledges [*gages*] of other signatures, of new bodies, within which neither philosophy, nor literature, nor perhaps general knowledge, would gather together their image or their history. "Autobiography" is certainly nothing but an old name to designate one of these bodies thus committed [*gagés*].

EWALD: But why is it so important to write? What does one commit [*engage*] of oneself when writing?

DERRIDA: I just said "pledge" [*gage*] and "commitment" [*engagement*] of *oneself* in a strange autobiography, yes, but the "I" does not exist, it is not present to itself until what involves [*engage*] it in this way [occurs], and which is not it. There is not a constituted subject which commits [*engage*] itself to writing at a given moment for such or such a reason. It exists through it [writing], given [*donné*] by the other: born [*né*] as we bizarrely said earlier, born [*né*] through being given [*donné*], delivered, offered and betrayed all at one and the same time. And this *truth* is a matter of love and police, of enjoyment and law — at one and the same time. This event is both serious and microscopic. It is the whole enigma of a truth *to be made*. Saint Augustine often talks about "making truth" through confession. In "Circumfession," I extensively quote him, and I try to think what this truth presents which appears rebellious in the eyes of philosophical truth — a truth of adequation or revelation.

EWALD: In 1968 you were teaching at the Ecole Normale, high place of the contestation. Did the events of May have any importance for you?<sup>21</sup>

20. *Psyché. Invention de l'autre*. "Comment ne pas parler," *Dénégations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). Trans. Ken Frieden, "How To Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3-70. This essay is on negative theology, particularly that of Meister Eckhart. (Trans.)

21. May 1968: a vast movement of political, social and cultural contestation which developed in France in May-June 1968. (Trans.)

DERRIDA: I was not what is called a "*soixante-huitard*."<sup>22</sup> Although at the time I participated in demonstrations and organized the first general assembly of this period at Ulm Street, I was reserved, even anxious, before a certain spontaneist, fusionist, anti-union euphoria, and before the enthusiasm of finally "liberated" speech, restored "transparency," and so on. I never believed in those things.

EWALD: You found this somewhat naive?

DERRIDA: I had nothing against it, but it is always difficult for me to be on the same wave length as the crowd. I did not have the feeling of participating in a major overhaul. But now, I believe that in this gaiety for which I had very little taste, something else was happening [*arrivait*, which also means "was coming"].

EWALD: And what was that?

DERRIDA: I could not give it a name — some seismic tremor coming from afar and carrying over a great distance. Within the culture and within the university, these shock waves have not yet subsided. I was more sensitive to them after the fact, at the sight of the bitterness and regaining of control by the more conservative, even retrograde, forces, especially within the university. It is during this aftershock that I started to give a more visibly, let's say, "militant" form to my work as an educator. The foundation of the GREPH takes place during those years.<sup>23</sup>

EWALD: What was 1968? What is that event which never comes to an end? What is it that had to be sutured? Why were some people so frightened?

DERRIDA: Through spontaneism and a certain naturalistic utopism, an awareness of the artificial, artefactual character of institutions was undoubtedly emerging. Of course, we did not wait until 1968 to know that, but perhaps to develop a more practical and effective awareness of it: because obviously, these nonnatural, founded, and historical things were no longer working. As usual, it is a breakdown which lays bare how the machine as such works. And as a consequence, because these nonnatural, historical, and founded institutions were no longer working, they were no longer perceived as founded at all, founded by right and legitimate. To this must be added the fact that the media, and with them the whole culture, were taking forms and dimensions which marked a real mutation, even in the very production of the 1968 "event." This opened up all kinds of questions on the legitimacy and origin of the existing powers: [questions of] sanction, evaluation, publication, communication, and so on.

22. Someone who took an active part in the 1968 unrest. In 1968 Derrida stood back on some aspects of the May 1968 movement, although he took part in the demonstrations and organized the first general assembly at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, on Ulm Street. (Trans.)

23. In an interview with Imre Salusinsky (1987), Derrida answered the question: "Have you ever considered how your own ideas might eventually apply in the educational system, outside the university?" and declared: "In France, in fact, with friends or colleagues or students of mine, I was involved in trying to make a topic, a thematic problem, of this. We founded a group, in 1975, which is called "Groupe de Recherche sur l'Enseignement Philosophique" [GREPH], dealing with the teaching of philosophy in high schools...in France we have philosophy in the last grade of high school." *Criticism in Society*, ed. Imre Salusinsky (New York: Methuen, 1987), 9-24. Rpt. of *Southern Review* [Adelaide] 19 (1986): 3-12. Interview: "Jacques Derrida on the University" with Imre Salusinsky. (Trans.)

EWALD: Does May 1968 designate a philosophical event?

DERRIDA: No doubt, probably one of those philosophical events which do not take the form of a body of works or a treaty but which *bring forth* [*portent*], and always entail [*comportent*], these philosophical events which can be identified thanks to titles or authors' names. It is also a philosophical event or the promise of a philosophical event to practically question a social or discursive state which certain people would gain to have naturalized and dehistoricized, by unsettling it or participating in its transformation, and to pose the question of the historicity of these structures. Whether we know it, want it, or not, this changes things in philosophy. It is difficult to follow its paths and its repercussions, and other historiographic categories and instruments would be needed. Considering only the most common manifestations of philosophical work, philosophy books are no longer written the same way. Except for exceptions. One no longer teaches, no longer speaks to students, and especially with them, like in the olden days. They do not talk the same way between themselves. This did not change in one day, nor in one month, but probably in the tidal wave which somehow gathered on the crest of this demonstration, in the unfurling of May 1968, in France and elsewhere.

EWALD: *Glas*, published in 1974, was a book at once very novel and very baffling, at least in its design.<sup>24</sup> What was the project, the challenge of an enterprise like *Glas*?

DERRIDA: Without renouncing the classical norms and exactingness of philosophical reading for which I have always maintained the greatest respect, the goal in *Glas* was to address seriously certain themes of course (family, family name, religion, dialectics, absolute knowledge, bereavement — and therefore a few others), but by placing side by side, column by column, the interpretation of a great canonic corpus of philosophy, that of Hegel, and the rewriting of Genet, a poet more or less outlawed, and hardly receivable. Hegel and Genet at the same time, face to face, at once one inside the other and one behind the other, if the geometry or the mobility of this posture is possible. Later on, the question of what propriety is will be raised again in *The Post Card*,<sup>25</sup> with the positions of Socrates, seating and writing, and Plato, standing and pointing his finger. This contamination of a great philosophical discourse by a literary text which is considered to be scandalous or obscene, and of several norms or kinds of writing among themselves, could appear violent — beginning with its "page setting." But it also joined with or reawakened a most ancient tradition: that of a page whose blocks of texts, of interpretation, and of internal margins are organized differently. Therefore, that of another space, another practice of reading, writing, and exegesis. For me, it was a way to assume in practice

24. *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974). Plus a two volume edition by Gonthier-Denoël, 1982. Trans. John Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). Leavey's book *Glassary* is very helpful when reading *Glas*. From the dustjacket: "*Glas* is extraordinary in many ways, most obviously in its typography. Arranged in two columns, with inserted sections within these, the book simultaneously discusses Hegel's philosophy and Jean Genet's fiction, and shows how two such seemingly distinct kinds of criticism can reflect and influence each other." (Trans.)

25. *La Carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1980). *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

the consequences of certain propositions in *Of Grammatology* concerning books and the linearity of writing. And also to do something quite different from mixing literature and philosophy, contrary to what has sometimes been said without reading it.

EWALD: When you write a book like this one, do you write in relation to yourself, or do you address a particular public?

DERRIDA: No doubt I address some readers whom I presume will be able to help me, to accompany me, to recognize [me], and to respond [to me]. The typical profile of a possible reader is announced in the instances of existing readers (sometimes just one is enough). Perhaps, we hope to entice others, but always in an ambiguous fashion: or rather [we hope] to discover or invent other readers who do not yet exist — but who already know, or will know, however, more than we do. There we are, in the most obscure and confusing [*déroutante*], confused [*déroutée*] topology, in the confusion [*déroute*] of the destination: of what seemed convenient for me to name the *destinerrance* or the *clandestination*.

EWALD: Then the book induces certain modes of reading?

DERRIDA: That's also possible, but without forming [*former*] or closing [*fermer*] a program of reading, without suturing a system of formalizable rules. It is always an *opening*, both in the sense of a nonclosed system, of the opening *left to* the freedom of the other, but also in the sense of the opening, the advance or the invitation *extended to* the other. The intervention of the other, who perhaps should no longer be called just "reader," is an essential but always *improbable* counter-signature. It must remain un-anticipable. The possible occurrence of the absolute event, a bottomless foundation [*un fond sans fond*] of initiative, always remains available to him/her [the other], must always fall to him/her by right.

EWALD: Is this the same thing as instituting a group?

DERRIDA: Rather an *open* "quasi" community of people who, "since they like that," while acknowledging receipt, also go somewhere else, and in turn read and write, quite differently. This is the generous response, always more faithful yet at the same time more thankless.

EWALD: Have you found this community?

DERRIDA: It can never be found, one never knows whether it exists, and taking into account the opening about which I was talking earlier, the gesture by which one would think that one has found it [community] would not only be mystified, but it would lose it [community], it would destroy it on the spot. Such a community is always to come, it has an essential relationship to the singularity of the event, to what is coming but (therefore) "has not arrived" [*arrivé*, which also means "occurred"].

EWALD: However, in the United States, there seems to be around you a number of readers who have managed to formalize this practice of reading and writing.

DERRIDA: A number of very interesting things happened in the United States in that respect. It would require long analyses — which I started here and there. But I have

much suspicion as to such a frequent and interested reckoning which consists in sending me back to the United States, or in assigning me American residence. What are they trying to do or defend in this way? I leave it to your imagination. No, I spend only a few days, a few weeks in the United States every year. However intense this experience, the generosity, but also the aggressiveness (you can't imagine) with which I meet there, the things which matter for my work happen also elsewhere, outside Europe, in Europe, and for instance certainly in France.

EWALD: The amount of works you have published is extensive. What relation is there between one book and another? Each time, is your objective to reinvent, to leave the preceding trace in order to produce another one? Or is there any continuity?

DERRIDA: I must give you a contradictory answer, yet typical and without originality: of course, "something" endures and is recognizable from one book to another, it is undeniable, and anyway, I must want it this way. Yet each text belongs to a whole different story: there is discontinuity in the tone, the vocabulary, even the sentence structure, and basically, in the address. It is really as if I had never written, not even known how to write (I mean, very sincerely, in the most elementary, almost grammatical way): each and every time I start a new text, as modest as it may be, I feel confusion in front of the unknown and the inaccessible, a crushing feeling of awkwardness, inexperience, and impotence. Anything I had already written is instantly obliterated, or rather, as if thrown over board.

EWALD: How does the idea of a book or an article occur to you?

DERRIDA: A kind of animal movement tries to appropriate what comes always, always from an *external* provocation. By responding to some demand, invitation, or command, an invention must nonetheless seek itself, and it must all at once defy a given program, a system of expectations, and finally surprise *me* — surprise me by having suddenly become for me imperious, imperative, even inflexible, like a very tough law. The more singular the form, approaching what is called no doubt inappropriately "fiction" and "autobiography," like in *Glas*, *Post Card*, or "Circumfession," the more this compelling surprises me. But all these books also tell a story in their own way, and every time a new scene is described — the played-out story of their making. Afterwards, I forget just about everything of the moment when this "internal" constraint bent me and made me yield under itself.

EWALD: An internal constraint — this means that it is not a cultural constraint, or a political constraint.

DERRIDA: One always reckons with what one perceives of the cultural field. But even if this reckoning negotiates very cleverly, it always puts itself in the service of a wilder, more defenseless, more naive desire, in any case, of another culture which no longer reckons, certainly no longer according to the norms of the "present" culture or politics. One explains oneself<sup>26</sup> with somebody, with someone *other*, *alive or dead*, with *some* who have no identity on this cultural scene.

26. *S'expliquer* also means "to discuss," "to talk the matter over," as well as "to have it out with somebody." (Trans.)

EWALD: Together with this entreaty which provides you with this incentive, there is also a remarkable fact: all the texts you write are indexed to some great references, Husserl, Plato, Heidegger, Hegel, Rousseau, Jabès, Celan. The list is extensive.

DERRIDA: There is always someone else, you know. The most private autobiography is explained with great transference figures which are *themselves*, and also themselves *plus* someone else (for instance Plato, Socrates and a few others in *Post Card*; Genet, Hegel, Saint Augustine and so many others in *Glas*; or "Circumfession"; and so on). Even when speaking of the most intimate thing, for instance of one's own circumcision, it is better to know that an exegesis is going on, that you carry its diversion, its outline, and its memory inscribed within the culture of your body. For instance, take one example among a thousand others, one of which I have never talked, an explanation with Meister Eckart relating something Maimonides had said about it [circumcision] with as much science as naiveté, namely that "the prepuce which was removed was more useful for concupiscence and the pleasure of the flesh than for generative purposes. This is why — as this author says — it was hardly possible to separate a woman from a non-circumcised man. Therefore, it shows that God's commandment ordering that the male be circumcised was to prevent in the woman the superfluous, that is any excess of carnal concupiscence." Don't ask me, around all these roundabouts, why Heidegger, who has read Eckart like a master all his life, never talks about either circumcision or Maimonides, this is another chapter. I only wanted to suggest that these reading grids, these folds, these obstacles, these references and transferences, are as if under our skin, on our bare sex, at the moment when we pretend to address our "own circumcision." In short, because there is no wild nature, nor any opposition which could stand between nature and culture, only the *différance* between one and the other, well then, a text from which the name of the other would be absent, always resembles a dissimulation, an erasure, even a censorship. Violent, ingenuous — or both at the same time. Even if the name of the other does not appear, it is there, it swarms and maneuvers, sometimes it howls, and it becomes all the more authoritarian. It is better to be aware of it and to say it. And besides, other people are so much more interesting. In whom should we be interested otherwise, tell me? Even in ourselves?

EWALD: What is the relationship between all these texts? Do they constitute an *oeuvre*?

DERRIDA: What is an *oeuvre*?

EWALD: A comprehensive set of texts, books, linked by the same identity.

DERRIDA: From a sociojuridical viewpoint, it is hardly questionable. There are copyrights and legal registration, texts signed with the same name, rights, responsibilities, ownership, and insurances. I am very much interested in that. But this is only one stratum of the thing or of the singular adventure called *oeuvre*, and which I feel is constantly in the process of coming undone, of expropriating itself, of falling apart without ever gathering together into its signature. From the old concept of *oeuvre*, I would be tempted to retain the value of singularity and not that of self-identity or gathering. If there is something which repeats itself within me in an obsessive manner, it is this paradox: there is singularity, but it does not reassemble, it

"consists" in not reassembling. Maybe you will tell me that there is a way of not reassembling which is resembling — a short time ago it was called a "style."

EWALD: Can you tell in which way it is similar?

DERRIDA: This can be perceived only by the other. The idiom, if idiom there is, that by which a signature is recognized, cannot be reappropriated, as paradoxical as it may seem. It can be apprehended only by the other, surrendered to the other. Of course, I may believe that I recognize myself, that I identify my signature or my phrase, but only from experience or from an exercise in which I got involved, swept along *as other*, the possibility of repetition, and therefore of imitation, of simulacrum, being inscribed at the very origins of this singularity.

EWALD: You invite [your readers] to do two things: to displace the practices of reading and to create a sort of community of readers.

DERRIDA: I do not like the word community much, I am not even sure that I like the thing itself.

EWALD: You yourself used it.

DERRIDA: If by community we understand, as is often the case, a harmonious whole, a consensus and a fundamental agreement under phenomena of disagreement or of war, I do not really believe in it, and in it I foresee as many threats as promises.

EWALD: I am thinking about Roger Chartier's work on reading, when he explains that the meaning of a book is linked to the practices of reading which one entertains with that book. I was wondering whether it could not be said that the work of your writing is to induce these practices of reading which will themselves be productive of meaning.

DERRIDA: There is probably this irrepressible desire that a "community" be formed, but also that it should know its limit — and that its limit is its *openness*: once it believes that it has understood, recovered, interpreted, or *preserved* [also *protected*, *guarded*] the text, then something of this text, something in it which is totally *other*, resists or escapes it, which calls for another community, which never lets itself be totally internalized into the memory of a present community. It is an experience of mourning and of promise which institutes the community, but which also forbids it to gather together, which keeps in it the potential [*reserve*] of another community which will sign, in another way, totally different contracts.

EWALD: Something may surprise in our discussion: we have not mentioned "deconstruction."

DERRIDA: It is never indispensable, and I would rather not.

EWALD: Does the term deconstruction refer to your fundamental project?

DERRIDA: I have never had a "fundamental project." And "deconstructions," which I prefer to use in its plural form, has probably never named a project, a method, or a system. Especially not a philosophical system. Within contexts always very well defined, it is one of the possible names used to designate, in short by metonymy, what occurs [*ce qui arrive*], or cannot manage to occur [*ce qui n'arrive pas à arriver*],<sup>27</sup>

27. Again, *arriver* in the sense of "to occur," but also "to come," "to arrive." (Trans.)

namely a certain dislocation which in effect reiterates itself regularly — and everywhere where there is something rather than nothing: within what is classically called texts of classical philosophy, of course and for instance, but also within any “text,” in the general sense which I try to justify for this word, that is to say within experience itself, within the social, historical, economic, technical, military, and so on, “reality.” For instance, the event of the so-called Gulf war is a powerful, spectacular, and tragic condensation of these deconstructions. Within the same conflagration, within the same seism, quakes the cleaved genealogy of all the structures, and of all the foundations about which I have just talked: the Western world and the history of philosophy, its bonds with several great irreconcilable (whatever is said of them) monotheisms on the one hand, and on the other hand, with natural languages and national affects, with the concept of democracy and with the theologico-politics, and finally with the infinite progress of a concept of international law, the limits of which appear more distinctly than ever. They appear so not only because those who represent it [progress] or who appeal to it always hail it for the benefit of specific hegemonies, and in any case, can only indefinitely attempt to inadequately approach it, but also because it is founded upon (and therefore limited by) concepts of European philosophical modernity (nation, State, democracy, relations of parliamentary democracy between the States, whether they are democratic or not, and so on) — not to mention what binds science, technology and the army to these formidable problems, from within. These violent deconstructions are taking place, *it is happening [it is coming, ça arrive]*, it does not wait for the completion of the philosophico-theoretical analysis of all I have evoked in one word: this analysis is necessary but infinite, and the reading which these cracks make possible will never override the event; it merely intervenes there, it is inscribed in it.

EWALD: What is the relation between deconstruction and critique?

DERRIDA: *Critical* thinking, which I believe one should never renounce, has a history, and assumptions, the deconstructive analysis of which is also necessary. In the style of the Enlightenment, of Kant or of Marx, but also in the sense of evaluation (aesthetic or literary), *critique* supposes a judgment, a willful decision, or a choice between two terms, and to the concept of *krinein*, of *krisis*, it attaches a certain negativity. To say that all this is deconstructible is not the same thing as to disqualify, to negate, deny, or exceed, to perform the *critique of the critique* (just like critiques of the Kantian critique were written as soon as it appeared), but to think its possibility from another point, that of the genealogy of judgment, will, conscience, or activity, of the binary structure, and so on. Perhaps this thinking transforms space and, through aporias, it lets appear the affirmation (nonpositive) assumed by all critique and all negativity. I try to say something about this necessary aporiatic in “Of Spirit” and in *The Other Heading* about Europe.<sup>28</sup>

28. “De l’esprit,” Heidegger — *questions ouvertes*. Presentation by Eliane Escoubas, *Le Cahier du Collège International de Philosophie* 6 (1988): 213-45. “Of Spirit,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989): 457-74 and *L’Autre cap* (Paris: Minuit, 1990). *The Other Heading*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Nass (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

EWALD: Could we say that deconstruction *is* the techniques which you use for reading and writing?

DERRIDA: Rather, I would say one of its forms or manifestations. This form remains necessarily limited, determined by a number of open contextual characteristics (language, history, the European scene within which I write and am inscribed with all kinds of particulars more or less contingent to my own little history, and so on). But as I was telling you, there is deconstruction, deconstructions, everywhere. What takes the form of techniques, rules, and procedures, in France or in the Western world, in philosophical, juridico-political, aesthetic, and so on research, is indeed a very defined configuration; it is carried on — and therefore exceeded — by processes much broader, more obscure and powerful, between this planet and the world.

EWALD: Then deconstruction is not merely the critical activity of a literature or philosophy professor in a university. It is a historical movement. Kant characterized his age as the age of critique. Can we say that we are in the age of deconstruction?

DERRIDA: Rather, it is the age of a certain thematic of deconstruction, which indeed receives a certain name, and can be formalized up to a certain point into methods and modes of reproduction. But deconstructions neither begin nor end there. Of course it is necessary, yet still very difficult to account for this intensification and this shift to a theme and a name, to this beginning of formalization.

EWALD: What would be the proper historical beacons?

DERRIDA: I don't know. Indeed one should never renounce the historical acknowledgement of these references, but I wonder whether something can take the form here of one single set of "historical beacons," even whether the question can be posited in this way without precisely implying some historiographic axiomatic which should perhaps be suspended, since it is too tightly bound to deconstructible philosophemes. The things we are talking about (these "deconstructions" if you will) do not occur within what would be, and what would be recognizable under the name of "history," a directional history with periods, epochs, or revolutions, mutations, emergences, ruptures, scissions, *épistémè*, paradigms, and *themata* (to respond according to the most diverse and best known historiographic codes). Each "deconstructive" reading proposes another one of those multiple "sets of beacons," but I do not know around which main axis to orient them. If, as is the case for me, one also has reservations as to history and the epochality of Being, in Heidegger's sense, what is left? This being said, from a phenomenological and even trivial viewpoint, the intensification and the thematization which we were discussing are indeed "contemporary" with the double post-World War era, with what is happening to Europe, what is cleaving Europe and violently folding it back onto another which is no longer even *its* other. Here again, permit me to refer you to what I try to suggest in "Of Spirit," and *The Other Heading*.

EWALD: You mean the consequences of anthropology?

DERRIDA: Anthropology as a scientific project is definitely not a cause, no more than any knowledge in itself. Rather, ethnological knowledge would be one of the consequences, quite significant indeed, of this general shake-up. It reflects, in all the

meanings of this word, the (European) history of culture as colonization and decolonization, mission in a broad sense, import-export of national or state models, ex-appropriations, identification crisis, and so on.

EWALD: Where is all this going? We live in a period when no one knows what one should want anymore, in a period of very accomplished, very consummate nihilism. Everyone is waiting to know where we are going, what we are heading for, toward where we must set course, direct ourselves. A work like yours, where is it going?

DERRIDA: I don't know. Or rather, I believe that this is not of the order of knowledge, which does not mean that we should renounce knowledge, and resign ourselves to obscurity. Responsibilities are at stake which, in order to elicit decisions and events, must not follow knowledge, nor proceed from knowledge like consequences or effects. Otherwise, we would unfold a program and behave, at best, like some "smart" missiles.<sup>29</sup> These responsibilities, which will determine, as you say, "where it is going," are heterogenous to the order of formalizable knowledge, and probably [or no doubt] to all the concepts upon which was built, I would even say *arrested*, the idea of responsibility or decision (conscious self, will, intentionality, autonomy, and so on). Every time a responsibility (ethical or political) has to be taken, it is necessary to go through antinomic injunctions and their aporiatic form, through a kind of experience of the impossible, without which the application of a rule by a conscious and self-identical subject, objectively subsuming a particular case under the generality of a given law, comes on the contrary to *irresponsibilize*, at least to miss, the always unheard-of singularity of the decision to be taken.

The event being singular each time, to the measure of the otherness of the other, each time one must invent, not without concepts, but by going each time beyond the concept, without any guarantee nor certainty. This obligation can only be double, contradictory, and conflictual, since it calls for a responsibility and not a moral or political technique. For instance, how, *on the one hand*, can one reaffirm the singularity of the idiom (national or not), the rights of the minorities, the linguistic and cultural differences, and so on? How does one resist uniformization, homogenization, cultural and linguistico-mediatic leveling, and its order of representation and spectacular rentability? However, *on the other hand*, how can one fight for this without sacrificing the most univocal communication possible, the translation, the information, the democratic discussion, and the law of the majority? Each time, one must *invent* in order to betray as little as possible one and the other — *with* no previous *guarantee* whatsoever of success. Another example: one should not renounce the idea of international law, nor the undeniable progress it made by being incarnated into institutions, but one should reaffirm this immense idea in an effective and significant fashion, yet without ceasing to carry an analysis and a critique (not only in a theoretical way but also in effect) of all the premises which have motivated such or such implementation of the aforementioned international law, of the mystification of the references one can make to it, and of its embezzlement to the benefit of specific interests. One should even, as I suggested earlier,

29. This interview took place at the time of the Gulf war. See news reports (i.e., *Time* magazine, January-February 1991) and their descriptions of, and comments on "smart bombs" and "ground war." (Trans.)

*deconstruct* (also, later in a certain way, but *already* and without any delay in another way) the conceptual and historical limits of *this* institution of international law, I mean the Office of the United Nations and the Security Council, of course.

But naturally, once this double imperative (heavy with so many contradictions) had been acknowledged, once the merciless critique of politics had been engaged, that of *all* the politics which, in the recent or more distant past, have constituted the premises of this war, the decision which remained to be made could only be but a terrible strategic wager, betting on the possibility — once the tragedy would be appeased (and nothing will ever compensate for all the dead it will have cost) — to be able to retain the memory, to draw some lessons and better respond to this double imperative. And a decision (for instance in politics) is always made at a time when the most critical theoretical analysis can no longer modify irreversible premises. No matter how one attempts the most necessary and exacting trial of Western, Israeli, and Arab-Islamic politics (besides, there is more than one [set of politics] under each category), no matter how far one wants to and *must* go back in these proceedings, (and one must go back very, very far, through articulated stages), the decision to be made (embargo or no embargo, war or no war, such or such "war objectives") must be made within a "today," in one unique moment when past errors are no longer erasable, if not reparable. The terrifying strategic wager can be guaranteed in advance by nothing, not even by the reckoning (always necessarily speculative) that an opposite wager might have led us to the worst. I believe that these abstract figures can easily be translated today, don't you think. (This interview will have to be dated: at the eve of the phase so strangely called the "ground" [*terrestre*] war). I merely wanted to suggest that all presumptions of guarantee and of noncontradiction in so paroxysmical a situation (but this goes for every situation) is an optimistic, complacent, and irresponsible gesticulation, and therefore a profound indecision and inactivity, under the appearance of activism or resolution.

EWALD: We can put things another way: is there a philosophy of Jacques Derrida?

DERRIDA: No.

EWALD: Therefore there is no message.

DERRIDA: No message.

EWALD: Is there any normativity?

DERRIDA: Of course there is, that's all there is. But it would be difficult for me to answer you if you implicitly asked me whether what I say here is normative in the usual sense of this term. Why am I not very fond of this word "normative" in this context? What I have just suggested about responsibility rather points toward a law, toward an imperative injunction to which one must eventually respond without norms, without any actually presentable normativity or normality, without anything which might eventually be an object of knowledge, belonging to an order of Being [*l'être*] or value. I am not even certain that the concept of *duty* [*devoir*] (or in any case of *must-be* [*devoir-être*]) can be measured. One will probably be tempted to reply: it is difficult to derive politics, morals, or law from all these apparently negative and abstract propositions. I believe the opposite. If they are stingy on these

doubts, questions, reservations, and clauses of nonknowledge, and so on, then politics, morals, and law (which I do not confuse here with justice)<sup>30</sup> insure and reassure themselves into delusion and good conscience — and are never far from being or doing *something other* than morals, politics, and law.

EWALD: Do you draw this from your philosophy?

DERRIDA: What do you mean by “draw”? Derive? Find? Deduct? Induct? Draw consequences? Conclude? As to some philosophy which would be “mine,” I have already told you no. I prefer to speak of *experience* — a word which means all at once crossing, journey, and ordeal — at once and the same time *mediatized* (culture, reading, interpretation, work, generalities, rules, and concepts) and *singular* — I do not say immediate (untranslatable “affect,” language, family name, and so on). To go back to your word, what I suggested earlier is “drawn” from [*se tire*] (without ever escaping! [*s’en tirer*]) this experience, more precisely *where it intersects*, where work and singularity intersect each other, or universality and this *preference* of singularity which it is out of the question to renounce, which it would even be immoral to renounce. It is not a preference which I prefer, but the preference *within which* I find myself inscribed, and which gives body to the decision or the singular responsibility without which there would be no morals, no rights, and no politics. I happen (with numerous complications into which it is not the place nor do we have the time to enter — anyway, I talk about it and more recently in *Du droit à la philosophie*, “Circumfession,” and *The Other Heading*), I happen then to have been *born*, as we were saying, *into the European preference*, into the preference of the French language, nation, and citizenship, to take only this one example, and also into the preference of this era, of those I love, of my family, of my friends — and of my enemies too, of course, and so on. At every moment, and it is our daily experience, these preferences can contradict and threaten the imperatives of the universal respect of the other, but neutralizing them or denying them would also be contrary to any ethico-political motive. For me, everything is “drawn” from experience (live, daily, naive or well thought out, always thrown against the impossible), *from this “preference” which I must both affirm and sacrifice*. For me, there is always, and I believe that there *must be more than one* language, mine and that of the other (I am greatly simplifying) and I must try to write in such a way that my language does not make the language of the other suffer [*souffrir*], that he/she puts up with me [*me souffre*] without suffering [*sans souffrir*] [because of it], receives the hospitality of my language without losing or integrating himself/herself in it. And reciprocally, but reciprocity is not symmetry — and first because we have here no neutral measure, no *common measure* given by a third party. It must be invented at every moment, every sentence, with no guarantee, no absolute guard-rail [*garde-fou*]. This is

30. For more discussion on the distinction of law and justice, see *The Other Heading*, and also “Force de loi: ‘fondement mystique de l’autorité’ / Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” trans. Mary Quaintance, *Cardozo Law Review* II, nos. 5-6 (1990): 919-1045. First presented at the opening of a colloquium organized by Drusilla Cornell at Cardozo Law School, October 1989, under the title “Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice.” Also in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld, and D.C. Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992). Reprinted in *Force de loi* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1994), 43-44/19. (Trans.)

equivalent to saying that madness, a certain "madness," *must* watch each and every step, and eventually must watch over thinking, just like reason also does.

EWALD: Could we say also that between your work with philosophy and writing, and politics, one should not try to establish any connections?

DERRIDA: The connections are not immediately identifiable, according to the current codes. Of course, there are connections, you don't doubt it, but here or there, they can go through routes which are not yet marked on the political map. In turn, they politicize discursive zones, corpora, and loci of experience which are generally perceived as apolitical or politically neutral. There are discourses and gestures whose code and rhetoric are by all appearances highly political but whose foreseeable submission to worn out programs seems to me seriously apolitical, or depoliticizing. And *vice versa*, if you like.

EWALD: Some will say that in regard to a certain tradition of philosophy which always entailed a moral component, your practice of philosophy is somewhat disappointing.

DERRIDA: Well, if this is true, let me hope for this "disappointment." What is a disappointment? At least, it prompts us to wonder why we were waiting, why we were expecting such or such thing, from such or such thing, from such or such person. It is still the best incentive to ask questions and to reflect. Why is a philosophy expected where it is explained that it must also be about something else concerning philosophy? Why was it believed that morality was a part of philosophy? Was it justified, morally justified, for instance, to believe that a philosophy should include a moral "segment," area or consequence, the consequence of some philosophical knowledge? Now, I told you earlier, indeed there is no philosophy, nor a philosophy of philosophy, which would be called deconstruction and which would derive from and by itself a "moral segment." But this does not mean that the deconstructive experience is not, does not practice, or deploy within itself, any responsibility, nor even any ethico-political responsibility. I would not say that by questioning philosophy on its treatment of ethics, politics, and the concept of responsibility, deconstruction aligns itself on a concept still *higher* than responsibility — because I am distrustful, we have learned to be distrustful also of this value of height and depth (altitude of the *altus*) — but it aligns itself on an exactingness which I believe more *untractable* about the response or the responsibility. Without which today, in my eyes, no ethico-political question has a chance to be opened or awakened. I shall not venture to say that this is a hyper-ethical or hyper-political "radicalization," not even — for that would take us too far today — whether the words "ethical" and "political" are still the most appropriate to name this other exigency, gentle or untractable, this precisely intractable exigency of the other.