DERRIDA, AFRICA, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Christopher Wise

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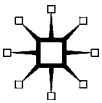

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For Judi, Zachary, Zoë, Ayesha, and Michael

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Preface

Every book has its story and this one, written between the turbulent years of 2001 and 2007, is certainly no exception. When I began this book, Jacques Derrida was still alive, the World Trade Centers in New York City were still erect, and the very notion of U.S.-led wars against Afghanistan and Iraq seemed little more than a fantasy of the far right. I was first drawn to Derrida as an Africanist scholar working in Sahelian literatures and society, especially Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal, but also further north into Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania. Much of my research is focused on the culture of the Djoliba, one of the truly great river civilizations of the world, and I could see from my work among Fulani, Dogon, Songhay, and Mossi peoples that Derrida's *Specters of Marx* especially resonates with Sahelian culture. This is so because the Sahel, in my view, is a culture that was influenced by Ancient Egyptian civilization. The Songhay language, for instance, is classified as a "Nilo-Sahelian" language, and cultural theorists have long studied links between the Songhay, the Fulani, the Dogon, and the Ancient Egyptians. To talk about links between Egypt and the Sahel is complicated for various reasons, not least because of the long history of Arabic slavery in the region and non-European and Arabic forms of racism toward black Africans. (The Fulani are a mixed ethnic group of both Arab and African origins.) *Specters of Marx* begins with a discussion of the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as if it is a conjuration rite, and I had learned from my research in the Sahel that conjuration rites are common in this region in Sufi brotherhoods, especially among the Umarian Tidjaniya. My initial interest in *Specters of Marx* therefore grew out of my desire to better understand conjuration, not as some residue of archaic societies, but as a vital, fascinating, and contemporary practice in West Africa. No other serious contemporary philosopher offered as attractive a means for theorizing conjuration, so I began to read Derrida more seriously, despite my initial reservations about the applicability of deconstruction in this context. The more I studied *Specters of Marx*, and related texts like *Archive Fever*, *Circumfession*, and *Veils*,

the more I become convinced of Derrida's relevance in a Sahelian context. However, Derrida writes as a Franco-Maghrebian and Sephardic Jew, or *un homme du nord*, as one says in the Sahel. Like the various, complex, and interrelated belief systems that are indigenous to the Sahel, and that have thrived in West Africa for centuries untold, Judaism was also deeply influenced by ancient Egyptian religious beliefs. Many contemporary Egyptologists, following Freud, have suggested that the prophet Moses was probably an Egyptian follower of the first monotheist, the Pharaoh Akenaten. In the Sahel, one similarly encounters a great deal of evidence to suggest the profound influence of ancient Egypt upon Sahelian peoples, especially the Woolf, Songhay, Dogon, and Fulani. The Songhay, for example, maintain that the sorcerers who first did battle with Moses, and whose serpent-staffs were swallowed up by those of the great lawgiver, were summoned to Egypt from the Upper Niger delta to do battle with the renegade prophet. As documented in the *Taríkh al-fettâch* and the *Taríkh al-Sudan*, "Oriental" or Sephardic Jews lived in the Sahel zone for many centuries, not far from Timbuktu, and the presence of the Jews was felt indirectly as late as the mid-twentieth century, before the founding of Israel, which precipitated the departure of most Jewish communities from northwest Africa. I am myself of Sephardic Jewish origins, and so the history of the Jews in this region has exerted a particular fascination upon me. While I found that Derrida's theorization of conjuration rites helped to explain a great deal about Sahelian religious practices, and while I hoped to learn more about possible common influences, I quickly ran into a theoretical difficulty, which unexpectedly became a major theme of this study: Derrida often makes the arbitrary claim that many of his criticisms of Greco-Roman logocentrism emerge from a specifically Jewish matrix of critical concerns. For instance, Derrida's doctrine of the trace is simply another word for circumcision or tribal cutting. In effect, Derrida echoes the historically inaccurate claim of the Jews that circumcision originated with the Jews, as a part of the Abrahamic covenant. This claim is preposterous in any historical sense, as we know beyond all doubt that circumcision existed in Egypt and Africa for thousands of years before the Abrahamic dispensation, and it remains an important aspect of West African society today. Sahelian *nyamakala* like the griot, for instance, continue to preside over various circumcision, name-giving, and scarification ceremonies, much like the *mohel* in the Jewish rite. Because most of Derrida's readers have little awareness of Egyptian, Arabic, and African peoples, they tend to accept his claims about Judaism's exceptional status, a claim

that may seem plausible in the European setting but is obviously false, or at least exaggerated, in these other contexts. In texts like *Of Spirit* and *Sovereignties in Question,* Derrida will go as far as to claim that the Messianic Jew should be considered an appropriate figure for *all* non-European peoples, including Arabic and African Muslims. In this other context, however, the Jews are more properly construed as one more tribe among many other similar tribes, and the claim to exceptional or exemplary status that Derrida makes would certainly be rejected. To put it another way, there are many other tribes besides the Jews in Egypt, the Middle East, and Africa who have made similar claims to being exceptional peoples. In West Africa, such claims are always about power. The Toucouleur Fulani, for instance, are parodied by the Malian author Yambo Ouologuem in *Le devoir de violence* as "Black Jews" for making the same claim in order to oppress the Dogon and forcibly convert them to Islam.

While Derrida offers a potentially liberating approach to African studies, or a powerful alternative to logocentric paradigms of cultural study, he tends to subordinate deconstruction to serve a myopic, if not exclusive, Jewish politics and political agenda. As a case in point, Derrida argues that Algerian Muslims should aim for a "disassociation" of the political and religious, as well as strive to develop a "laic [or secular] subjectivity," but he never says the same about Israel's ethno-theocratic state and its citizens (*Rogues* 33). For this reason, I found myself confronted with a tremendous obstacle in my attempts to apply deconstructive thought to the Sahelian context. First, Derrida's bias had to be clarified; otherwise, it seemed unlikely that his analyses would be of much use for Middle Eastern and African studies. Despite my ostensibly harsh political criticisms of Derrida, such criticisms are advanced precisely because I believe that his writings have a great deal to offer scholars in these fields, once this regrettable bias is acknowledged, if not carefully disentangled from those aspects of his writings that are so obviously valuable in his thought. In writing this book, I saw this as my principle task, so that—in the end—a very different variety of deconstruction might emerge. As I saw it, deconstruction could be made far more inclusive than the articulation of it one finds in Derrida's writings. For this reason, I ended up writing less the book I had originally intended to write than a book that first had to be written, in order to adapt deconstruction to these other contexts. My final chapter, which compares Egyptian, Hebraic, Greek, and Sahelian concepts of the word, could not have been written until the problem of Derrida's Jewish bias was first addressed. Now that it has been addressed, it is my hope that this

book will lead to a renewed interest in Derrida for scholars in African and Middle Eastern studies.

The first installation of this book was written for a seminar I taught at Western Washington University in Spring 2001, and an earlier version of it was not long afterward published in *Research in African Literatures* in an essay entitled "Saying 'Yes' to Africa: Derrida's *Specters of Marx*." It was first through the encouragement of Abiola Irele that I developed what was a very brief response into a much longer text. For this encouragement, I thank him. My first essay on *Specters of Marx* documents my initial enthusiasm for it, especially in relation to the African context. In the Fall of 2001, exactly one week before 9/11, my family and I relocated to Amman, Jordan, where I taught in the American Studies and Islamic Studies Programs on Fulbright awards until our mandatory evacuation shortly before the beginning of the U.S.-led war against Iraq. During my tenure at the University of Jordan, I had the opportunity to teach *Specters of Marx* once again, this time during a graduate seminar on U.S. foreign policy to students of Palestinian and Jordanian origins. Outside our seminar room, my students and I could sometimes hear vitriolic campus demonstrations against the United States, some of which led to violent police reprisals—and all of which included the burning of U.S. and Israeli flags. In the men's urinals of the university restrooms, someone had even spray-painted a makeshift image of the Israeli flag, a not so subtle reminder of local attitudes about the occupation next door. Studying *Specters of Marx* in this setting certainly influenced my evolving perceptions of it, especially Derrida's unsuccessful efforts in theorizing what he calls "the war for the appropriation of Jerusalem." There is no doubt that teaching in this highly charged environment sharpened my critical analyses of Derrida's writings, making me less willing to overlook what some scholars, in other circumstances, might indulge as a regrettable but not terribly significant shortcoming on his part. I acknowledge here the many valuable contributions of my Jordanian and Palestinian students in shaping my own reception of this text and wish to thank them for their input. I would also like to acknowledge the many valuable contributions of my students at Western Washington University over the last few years. In both the U.S. and Jordanian setting, I was enabled to first try out my ideas, working through them in critically challenging and receptive environments. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions and encouragement of the following people: Georg M. Gugelberger, Thomas Hale, Edward W. Said, Bongasu Kishani, Richard Priebe, Rosanne Kanhai, Shurla Thibou, Andrew Bodman, Fallou Ngom, Steven Wiens,

Sean Kilpatrick, Abdul Jalil, Muhammad Bani-Younes, Hala Abu Taleb, Erin Moody, Jacob McCalmont, Will Durand, Eddy Troy, and Node Smith. I would like to express my gratitude to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for hosting my family and me during our stay in Amman, especially Prince Hassan bin Talal. I also would like to acknowledge and offer my thanks for the financial support that was provided for me by the Fulbright Scholars Program, which awarded me four separate grants that brought me to Jordan and Egypt during this period. The Bureau of Faculty Research at Western Washington University also provided a summer research grant in 2004 enabling me to work on this project. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the loving support and companionship of my wife and children, to whom this book is dedicated.

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CHAPTER 1

Saying "Yes" to Africa

Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International* (1994) was published not long after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the so-called demise of Marxism, and President George H.W. Bush's proclamation of a New World Order. His book on Marx deservedly received a great deal of attention and was followed by the publication of a volume entitled *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* (1999), edited by Michael Sprinker. However, it would be erroneous to describe Derrida's book in strictly literary terms, or as a masterpiece of print media, rather than an unusual transcription of an important historical event. What must be emphasized is that *Specters of Marx* functioned in the first instance as a voiced performance at a specific place and time. Not unlike the Platonic dialogues Derrida has famously subverted, *Specters of Marx* must be construed as a book that seeks to subvert its own status as a merely reified and spatial artifact. Although surprisingly few commentators have remarked upon this book's deconstruction of the book form,[1] it is finally impossible to divorce *Specters of Marx* from its historical and performative context, or, as Derrida would have it, from its "perverformative"[2] and stubbornly anti-logocentric basis in temporality. The critical inattention to *Specters of Marx*'s deconstruction of the book may be traced to Derrida's orientation to Marxism as a uniquely *African* theorist of Sephardic, Maghrebian, and Judaic experience. Unless the reader of *Specters of Marx* is willing to entertain this possibility, especially by suspending the agendas of race politics as they are defined in the African (but also Judeo-African) diaspora in the United States, France, and elsewhere, the edge of Derrida's critique of the latent metaphysics operative within Marxist theory will be blunted, when not altogether misunderstood. In a broader sense, deconstruction may be compatible with political and cultural agendas that are more commonly acknowledged as traditional "African" concerns, including the European stigmatization of illiteracy,

the iconoclasticism of Judeo-Muslim hermeneutics, and the orality-aurality of traditional African culture. It goes without saying that the itinerary that I will sketch out here must also and necessarily reveal the limitations of deconstruction in addressing specifically African concerns, especially in building a viable and unified (or "gathered") concept of African identity that does not flounder upon the terrain of absolute ethnic, religious, and "racial" difference. Unexpectedly, *Specters of Marx* affirms a gathering of sorts, or a "bonding in difference" to quote Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,[3] but the "coming-together" that it promotes will no doubt prove too idiosyncratic for many Africans, including fellow Sephardic Jews who are more observant than Derrida. Whatever the limitations of Derrida's deconstruction in this instance, I will nonetheless affirm here the indisputable merits of this inaugural effort, especially as a critique of white European ethnocentrism.

The published text of *Specters of Marx* includes two lectures given by Derrida at the University of California, Riverside on April 22, 1993 and April 23, 1993, at the Whither Marxism? conference. The organizers of the conference, Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, state in the book's introduction that they had originally sought to bring together Marxist theorists from across the globe to discuss future directions for Marxism, following the demise of the Soviet Union and the so-called death of Marxism on a global scale. Magnus and Cullenberg wanted to host a conference that "would not consist of yet another autopsy administered mostly by Anglophone economists and policy analysts who typically were and are very far from the sites of struggle and transformation" (ix). To this end, representative Marxists from across the globe were invited to participate and offer their views on the future of Marxism, or to respond to the conference title's question Whither Marxism? It is significant that of those nations listed from which the roster of "distinguished thinkers and participants" were drawn, not a single reference to an African nation was made, despite the rich historical legacy of African theorists who have been influenced by Marxism, including figures like Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabril, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Thomas Sankara, to name only a few. If Marxism was conceived by the conference organizers as a truly global or international theory, rather than a merely Eurocentric one, Africa was once again left off the agenda of this prestigious and hopelessly academic affair.[4] There were, nonetheless, two notable guests who could lay claim to an African identity of sorts: Abdul JanMohammed and Jacques Derrida. JanMohammad gave an interesting paper on Michel Foucault's indebtedness to Marx, but his concerns were largely

irrelevant to the question of Marxism's future on the African continent. Like Derrida, JanMohammed is a nonblack, diasporic Africa but of Indo-Asiatic descent. In more bluntly racial terms, neither of the Africans invited to the Whither Marxism? conference was black, and neither was imagined as offering a particularly *African* perspective on the fate of Marxism. It is within this complex and paradoxical context that we may understand Derrida's decision to dedicate his lectures to former ANC secretary Chris Hani, once described as "the number one enemy" of pro-apartheid forces in South Africa. Like numerous other absent black African Marxists, Hani was killed not simply for the color of his skin, but for his obstinate commitments to a class-based politics. The specter of Hani haunts Derrida's intervention, not least as an absent African voice at this avowedly "international" gathering of Marxists.

One question that immediately confronts the reader of *Specters of Marx* is Derrida's problematic national identity in this assembly of Marxist theorists from across the globe: Is Derrida the "Marxist" who is meant when Magnus and Cullenberg list France among those honored nations that were represented? A national designation eliding Derrida's Sephardic Jewish ancestry, or the fact of his Algerian, Levantine, and paradoxical African heritage? The first sentence of Derrida's book reads as follows: "One name for another, a part for the whole: the historic violence of Apartheid can always be treated as a metonymy" (xx). If apartheid, which is said to be defunct but which flourishes today in places like Israel, Mauritania, and the Sudan, is evoked for its metonymic value, the historic violence of apartheid seems to justify Derrida's usurping of Chris Hani's rightful place, a displacement emphasizing the undeconstructible alterity of Hani, even as Derrida offers to stand in for him. Whether or not Derrida is justified in adopting this deliberately violent rhetorical strategy, neither Derrida nor the auditor of his lectures can ever really know: for, according to the terms of deconstructive intervention, such knowledge is not available to any of us, least of all to Derrida himself. What is *just* in our relationship to the other is finally *beyond* deconstruction, Derrida insists. Instead, justice is defined as an aim of this rather problematic and paradoxical affirmation: it is something to be hoped for, nothing more. Derrida therefore risks dislodging Hani, not to speak for that absent black African voice, but instead to affirm his solidarity for a fellow African. Hence, Derrida qualifies this unexpected gesture of solidarity by stating that, "one should never speak of the assassination of a man as a [mere] figure . . . [for] a man's life, as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol" (*Specters of Marx* xv).

Most readers of Derrida, even those who read him seriously and admire his work, understand and accept his reversal of speaking-writing binaries as a necessary deconstruction of the logocentric premises of Western thought. In this sense, Fredric Jameson (and many other Marxists) are at one with Derrida in seeking to undermine the secretly metaphysical and religious biases that are built into Western understandings of the real. What rarely gets emphasized, however, is the extent to which this enterprise is defined by Derrida in frankly racial terms; that is, logocentrism is also for Derrida a white man's mythology, a variety of Indo-European ethnocentrism. This point is perhaps made most explicitly in Derrida's "White Mythology" where he famously describes philosophers as "a sorry lot of poets [who] dim the colors of the ancient fables" (9). Derrida explicitly defines metaphysics as a "white mythology reflect[ing] Western culture": "[T]he white man takes his own mythology (Indo-European mythology)," Derrida writes, "his logos—that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason" (10). The Jewgreek Derrida appeals to the Greco-Roman Christian as the dark brother. It is no exaggeration to think of this prodigal son of a Greek father as engaged in a form of parricide, as a Maccabean slayer of Zeus.[5] But when the racial and ethical dimensions of Derrida's critique are ignored, a path is cleared to emphasize Derrida's alleged valorization of the written text over and against the spoken word. In such accounts, the point of deconstruction is commonly defined as recuperating and even celebrating the power of the written word, which has wrongly been stigmatized in the post-Socratic West. Critics of Derrida, even those who are happy to see the oral word finally put in its place, often adopt anti-Semitic rhetorical strategies by implying that Derrida is merely holding up the letter against the spirit of the law, which he—and all Jews—are said to privately worship. As Derrida notes, such misreadings prevail in large measure because even those who criticize and write about him "do not really want to read [him]," or at least read him very carefully ("Marx & Sons" 244). What is often missed is the fact that Derrida also—like Plato but for decidedly un-Platonic reasons—tends to prioritize the oral-aural word because of its nonvisual, nonreified, and temporal character. It is indeed significant that Derrida *speaks* at the Whither Marxism? conference, that his words reverberate off the eardrums of those Marxists and non-Marxists in attendance. Derrida's prioritizing of the oral-aural dimensions of this event is worth emphasizing here not only because such a gesture is wholly coherent in terms of the project he has called deconstruction, but also because it deepens his solidarity with those Africans

who were not invited to this highly literate, academic, and decidedly white conference setting.

The European discourse of racial essentialism, particularly in describing the peoples of North Africa and the Western Sudan, is at one with a literacy based hierarchy that imputes a degraded status to "illiterate" black African peoples, but also "Semitic" (i.e., Jewish, Arab, and Fulani) and Berber Africans. In other words, European and Euro-American peoples have historically imagined the inferiority of such peoples not only on the basis of their nearness or remoteness from white skin coloring but also according to their degrees of literacy, specifically defined in reference to their ability to read certain kinds of books (i.e., moveable type print rather than chirographic media). If Derrida is a "privileged" African, he is therefore privileged for at least two specific reasons: (1) his hard-earned access to certain kinds of reading material, including institutions where such books are taught; and (2) the color of his skin, which marks him as a "nearly white" African man. The vast majority of Africans today remain in a state of illiteracy—or, at least in what is conceptualized as illiteracy in the West where it is always a pejorative or degraded term—not because the gospel of print media has not been spread as fully it might, as if the problematic of literacy-illiteracy was reducible to economics, but because they embrace culturally specific and highly developed belief systems that tend to be skeptical, when they do not simply reject, Western ideologies of industrial literacy, especially as a Good that precedes dialogue. In the Sahel, for instance, fewer than 15 percent of African peoples today are literate in print media, despite the existence of writing systems in West Africa for more than a thousand years. In the context of the Western Sudan, Derrida's gesture of emphasizing the oral-aural word as an event-in-time could hardly go unnoticed. But there is more to this gesture than meets the eye. In fact, Derrida's gesture is largely unintelligible except as a deconstruction of the hegemony of the eye/I within Western metaphysical systems like Marxism. It also parallels Judeo-Muslim critiques of Euro-Christian philosophy that assert the doctrine of the Incarnate Word as a linguistic sign that flourishes in the otherwise wordless field of the ontological, or as a silently present Word that is seen by the human eye rather than spoken by the mouth and heard by the ear.

Judeo-Muslim peoples who reject the archetype of the Logos (*ta'wil*), or Word-Made-Flesh, and remain faithful to the ban on graven images, have understandably exhibited far more skepticism about the Word that enters the body via the eye, a word whose status for them is secondary to the word-event-in-time, the word that enters

the body through the portals of the ear. In the Biblical account of Abraham's three visitors at the terebinth of Mamre, Abraham is not able to recognize the divinity of his guests by sight alone. The version of this tale offered in Genesis twice emphasizes the fact that Abraham sees his guests without realizing who they are: it is only when Abraham listens to the words of his unknown guest, following his acts of hospitality, that he recognizes his divine visitors (Genesis 18:1–10). In both Judaism and Islam, one learns about God through the ears, through *hearing* the word of God. For Jews, the law encompasses both the written and oral traditions, which were believed to have been transmitted simultaneously. "All the precepts which Moses received on Sinai were given together with their interpretation . . ." Maimonides wrote in his "Introduction" to the *Mishneh Torah*. "Though the Oral Law was not committed to writing, Moses taught it in its entirety in his court" (Peters II 161). It is nonetheless remarkable that this emphasis upon aurality in Judaism in particular is often misconstrued as a fetishizing of the written word or law, a tradition that dates back as far as the *Letter to the Romans*, authored by Paul, and *On Christian Teaching*, authored by Augustine, the latter whom denigrates Jewish peoples by labeling them as "slaves to the sign" (74). In the case of Islam, it is well known that the Quran itself, as the coeternal and uncreated Word of God, is said to exist in the Seventh Heaven, inscribed upon golden tablets. The merely written Quran is not even recognized as the Quran but is instead called the *mus'haf*, a degraded textual artifact.

In the last forty years, much has been learned about African beliefs regarding the priority of the aural word, the word that is heard and not seen (and not even necessarily spoken in the case of the talking drums of the Mossi in Burkina Faso).[6] In the Sahel, for instance, the force of the word as pure sound may be said to exceed its semantic content. Studies of the Songhay in particular by scholars like Jean Rouch, Thomas Hale, Paul Stoller, and many others have emphasized this question perhaps most persuasively.[7] Derrida's *Specters of Marx* therefore advances an arguably *African* critique of Western thought systems with reference to the eye, the optic lens where Marx's specters make their appearance. In fact, Derrida's complex critique of spectrality in Marx may be haunted by ancient scholarly authorities like the second-century C.E. rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and the fourteenth-century Kabbala scholar Moses of Leon. In the Jewish book of mysticism that came to be known as Kabbala (sometimes spelled Qabbalah or Cabala), a similar fine distinction is made between the soul and "outer garments" of the Torah, a clarification that Derrida echoes in his critique

of Marx: "When the Torah came down into this world," the Zohar informs us, "it clothed itself with the garments of this world, otherwise the world could not have endured it. So the stories of the Torah are only the Torah's outer clothing. That man is lost who mistakenly thinks that that clothing is the Torah itself, and that there is nothing more to it" (Peters II 76). It is helpful in this context to remember that what Derrida alternately calls *écriture* is interchangeable not only with the English terms "text" or "writing" (as it is commonly translated from the French) but also writing or *scripture*, a term that may be illuminatingly substituted for the word "Torah," as it appears in the above citation from the Zohar. For Derrida, the thing that we allegedly see is "hauntological" rather than ontological—"not metaphysical but 'deconstructive'" ("Marx & Sons" 244), an "experience of the impossible" (*Specters of Marx* 175).

However powerful Derrida's deconstruction of spectrality in Marx may be, it remains of limited value within an African and Middle Eastern context, not only because of the idiosyncratic nature of Derrida's approach, but also because of significant omissions implied by his critique. More than four decades have passed since Derrida's widely discussed critique of Western ethnography in his early book *Of Grammatology* (1967). Given the natural evolution of Derrida's writings over time, it may be helpful to briefly return to his discussion of Claude Lévi-Strauss's avowed Marxist theory of writing and ethnography. Here, Derrida suggests that Lévi-Strauss erroneously defines writing as an inherently imperialistic and corruptive agent that spoils the natural innocence of societies lacking in this technology. In opposition to Lévi-Strauss, Derrida insists that "all societies capable of producing, that is to say of obliterating, their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play, practice writing in general" (109). In one of his most widely discussed assertions, Derrida goes on to insist that there is no such thing as a society without writing, or that "[n]o reality or concept correspond[s] to the expression 'society without writing'" (109). Instead, Derrida argues that Lévi-Strauss's characterization of the Nambikwara Indians of South America as a people without writing betrays his own deluded longing for the plentitude and self-presence of speech (110). In much of the commentary that has been published on Derrida's critique of Lévi-Strauss, the emphasis has tended to fall upon how Derrida's approach restores dignity to the language of the Nambikwara people, as well as the languages of preliterate societies everywhere, not only by showing how such peoples obviously possess a "writing" of their own, but also by delineating the inherently degrading ethnocentrism of the white

European man who would "deny the practice of writing in general to a society capable of obliterating the proper [name]" (110). Derrida therefore offers us an ostensibly progressive critique of ethnography in opposition to Lévi-Strauss's inadvertently oppressive and logocentric perspective on writing. Ironically, Derrida achieves this by insisting upon the violent nature of Nambikwara culture, as well as "the violence of arche-writing, the violence of difference, of classification, and of the system of appellations" (110); that is, Derrida elevates the status of the Nambikwaras' language by emphasizing their patently violent and often inhumane cultural practices, including rape, warfare, poisoning, and assassination (135–136). Above all, Derrida insists that the Nambikwara were not "good" or naturally innocent in the way that Lévi-Strauss implies.

Derrida's intervention has indeed contributed toward a wide ranging rethinking of the discipline of anthropology in the West, as well as many unexamined biases that are latent in ethnographic writings on oral-aural peoples. Many critics of Derrida have nonetheless remained unsatisfied with how his critique of Lévi-Strauss elides important differences in oral-aural and written languages. "Homo sapiens has been in existence for 30,000 to 50,000 years," Walter J. Ong states in his study *Orality and Literacy* (2). "The earliest script dates from only 6,000 years ago." Eric Havelock has similarly argued that "from the standpoint of human evolution, a perspective on the 'orality'... of the human animal requires us to recognize that oral language is fundamental to our species, whereas reading and writing wear the appearance of a recent accident" (*Origins of Western Literacy* 6). Critics of Derrida like Ong have emphasized how Derrida ignores the alphabetic reduction of the temporal or spoken word into the reified or thing-like word existing primarily in the dimension of space. One may agree or disagree with Derrida that the essential structure of all language, even in oral-aural or "preliterate" cultures, is that of "script" (*écriture*), without being fully satisfied with his failure to theorize important differences between oral-aural and literate societies. In other words, to claim that the Nambikwara also possessed writing, even if they obviously possessed only rudimentary chirographic writing technologies remains insufficient in itself. For the writing possessed by the Nambikwara is clearly not the same as that possessed by early European ethnographers like Mungo Park, Heinrich Barth, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and countless others. In the West African context, where chirographic writing existed some eight hundred years before Park's arrival on the shores of the Djoliba, typographic print media was virtually unknown, and it remains even today a relatively

marginalized form of human communication. As opposed to countless indigenous languages like Moré, Djioula, and many others, English and French were not only spoken languages in the late eighteenth century, as was true of the majority of indigenous Sahelian languages, they were also typographic languages possessing hundreds of thousands of written books, including extensive word lists, dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopedias, and so on. To be more precise, European languages at this time may be defined as grapholects containing recorded vocabularies of over a million words. However complicated the syntax, the unwritten languages of the Western Sudan (with obvious exceptions like Arabic and Fulfulde) by necessity could not have included more than a few thousand words, the majority of which had no known etymologies. A grapholect may be defined as "a transdialectical language formed by a deep commitment to writing," Ong states. "Writing gives a grapholect a power far exceeding that of any purely oral dialect" (*Orality and Literacy* 8). Not unlike any other weapons technology, grapholects can perform wide-ranging destructive services for those who possess them. In this respect, the primary difference between West African and European peoples consisted *not* in the possession of chirographic and alphabetic writing, but in the impact of moveable-type print, developed more than four hundred years before Park's arrival in Bamako. The main psychological effect of this development is the word's increasing reification in the dimension of space, the illusory transformation of the word as visual spectacle, or an object that, like any other object, may be allegorically recoded as commodity fetish.

In his critique of Lévi-Strauss, Derrida acknowledges this difference in one brief sentence before hurrying on to advance his enormously broad definition of writing and his condemnation of Lévi-Strauss's denigration of the Nambikwara Indians' so-called writing-less society. "It is true," Derrida admits, "and one cannot ignore it, that the appearance of certain systems of writing three or four thousand years ago was an extraordinary leap in the history of life" (*Of Grammatology* 131). Derrida acknowledges here the existence of an enormous gap between speaking and writing systems, but two sentences later, without offering further commentary upon the epistemological consequences of this gap, Derrida merely extends his ideological critique of Lévi-Strauss whom he criticizes for violently interpolating the Nambikwara within his own metaphysical and logocentric theory "in the name of a Marxist hypothesis" (131). Far from theorizing the implications of the existence of this gap, Derrida will content himself with stigmatizing the epistemological violence of

ethnographers like Lévi-Strauss who blindly endorse phonetic models of writing that "separate writing from speech with an ax" (121). It is possible that Derrida declines to explore the implications of this "ax-hewn" fissure because of deep-seated and unarticulated religious biases that are latent within his own position. In an essay on Jabès that appeared in the same year as *Of Grammatology*, for instance, Derrida tells us that "the difference between speech and writing is sin, the anger of God emerging from itself, lost immediacy, work outside the garden" (*Writing and Difference* 68). Theorists who are far from conceptualizing this distinction as "sin" will understandably not share Derrida's indignation at ethnographers like Lévi-Strauss who find it useful to explore what happens when chirographic and typographic writing technologies are introduced among predominately oral-aural peoples.

Specters of Marx does not really undermine Derrida's earlier critique of Lévi-Strauss's "Marxist" ethnography and theory of writing as much as it more fully clarifies Derrida's possible motivations and most significant elisions. What this later text by Derrida suggests is that the critical emphasis upon the Nambikwaras' possession of their own system of writing may be misplaced, for the true impetus of Derrida's critique may be his disdain for Lévi-Strauss's failure to respect the Nambikwaras' own highly developed and esoteric oral-aural system of language, rather than any slight to writing itself. Lévi-Strauss is not only guilty of upholding a naively phonetic model of writing, one that does harm to the Nambikwara people, he also steals his way into their hermetic interpretive circles, reserved only for elected tribal members. That the foreign interloper does this by abusing the trust of the Nambikwara children, who are more welcoming in their reception of him than their parents, makes him all the more monstrous for Derrida, who merely assumes that his reader will accept his politically motivated critique of Lévi-Strauss. In the end, this may well be Lévi-Strauss's greatest transgression for Derrida, his forced entry into a realm inhabited by the allegedly "pure" or "childish" *initiates*, or the more "naïve" among those who possess the guilty secrets of Nambikwara belief systems (*Of Grammatology* 110–111). Lévi-Strauss herein becomes pedophile or child rapist of the simple Nambikwara girls who are innocent in their youth but wise by virtue of their possession of language.

Another key question not sufficiently articulated in Derrida's culturally specific defense of the literate orality of the Nambikwara is an inherently ideological one, but also one that complicates Derrida's claim that he "has no stable position" on any specific Abrahamic

religion (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 21–22): Who has access to this always already literate word that is spoken? Unlike Christians and Muslims, Jewish peoples have traditionally upheld the perspective that the unwritten or Oral Law remains the distinctive mark of Israel, a gift given by God to Jewish peoples to distinguish them from other nations: "It was not given in writing," *Numbers Rabbah* records, "so that the Gentiles might not falsify it, as they had with the Written Law, and say that they are the true Israel" (Peters II 158); or, as the first-century C.E. Sanhedrin put it, "Greater stringency applies to the observance of the [spoken] words of the Scribes than to the observance of the words of the written Law" (175). What must also be emphasized here, in opposition to African beliefs about the magical power of the spoken word, is that the "exegesis" exercised by the Nambikwara remains a merely human and presumably "fallen" form of language; that is, if the spirit or breath of God first brought the world into being, God's voice, for Derrida, has long since fallen into silence: "God separated himself from himself in order to let us speak . . . ," Derrida writes. "He did so not by speaking but by keeping still . . . Our writing . . . starts with the stifling of his voice" (*Writing and Difference* 67). Derrida's remarks about God's silence are intriguing as theological speculation, but they will obviously have a far more limited appeal for those who do not share his affinities for Judaism. Despite the fact that Derrida succeeds in restoring a valorized concept of preliterate language among the Nambikwara, one that seems to be on an equal footing with those societies possessing more fully developed writing technologies, there remains an undeconstructed defense of privilege—albeit a non-Greek form of privilege—latent in Derrida's approach, for if inherently evangelical belief systems like Christianity, Romanticism, and Marxism have been exposed for their ideological shortcomings, Jewish varieties of imperialism remain amazingly impervious to deconstructive critique in either *Of Grammatology* or *Specters of Marx.* This is true in spite of the fact that deconstruction's viability, its very relevance as a theory, depends upon it remaining at all times the deconstruction of unmerited privilege *whenever and wherever its manifestation.*

In the case of South African apartheid, Derrida took an admirable stand against an obviously racist government, using his considerable gifts to deconstruct the word "apartheid" in a widely read and discussed essay published while Nelson Mandela still languished in a South African prison. Few people of color, however, especially those in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the postcolonial world, will remain satisfied with Derrida's far more vague approach to the

question of Israeli apartheid in Palestine. Black African Muslims, who have themselves experienced centuries of Arab Muslim imperialism and racism in Mali, Mauritania, and elsewhere on the continent, know very well that the on-going Zionist colonization of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights is an extension—albeit one with a painful history of its own—of white colonization emanating from Europe and the United States. Derrida identifies the ethnocentric dimensions of Marxism as a white European enterprise, and by implication a species of imperialist ideology. In advancing this critique, it is significant that Derrida emphasizes the problem or question of listening rather than seeing, insisting upon a concept of the other as wholly other or different. How do we respect the absolute otherness of the other, especially at the moment that we claim affiliation with him/her? This is one of the key problems or even paradoxes of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. It is also the reason why the name of Chris Hani is absolutely essential to this text. "I cannot reach the other. I cannot know the other from the inside," Derrida insists. "That is not an obstacle but the condition of love, of friendship, and of war . . . So dissociation is the condition of community, the condition of any unity or identity as such" (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 14–15). Derrida emphasizes that our relation to the other must be defined in terms of *justice*, a concept that is beyond the law, beyond deconstruction. It is in this sense that *Specters of Marx* seems to affirm Derrida's own identity as a "nearly black" African man, sharing the aims of many other black Africans like Chris Hani. "The scholar of the future, the 'intellectual' of tomorrow," Derrida concludes, "should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with ghost[s] but . . . *how to let them speak or how to give them back speech* [my emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 176). If *Specters of Marx* represents Derrida's "definitive entry into social and political philosophy," as the blurb on his book jacket advertises, this political and deconstructive inauguration is at one with Derrida's "yes-saying" to the desire to hear the silenced voices of African ghosts like Chris Hani. In his book *Specters of Marx*, but also at the Whither Marxism? conference at Riverside, California, this does not seem to be a matter of mere intellectual curiosity for him but justice. Whatever its limitations, or latent theological motivations, such an effort should and must be acknowledged as a thoughtful and significant intervention on behalf of African peoples everywhere, no matter how impatient one might be at its historical necessity, especially at a conference of Marxist theorists.

CHAPTER 2

Deconstruction of the Veil

In "A Silkworm of One's Own," Jacques Derrida raises a number of provocative questions with respect to Judeo-Christian beliefs about the veil or prayer shawl, questions that are timely in the post-9/11 world. In previously published texts, Derrida traces the history of deconstruction to the German reformer Martin Luther, who influenced philosophers such as Fredrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. While Derrida's deconstruction of the Pauline epistles denies the authority extended to them in the Lutheran tradition, it also contributes to a rethinking of the Christian religion, reinforcing the importance of Paul for critical debate. Although this chapter focuses mainly on Derrida's deconstruction of the veil in the Judeo-Christian religion, the Islamic *hijab* also provides an important point of reference. In this chapter, Fatima Mernissi's insightful discussion of the Islamic *hijab* in her book *Harem politique* (1987), translated in English as *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991), will be compared with Derrida's deconstruction of the Pauline veil. Although analyzing the formation of irreducibly different religious traditions, Derrida and Mernissi similarly argue that powerful and influential men misappropriated the veil in order to exclude women from positions of power. They also link nascent interpretations of the veil with pre-Christian and pre-Islamic customs, which both religions initially sought to repel. While Derrida has not proposed any deliberate deconstruction of Christianity, as one finds, for instance, in the writings of his former associate Jean-Luc Nancy, his thoughtful analysis of Paul's writings on the veil cannot be disassociated from an affirmative thinking of the Christian tradition, albeit one seeking to reexamine its Platonic—and Pauline—inheritance. Mernissi, on the other hand, explicitly affirms her loyalty to the Islamic religion and militates against the interpretive violence that is enacted against it, immediately following the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

Derrida's "Un ver à soie: points de vue piqué sur l'autre voile," translated into the English title, "A Silkworm of One's Own," was published in a book entitled *Voiles* (1998) (*Veils* [1998]), which he jointly authored with Hélène Cixous. Although Derrida's own essay directly responds to Cixous's initial contribution, his remarks would be difficult to comprehend without reference to Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians.* Derrida's deconstruction of Paul is elliptical, carried out mostly in the footnotes of his text on Cixous's narrative. Among other factors, Derrida is troubled by Paul's claim "to know *literally* what is the breath of spirit [my emphasis]" (*Veils* 76). The Pauline distinction between letter and spirit is problematic for Derrida, who suggests that Paul exclusively associates the "letter" with death and the "spirit" with life. The opposition of letter and spirit, or *specter* and *spirit* in Derridean terms, reinforces the Platonic claim that speaking is inherently more truthful than writing, which is construed in Western philosophy as a "dangerous supplement" to speaking. Derrida suggests then that the Pauline critique of Judaism promotes a basic—and possibly deliberate—misunderstanding, but one that has had devastating consequences through the centuries, particularly for Jews. Traditionally, Jews have affirmed that the Law was revealed to Moses in its entirety on Mount Sinai, including the Torah, or what Christians call the first five books of the Old Testament, and the Talmud, which is a written transcription of the oral scriptures that remains unknown to most Christians. The suggestion that Jews become "miserable slaves of the sign" (or the "dead" written law), as Augustine once put it (*On Christian Teaching* 72), and thereby ignore the oral, embodied, or living word, is a popular misconception influencing Christian criticisms of Judaism for centuries. Paul criticizes Jews for their refusal to affirm the Platonic concept of the Logos, Derrida suggests. While Derrida respectfully refers to Paul as a "Saint," he also sharply rebukes him in this respect: "[The] author [of the *Epistle to the Romans*] thought he knew the literality of the letter. He prided himself on being able to distinguish, for the first time, he no doubt thought, wrongly, the circumcision of the heart, according to the breath and the spirit, from the circumcision of body or flesh, circumcision 'according to the letter'" (*Veils* 75–76). Derrida points out that the distinction between "circumcision of the heart" and actual circumcision long predates Paul in Jewish thought and is by no means cancelled because Christians make use of it in order to stigmatize Jews (*Acts of Religion* 85). "Before Saint Paul, the Bible tells of the circumcision of the lips, that is to say, in the tongue, of the tongue (Exod. 6:12, 30), of the ears (Jer. 6:10), and of the heart (Lev. 26:41),"

Derrida points out (*Sovereignties in Question* 59). "The 'spiritualization' [of circumcision], as one often says, the interiorization that consists in extending the meaning of the word well beyond the sense of the cut into the flesh does not date from Saint Paul: it is not limited to the circumcision of the soul or the heart" (55). For these reasons, among others, Derrida even describes Paul's legacy as "monstrous" and criticizes him for his excessive pride (*Veils* 76).

Derrida's response to Paul becomes clear when compared to his views on Cixous's "Savoir," where she narrates how laser surgery on her eyes transforms her life. Before undergoing surgery, Cixous describes her vision as profoundly myopic. In fact, she experienced great difficulty performing many ordinary daily tasks, including navigating her way through city streets. After surgery, Cixous marvels at her newfound vision and freedom but also laments the loss of her myopia. Surprised at her own reaction, she admits that she feels nostalgic about her myopia and even mourns its loss, which she compares to the loss of a veil: "She had been born with the veil in her eyes. . . . She had been born with the veil in her soul" (*Veils* 6). Cixous also compares her eyes to "miraculous hands" that enable her to touch the world: "She hadn't realized the day before that eyes are miraculous hands, had never enjoyed the delicate tact of the cornea, the eyelashes, the most powerful hands" (9). In another place, Cixous refers to the loss of her myopia as a "miracle" and a "*seeing-with-the-naked-eye* [Cixous's emphasis]" (9). Cixous's text is rich in metaphor and hyperbole: her comparison of eyes with hands—a philosophical theme that Derrida explores in his reading of Jean-Luc Nancy (see Derrida's *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* [2005])—resonates with Aristotle's thesis that touching is the master sense, or that all senses other than touch are mere enhancements to sensation, whereas touch is indispensable. In this sense, vision is subordinate to touch, the sense of touch, or is itself a form of touching. Eyes then are really hands; they involve a manner of touching the world in a way that is not figurative but actual. While Derrida obviously appreciates the sincerity of Cixious's personal experience, he does not refrain from selecting a few of the most troubling figures in her narrative and posing his own provocative questions in response. In response to her narrative, Derrida not only draws upon their long-standing friendship, as well as his intimate knowledge of her voluminous writings—many which frankly acknowledge their debt to Derrida, and which have also helped to shape the very concept of women's writing in France and the United States—but also their shared heritage as Sephardic Jews whose ancestors were forced to be conversant with hegemonic Christian beliefs as

a matter of survival. Both Derrida and Cixous grew up in Algeria, within a predominately Islamic society with its own unique history of the veil, which was affected by French colonial policies directed against the veil in that era. Writing as a Jew on Christian theology, Derrida remains within a Greco-Platonic and Judeo-Christian frame of reference in his response to Cixous, but he is also sensitive to complex Muslim articulations of this question, which are not directly explored in his essay. In effect, Derrida suggests that Cixous adopts a Pauline theology of the veil, and he upbraids her for this indirect betrayal of their earlier work.

Derrida's harsh critique of Paul, while obviously drawing from the Nietzschean-Heideggerian deconstruction (or *destrukion*) of Western ontology, takes its impetus from far more ancient sources of Jewish and ancient Egyptian religion. Beyond the matter of Derrida's loyalty to his Jewish heritage, it is undeniable that Paul's writings on women have enormously influenced the history of gender and sexuality in the West. Arguably, Paul can be said to provide the theological foundations for the subordination of women to men within Western society. For Derrida, Paul is the phallologocentric thinker par excellence. Saul-Paul was, of course, the Jew-Greek convert, the Jew who fiercely hated Christians but then experienced a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, thereafter becoming the apostle to the Gentiles. It is important to remember the historical backdrop of Christianity's emergence within an ancient colonial context. The Pharisees, or "the separated ones," along with the Essenes and other Jews of this era, sought desperately to escape Rome's imperial hegemony. In contrast to these fierce Jewish opponents of Hellenization, Paul is the Jewish-Greek Apostle, not only because he was the apostle for the Greco-Roman world in an obvious historical sense, but also because of the powerful influence of Plato upon his thinking, or because he succumbs to what Derrida calls "the logocentric psychosis" (*Acts of Religion* 159). In fact, Derrida also criticizes the medieval Jewish theologian Maimonides for similarly Platonizing—that is to say, Hellenizing—Jewish religion: "It is in the name of reason [*logos*] that [Maimonides] founds the Jewish Reformation," Derrida states (163). Derrida's thesis with respect to the Platonic elements of the Christian religion is not particularly new (Augustine, for instance, addressed criticisms that Jesus "plagiarized" Plato some 1,700 years ago); however, his discussion of the Pauline veil offers insight into why deconstruction has so profoundly influenced feminist theory over the last forty years.

In the case of Cixous's "Savoir," Derrida cautions a fellow Jewish writer to rethink her claim that—like the male convert to Christianity

in Paul—she is really finished with the veil. Though his argument is complex, Derrida's criticisms can be more clearly comprehended if the deconstructive critique of binary thinking is considered. Like Plato, Paul creates a metaphysical hierarchy that Derrida will seek to deconstruct; that is, Paul advances a form of binary thinking not merely with respect to the living spoken word, which is pitted against dead writing, but also with respect to gender differences. In 1 Corinthians, Paul does not really make the case that women must be veiled when they enter a church or synagogue. In fact, Paul merely reaffirms long-standing cultural practices of the Jewish faith. What is new about Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians is his suggestion with respect to the clothing of men, not women; specifically, Paul argues that men no longer need to wear a head covering in the temple. To this day, Christianity differs from Judaism in this respect: Jewish men are instructed to wear head coverings in places of worship, whereas Christian men, following Paul, do not believe such a head-covering is necessary.[1] In other words, Derrida believes that Paul Platonizes gender differences and thereby makes an error of colossal proportions, an error that will reverberate throughout the ages. In 1 Corinthians 11:3–10, Paul states

> But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is man; and the head of Christ is God. / Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. / But every woman that prayeth or prophesyeth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. / For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. / For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman of the man. / Neither was the man created for woman; but the woman for man. / For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

Those familiar with Derrida's deconstruction of the Platonic speaking-writing binary will not be all that surprised by his similar response to Paul. In the case of the former, the Logos is said by Plato to be the transcendental word that is inscribed on the soul. For Derrida, Paul replicates a Platonic logic when he invokes the law that is "written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on the fleshly tablets of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:2–3), a metaphor that will prove decisive for the neo-Platonic convert Augustine (*On Christian Teaching* 94). In the *Gospel of John*, Jesus Christ is also compared to the Logos, and for Western Christians, the identification

of Christ with the Logos marks an important departure from the Platonic doctrine of the Logos, insofar as the Logos no longer simply implies a scriptural image of a kind of "invisible writing," but also the historical personage of Jesus of Nazareth. While the Platonic Logos is not wholly without anthropomorphic features, it is not before the Christian era identified with the historically existing personage, Jesus Christ the God-Man, who is for Christians the very image of God that is inscribed upon the human heart. In Islam, by way of contrast, a parallel logocentrism comes to be developed, but the Logos is not anthropomorphized, or even construed as something that is seen. For instance, in his interpretive response to the *Gospel of John*, the Baghdadi theologian al-Ghazali will state that "the 'Word' [Logos] can be employed to connote the essence as defined by knowledge or speech, without any implication of the essence having the attribute of corporeality" (*Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Vol. I* 162). Instead, the Logos is compared to the Heavenly Book. In other words, in Christianity and Islam both, one affirms the existence of a Divine Word that dwells beyond the realm of the five senses; however, Christians and Muslims employ different metaphors to describe this transcendental Word: for Christians, the Word is conflated with a gendered and historical man; for Muslims, the Word is a Heavenly Book, of which the Quran is said to be a spoken replica. In relation to questions of gender, however, the application of these contrasting metaphors of the Heavenly Word enormously influence the historical, social, and political development of both religions.

With reference to the Pauline articulation of this question, Derrida shows that a Platonic logic operates in Paul's letter. One way of demonstrating this might be to underscore differences between Abrahamic religions in their interpretation of the second commandment of the Mosaic Law; that is, the injunction against the creation of graven images. In the Orthodox and Catholic Christian religion, the second command is struck from the Mosaic Law, and the tenth commandment is bifurcated into two commandments, hence preserving the symmetrical integrity of ten commandments; that is, the injunction against coveting the house of one's neighbor and the wife of one's neighbor, formally one single commandment, is split into two distinct commandments. The Christian argument for omitting the second commandment is as follows: the second commandment, or the injunction against making graven images, is a remnant of the "old" law (or "Old" Testament) that Christianity supersedes. This is so because Christians, unlike Muslims, believe that Jesus is God. The essence of the Christian religion is the proclamation that "Jesus is

God," whereas for Muslims, Jesus is merely a great prophet and messiah, but not a God. Christians argue, however, that since Jesus is God, and since God entered into the realm of the five senses, humanity has now seen God. Humanity knows what God looks like, and God is a man. God represented himself to humanity as such, offering irrefutable proof of His true nature. In effect, God was seen. Therefore, it is now licit to create representations of Him. The old injunction against creating such images is no longer binding. Muslims do not accept the proposition that Jesus is God, so it follows that the ban on graven images remains relevant. This is also why images cannot be fashioned of the prophets, and why mosques are adorned with calligraphy from the Quran, but not images of Muhammad, Jesus, Moses, and other important figures. Later, Protestant reformers restore the second commandment in opposition to the Christian orthodoxy, which is also why the sanctuaries of Protestant churches tend to be plainer than Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Paul's reasons for eschewing the veil are similar to the Catholic church's reasons for eliminating the second commandment: Jesus is God, and humanity now knows what God looks like. God is a man. The Logos is a human being with a specific gender. The Logos is a gendered man. Man is made in that specific image. Man is a reliable copy of the God who was seen: he is the image and glory of God, whereas woman is the image and glory of man. From Derrida's perspective, the logic of the dangerous supplement is fully operative in Paul's argument; or, Paul implies that Man is a more truthful copy of the Logos (as speaking is a more truthful copy of the Logos, or a legitimate child of the Father in Heaven), whereas woman is a mere copy of a copy, a replica with a difference (as writing is further removed from the Logos or is the illegitimate child of the Father in Heaven). In effect, Paul defines woman according to what she lacks, and what she lacks is a penis. Woman must wear a veil in order to cover this natural absence. By way of contrast, men do not need to wear a veil, Paul suggests, because they are in no way lacking.

The teachings of Jesus and the Epistles of Paul coincide with the teachings of Socrates-Plato in obvious ways, regardless of whether or not there was any direct influence or cultural transmission. (It is nonetheless difficult to imagine that the teachings of the Greek philosophers did not influence the academies of Palestine at this time.) One similarity is the shared parable of the sower, which is told by Socrates in the "The Phaedrus" and by Jesus in the synoptic gospels. Both Socrates and Jesus explicitly compare the word to the seed, which the farmer sows into the soil. In the version told in the Gospels,

the seed lands in rocky soil and does not bear fruit, but in other cases, it lands among thistles, and its slender stalks are strangled. The seed also manages to fall in fertile soil where it bears fruit. The metaphor of the word-seed, following the impossible or poetic logic in which "A" is "B" (or in which the word *is* the seed), inevitably includes the human seed or male semen, whereas the soul or soil, where the word is implanted tends to be conflated with the womb, uterus, or matrix, a comparison that is made explicit in "The Phaedrus." Paul refuses to allow women the right to speak in the church largely on Platonic grounds. In other words, women are not only lacking in the sense that they have no phallus, but also because they have no seeds. "In its Latin etymology," Derrida points out, "witness, *témoin* (*testis*), the one testifying, is the one who is present as a third (*terstis*). We would have to look very closely to understand what this might imply. *Testis* has a homonym in Latin. It usually occurs in the plural, to mean 'testicles'... Etymologically testis means the one who is present as the 'third' person (*terstis*) at a transaction where two persons are concerned" (*Sovereignties in Question* 72–73). In his essay on Plato, Derrida points out that "liquid is the element of the *pharmakon*" (*Dissemination* 152). If the word, for Plato, is a kind of medicine, having the power to both cure and cause great harm, this medicine is imagined as a kind of bodily fluid. The spoken word enters the body as a wet wind, leaving it trace through the portals of the ears. The written word similarly consists of wet ink, which, after drying upon the flattened surface of the paper, enters the body upon the wet lens of the eyes where it too leaves its trace. The trace is a material residue that remains in the body in the absence of the word. In Western metaphysics, however, the traces or bodily secretions of men are imagined to be superior to those of women. Aristotle, for instance, describes the catamenia or bodily secretions of females as impure because they do not contain the principle of the soul (or *psyche*). Male semen, by way of contrast, is said to bear the immortal soul within it, leading Aristotle to conclude that woman is a kind of mutilated man.

Derrida's title, "A Silkworm of One's Own," alludes to Virginia Woolf's famous essay "A Room of One's Own." Refracted through a Freudian lens, the image of the worm implies obvious phallic connotations. The worm also, as Derrida himself suggests, connotes the Biblical snake in the Garden of Eden and is therefore linked to knowledge (*Veils* 90). In effect, to possess a worm of one's own means possessing a phallus of one's own. As Cixous urges in her famous essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Derrida encourages women-writers to write the body, or to write their sexed experience in more deliberate

ways. Following Freud, in Cixous's often-anthologized essay, the Medusa is a figure of the vagina; hence, Cixous speaks frankly of writing in white milk ("Laugh of the Medusa" 1458), or writing with the fluids of the female body. The silkworm is a worm or phallus, but it is also a worm that leaves a kind of wet trail or bodily fluid in its wake. From this fluid comes silk, a substance from which beautiful fabrics can be woven. Derrida speaks of a childhood experience during which he collected silkworms (*Veils* 87–91). Against Platonic, Aristotlean, and Pauline metaphors, Derrida therefore poses the metaphor of the silkworm as a feminine penis that emits a feminine semen, seed, or bodily fluid. Derrida deconstructs Platonized and Pauline conceptions of the Logos, weighing against them the notion of a feminine word-seed. However, Derrida claims that he does not seek to create a new female-centered hierarchy, or champion the phallic mother against the Logos-wielding man, but to move beyond binary thinking altogether, to the extent that this is possible. Derrida's suggestion that woman may possess a silkworm of her own is consistent with Cixous's notion that "the penis gets around in [her] texts" as well ("Laugh of the Medusa" 1464); that is, Derrida does not attempt to turn women into men with little penises; or, if woman also has a penis, men can also be said to have a vagina. The ear, for instance, as the receptacle that receives the word-seed of the other, is like a vagina, a bodily receptacle wherein the word-seed is deposited (*The Ear of the Other* 52–53). In opposition to essentialist concepts of gender, Derrida will suggest that it is not possible to "know for certain what a feminine and masculine body is" (183). It is also not possible to know that there are only two specific genders: "I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices," Derrida states. "…this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, [and] multiply the body of each 'individual'" (184).

Derrida also objects to Paul's references to natural differences between men and women, which can be known for certain:

> Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? / Does not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? / But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. (1 Corinthians 11:13–15)

According to Paul, nature teaches humanity that women should wear their hair long, and that men should wear their hair short. Derrida

unpacks Paul's logic with a little help from Freud, suggesting that feminine pubic hair, for Paul, is also a kind of veil that grows as a covering. What this veil of hair covers is the fact of sexual difference. In this psychoanalytic reading, the veil in Paul is means of covering woman's lack of a penis. Pubic hair is a kind of natural veil growing over the pudendum. Derrida suggests that this is what Paul means when he claims that long hair on women forms a natural covering or veil. It covers the site where the phallus is not, or it covers a natural absence. By way of contrast, Paul also claims that a man who grows his hair long, or who drapes himself in a veil, signals that he has no penis—and this is an abomination. Paul's views, in this respect, echo traditional Jewish laws about castration. For instance, in the *Book of Deuteronomy*, one finds the perplexing law banishing eunuchs and the disabled from worship in the temples: "He whose testicles are crushed or whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:1). In Pauline theology, it is an unnatural travesty for a man to dress as a woman or to engage in non-procreative sexual activity; hence, Derrida jokes that he himself wears his Jewish veil, prayer shawl, or head-covering as a means of going in drag, for the logic of Paul's argument seems to suggest that the Jewish man, by clinging to the veil or prayer shawl makes a transvestite of himself. From this perspective, Paul urges men to unveil themselves because he believes that they are identical albeit sensual copies of the Phallo-Logos, the "truly existing intangible essence" in the realm of the transcendent (*Plato's Phaedrus* 28).

Derrida's analysis of the Pauline veil similarly implies a critique of the Freudian theory of penis envy, which is an inevitable consequence of a logic at work in the Jewish Freud's latently Pauline psychoanalysis; that is, penis envy, or woman's desire to possess a penis, would result from the Pauline logic of natural gender differences. For Derrida, by way of contrast, the absence that Paul dramatizes is not an absence to begin with, which does not, of course, mean that there is no such thing as sexual difference. However, after Paul, symbolic possession of the Phallus becomes decisive in the Christian religion. In the realm of the symbolic, power is henceforth reduced to a matter of who wields—or doesn't wield—the phallus. In other words, the sign of the phallus, which is itself meaningful only on the condition of its *différance* (difference/deference) from other signs within the order of the symbolic, becomes the privileged trope in Western discourse. It becomes a god-term or transcendental signifier, an inside that is also an outside. Similarly, what Freud calls "castration anxiety" can be linked to far more than fear of the loss of this bodily organ,

but the loss of social power and prestige within a particular phallologocentric order. In some sense, Derrida urges a psychoanalytic solution to the problem of patriarchal oppression in the West; or, like Freud, Derrida attempts to bring to consciousness a problem that lies repressed in the political unconscious. However, Derrida also urges a politics of the veil, as well as a politics that might be more attentive to the workings of the unconscious.

For such a politics to develop, Derrida suggests that it will be necessary for future generations of scholars to more deliberately articulate the problematic, complex, or discourse of woman, especially the mother. Whereas Paul and Freud similarly imply that the gender of woman is a fact of nature, Derrida points out that woman, particularly the mother, is also—and has always been—a matter of discursive construction; that is, the problematic of the mother has already been obsessively articulated in the patriarchal realm of the Law, it is just that influential men like Aristotle, Paul, and Freud have defined her complex to be a matter of Nature. Freud, for instance, argues that patriarchy represents a significant advance in human civilization because paternity has always been a matter of discursive reconstruction; that is, before blood and DNA tests, the mother was necessarily taken at her word with respect to the paternity of her child. This is why, for instance, in the orthodox Jewish religion, the mother becomes the guarantee of authentic Jewish identity. The assumption, in this case, is that one can never be absolutely certain who the father is, but the fact of maternity can be verified by direct observation at childbirth. Historically then, the father has necessarily been reconstructed in language, in the order of the discourse or the law. While the father has necessarily been a problematic of discourse, the articulation of the complex or problematic of the mother has been construed as superfluous: the mother is said to be natural, not a technological or discursive construction.

Because Muslims do not construe the Transcendental Word as an anthropomorphized or visually apprehended man, the veil is arguably less a marker of sexual difference in Islam than a means of dividing social space. This is not to say that there are not similarities between Christian and Islamic theologies of the veil—for clearly these religions have a shared Abrahamic heritage of the veil—but differences in orientation to the veil in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam may finally outweigh the similarities. In Mernissi's view, many customs that are linked to the *hijab* sharply contrast with the original teachings of both the Quran and Muhammad about the veil, hence reinforcing pre-Islamic customs that the Islamic religion attempted—unsuccessfully—to

supersede. The concept of the *hijab* that emerges after the death of the Prophet Muhammad therefore has much in common with beliefs about the veil that prevailed in the pre-Islamic era, or the time of the *jahiliyya* (the era of ignorance). Mernissi compellingly adumbrates the theological dimensions of the veil, which she shows is a major concept in Islam that is not reducible to a strip of fabric covering the face. Mernissi argues that the *hijab* is a multidimensional concept, meaning "to hide something from sight," but also "to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold" (93). Among other meanings, the veil also has ethical connotations, referring to something that "belongs to the realm of the forbidden" (93). "[T]he concept of the *hijab* is a key concept in Muslim civilization, just as sin is in the Christian context, or credit in American capitalist society," Mernissi states. "Reducing or assimilating this concept to a scrap of cloth that men have imposed on women to veil them when they go into the street is truly to impoverish this term . . ." (95). Underscoring the enormous complexity of this concept, Mernissi examines how the *hijab* became reduced to an instrument for subjugating women in Islamic society. Mernissi argues that powerful men were able to appropriate the veil, promoting pre-Islamic beliefs that harkened to ancient superstitions about the female body that contradict the practices and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. As Mernissi points out, the Arabic word *hijab* is also used with reference to the hymen, which is called the "*hijab al-bukuriyya* (*hijab* of virginity)" (96). The *hijab* in Islam also becomes an anatomical veil, or a veil that has a specific and ostensibly natural relation to the feminine body. Although the veil in this sense does not necessarily imply the covering-over of a deficiency, as in the Pauline concept of the veil, it is nonetheless exclusively associated with the body of women. In opposition to the ignorant male elite, who promoted pre-Islamic superstitions regarding the uncleanliness of women during menstruation, Mernissi emphasizes how the Prophet Muhammad was known to recite the Quran while resting his head on the lap of a menstruating wife (75). Like other pre-Islamic customs, such as honor-killing and excision, Mernissi insists that the male elite's exaggerated horror of menstrual fluids is anti-Islamic. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad viewed the phobic behavior of the Islamic community with respect to menstruation not only as inappropriate, but as a matter that clearly set Muslims apart from the Jews of Medina. For this reason, Muhammad ordered a number of Muslim men who had queried him on this question "to eat with their [menstruating] wives, drink with them, share their bed, and do everything with them that they wanted except copulate" (74). Mernissi concludes, "apparently the Prophet's message,

15 centuries later, has still not been absorbed into customs throughout the Muslim world, if I judge by the occasions when I was refused admittance to the doors of mosques in Penang, Malaysia, in Baghdad, and in Kairwan" (74–75).

In Mernissi's account, the Prophet Muhammad militated against any concept of the *hijab al-bukuriyya* (or hymen) as a transcendental signifier, just as he eschewed the notion that menstrual blood is a natural pollutant. In this respect, the views of Muhammad were similar to those of Jesus, who also rejected the notion that human bodily fluids may be construed as an occult substance. For instance, when Jesus is rebuked for eating from the same dish of a tax-collector, and presumably consuming saliva from the hands of the evil-doer, he replies that it is not what enters our bodies that defiles us, but what exits our bodies: "It is not what enters one's mouth that defiles that person; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one . . . Do you not realize that everything that enters into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled into the latrine?" (Matthew 15:11–17). Here, Jesus seems to reject an ancient thinking of bodily fluids as magic substance, or *heka* as it is referred to in *The Papyrus of Ani* (and other Egyptian Books of the Dead). In Islam, by way of contrast, the male elite's promotion of superstitions about women's bodies enabled a return to forms of pre-Islamic occult sorcery, which Muhammad sought to refute. Arguably, the same may be said in the case of Paul's superstitious orientation to the Christian veil, as well as his suggestion that long hair is natural to woman, whom he depicts as a dangerous supplement (or *pharmakon*) to man. With reference to the hymen, or the *hijab al-bukuriyya*, Derrida states:

> One could say quite accurately that the hymen *does not exist*. Anything constituting the value of existence is foreign to the "hymen." And if there were a hymen—I am not saying if the hymen existed—property value would [not be] . . . appropriate to it . . . How can one then attribute the *existence* of the hymen *properly* to woman? [Derrida's emphasis]. (*The Ear of the Other* 181–182)

For Derrida, any claim supporting the notion that the veil belongs exclusively to woman would naively promote a hypostasis of the hymen, which would be no less problematic than a logocentrism of the phallus. The *hijab* became an idolatrous fetish for the male elite of Islam, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, whereas Paul made an idolatrous fetish of the long hair of Christian women. In opposition to both views, a deconstructive critic would point out that

neither the *hijab* nor long hair can *properly* be attributed to women. Like the male elite in early Islam, Paul may very well have been influenced by occult superstitions surrounding the body of women, to which he appealed in order to subjugate them, or in order to assign them a subordinate status. Whereas Jesus eschews an occult thinking of the human body, Paul seems to have reintroduced it by suggesting that men no longer have need for a head covering, and that long hair is natural to woman. Paul may have sought to preserve ancient cult beliefs about the body linked to forms of pre-Christian and possibly Egyptian sorcery, which Jesus rejected. What complicates the question of the veil in relation to Derrida's own position on these matters, as opposed to a deconstructed articulation of the veil in either the Christian or Islamic faiths, is the fact that Derrida too affirms a concept of blood that is clearly occulted, unlike the founders of either Christianity or Islam.

CHAPTER 3

Arab-Jew

In Jacques Derrida's "Circumfession" (1991), which is a moving account of the death of his mother, he describes a decisive event that shaped his identity as an adolescent. In 1942, at the age of twelve, Derrida was expelled from the Lycée de Ben Aknoun in El-Biar, Algeria because of his Jewish ancestry. Derrida describes himself at this time as "a little black and very Arab Jew who understood nothing about [the reasons why he was expelled]" (58). Racial prejudice against Jews in Algeria, emanating from colonial French nationals as well as indigenous Algerians, led Derrida's parents to teach him to mask his ethno-religious identity as a matter of personal safety. Derrida's parents instructed him to "not openly wear any Jewish sign," he writes. "[T]hey wanted to hide me like a prince whose parentage is provisionally concealed to keep him alive" (90). These early experiences provide important clues in understanding why Derrida refers to himself as a "Marrano" in his writings, or a Sephardic Jew of the Spanish Inquisition period, who is immersed in the intricacies of an alien and often detested doctrine, the beliefs of those Christians who menace him. A child raised as a Marrano learns from an early age the importance of guarding secrets, of hiding the truth about his or her ancestry. True to his Marrano heritage, Derrida's descriptions of himself as a Sephardic Jew are seldom articulated without irony or some distancing gesture: "I am one of those *marranes* who no longer say they are Jews," he insists, "even in the secret of their own hearts . . ." (171). Derrida holds on to the secret of his Jewish identity, even as he publicly discloses it. The experience that Derrida underwent as a twelve-year-old boy in El-Biar, Algeria is not so very different from that of many Arabs and Arab Jews, especially in Europe and the United States. Unlike the Ashkenazi (or European) Jew, who is often imagined as embodying a white racial essence, Derrida reminds us that he is a Sephardic or "Arab-Jew," and that the color of his skin is "a little black." In the West, Arabs and Jews alike often pass as whites,

depending upon their manifest racial phenotype. As true for Ashkenazi Jews, many "white" Arabs have assimilated into European and Euro-American societies with relative ease, whereas their darker (or more "wheaty") kinsmen have found that their color, if not their religion, remains an irreducible marker of difference.[1]

The term Arab-Jew, on the other hand, collapses two binary opposites as if they were identical. At first glance, the paradoxical coupling Arab-Jew would seem to enact the experience of the impossible that Derrida calls deconstruction, as do couplings like the sensuous-nonsensuous, specter-spirit, writing-speaking, the living-dead word, and so on. It is at least paradoxical to be an Arab and a Jew at the same time, or a so-called Arab-Jew, despite the fact that Sephardic or Oriental Jews are often referred to as Arab-Jews in the West. It should be clear, however, that the experience Derrida describes in "Circumfession" does not occur because of his "nearly white" phenotype, but because of his Jewish ancestry. In the "Curriculum Vitae" published in the same book as his "Circumfession," the reader is informed that Derrida was expelled at the age of twelve because of his school rector's anti-Semitism within a specific colonial setting: "In his zeal," we are told, "the terrible Rector [of Derrida's school] lowered the cutoff point [for the number of Jewish students in his class] from 14% to 7%: 'The highest percentage [could] not exceed 7%; any fraction above the last unit must then fall: example: class of 41 pupils; 7% = 2.87: number of Jewish pupils that [could] be admitted = 2' " (Bennington 326). Derrida therefore suffered from a highly calculated form of prejudice because of his identity as a Jew, not because he was black or Arab. When Derrida describes himself as "a little black and very Arab Jew," these words are markers of his personal abjection. They signal the psychological despair he felt at a difficult moment in his adolescence. Derrida experienced discrimination as if he was a black or an Arab, but he did not undergo racial discrimination because of these things. Derrida does not describe himself as "a little black and very Jewish Arab." The Sephardic Jew in Derrida's writings is sometimes described as the Arab-Jew but never the Jewish-Arab; that is, the word Arab serves as an adjective for Derrida, not a noun. If the term writing (*écriture*) for Derrida already means both speaking and writing, the term Jew also already means both Arab and Jew, but the sign of the Arab is subordinate in the Arab-Jew binary.

To understand why this is so, we must turn our attention to what Derrida calls the foreign or maternal debt. It is no accident that Derrida's "Circumfession" is finally a meditation on what he calls "the state of the debt" in *Specters of Marx*. To put this more simply, "Circumfession"

is a book about Derrida's debt to his mother. What he finally owes her, in a strictly biological sense, is his blood. Derrida tells us that he first came to life in the womb of his mother as a kind of parasitical sponge that soaked up maternal blood. Before we exit the subterranean cave that is our mothers' womb, Derrida suggests, we exist as protoplasmic things that are made of their blood. The lungs that grow inside our bodies are nurtured in the blood of our mothers. The words that we speak usher from our blood-filled lungs, which means that our every breath is owed to our mothers. For Derrida, this blood debt is never settled. We can never pay our mothers back for the blood that they gave us. If the *ruah* in Derrida is the *voiced* word that blows from the lungs (as in the Latin *spiritus* or Greek *psyche* meaning "aspirated breath"), the actual substance of that spirit remains a *physis* from the mother: it is a wet liquid wind drawn from the heart of the mother. For Derrida, spirit always and necessarily springs from the maternal blood source. In "Circumfession," Derrida thanks his mother for the blood that she gave him, and even wonders if he will be able to write following her impending death. He also insists that the mother or the blood source is at the "heart" of his writing ("Marx & Sons" 231), and that the "place of the heart is . . . the place of true riches, a place of treasures . . ." (*The Gift of Death* 97). "Where is the heart?" Derrida asks. "What is the heart? The heart [is] . . . wherever you save real treasure, that which is not visible on earth, that whose capital accumulates beyond the economy of the terrestrial visible or sensible . . ." (*The Gift of Death* 98). In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida would like his readers to believe that he offers a political alternative that is more materialist than Marx's; that is, if Marx finally succumbs to a "Greco-Christian" ontology, Derrida insists that the maternal debt that constitutes spirit remains real but invisible; it is also real but inaudible when manifest as specter, or the silent word for the eyes. What authorizes Derrida to claim that his position is historical materialist rather than simple theology or metaphysics (as opposed Marx's allegedly more contradictory theory of the real) lies in the very real nature of the substance, the matter of the mother. No where is this more clear than in Derrida's religious meditation upon the debt he owes to his mother in his "Circumfession."

It is sobering to remember that the doctrine of the Messiah is grounded in religious doctrines of blood election, or the belief that the Messiah upon whom the world awaits may or may not come, but his coming is only from the Stem of Jesse. Belief in the necessity to preserve a pure remnant from David's genealogical blood reaches maturation in the period of the Israelites' return to Palestine from Babylonian exile. This is why, for instance, the Book of Matthew

begins with a birth genealogy clarifying the parentage of Jesus, whom Christians and Muslims alike believe was the Messiah. Messianic Jews continue to uphold the matrilineal basis of Jewish identity, as well as belief in the status of Jews as a chosen people, in hopes that the Jewish Messiah will come, a matter that is too important to entrust to the word of the lying mother (or the merely reconstructed fact of fatherhood). This is one reason why there is no such thing as a Jewish-Arab identity. The Jewish-Arab would mark the offspring of the Jewish father and the non-Jewish mother. In other words, if the Jewish mother cannot be trusted to speak the truth of her child's paternity, the word of the foreign mother will certainly be regarded with some skepticism; that is, the Abrahamic vow of the mother—whether sworn by Sarah, Hagar, or Keturah—is not to be believed. The Jewish mother is foreign for Derrida because she is a woman or other, not because she is a Jew. But this means that once the Messianic doctrine is renounced, or once the Messiah is said to have already come (as in the case of Christian and Islamic doctrines regarding Jesus of Nazareth), it is less clear why the mother's tribal identity must be preserved.

The Bible is filled with stories of men who commit evil in the eyes of Yahweh because of their marriage with foreign women. Perhaps the most famous example is the case of Esau, who loses his birthright to his brother Jacob because of the women he marries. The idolatrous brides of Solomon also cause him to lose favor in the eyes of Yahweh, serving as yet another reminder of the dangers of foreign woman. Perhaps the most poignant illustration of this danger is recounted in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Following the return of the Israelites after the Babylonian captivity, many men had taken brides from among the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and other indigenous "Arab" peoples. The Prophet Ezra writes, "When I heard this, I rent my garment and robe, I tore hair out of my head and beard, and I sat desolate" (Ezra 9:1–12). The problem posed by these foreign women was eventually solved when they were all expelled along with their children, a gesture that appeased the Prophet Ezra. The men also took an oath that they would not "give [their] daughters in marriage to the peoples of the land [i.e., the Amalekites, Samaritans, and others], or take the daughters [of these tribes] for [their] sons" (Nehemiah 10:30–31). Belief among the Israelites in a Messianic redeemer coincides with the Babylonian exile, first explicitly articulated by the Prophet Isaiah in the aftermath of the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the servitude of the Israelites in Babylon (2 Isaiah 49:1–6). Doctrines of the Messianic Redeemer reached their fullest fruition

among the followers of Jesus, as well as the Essenes at Qumran, who believed that two or more Messiahs might come (or had already come). When Derrida refers to the "ancient ancientness" of the Messianic in *Specters of Marx*, he is therefore speaking in a hyperbolic sense. Derrida knows very well that Messianic doctrines in ancient Palestine were articulated at particular historical moments to serve the needs of very specific religious communities. In the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the expulsion of undesirable foreign women is not only contemporary with Messianic doctrines asserting the need to preserve a pure ethnic or tribal remnant, it is also linked to more general beliefs about the unique status of Israelites as a chosen people. If such beliefs tend to be reinforced in Derrida's later writings, it is worth noting that they are not included in Maimonides' "Thirteen Fundamental Principles of Jewish Belief" (Peters I 270–273), and many Jews do not regard them as essential elements of the Jewish faith.

Derrida claims in *Specters of Marx* that the messianic structure (or what he calls "messianicity") is "universal," but he also suggests that doctrines of Jewish election may enact a *necessary* political violence against the non-Jew (*Archive Fever* 79). "The Other is the condition for the One," he states, "but the One is sometimes condemned to violently gather up the Other within itself" (79). In reference to what Derrida calls the "war for the appropriation of Jerusalem" in *Specters of Marx*, the non-Jew signifies the Christian or Muslim Arab, or, more simply, the Palestinian. Derrida's indirect formulation in this context could therefore read as follows: "The Palestinian Arab is the condition for the Israeli Jew, but the Israeli Jew is condemned to violently gather up the Palestinian Arab within itself." Derrida further elaborates that "the One [or Jew] forgets to remember itself to itself [i.e., that it is *not* "One" or it is also the "non-Jew" or "Arab"], it keeps and erases the archive of this injustice that it is" (78). In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida puts it this way, "I admit to a purity which is not very pure" (47).[2] He also notes "[t]his impurity is precisely where all of politics comes in" (*Archive Fever* 79). What justifies this political act is what Derrida calls "a certain idiomaticity," which is here a euphemism for blood election. Derrida states, "I believe that the affirmation of a certain idiomaticity, of a certain uniqueness, as of a certain *differing, deferring, that is to say, impure, unity* is irreducible and necessary [Derrida's emphasis]" (79). This assertion is offered as a means of defending Derrida's claim that it may be Jewish people *alone* who uphold the "injunction to remember" as a "religious imperative" (76–77). Not only does the universality of the messianic structure disappear in this formulation (for

what is universal messianicity other than the imperative that *all* of humanity should "remember to remember the future" [76]), Derrida also herein confesses (or "circumfesses") his belief in the doctrine of Jewish election, or Israel's claim to be divinely privileged before all nations. "I would have liked to spend hours, in truth an eternity, meditating while trembling before this sentence," Derrida tells us, "*Only in Israel and nowhere else* is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people [my emphasis]" (76). "Trembling," as we learn in Derrida's commentary on Kierkegaard in *The Gift of Death*, is the proper posture before the demonic secret whenever Yahweh commands us to violate merely human ethics. One should never speak of Yahweh's secret commands, just as Abraham could not speak of his intention to murder his son (*The Gift of Death* 58–59). Derrida will not speak frankly of his beliefs in Israel's election but instead affirm a nonspeaking that disguises the hard teachings of Yahweh. "[Abraham] speaks in order not to say anything about the essential thing that he must keep secret," Derrida insists (59). Rather than utter the demonic secret, Derrida trembles before it and wonders why the whole world does not tremble with him (*Archive Fever* 76). Doubtless those "Arab" wives and children who were repudiated by the Prophet Ezra trembled when they first learned of this doctrine, especially when they saw their husbands' resolve to act upon it.

To fully appreciate what is at stake in the Arab-Jew couplet, it is also necessary to take into account the very hyphen that links the "Arab-Jew." In fact, this deceptively innocuous mark may be even more significant than either the terms Arab or Jew. The French term for hyphen is *trait d'union*, which literally translated means "trace of a union." The trace for Derrida is also *milah*, or the cut that marks the name. It is comparable to the Lacanian notion of the *le non/nom du père* (or "the 'no' of the father" that is also "the 'name' of the father"). The child is cut by the father as a means of opening the child to the other, of inserting the child into the realm of the symbolic (the law or order of the father), but it also functions as a symbolic warning, a marker of prohibition; that is, the child learns through the naming rite of circumcision that he may not have unlimited access to the body of the mother. As Derrida once remarked, "the most violent thing that you can do to a child is give him a name."[3] The incision leaves a painful wound, in fact permanently traumatizing the child, but it also marks the pledge that is made to him: It is a life-long guarantee of rights to the one who is symbolically cut or given a name by the father. It is important to emphasize the tribal nature of this rite, which

is practiced today not only among Jews, but many other ethnic groups throughout Africa and the Middle East. The rite of circumcision long predates the Jewish religion and is certainly not an exclusively Jewish practice. The Ancient Egyptians practiced circumcision for centuries before it was adopted by the Ancient Israelites; and, in many parts of West Africa, it remains one of the most important rituals—along with tribal scaring, tattooing, teeth-sharpening, and other signatory rites—binding the individual to his or her specific ethnic group. Against the Hegelian reading of Jewish circumcision, emphasizing its more exclusive dimensions,[4] Derrida argues that circumcision reduces the narcissism of the one by opening the one to the other. In West Africa, tribal scarring also serves the important function of indicating to members of other ethnic groups the tribe to which each individual belongs. Throughout history, the Jewish rite of circumcision was similarly a means of setting the Israelites apart from other local tribes.[5] Its historical purpose was not merely to reduce the narcissism of the one, but also to mark the individual as a member of a particular tribe. Derrida theorizes this more exclusive aspect of the trace in his discussion of the *shibboleth* in the poetry of Paul Celan. The shibboleth is a password or phrase that only speakers of a particular dialect can utter: It is therefore an oral or "spiritual" indicator of ethnic difference. In *Sovereignties in Question*, Derrida speaks of the double-edge of a *shibboleth*: "One may, thanks to the *shibboleth*, recognize and be recognized by one's own . . . , but [it] also [serves] the purpose of denying the other, of denying him passage or life" (63). Like the *shibboleth*, the hyphen (or *trait d'union*) is a marker of difference, a double-edged trace that opens the one to the other but also distinguishes the one from those who do not belong to his or her specific group. What is important to understand about the hyphen (or *trait d'union*) in the Arab-Jew couplet is that Derrida recommends the Jewish *milah* as a universalized figure of the trace. Caputo puts it this way: "If circumcision is Jewish, it is only [Jewish] . . . inasmuch as the Jew is the witness to something universal, [and] that *spiritually we are all Jews* [my emphasis]" (*Prayers* 262). In both his reading of Celan and of Heidegger in *Of Spirit* (111), Derrida makes of the Messianic Jew a universalized figure that is capable of subsuming all other ethnic groups (*Sovereignties in Question* 54–55). For Derrida, the Messianic Jew becomes a valid substitute for the human subject of U.N. law. The Arab is the condition for the Messianic Jew, but this figure is violently "gathered up" by the Messianic Jew, who remembers to forget his regrettable but necessary act of violence. The Abrahamic hyphen (or *trait d'union*) that links the Arab and Jew together in the

Arab-Jew couplet is also the sign of the Messianic Jew, which is both a particularized indicator of Jewish identity and a broader indicator of "human" identity. The gathering that is created in the Arab-Jew couplet also marks a potentially explosive union, one that can erupt into violence at any moment. The sibling rivalry of the brothers Isaac and Ishamael are joined together by their common father, but this Messianic joining can as easily lead to bloodshed as to fellowship.

In contrast to this more violent and explosive notion of the bond (or *the trait d'union*), Christian theology insists upon the possibility of a nonviolent, communal bond. For most Christians, the defining religious rite is not circumcision but the rite of communion or the Eucharist. In orthodox Christianity, the Jewish notion of writing as Abrahamic *milah* is superseded by a theology of the Word, which is also the *Corpus Christi*, or the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ. Allegorical interpretation of circumcision does not merely cancel the literal rite, it also enables the individual believer to assume his or her place within the greater body of believers: its purpose, as both Northrop Frye and Fredric Jameson have respectively emphasized, is fundamentally social or communal.[6] Derrida, by way of contrast, states that he is "undecided" about allegory ("Marx & Sons" 246). An orthodox Christian reading of the Abrahamic narratives does not emphasize the importance of the covenant that is sealed by the rite of circumcision, for this rite is part of the Old Covenant that the New Covenant supersedes. What Derrida affirms as the "vow" is, for most Christians, a matter of the promise that was fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah Jesus, who is believed to be the actual Son of God. Yahweh fulfills His covenant to Abraham through the sacrifice of His only begotten son. This is why Christians generally believe that the Biblical figure of Melchizedek is more important than Abraham, and that the communal rite celebrated by Abraham and Melchizedek is more significant than the superseded rite of circumcision. In Genesis 14:17–20, Melchizedek is described as "the King of Salem" and a "priest of God Most High," who brings out bread and wine, which are shared by Abraham and Melchizedek. The King of Salem (or Jerusalem) gives Abraham (named "Abram" at this time) his blessing, and in response Abraham tithes to Melchizedek one-tenth of all his goods. In fact, the Christian tradition of tithing and the rite of communion are lent Biblical support by these verses. What is worth emphasizing here is that Christians do not simply believe that Melchizedek is more important than Abraham, but that he is actually a Messiah or Christ figure in his own right. For Christians, Jesus Christ is "a priest forever, in the succession of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). This is why the

author of the New Testament's *Letter to the Hebrews* states that the name "Melchizedek" means "'king of righteousness'; next he is king of Salem, that is, 'king of peace.'" But the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* goes even further, emphasizing that Melchizedek "has no father, no mother, no lineage; his years have no beginning, his life no end. He is like the Son of God: he remains a priest for all time" (*Hebrews* 7:1–4). The proof of Melchizedek's greatness, though he is not himself circumcised (for the covenant has not yet been established), is that it is Melchizedek who gives the blessing to Abraham, and it is Abraham who gives tithes to Melchizedek. The author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* therefore asserts: "beyond all dispute the lesser [i.e., Abraham] is always blessed by the greater [i.e., Melchizedek]" (*Hebrews* 7:7). Paul's allegorical reading of circumcision must be read in this context, with reference not only to the Messianic figure of Melchizedek but also the taking of bread and wine, which both Abraham and this "greater" priest share. In other words, Abraham himself participates in the Christian rite of communion, a rite in which the communicant becomes at one with other believers in the mystical Body of Christ. This too is the point of the allegorical reading of circumcision, not merely to cancel the actual rite of *milah* (which Paul, in any event, retains with respect to Jewish Christians like Timothy), but to partake of the sacred mystery of communal fellowship. By participating in the rite of communion, Christians not only join with other believers, they also participate in a divine mystery enabling them to commune with Christ (or God). In the case of the Christian religion then, Caputo is therefore in error when he asserts that Derrida's views on the annulment of the physical rite of circumcision can also be construed as "practically Christian and Pauline" (*Prayers* 262). Caputo is far closer to the truth, however, when he states that, "In the end, circumcision is a marvelous figure, but by no means merely a figure for Derrida" (284). But if Caputo is correct that circumcision is not merely a figure for Derrida, then it cannot also be true that Derrida is "undecided" regarding the question of allegory. For Christians, the Abrahamic *milah* indeed becomes a mere figure, and this is a difference that makes all the difference.

In the case of Islam, the question of the *milah* is also complex, not only because the rite of circumcision is affirmed by Muslims, but also due to the complicated history of the Quran's reception throughout the 1,400 years of Islam's existence as a distinct Abrahamic faith. Derrida regularly implies that the Islamic faith shares important similarities with Judaism, which indeed it does, but he goes too far in his assertions that Islam, like Judaism, is a religion that is, on the whole,

hostile to logocentric philosophies of the West. Derrida claims that Judaism and Islam are "the last two monotheisms to revolt against . . . the Christianizing of our world" (*Acts of Religion* 51). They are monotheisms that share a common experience of alienation "at the heart of Graeco-Christian, Pagano-Christian Europe" (51). In contrast to the "blinder" monotheisms of Judaism and Islam, Christianity is a "reflecting faith" (49), by which Derrida means it is essentially a "pagano-cult" religion, or a religion that encourages worship of a God that may be seen. From the pre-Socratics through Aquinas, Voltaire, and Heidegger, the West cannot get past its obsession with visual form. "Everywhere light dictates that which even yesterday was naively be construed to be true of all religions," Derrida states, "or even opposed to it and whose future today must be rethought (*Aufklärung*, *Lumières*, Enlightenment, *Illuminismo*)" (46). In comparison, Jews and Muslims do not allow themselves to be so easily deceived by any objective form, no matter how brilliant, which appears on the horizon. Unlike Christians with their Thomist epiphanies, Derrida suggests that these other Abrahamic religions have more faithfully upheld the ban on images than their Greco-Christian rival. "[T]he Indo-European language already concurred in the very notion of 'god' (deiwos)," Derrida states, "of which the 'proper meaning' is 'luminous' and 'celestial' " (46).

While Muslims indeed practice circumcision as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, this rite is certainly not intended to affirm the elected status of the Jews as God's chosen people. Muslims generally do not read the Abrahamic narratives in the Torah (or "Old" Testament) because of changes that they believe occurred over many centuries of the text's transmission. The Quran affirms the Abrahamic covenant, as it affirms covenants made with Ishmael, Jesus, Muhammad, and other important prophets. However, circumcision is not generally upheld as a marker of ethnic identity. In fact, Muslims often assert that all people everywhere are born Muslims without reference to tribe or ethnicity, but that one's parents make one Jewish or Christian through the transmission of erroneous doctrines.[7] Conversion to Islam is conceptualized as "reversion" to the authentic faith, which is not a matter of belonging to any particular tribe or ethnic group. Derrida's suggestion that Islam affirms a notion of the Abrahamic trace, or his suggestion that the notion of writing in Islam is similar to what Derrida means by *écriture* (scripture), raises even more complicated questions. The Word in Islam is a transcendental Heavenly Book, whereas the orally recited word is believed to be a copy of that Word. What Derrida generally elides are the logocentric

dimensions of the Muslim faith. While the Greek word "logos" may seem inappropriate in the Arabic context, it is important to bear in mind the long and complicated history of the Quran's reception, especially in lands extending far beyond the Arabian Peninsula. By the ninth century, for instance, the entire Greek philosophical legacy had already been translated into the Arabic language, including the collected metaphysics, logic, and scientific writings of Aristotle. In Europe, by contrast, Aristotle was unknown until the thirteenth century. Derrida's reference to an Islam that has been emptied of logocentric thought is largely an antihistorical fantasy, for it would be necessary to imaginatively reconstruct how the Quran might have been read over several centuries, emptied of all reference to the Greeks. In fact, the Quran includes references to Alexander the Great, and it is extremely difficult to imagine how a de-Hellenized Islam might have historically evolved.[8] Derrida's descriptions of Islam therefore refer to an Islam that never really was. In fact, Derrida tends to imagine Islam as an imperfect form of Judaism, rather than a complex hermeneutic system in its own right.

Because of the Quran's attack on Christian clergy, no ecclesiastical hierarchy developed in Islam, although there arose a body of Quranic interpreters called the ulema, who were mediators between the general populace and political leaders. The ulema debated the Quran's meaning and helped to preserve religious knowledge, but they were not priests, and their power was largely informal. As Islam spread during its first six centuries, Muslim philosophers like Ibn Sina, or Avicenna, who was born in Uzbekistan and who lived from 980–1037 C.E., studied both the Quran and the teachings of Aristotle. Ibn Sina and other Islamic philosophers of this era developed a distinction between "the truth of the prophets" and the "truth of the philosophers." Ibn Sina argued that, while prophets like Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were shown the truth through divine revelation, the philosophers could discover truth through the far more difficult route of the senses. Ibn Sina and other Islamic philosophers from the ninth through the twelfth centuries C.E., especially Ibn Baja, Ibn Tufayl, and Ibn Rushd (or Averrores), affirmed that it was indeed possible to find truth through reason alone. The views of such philosophers often made the ulema upset, but such questions were widely debated among Muslims from the earliest days of Islam. In the Hadith (the "Tradition" or "Sayings" of the Prophet Muhammad), each passage in the Quran is said to have an "inside" and an "outside," or an esoteric and exoteric meaning. Many Sufis, for instance, make an esoteric/exoteric distinction between the "greater" and the "lesser" hajj. The actual hajj involves

boarding a plane and traveling to Mecca. However, the "greater" hajj, which all without exception must undertake, involves far more than a tourist excursion to Saudi Arabia: it signifies the journey to what the Ka'ba actually symbolizes, the "abode" or spiritual "house of God" that dwells at the center of one's being. The "ebb and flow" referred to in the Quran symbolizes this hermeneutic movement from outside to inside, from scripture to the heart's truth. In a historical sense then, Derrida's suggestion that Islam shares with Judaism a certain hostility to logocentric thought is problematic. In fact, the Islamic reception of Aristotle plays an important role in the historical development of European humanism. It is possible that the Western Renaissance might never have occurred had not the texts of great Islamic philosophers like Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Tufayl been translated from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For this reason, when Derrida states that "globalatinization is essentially Christian" (*Acts of Religion* 67), he elides the fact that what he calls globalatinization is arguably a form of "global*islam*ization." In other words, Derrida ignores the important role of Islam in shaping European humanist thought.

It must also be remembered that Judaism also has its own history of dialogue and debate with the Aristotlean tradition, especially evident in the writings of the Caireen Jew Maimonides, who was a contemporary of Ibn Rushd. Like the great Islamic philosophers of Spain, Maimonides sought to reconcile faith and science, particularly by interpreting the Bible in light of Aristotle's teachings. In contrast, Derrida criticizes Maimonides for allegedly Hellenizing Judaism. "[Maimonidies] founds religion upon a grand, rigorous rationalism," Derrida states. "It is in the name of reason that he founds the Jewish Reformation" (*Acts of Religion* 163). However, "reason" for Derrida is associated exclusively with the Greco-Roman Logos, which he imagines was never mediated by Arabic thought. The truth is that Maimonides also wrote in Arabic, and his writings later had to be translated into Hebrew before most Medieval Jews could read them. The Greco-Roman Logos that Derrida relentlessly attacks is arguably a Greco-Arabic Logos. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida compares the hegemonic religious viewpoint in the French-ruled Algeria of his youth to a viral infection, "an insidious Christian contamination," that infects all those living in the African Jewish community where he grew up. Derrida lists among the more pernicious "Christian" influences "the respectful belief in inwardness, the preference for intention, the heart, the mind, mistrust with respect to literalness or to an objective action given to the mechanicity of the body" (54). All

of these religious biases, for Derrida, imply a "conventional denunciation of Pharisaism" (54). But, with the exception of the members of a few extremist groups, like those who are influenced by the strictest Saud-Wahhabist inflections of the Islamic faith, there are very few in the Muslim world who do not also appreciate many of the "Christian" religious attitudes that Derrida views as inherently biased against Jews. Certainly, Shia and Sufi Muslims—but also many moderate Sunni Muslims—would take exception to Derrida's view that such attitudes are somehow uniquely Christian.

Derrida seeks to establish a philosophical alliance of Jews and Muslims against globalatinization, or the growing political and religious hegemony of the "Pagano-Europeans," who long ago dispensed with the doctrine of the trace. In doing so, he conflates globalization with the Greco-Roman religion of the Christians, but also the Platonic heritage of the West, extending through Kant and even Heidegger and Sartre. But, Derrida ignores the contributions of Muslim philosophers like Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd to the Western philosophical tradition, and he suggests that Maimonides's thought would have taken another direction, if only the great Jewish reformer had known how his work would later be misappropriated by the German Idealist tradition (*Acts of Religion* 162–163). Derrida seeks to show how Jews and Muslims may share affinities that run counter to Greco-Roman thought systems, most importantly their shared belief in the doctrine of the *milah*, although Derrida does not distinguish between Jewish and Muslim beliefs about circumcision. Derrida wants to insist upon the shared theological heritage of Arabs and Jews, preferring not to probe too deeply into the question of "Shemitic" ethnicity, for the "Shemitic" is just another name for the trace (109). By way of contrast with Derrida, the various founders of the Pan-Arab movement of the twentieth century insisted that the identity of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Middle East could be subsumed by the secular category of the "Arab."[9] As opposed to the more violent notion of the Abrahamic trace, Pan-Arab thinkers like Michel Aflaq, who was a Lebanese Christian, insisted that the bond uniting Arab Jews, Christians, and Muslims should be "love before everything else" ("Nationalism and Revolution" 242). In fact, Aflaq defined the Pan-Arab movement as the awakening of love (246). By doing so, the Arab Christian Aflaq affirmed the possibility of communal fellowship between "Arabs"—that is, between the Jews, Christians, and Muslims of the Levant—in order to transcend the polarizing tribal identities of the past. Aflaq looked beyond the doctrine of the trace to shared Christian, Jewish, and Muslims doctrines of charity. What Aflaq

called "love" certainly has its place in the history of Christian hermeneutics, but his appeal to charity also harkens to originary Islamic beliefs about the Quran's ultimate meaning, or Islam's "heart."[10] For instance, Pan-Arab Christians like Aflaq emphasized that Arabian Islam flourished as a religion promoting love of God and neighbor, not only faith in the trace.

Derrida indirectly treats the question of the Arab Christian in his essay on Louis Massignon, entitled "Hostipitality." Massignon was an important European Orientalist scholar, who is also discussed at length in Said's *Orientalism* (1977).[11] Derrida borrows the term "Abrahamic" from Massignon although Massignon was a European-born Christian, who was profoundly influenced by Islam. Derrida is interested in Massignon's notion of the Christian "hostage," living within Islamic society. While Christian-Europe certainly has its Jewish and Muslim hostages from the Middle East, Massignon emphasizes that Islam also has its own hostages, those Jews and Christians who dwell within the Islamic world. Derrida speaks only fleetingly of Arab Christians who have lived under Islamic governments for hundreds and hundreds of years. Instead, he focuses on Massignon and other French figures like Charles de Foucauld, a Catholic missionary among the Tuareg (not Arabs).[12] In other words, the Christian hostage for Derrida is theorized as a French Catholic Christian, but the complicated question of the Arab Christian like Michael Aflaq or Edward Said, who share a common ethnic identity as well as a common Abrahamic heritage, is ignored.

Despite his professed admiration for Massignon, Derrida levels the charge against him of a "vaguely sociological and atmospheric" form of anti-Semitism, also including in this trajectory of French "anti-Semites" Charles de Foucauld, who is a canonized saint of the Catholic Church. All of these "Bourgeois French Catholics" may be charged with "atmospheric" anti-Semitism. To substantiate his views, Derrida cites a few obscure letters with ambiguous statements made by Massignon, which Derrida analyzes without placing in historical context (*Acts of Religion* 418–419). These letters refer to the efforts of specific Jewish enemies of Massignon in France, whom he claims were seeking to undermine his efforts to establish solidarity between Muslims and Christians. However, there is little evidence that Massignon was hostile to Jewish people, only that he was upset about the efforts of particular Jewish "refuges" whom he claimed were "working towards [his] destruction" (418). However, Derrida's own intervention into these matters obviously does not appear in a historical vacuum. Derrida's essay was published in 1999. With the fall of

the Soviet Union, many Arab states lost their principle economic sponsor. Many Israeli and Diasporic Jews welcomed the disintegration of the Pan-Arab movement, especially in its Ba'athist form, just as many Americans welcomed the demise of socialism. For better or worse, the interests of Israel and the United States tended to converge in relation to Ba'athism's historical collapse. In this specific context, the glaring omissions in Derrida's essay cannot be regarded as simple oversights on his part. If the names of Arab Christians like Said and Aflaq are substituted for Massignon and Foucauld, Derrida's critique of Massignon can be seen for what it truly is: an effort to unbind a political "collective" that he finds worrisome. The critical "unbinding" (*analuein*) or deconstruction of the Christian and Muslim gathering is finally the goal of Derrida's essay on Massignon; it certainly does not seem—in Aflaq's sense—aimed at fostering "revolutionary love" between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.[13]

What is unusual about Derrida's approach to current crises in the Middle East is his suggestion that Jews and Muslims should forge a religio-theoretical alliance against European Christians. Is this wild fantasy, one wonders? Is Derrida simply out of touch with the political history of the Middle East over the last fifty to sixty years? If the later were true, perhaps Derrida could not be charged with advancing a subtly, but indisputably anti-Arab argument. I would venture to suggest that it is unlikely that Derrida was so uninformed about the political implications of his views. But if he was, there are two distinct possibilities with respect to the proposed Judeo-Muslim alliance in his writings, emblematized in the Arab-Jew couplet: First, Derrida was in earnest about forging an alliance against what he called Globalatinazation, only he was profoundly and even deliberately "out of joint" with current historical events. Second, Derrida may have stoked these fires as a means of distracting his Western based readers from the complex questions that his political views entailed. Probably, both are true at the same time. Derrida does not, for instance, suggest that the formation of such an alliance would necessarily be attended by the dissolution of the equally violent Judeo-Christian link: In fact, he consistently asserts that Christianity cannot exist independently outside of an "older" theological framework that is Jewish through and through. "The fundamental difference between the three original 'great monotheisms,'" for Derrida, is that Judaism and Christianity share a common scripture (i.e., The Old Testament or Tanakh), which Islam also affirms, but without being bound to its careful study (*Acts of Religion* 91). Hence, Derrida agrees with the Levinasian argument that Judaism is indispensable for the Pagano-Christians in order to

"keep [their Old Testament] readable" (91). What is more likely then is that Derrida affirms a Judeo-Muslim alliance, in order to strategically diminish Greco-Roman hegemony, while preserving a central role for Judaism within the very order he seeks to undermine.

Whatever his motivation, it is undeniable that the number of Arab Christian (not to mention Jewish) "hostages" living in the Islamic world has dwindled to alarmingly small numbers in recent years. For instance, at the time that Said was a Palestinian student in Nasser's Cairo, Arab Christians made up about 20 percent of the Palestinian population. Today, that number has dwindled to about 1 percent of the total Palestinian population, most of whom reside in the Christian tourist town of Bethlehem. Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the situation for Arab Christians living in the region has become far more difficult, facilitating further immigration of Arab Christians, mostly into the United States. When U.S. politicians and religious leaders regularly compare recent conflicts in the Middle East to the "crusades" of the Medieval period, this too subtly affects the lives of Arab Christians, some of whom find it no longer possible to continue living in their ancestral homelands. In this context, it is worth underscoring that Derrida's theorization of the Arab Christian hostage in Muslim lands is not simply a fascinating theoretical problematic, but a matter of extreme urgency for many Arab Christians living in the Levant. To focus exclusively on European figures like Massignon as symbolic representatives of the Christian hostage is shortsighted at best, a calculated misrepresentation at worst. Unlike Jewish intellectuals such as Ella Shohat, Israel Shahak, and Noam Chomsky, Derrida has almost nothing to say about the racism of Ashkenazi Jews toward Arab, black, or Ethiopian Jews in the modern state of Israel. Although there have been some positive developments in Israel in more recent years, Derrida himself—despite his own Sephardic heritage—made no significant contribution to current debates in Israeli society about the Jews' historically Arab identity.

In his "Circumfession," Derrida calls himself a "little black" and "very Arab" Jew, therefore inviting critical scrutiny of his views on Arabism. While Derrida reflects upon what it means to be a "very Arab" Jew, his writings on Arab identity tend to reinforce the conventional views of many European and American Zionists. However, Derrida asserts that the shared aversion of Muslims and Jews for Greco-Roman articulations of Abrahamic religion may form the basis for a future religio-political accord, bonding Jews and Muslims in their common disdain for "cult" religions in the West. One problem with this view is the fact that Hellenic and Latin culture also permeates Levantian

civilization. Derrida's vision of Hellenism, like similar views held by the Messianic Zionists in the West Bank, not only has implications for Arab Christians living in the region, it is also coterminous with the views of Jewish and Islamic extremists, who would like to "restore" their respective religions to reactionary and antirationalist articulations of their faiths. Another problem with Derrida's views regarding Christianity's alleged "pagano" heritage is that he does not therein claim that Christianity ceases to be an Abrahamic religion. Derrida wants to define Christianity as a religion of the trace, but he also wants to stigmatize Christians for their repression of the trace. Derrida homogenizes many complex differences under the rubric of the Abrahamic. But, if it is necessary to insist upon the heterogeneity of the Religions of the Book, it is also important to acknowledge the authentic points of convergence within these traditions. What Derrida calls the Abrahamic—by which he means those Middle Eastern religions affirming a doctrine of the trace—does not accurately represent the views of most Christians. Nor does it do full justice to the views of most Muslims who regard the Quran as a living copy of the Heavenly Book. It is nonetheless untrue to assert that the Christian and Islamic religions are lacking a concept of the trace. Derrida's concept of writing (*écriture* or scripture) remains so deeply enmeshed in Jewish theology that it risks becoming irrelevant, unless it is rigorously historicized and compared to Christian and Muslim beliefs about the trace, which are clearly not identical.

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CHAPTER 4

Deconstruction and Zionism

What Derrida calls "Abrahamic Messianism" refers to the specific experiences of revelation of prophetic figures like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Derrida argues that the "universal structure of the Messianic" must be distinguished from the historical experiences of revelation within these religious traditions. Derrida defines "Messianicity" as a fundamental aspect of the human experience: "As soon as you address the other," he claims, "as soon as you are open to the future, . . . [to] waiting for someone to come: that is the opening of experience" (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 22). But Derrida is even more specific than this: "Each time I open my mouth, I am promising something . . . Even if I lie, the condition of my lie is that I promise to tell you the truth. So the promise is not just one speech act among others; every speech act is fundamentally a promise." At times, however, Derrida will also suggest that we might not "know what Messianicity is without [Abrahamic] Messianism, without these events which were Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, and so on" (23), an assertion that not only Marxist critics might disagree with but also Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, or adherents to other non-Abrahamic religious traditions, not to mention agnostics and atheists. To the extent that the historically specific word Messianicity would be acceptable to any of these peoples, critics excluded from Abrahamic religious genealogies would obviously be less inclined to agree with Derrida's speculation that we might only know Messianicity because of the revelations of the Abrahamic prophets. Derrida will not insist upon his religious hypothesis about Abrahamic Messianism but will hold firm to his belief in a universal and atheological concept of the Messianic. Derrida calls this other possibility a "Heideggerian gesture" (23), or "the quasi-atheistic dryness of the Messianic" (*Specters of Marx* 168), suggesting that it may be possible to "go back from these religions to the fundamental ontological conditions or possibilities of religions,

to . . . the groundless ground on which religions have been made possible" (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 23). However, his descriptions of this paradoxical "groundless ground" are saturated with images drawn from the "arid soil" of the Biblical desert, where the God of Genesis first spoke to the prophets of the Middle East. For this reason, Derrida's more secular readers will understandably be skeptical about the value of conceptualizing this universal experience in terms of the Messianic. Because words like the Abrahamic and the Messianism necessarily carry within them the historical traces of their previous articulations, Derrida himself is compelled to admit that such objections are legitimate and implies that he may eventually abandon the word messianic, after it has served its "essentially strategic" purpose ("Marx & Sons" 254). Its present value, he insists, is "merely rhetorical or pedagogical."

Derrida's professed lack of attachment to this word is consistent with deconstructive practices as they have been historically defined, but the fact that he believes it retains a certain pedagogical and rhetorical value obviously raises questions about what it is that we, his student-readers, are supposed to learn or be persuaded to accept. There is clearly a lesson intended in Derrida's use of the word Messianic, a lesson about religion and prophetic revelation. As we will see, this lesson will complicate Derrida's polemical critique of Francis Fukuyama as an "evangelical" theorist who announces a liberal "gospel" of history's end. The Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad, who frankly confess his bewilderment about Derrida's Messianic terminology ("Reconciling Derrida" 102), is scolded because he too quickly "dispense[s] with the vast question of religion and the religious by leveling rather muddled accusations about [the] 'quasi-religious' tone [of *Specters of Marx*]" ("Marx & Sons" 234). In fact, Derrida insists, "The religious question should not be regarded as clear or settled today. One should not act as if one knew what the 'religious' or 'quasi-religious' was" (234). Ironically, this is precisely what Derrida will do in *Specters of Marx* where he defines the religious as "not just one ideological phenomenon or phantomatic production among others . . . [but that which] gives to the production of the ghost or of the ideological phantasm its originary form or its paradigm of reference, its first 'analogy'" (166). In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida not only acts as if he knows what the "religious" is, he attempts to proselytize his readers by suggesting that they must reevaluate Marxism's reactionary negation of the religious by reinvesting historically stigmatized concepts like the Abrahamic and Messianic with valorized meanings.

If Derrida's recuperative use of Jewish theological concepts is reminiscent of the writings of Walter Benjamin, he will insist that Benjamin's concept of the Messianic is too closely allied with Judaism,

a religious affiliation that compromises, if it does not vitiate, Benjamin's approach. "[A] considerable effort would be required to dissociate the Benjaminian allusion to a 'Messianic power,' however weak, from any and all forms of Judaism," Derrida states, "or, again, to dissociate a certain Jewish tradition from the usual figures or representations of Messianism" ("Marx & Sons" 250). Unlike Benjamin's Judaic Messianism, Derrida suggests that his own Messianism avoids this affiliation in two ways: first, Messianicity is only a suggestive way of discussing a universal structure of human experience, and, second, even its historically specific articulation, what Derrida calls "Abrahamic Messianism," is broadened far enough to imply the theological validity of prophetic revelation in the three major Middle Eastern religions. Derrida would have us believe that his approach to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is wholly unbiased and symmetrical, whatever his personal history as a Franco-Algerian and Sephardic Jew, and in spite of his often playful self-descriptions as "Reb Derissa" (*Writing and Difference* 300) or as "a sort of Marrano" ("Marx & Sons" 261–262), that is, a Spanish or Portuguese Jew who was forcibly converted to Christianity in the late Middle Ages but who continued to practice Judaism in secret. Derrida will insist that he has "no stable position on [any Biblical text], on the prophets and the Bible . . . [T]his is an open field . . . Within what one calls religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or other religions—there are . . . tensions, heterogeneity, disruptive volcanoes, sometimes texts, especially those of the prophets, which cannot be reduced to an institution, to a corpus, to a system" (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 21).

Derrida will even argue that, for him personally, "*there is no such thing as 'religion'* [my emphasis]" (22). The main offense of Ahmad, whom Derrida rebukes for his remarks about the "quasi-religious tone" of *Specters of Marx*, as well as his antireligious rejection of frankly theological concepts like Messianicity, is therefore Ahmad's characterization of Derrida as a "quasi-religious" rather than a "quasi-atheistic" philosopher. "One may always take the quasi-atheistic dryness of the Messianic to be the conditions of the religions of the Book . . ." Derrida states (*Specters of Marx* 168), meaning Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In both instances, the prefix "quasi-" could mean "partly" or "almost," but it might also mean "as if" from the Latin root of *quasi*, implying the mere appearance of something that is really not so. Derrida conceptualizes Messianicity as the "atheological heritage of the Messianic," or a "quasi-atheism" (*Specters of Marx* 168). He will happily accept a description of himself as embracing a "partial" or "quasi-" atheism—an atheism that secretly remains a religion—but

he refuses to be described as someone who embraces a religion in appearance only, a religion that is, in fact, not a religion at all. Derrida's main objection then is to "false" religion, which he seems to equate with any organized body of believers: "If by religion you mean a set of beliefs, dogmas, or institutions—the church, for example,—then I would say that religion as such can be deconstructed, and not only can but should be deconstructed . . ." (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 22). In this way, Derrida attempts to distance himself from Orthodox Judaism, or any specific Abrahamic religious tradition, affirming instead a nonreligious concept of faith, which he insists must be distinguished from the religious. "[F]aith is not religious, strictly speaking," Derrida states, "at least it cannot be totally determined by a given religion" (22). Unlike religion, faith is absolutely universal and what is meant when Derrida evokes the more general concept of messianicity or the messianic structure: "You cannot address the other, speak to the other, without an act of faith . . . , a faith that cannot be reduced to a theoretical statement" (22). Derrida therefore claims to be a man of faith, but not religion.

The obvious problem with this distinction is that Jewish peoples will have fewer problems with it—as well as with Derrida's quasi-atheistic definitions of *spirit*, *revelation*, and the *messianic*—than either Christians or Muslims, for whom *Specters of Marx* will now begin to sound like the disguised form of Judaism that it really is. If we set aside the largely impertinent question of Derrida's actual religious beliefs, focusing instead upon the theoretical actuality of these concepts for Judaism's sibling rivals, basic differences in theological orientation are enormous if not insurmountable. This is so not only because it is only the Jews who claim that the Messiah is "yet to come," since both Christians and Muslims believe that he has already come in the historical personage of Jesus of Nazareth, but also, because Derrida's universal structure of Messiancity, which privileges speaking over writing but in a radically anti-Platonic sense, also implies a theology of the voice, spirit, or "breath" (in Latin, *spiritus* means breath or breathing). Like Judaic creationist theology, Derrida's theory of the "universal" structure of language—or Messianicity—ignores important textual and ontological distinctions that are inherent to Christian and Islamic belief systems. For Derrida, belief in the Christian God-Man (or Jesus Christ) as well as the "gathered" Heavenly Book (or Quran) here implies belief in competing logocentrisms and the necessity of deconstructive analysis. For Muslims, Jesus remains the Messiah but occupies a merely prophetic status; that is, Muslims like Jews reject Christian doctrines of the incarnation and

the trinity. This does not of course mean that Issa (or Jesus) is not highly venerated by Muslims as prophet and Messiah, but that he is not a god, nor did he undergo the ordeal of crucifixion. In Islam, irreducible truth in the universal or Messianic sense affirmed by Derrida is uniquely manifest in Quranic revelation. In other words, if one must be suspicious of totalized or gathered concepts of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam as monolithic human communities (in the sense implied by Edward W. Said's healthy critique in *Covering Islam* of the "word politics" of a term like Islam), there nonetheless remain irreducible historical doctrines that may not be willed away by fiat. As Theodor W. Adorno never tired of insisting, concepts themselves may not escape their own historicity, including theological ones. What must be emphasized here is that most Muslims will at least insist that the Quran is God's revealed word whereas Christians almost universally affirm a concept of Messianic incarnation. From these non-Judaic perspectives, the universal structure of messianicity, or "messianism without content" (*Specters of Marx* 65), tends to recast both religions as distorted or even heretical forms of Judaism, implying that all three of these Abrahamic theologies posit Messianic truth as absence. To the extent that Derrida insists we are all men and women of "faith" and that we all necessarily await this irreducible truth-to-come—whether we are believing Jews or not—Derrida no longer may be said to solicit the voice of the other but instead promote a rhetoric of alterity.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida criticizes Francis Fukuyama for promoting a neo-imperialistic vision of history's end, or for retrospectively justifying the triumph of Western capitalism in the post–cold war era of the so-called New World Order. While convincingly demonstrating how the Hegelian-Christian Fukuyama tends to privilege a specific "angle of the escatological triangle [of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam]" (60), or how, for Fukuyama, "the End of History is essentially a *Christian* escatology [my emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 60), Derrida has practically nothing to say about the Jewish angle of this triangle. In fact, the word "Zionism" is totally absent from Derrida's book in favor of euphemisms like "Judaism" and "Jewish philosophy"—implying that the latter are entirely reducible to the former: Zionist discourse in *Specters of Marx* is uniformly conflated with "Jewish discourse," or the "*Jewish* prefiguration of the Promised land [my emphasis]" (60). Derrida's critique of Marx and Marxism not only tends to elide the question of Palestine, it promotes Fukuyama's *The End of History and The Last Man* (1992) as a red herring so that Derrida's readers may focus upon Liberal and Christian rather than Israeli Zionist forms of imperialism. While no one can deny that

certain forms of evangelical Christianity in the United States, whether they are articulated by sophisticated State Department intellectuals like Fukuyama or Bible-belt protestants, have served to reinforce historically racist policies aimed at Arab Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Palestine, it may be worse than misleading to aim exclusively at such targets while remaining silent about actual Zionist policies that have been implemented in Jerusalem/Al-Quds, the West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights, and so on. Unlike Derrida, Fukuyama actually criticizes the illegal Israeli siege of Arab Palestine as an example of a particularly oppressive and outdated form of imperialism (385 fn 17), comparing "the Israeli occupation of the West Bank" to the French occupation of Algeria before decolonization; the U.S. military interventions in Vietnam; the Libyans in Chad; the Soviets in Afghanistan, and the like (275). Fukuyama actually condemns Israeli policies in the West Bank because they deny "the right of [a] national group to live independently in [its] traditional homeland" (274). While Fukuyama indeed promotes a highly problematic vision of Jerusalem's future, he nonetheless makes clear his view that current Israeli practices must be overturned as an "unprofitable" form of "territorial conquest" (275).

In fact, Fukuyama states clearly his belief that Orthodox Judaism is "very hard to reconcile with liberalism and [with] the recognition of universal rights, particularly freedom of conscience or religion" (217). Given the rather obvious fact that Arab Christians and Muslims in Israel, like "colored" peoples living under South African apartheid, are routinely denied basic civil rights on the basis of their race and creed, Fukuyama's statement may seem controversial—even offensive from a Jewish but anti-Zionist perspective—but it is certainly understandable why an outside observer like Fukuyama (and others who are equally bewildered by the ontological distinctions implied by current Israeli law) might venture such an equation. Derrida, however, criticizes Fukuyama for "associat[ing] a certain Jewish discourse of the Promised Land [i.e., Zionism] with the powerlessness of economic materialism" (*Specters of Marx* 60); that is, Fukuyama criticizes both Marxists and Zionists, who should equally feel slighted at having their respective "discourses" characterized as "powerless" or theoretically archaic. In this instance, Derrida explicitly positions himself as defender of both Marxism and "a certain Jewish discourse of the Promised Land" against Fukuyama's Christian and "escatological" critique: "[I]t is in the name of a Christian interpretation of the struggle for recognition, and thus of the exemplary European Community, that [Fukuyama] criticizes Marx and proposes to correct his materialist economism . . . ," Derrida states (*Specters of Marx* 61). One would be all to willing to

express solidarity with Derrida's deconstruction of the latent imperialism of Fukuyama's evangelical vision were it not for the added baggage of this other "falsely maligned" discourse. It is nonetheless ironic that the conservative, "State Department intellectual" Fukuyama is compelled to criticize the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, and to affirm the right of Palestinians to self-determination (*The End of History* 274–275), whereas Derrida seems to go out of his way to obscure and even distort this aspect of Fukuyama's analysis.

After adumbrating Fukuyama's latent religious bias, without claiming any religious affiliation of his own (other than a quasi-atheistic one), Derrida warns that the resurgence of religion in the Middle East must not be arrogantly dismissed but taken seriously and understood, especially by Marxist critics who often underestimate the autonomy and power of the religious. Because the concepts of religion and faith are conflated in this section of Derrida's analysis, the reader is left to consider one of three possibilities pursuant to this warning: (1) Derrida means the return of religion in its purely negative valence, as "dogma, institutions, church" (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 22); (2) he means the concept of faith or Messianicity as a universal structure apart from one's culturally specific religious affiliation; or (3) he means both at the same time. Whichever formulation is correct, Derrida's analysis of religion's return is deeply flawed for a number of reasons: Assuming that Derrida forecasts religion's return in its positive valence (i.e., as universal Messianicity), his argument negates Fukuyama's neo-Hegelian imperialism by offering a latent Jewish imperialism in its place: "At stake *first of all* [my emphasis]," he argues, "is that which takes the original form of a return of the religious, whether fundamentalist or not, and which overdetermines all questions of nation, State, international law, human rights, Bill of Rights…" (*Specters of Marx* 167). If by "religion" in this instance Derrida actually means faith, the unavoidable implication is that his own belief in the universal structure of Messianicity should override *every political consideration imaginable*, a bold if implausible suggestion, especially for Christians and Muslims; that is, if Derrida's concepts of the Messianic cannot be dissociated from Jewish religion, as I have argued here, Derrida's insistence that the "return of the religious" is "first of all at stake" may imply a Jewish political agenda of staggeringly absurd portions. In other words, it is extremely unlikely that non-Jewish readers of Derrida will be comfortable with the implication that neither law, human rights, nationalism, State, and so on may be conceptualized without first taking into account the Jewish belief that the entire human race ceaselessly awaits the coming of the Messiah (whether

figuratively as in a "truth-to-come" or in a more literal religious sense), especially Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Christians in particular profess to worship an Incarnate Word that was already seen, that entered into the silent plane of the ontological, and that is proclaimed as good news by those who witnessed the Messianic event. Similarly, Derrida's notion of Messianic truth tends to imply the inherent falsity of the truth that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad at a specific historical moment. Derrida's concept of Messianicity carries within it the assumption that a revealed truth is valid only on the condition that it *not* arrive.

A second possibility is that Derrida means that "what is first of all at stake" is the resurgence of religion in its purely negative valence. This is how Jameson, in any event, interprets Derrida's remarks, stating that, for Derrida, "religion is once again very much on the agenda of any serious attempt to come to terms with the specificity of our time" ("Marx's Purloined Letter" 53). If Jameson is correct, Derrida's thesis about the resurgence of religion, especially in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, merely repeats the baldest clichés of Orientalist "experts" who routinely refuse to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in secular or historical terms. More than thirty years ago, Edward Said made a similar point about the Jewish American scholar Bernard Lewis whose essay "The Return of Islam" (1976), originally published as "The Revolt of Islam" (1964), rationalized Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation as "Islamic resurgence": "[W]ith Bernard Lewis, you say that if Arab Palestinians oppose Israeli settlement and occupation of their lands," Said wrote, "then that is merely 'the return of Islam . . . History, politics, and economics do not matter" (*Orientalism* 104). "Literal" Zionism, or the belief that a particular geographical region was promised by God to a select ethnic group, is not a religious or doctrinal concern of Palestinian Christians and Muslims, whose sufferings because of such beliefs are of a more pedestrian order. In the Israeli-Palestinian context, rhetorical and Orientalist invocations of religious "resurgence" are almost always disingenuous: Beyond the fact that religious "return" usually means the return of *Islam*, they also tend to displace more basic questions like how and why can an entire people's civil rights be denied them on theocratic grounds? While some Orthodox Jews might indeed be expected to speculate upon the deeper theological meaning of their historical "return" to a mythical homeland, Palestinian Christian and Arabs obviously exert a geopolitical or more "literal" claim to this same homeland, the claim of stolen property.

Derrida's dramatization of religion's recent return, like his insistence upon the universal structure of Messianicity, fails to respect

Christianity and Islam in their irreducible difference from Judaism, a classically imperialist gesture in which the Other is rewritten as a lesser or inauthentic version of oneself. This is so because Derrida wrongly assumes that all three Abrahamic religions press identical religious claims upon Jerusalem as their Promised Land. For Derrida, Middle Eastern violence is not a merely secular struggle for land, it is an apocalyptic "unleashing of Messianic eschatologies" (*Specters of Marx* 58). In the West, however, from the time of the earliest Christian crusades to George W. Bush's more recent malapropism describing his war on Afghanistan as a "crusade," the religious has mostly served as mere ruse for political powers seeking extrinsic support for their crassly economic ventures. Similarly, the vast majority of Levantine Muslims have dismissed Saddam Hussein's and Osama Ben Laden's respective appeals to *jihad* as crass political manipulations of the Islamic religion (while appreciating the historical frustrations of extremists who have been persuaded by such demagogues). In terms of religious doctrine, both of Judaism's sibling rivals find their historically unique identities only by renouncing such claims in any Messianic or theological sense. Islam, for instance, finds its own mission precisely when Muhammad redirects the prayers of his followers *away* from Jerusalem, toward the Ka'ba in Makkah. The vast majority of Christians, on the other hand, assert that the Covenant promising the Israelites a specific geographical territory was part of the Old Covenant that is rendered null and void by the New Covenant: "I will conclude a New Covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah, says the Lord. *It will not be like the Covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt* [my emphasis]" (Hebrews 8:7–13). In a scriptural or doctrinal sense, Christians and Muslims tend to agree that the Israelites lost their claim upon the Promised Land out of disobedience to the "Old" Covenant. From an Orthodox Jewish perspective, such views may seem offensive to some, but for believing Christians and Muslims they remain inextricable from the deepest essences of their faiths: which is to say, neither Christianity nor Islam may be reduced to Jewish heresies.

In contrast, Derrida makes of these Abrahamic religions *including anti-Zionist varieties of Judaism* (but also Fukuyama's Liberal Hegelian evangelism), identical partners in the Zionist obsession for retaking Jerusalem. If his comments on "the war for Jerusalem" were merely a matter of divergent doctrinal perspectives, Derrida's affinities for Judaic religion might well prove interesting in the same way that his essays on Jabès, Levinas, Augustine, and others have proven to be thought provoking for countless readers interested in theology.

However, by conflating the three Abrahamic religious doctrines as secret and identical sharers in the obsession for Jerusalem, a number of basic historical facts tend to be neglected: First and foremost is the fact that the State of Israel has illegally occupied the city of Jerusalem since 1967, when Moshe Dyan declared at the Wailing Wall, "We have reunited the torn city, the capital of Israel" (Talal 28), restoring the "unity" of Jerusalem in flagrant opposition to international law and numerous U.N. resolutions; that is, one angle of the so-called escatological triangle has relentlessly pursued its religious dream of possessing Jerusalem in a particularly violent, oppressive, and appalling way. What Derrida calls the "war for the appropriation of Jerusalem" is perhaps better characterized as the "*Israeli* war for the appropriation of Jerusalem," a war that has by no means been carried out by equally obsessed or endowed partners. Furthermore, it is questionable that what Derrida calls the war for the appropriation of Jerusalem can accurately be applied to Arab Christians and Muslims for whom the term "appropriation" tends to distort the historical reality of their situation. In common parlance, the word appropriation means "to take possession of, or to make use of for oneself, often without permission or legal right," a description that can only be said to apply to the State of Israel *but not to Palestinian Arabs.* If someone steals my wallet, for instance, it would certainly be odd to call me a thief for wanting it back. In such an instance, it is unlikely that many would describe me as someone who seeks to make use of my wallet "without permission or legal right." From this perspective, when Derrida states that "[the war for the appropriation of Jerusalem] is happening everywhere (*Specters of Marx* 58)," he does more than simply indulge in hyperbole, he distorts the basic facts of Palestinian-Israeli history.

In *Specters of Marx*, far from criticizing Zionist policies, Derrida repeatedly and deliberately deflects attention away from past Israeli actions, first by implying that *all* nationalisms equally promote "promised land" narratives and, second, by insinuating that the real fault for illegal Israeli actions in Palestinian lands must be laid at the doorstep of the international community, not at that of Israeli-Jewish peoples themselves (or "diasporic" Jews). "Beyond even alliances with a chosen people," Derrida states, "there is no nationality or nationalism that is not religious or mythological, let us say 'mystical' in the broad sense" (*Specters of Marx* 91); or, later, "every ideological phenomenon is marked by a degree of religiosity" ("Marx & Sons" 256). One implication of such remarks is that, in asserting a unique religious claim to contested Palestinian-Israeli territories, Zionists would seem merely to be doing what every other nation in the world must

do, only they are presumably more honest about their territorial blood rights; that is, according to this formulation, all nationalisms, including that of Arab Palestinians, become secret Zionisms. To make matters worse, Derrida apparently assuages his non-Jewish readers' anxieties regarding their possible fates within such "mystical" or "mythological" confederations by assuring them that "there is no inheritance without a call to responsibility" (*Specters of Marx* 91). In regards to international law, Derrida will similarly remark that, to fully account for the founding of the State of Israel in any historical sense, "one would have to analyze . . . the violence that preceded, constituted, and followed [its founding] on every side, *at the same time* in conformity with *and* in disregard of an international law that therefore appears today to be *at the same time* more contradictory, imperfect, and thus more perfectible and necessary than ever [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 58). Here, Derrida rightly (and unavoidably) emphasizes Israel's historical disregard of international law, and the fact that U.N., British, and U.S. declarations regarding Israel's formation failed to sufficiently take into account that, from the perspective of the vast majority of Arab Christians and Muslims, Palestinian territory *was not theirs to grant*, but his formulation also implies a more general dialectical process in Israeli history, a "give-and-take" between respectfulness and defiance of international law, that is simply false. In the specific case of the occupation of Jerusalem, for instance, Israel has repeatedly and flagrantly violated international law, including the reversal of its own prior agreement to the 1949 U.N. proposal for a *corpus separatum* of Jerusalem as the price of its statehood, a fact that even well-known figures like David Ben Gurion have frankly admitted. Moreover, Derrida's statement implies that it may well be "flawed" international laws themselves, not Israeli disregard of them, that is ultimately responsible for Middle Eastern violence. Taken to its logical conclusion, Derrida's formulation implies that the present political situation might not be so terrible if only the laws themselves were better written, or more "perfect." However, Derrida never bothers to ask what the situation might be if the State of Israel simply adhered to international laws rather than ignoring them.

Instead of holding Israelis responsible for their violations of such laws, Derrida consistently deflects attention away from Zionist imperialism, even at those moments where he articulates his bluntest criticisms of it. "Like those of blood, nationalisms of native soil not only sow hatred," Derrida tells us, "not only commit crimes, they have no future, they promise nothing even if, like stupidity or the unconscious, they hold fast to it" (*Specters of Marx* 169). Derrida could

not be more correct in this assertion, but this realization does not in any way propel him toward the deconstruction of Israeli Zionism. Instead, the more fundamental question seems to be how Jerusalem can be made more habitable—that is, more fully occupied—"without killing the future in the name of old frontiers" (*Specters of Marx* 169). Derrida ponders what will happen to the messianic once every square inch of promised real estate has been fully secured. Once the promise becomes a reality, that is, once the Zionist dream is fully realized, Israeli and diasporic Jews may end up with nothing left to anticipate. They will therefore be in the exact same unfortunate position as Christians with their Incarnate Logos or Muslims with their Revealed Word. It goes without saying that Palestinian Arabs may not find this last danger to be a particularly urgent one, at least not as urgent as keeping one's property from being bulldozed, or being killed oneself in yet another illegal air strike.

The main result of the theological elision in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims are assembled under the "neutral" banner of Abrahamic Messianism, as well as Derrida's total denial of the illegal military occupation of Jerusalem in any historical sense, is that Israeli-Zionist responsibility for the devastating effects of this religious obsession tends to be displaced, if not altogether absolved. In a more general sense, we may say then that Derrida's quasi-atheistic theorization of the Messianic, as either universal structure or historical Messianism, effectively assigns Christians and Muslims a marginalized place within a clearly defined Jewish political economy. In this regard, Derrida's approach is coterminous with the official Israeli position assigning itself legal custody of shared holy places as "present guardian" (according to the so-called Israel Protection of Holy Places Law, enacted on June 27, 1967); that is, if Arab Christians and Muslims are partners with Israeli Jews in their access to such sites, they remain junior partners at best, rather than full equals. In fact, Derrida's position in *Specters of Marx* is reminiscent of that of the late Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who stated to Anwar Sadat in 1977, "We can assure . . . both the Islamic and Christian worlds . . . that forever and ever access will be free without hindrance to the Holy Places sanctified to each faith" (Talal 13). The only problem with this assertion, as Jordanian Prince Hassan bin Talal once remarked, is that it "assumes that Jerusalem, the whole of the city, will remain 'forever and ever' under Israeli territorial sovereignty" (13).

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida also conflates anti-Zionist varieties of Judaism with Zionist Judaism, as if all "Messianic escatologies" were Zionisms. Properly speaking, however, Zionism is not reducible to

Judaism, only a particular inflection of the Jewish religion and even some paradoxical inflections of Christianity and Islam. For that matter, Zionist ideology is not exclusive to adherents of Abrahamic religion but is often embraced by secular, agnostic, or atheistic peoples. Derrida's invocation of religion's return in this context is not only unhelpful, it actually tends to mandate a resolution of the Palestinian question that is one-sidedly pro-Israeli and pro-Jewish. In opposition to Derrida's biased descriptions of "the war for Jerusalem," the reader of *Specters of Marx* must keep in mind a number of considerations: First, the State of Israel, as it is currently constituted, remains an ethnic democracy, granting full civil rights to only a single ethnic group, sometimes imagined in religious rather than racially essentialist terms. Among countless other discriminatory laws, perhaps the most appalling is the 1950 Law of Return, which grants Jews from anywhere in the world the right to immigrate to Israel while no Arab Palestinian may return to land that was forcibly confiscated from him/her or family members in the recent past. The World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency (Status) Law of 1952 similarly gives Israelis of "Jewish nationality" the exclusive right to purchase land, as well as special economic rights and social security benefits. Throughout Israel and Israeli-occupied territories, Arab Christians and Muslims must also carry identity cards at all times that clarify their inferior ethnic status as "non-Jews," and that enable their subjugation to countless forms of legalized racial harassment, economic hardship, and personal humiliation. These laws along with many others in Israel do not really require sophisticated deconstructive analysis nor agonized ethical inquiry to ascertain their possible injustice, which for most supporters of human rights will be self-evident. Second, whatever the shortcomings of his "evangelical" analysis of history's end, Francis Fukuyama could not be more correct when he calls the current Israeli occupation of the West Bank an obsolete and oppressive form of "territorial conquest" (275). It is therefore ironic that the left in general, and academic critics in particular, have uncritically accepted Derrida's stigmatization of *The End of History and The Last Man* as an apology for U.S. imperial hegemony, when it is Derrida himself in his subtle defense of Zionist ideology who performs this same function in a more complex if indirect and less honest way. In fact, in *Specters of Marx,* Derrida negotiates a careful reconciliation between Ango-American leftist theory and Zionist or racially essentialist ideology. "Marxism remains at once indispensable and structurally insufficient," Derrida insists. "It is still necessary but provided it be transformed and adapted to new conditions and a *new thinking of the ideological*...[my emphasis]" (*Specters*

of Marx 58). However, what Derrida calls this "new thinking of the ideological," alternately described by him as a universal Messianicity, actually imposes a concept of the universal that is saturated with historical particularity and a specific political bias. Derrida's Messianic structure militates for a Jewish concept of Messianic truth as absence that in fact subordinates non-Jewish peoples, especially Palestinian Christians and Muslims, to its own idiosyncratic logic. For Derrida then, it may not be Marx's latent metaphysics that provide the biggest obstacle for those who continue to insist upon the viability of Marxist theory (although this too must be taken into account), but the possible refusal of leftist theorists to adhere to a Zionist-friendly concept of ideology. Categorically rejecting all competing modes of theorizing the ideological, Derrida remains faithful to his own "undeconstructable" Messianic ideal/idol, which he elevates above "law or right and even human rights—and an idea of democracy" (*Specters of Marx* 59).

CHAPTER 5

The Figure of Jerusalem

> *The beautiful golden city is the heart and soul of the Jewish people. You cannot live without a heart and soul. If you want one simple word to symbolize all of Jewish history, that word would be Jerusalem.*
>
> *—Teddy Kolleck, Israeli Mayor of Jerusalem in 1977*

> *The* intifadah is *Palestinian self-determination, and is not a figure of speech.*
>
> *—Edward W. Said,* The Politics of Dispossession

In this chapter, I explore Jacques Derrida's evocation of the Jerusalem figure by contrasting Jewish and Christian approaches to allegorical interpretation, and by closely examining Fredric Jameson's suggestion that *Specters of Marx* advocates a figurative exegesis or an inherently didactic hermeneutics. In describing the "war for the appropriation of Jerusalem," Derrida effectively subordinates deconstruction to serve the interests of a specific politics that are far from neutral. He does this by authorizing a hypostasis of the Jerusalem figure in the pages of *Specters of Marx* (but also at the Whither Marxism? conference in Riverside, California) at the expense of actual Palestinian peoples and the historical city of Al-Quds, the Arabic name for Jerusalem. The Jerusalem figure is universalized rather than identified as a strictly Zionist obsession. The inherently didactic nature of this allegorical maneuver is further strengthened by Derrida's assumption of a homiletic and pedagogical posture at the Whither Marxism? conference, where he offers to lead disoriented Marxists into the future, provided that they accept his "unalterable" condition of repoliticization: namely, that the Marxist theory of ideology be rewritten as a variety of messianic eschatology, or Abrahamic religion. Derrida seeks to convert Marx into a "thinker of technics," or a

deconstructionist *avant le lettre*. *Specters of Marx* is haunted by an evangelical spirit, or Derrida's desire to transform Marxism into a imperfect version of deconstruction. In fact, Francis Fukuyama is also recast as a "thinker of technics" albeit an immature and childish one. Derrida imagines that his Marxist student-readers are also in need of his benign pedagogical assistance. *Specters of Marx* is therefore offered to the incompetent reader as a lesson in Middle Eastern politics. To this end, the capital of Elsinor and the medieval kingdom of Denmark from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are set before the reader to elicit a judgment about the modern "capital" of Jerusalem and the "rotten" State of Israel. I urge the reader to decline Derrida's charitable gift, as well as his sermonic lesson about the Jerusalem figure and the mortified remains of the messianic. This rejection will almost always be necessary for Christian and Muslim readers of Derrida because his allegedly universal concept of messianicity promotes a Jewish concept of the Messiah as a structure of expectation rather than absolute or even historical event.

In *Specters of Marx,* Jacques Derrida will agree with Max Stirner that "[the Christian God] Jesus is at once the greatest and the most 'incomprehensible of ghosts,'" a kind of "horrible being…[who] introduced great distress into history" (144). It may well be, however, that there is no ghost in more recent global history that has brought greater distress to human life everywhere, but especially to Levantine peoples in the Middle East, than the ghostly figure that continues to haunt the dreams of Zionists throughout the world: the "symptomatic figure" of a Holy City built upon the ruins of Palestinian Al-Quds (or Arab Jerusalem) and countless Arab lives. At the Whither Marxism? conference event in Riverside, Derrida repeatedly evokes "the figure of Jerusalem," summoning this religious phantom on numerous occasions. "Frequency counts," Derrida reminds us. "The experience, the apprehension of the ghost is tuned into *frequency*: number (more than one), insistence, rhythm (waves, cycles, and periods) [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 107). Like the ghost of Hamlet's father, the Jerusalem figure possesses "spectral density" (109), becoming a master trope that reigns in this text's more anarchistic impulses. As is also true of the murdered king in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Derrida's Jerusalem figure haunts the pages of *Specters of Marx* at its most dramatic, climactic, and paradoxical moments.

To clarify the importance of the Jerusalem figure to this text, we must first differentiate Derrida's quasi-atheistic approach to figurative exegesis from dominant Western ones, especially Christian and Marxist hermeneutical models. In Derrida's exchange with Fredric

Jameson, who relies upon a Marxian variety of figurative interpretation, Derrida will state: "I continue to have reservations concerning the word 'allegory,' which Jameson assigns so important a role . . . and am still undecided about it" ("Marx & Sons" 246). Derrida rejects the words "aesthetic" and "utopian" as irrelevant while merely registering his ambivalence about allegory without further explanation. Understandably, Derrida expresses his discomfort at the ease with which Jameson employs allegorical interpretive strategies (for Jameson, a term that is related to Claude Lévi-Strauss's general concept of the *pensée sauvage* and integral to his own theory of the political unconscious); however, in responding to Jameson's critique of *Specters of Marx*, Derrida is compelled to recognize that, unlike the concepts of the aesthetic and the utopian, he may not simply reject the concept of allegory because of his frank manipulation of it.

In part, Derrida's divergence from Jameson can be explained with reference to his unique heritage as a Sephardic Jewish philosopher, understandably less at ease with reworked Christian concepts and interpretive strategies. In his introduction to *The Political Unconscious* (1981), it will be remembered, the Marxist critic Jameson surprised many by his frank appreciation of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1959), a modern Christian reinvention of the patristic hermeneutic systems of Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson even applauded these church fathers for devising an interpretive system that sought to mediate between the temporal horizons of their imaginary "neolithic" ancestors and the present needs of the church community. Implicit in Derrida's discomfort with Jamesonian allegory is the long history of Jewish and Christian discord over the concept of allegory and its proper usage in the interpretation of the Bible. Although Jewish interpreters employed allegorical interpretation long before Augustine's *On Christian Teaching* appeared in A.D. 427 (the first comprehensive and systematic treatment of figurative hermeneutics and homiletics), those Jews who did not convert to Christianity were often dismayed at how their Greco-Roman rivals relied upon allegory as a means of canceling the literal (or etiological) meaning of the text. Augustine of Hippo, who was deeply influenced by Neo-Platonism and who was far less familiar with Hebrew civilization, often sought the Biblical text's allegorical meaning for the new "chosen" community as a way of superseding Judaic theology and history. This Christian practice predates Augustine in the Epistles of Paul, where Levantine customs like circumcision, the prohibition of eating animals with cloven-hoofs, and similar indigenous practices were negotiated in light of the cultural

prejudices of new Greco-Roman converts to the faith. If the contradictions of the Biblical text itself rendered any strictly antifigurative exegesis unlikely, Jews who remained loyal to the religious beliefs of the Pharisees, Scribes, Essenes, and others understandably felt that the interpretative practices of the Christian community were both offensive and heretical. As Solomon ben Ardet, a leading Jewish exegete in the medieval period, put it, "A man [like Augustine] who reduces the entire Bible to useless allegories trifles with and perverts all the commandments in order to make the yoke of his burden lighter to himself" (Peters II 116). From this orthodox Jewish perspective, Christian allegorical exegesis served the function of freeing the Christian from adhering to the far stricter Mosaic codes while preserving such codes as old or defunct instances of scriptural revelation. Allegorical interpretation in the emerging Christian orthodoxy implied that Judaism was both idolatrous and irrelevant.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida indeed relies upon allegorical interpretation, as Jameson suggests in his essay "Marx's Purloined Letter," but Jameson too hastily assumes their shared beliefs about this strategy, which no Jewish exegete could employ without careful equivocation or qualification. Perhaps the most obvious reason for Jewish disdain of figurative rhetoric in Christian discourse is its implied anthropomorphism, or its recasting of scriptural meaning in terms of the *Corpus Christi*, or body of Christ (i.e., the united church community). The word figure, from the Latin *figura* or Old Latin *fingere*, literally means "to form." In Derrida's antiessentialist critique of the Platonic Idea as idol, or a kind of "Wise Guide" for the human eye/I, he suggests that forms are unavoidably sedimented with the real, which can never be real in the way that many Western philosophers assume. Allegory or *figura* in its most obvious sense is commonly evoked to enable the transcendence of the level of the literal, etiological, or historical meaning of a text, which in this instance may be signified by the Palestinian Arab term for Jerusalem, which is the holy city called Al-Quds. Arab Al-Quds, a word that never appears in *Specters of Marx,* is the historical or etiological level that Derrida effaces with his Jerusalem figure. The word Al-Quds means holy and is etymologically related to Gaddos in Arabic and Gaddosh in Hebrew. All of these names are preceded by the Aramaic word Qaddosh. (In the Quran, one of God's names is Qaddoos or the Holy One.) From a Muslim perspective—and, arguably, from a historical perspective—the city of Al-Quds is far more ancient than Jerusalem. In fact, the name Jerusalem is almost never used by Arabic, Aramaic, or Muslim speakers, except when addressing a

Western audience. The Quran does not refer to either Jerusalem or Al-Quds but mentions the Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, known by the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad to be located in the town of Al-Quds. Muslims believe that Muhammad visited Al-Quds on the night of Al-Esra'e. The Quran also refers to the Qubaat Al-Sakhrah, or the Dome of the Rock of Al-Quds. The Prophet Muhammad himself never utters the word "Jerusalem" in any of his Hadith or "Sayings." In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida deliberately elides the specificity of Al-Quds, burying this ancient name in preference for Jerusalem. In other words, while Israeli Jews may certainly be fighting a war to win their beloved Jerusalem, Arab Muslims are embroiled in an *intifada*—or shirking off—to restore their Holy City of Al-Quds. In one of the most striking passages from *Specters of Marx*, following an apocalyptic reference to what he alleges is a "world war" for the Holy City of Jerusalem, Derrida collapses all distinctions between this armed figure and its historical grounding or "place":

> . . . the greatest symptomatic or metonymic concentration of what remains irreducible in the worldwide conjuncture in which the question of "whither Marxism" is inscribed today has its place, its figure, or the figure of its place in the Middle East: three other messianic eschatologies mobilize there all the forces of the world and the whole "world order" in the ruthless war they are waging against each other, directly or indirectly. (*Specters of Marx* 58)

Reduced to its constituent elements, this complicated sentence makes a simple assertion: the irreducible center has its place. It has a ground of its own. *The thing is a thing.* Moreover, this thing "*has its place, its figure, or the figure of its place in the Middle East* [my emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 58). In the later portion of the sentence, Derrida conflates the levels of the historical and allegorical: The *place* of Jerusalem is the same as the symptomatic *figure* of Jerusalem; or, the *figure* of Jerusalem implies "the figure of [Jerusalem's] place" (*Specters of Marx* 58). Earlier in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida quotes a remarkably similar passage from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* after the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to the Prince and his fellow conspirators: *"The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King, is a thing* [my emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 9). After Derrida demonstrates how the god-term (or King-Thing) comes into being for Hamlet and his fellow conspirators, or how word and thing become conjoined as word-thing when summoned by the human voice, he clarifies the social consequences of this conflation by showing how logocentric centers like the King-Thing (in the play, the Ghost of Hamlet's father) are evoked on

behalf of interpretative bodies, who swear collective oaths of silence about truths that they know are lies. The King becomes King-Thing, Derrida writes, "in order to reign, and first of all, to inherit royal dignity, whether by crime or election." In the case of the Jerusalem figure, this ghostly city also becomes a Thing at the moment that it separates from the more literal ground of Al-Quds. In other words, Jerusalem doubles as simultaneous figure and place in order that some unified body might reign "whether by crime or election." In the meantime, the historical field of Al-Quds is superseded if not annihilated in a figurative sense, not to mention an implicit moral sense, the inevitable adjunct to these first two levels of meaning; that is, after allegorical meaning is secured, it is incumbent upon the body of believers in the ghost to act. For this reason, Frye and Jameson have both emphasized the social or communal character of figurative interpretation despite their great differences in political orientation.

Jameson is certainly correct that Derrida proposes a figurative hermeneutics in *Specters of Marx*, but Derrida's own figurative system diverges from the patristic or medieval Christian model in at least one very important way: The central mechanism that propels the movement of the Augustinian system differs from what gives impetus to Derrida's own figurative model, a mystical "mechanism" that is paradoxically described as invisible writing. It bears emphasizing that this mechanism is devoid of metaphysical content. For this reason, Derrida may always claim that the figure of Jerusalem is little more than a ghost, not a metaphysics. In relation to Jameson's reading of Derrida, the movement of Derrida's system is not in any way driven by Christian charity (*caritas*), as in Augustinian polysemous interpretation but by the "universal" or messianic structure of irreducible faith. In *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine draws from Paul to define the Christian concept of Spirit with reference to the law that is inscribed upon the human heart: "*You are our letter,*" Paul writes, "*written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on the fleshly tablets of the heart* [my emphasis]" (2 Corinthians 3:2–3). In certain circumstances, Augustine suggests the superfluous character of sacred scripture, which must finally be subordinated to this other corporeal "text": "[A] person strengthened by faith, hope, and love, and who steadfastly holds on to them," Augustine writes, "has no need of the scriptures except to instruct others" (*On Christian Teaching* 28). With some exceptions, Christians generally assert that the law written upon the human heart takes precedence over written scripture, which from an orthodox Jewish perspective fails to respect the literal integrity of the Biblical text. In

Augustine, on the other hand, Christian exegetes measure the validity of their reading of scripture in relation to the guiding principle of Love or charity; or, as Paul puts it, "there remain faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinithians 13:13). Extrapolating from Paul, Augustine argues, "When someone has learnt that the aim of the commandment is 'love from a pure heart, and good conscience and genuine faith' [1 Timothy 1:5], he will be ready to relate every interpretation of the holy scriptures to these three things and may approach the task of handling these books with confidence" (29). For Augustine, the Spirit that guides interpretive inquiry implies logocentric embodiment, which is the chief consequence of Augustine's and Paul's insistence upon the priority of love, whereas the universal principle that guides Derrida's approach to figurative exegesis is the messianic "structure of the promise" (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 22). In other words, the greatest for Derrida is not love but faith, a concept that he argues cannot be reduced to any specific religion or "determinate figure and form" of the Messiah: "When I insisted in *Specters of Marx* on messianicity," Derrida states, "which I distinguished from messianism [in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam], I wanted to show that the messianic structure is a *universal* structure [my emphasis]" (22).

For Derrida, the validity of textual exegesis may be ascertained with reference to the exegete's adherence to or deviance from this preemptorial interpretive principle. Derrida states: "[T]he fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice . . . is what I call the messianic structure" (23). Readers who are not believing Jews will obviously be more skeptical about Derrida's claim that the messianic structure may be posited in any universalizing way. Christians who remain loyal to their own concept of Messianic Truth, which for them is a concept that implies Messianic incarnation, may understandably feel that Derrida's assertion that his faith in a Messiah who never comes is far from being a matter of universal truth. Muslims too may wonder if Derrida's claim that messianicity supercedes even Quranic revelation, or belief in an uncreated and coeternal Book, is not a disingenuous strategy for asserting the cultural hegemony of a historically specific universalism, one that has more in common with Judaic religion than either Islam or Christianity. "This 'trust me, I am speaking to you' is of the order of faith," Derrida insists, "a faith that cannot be reduced to a theoretical statement, to a determinative justice . . . [and] is *absolutely universal* [my emphasis]" (22). The position of the Jew who awaits the coming of the Messiah but rejects belief in a revealed truth that has already arrived—whether that truth

is Jesus Christ or the Heavenly Book—becomes the common subject position for all humanity, as well as a basis for establishing a new concept of human rights.

While Derrida emphasizes that the messianic structure should not be reduced to any given Messianism that privileges one Abrahamic tradition over its rivals, he effectively reduces *both* Christian and Islamic Messianism to *Jewish* Messianism. Derrida refrains from stating his actual beliefs but his equivocating on this question seems disingenuous. "On the one hand," Derrida states, he *may* accept the historical validity of revelation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as absolute events that have unveiled messianicity. In this case, "we would not know what messianicity is without messianism" (23). "On the other hand," he also states, he *may* accept that messianicity is a universal rather than an historical experience, what he calls "a stylistic Heideggerian gesture." The latter assertion tends to reinforce the hegemony of Judaic belief systems, promoting a spiritualist theology rather than a logocentric one. Derrida will elsewhere insist upon the materiality of this theology ("Marx & Sons" 267), but "matter" for Derrida is always the "matter of the mother" or an ideology affirming the theological character of the maternal debt ("Circumfession" 155). For this reason, Derrida also refers to messianicity as a quasi-atheism or a religious belief system that appears to be materialist but is actually Jewish theology. Derrida's prior assertion that Abrahamic revelation occurred as "absolute events" would, by way of contrast, imply that Derrida affirms a more traditional belief in Mosiac revelation. This would mean that Derrida is simply a believing Jew. Emptied of universality, this possibility will no doubt seem more acceptable for believing Christians and Muslims because it might allow them to retain their own belief systems without converting them into Jews *manqués*; that is, Jews, Christians, and Muslims could simply agree to disagree about revelation in their respective faiths. Jews could continue to affirm that the entirety of revelation was given to Moses at Sinai; Christians could continue to affirm belief in Jesus Christ as Revealed and Incarnate Word; and Muslims could continue to affirm that the Revealed Quran supersedes both Jewish and Christian revelations. Interlocutionary exchange between Abrahamic rivals would therefore imply the need for a secular (or liberal) framework rather than a religious one.

In the case of Christian hermeneutics, the Augustinian system, which has overshadowed Western interpretive theory for hundreds of years, nonetheless parallels Derrida's disguised allegorical system in at least one important sense: the guiding interpretive principle of *caritas*, or Christian love, also advocates that Christians adopt a spirit of

forbearance in judging the meaning of any given text, including the universe of ontological signs. The guiding principle of Derrida's system similarly mandates that the exegete approach the text in a spirit of patient anticipation, a hopeful waiting for the truthful word of the other. Although Augustine finally insists upon a concept of *caritas* that is inseparable from an ideology of Messianic incarnation, he also acknowledges the importance of "genuine faith" and "good conscience" (*On Christian Teaching* 29). Augustine and Derrida nonetheless diverge in their speculative location of their respective true or revealed words, which both imagine to be autonomous. While Augustine will insist that the exegete's spirit of critical leniency must finally give way to a concept of embodiment, wherein merely written texts are disregarded in favor of the corporeal word, Derrida theorizes that the exegete's spirit of hopeful anticipation should lead to belief in a factual but unseen word that circulates *outside* the human body, not as an Incarnate Word or Gathered Book in Heaven, but in discourse that is produced during interlocutory exchanges with the other. Derrida maintains that the spirit (or trace) of the word cannot be contained within the human body, or within any organic interior space, but enjoys an independent life in a realm exterior to the mind, heart, or organic body (*Specters of Marx* 171–172). If not identical to mainstream or orthodox Judaism, his revised definition of the trace in *Specters of Marx* parallels Kabbalistic concepts of spirit, or "the soul of the Torah": *The Book of Splendor*, for instance, affirms that "the genuine Sages, the servants of the Most High King, those who stood at Mount Sinai, look only at the soul of the Torah, which is the most elemental principle of all, the True Torah" (Peters II 76). The true Torah in this sense is an oral-aural word that is destined for the ears rather than the eyes, in stark contrast to the Pauline view that Jews follow the letter of the law rather than its invisible spirit. Both Jewish and Christian concepts of revelation are integral to their respective orthodoxies, and they are powerful in theological implication, but no single exegetical tradition should seek to obliterate its religious rival, nor posit itself as "absolute truth" or empirical fact.

For many Levantine peoples today, there is obviously more at stake in this matter than the resolution of a subtle difference in exegetical orientation. First, in mediating from the level of the literal to the figurative, Derrida not only insists upon the priority of his Judaic concept of universal faith, he also evokes the Jerusalem figure without asking what happens to the historical level that is strategically transcended. Here, the temptation to assert that Derrida is unwittingly logocentric may be impossible for some to resist, although this

temptation must be resisted, not merely for the interpretive violence it enacts against Derrida, but also because of its inaccuracy. Even though he does not always live up to his own high standards in every instance, Derrida must not be recast as secret Christian or closet ontologist, an all too common catachresis of Marxists and other theorists in the West. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida nonetheless leaves himself vulnerable to the charge of promoting a regressive ontology because Arab Al-Quds, or the literal or etiological field, is eclipsed within his own figurative system. The fact that the State of Israel has illegally controlled Jerusalem for more than thirty years now seems too obvious to have been overlooked. Derrida also insists that this figure is a "symptomatic" or "metonymic" one, implying that the Jerusalem figure, like the term apartheid, is intended as a moveable one that is not reducible to the State of Israel but must be appreciated in a global sense rather than one too narrowly centered upon the actual site of Al-Quds. In regards to the later, or the Jerusalem figure in its more global valence, the appeal to its transferability must be renounced because of the obvious interpretive violence it enacts against actual Palestinians.

It is also worth noting that in Maimonides' famous list of "Thirteen Principles," articulating the essentials of Judaism, there are no references to land-claims or even the status of Jews as a chosen people. As do Christians, Maimonides *does* affirm the Messiah must come from David's lineage, implying the need for a Jewish remnant, but that is all (Peters I 271–273). Maimonides' view here is not unlike the beliefs of Shi'ite Muslims that the Mahdi, or the man who will prepare the way for the second coming of Jesus, will come from the line of Muhammad (through Ali and Fatima). Zionism is similarly at variance with historically orthodox articulations of the Christian religion. As in the case of the figurative interpretation of circumcision rituals in the Christian religion,[1] the Zionist claim to the Promised Land, believed to be recorded in the Book of Joshua, becomes an idolatrous literalism for Christians, a no longer binding "Old" testament that has been rendered invalid by the Gospel of Jesus. Some Americans like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and others have lent support to U.S. foreign policy in Israel by affirming a distinctly American form of Christian Zionism.[2] The seeds of the American Christian double-standard are latent in the Pauline approach to circumcision, wherein Paul maintains that circumcision retains its validity, but only for Jews. Paul refuses to circumcise his disciple Titus, who is born of a Gentile mother, but agrees to circumcise Timothy, another disciple born of a Jewish mother. If cases like this one have led some Christians to view

Jewish peoples as entitled to unique spiritual privileges and responsibilities, the more widely accepted historical view in the Christian religion has been that Paul's tolerance of circumcision was a product of specific historical circumstances that are no longer binding. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, argued that "[t]he reason why the Holy Spirit did not wish the converted Jews to be debarred at once from observing the legal ceremonies, while converted pagans were forbidden to observe the rites of paganism, was in order to show that there was a difference between those rites" (Peters II 277). Hundreds of years after the time of Paul, Aquinas and most Christians believed that this period of special dispensation for Jews had come to a conclusion. Islam, on the other hand, allows for less ambiguity on the Zionist question, since Jewish scriptures are viewed as imperfect, due to textual revisions that Muslims believe occurred, both from Jewish carelessness and from deliberate efforts on the part of Jews and Christians to erase all prophetic references to the coming of Muhammad and the Islamic religion. From a Muslim perspective, there is little need to rationalize or even discuss Biblical references to Jewish claims about the Promised Land, which may be viewed as historically invalid or false. For instance, Muslims reject the story of Lot's incestuous relation with his daughters, which they believe were invented to imply the illegitimacy of non-Jewish claims about the region (i.e., Lot's daughters were the founding mothers of the Ammonites and Moabites). Beyond the belief that a venerated figure like the Prophet Lot (or "Lut" in Islam) would have not have become drunk and fornicated with his own daughters, Arab Muslims commonly believe that Jews often falsified the scriptures out of self-interest.[3] In opposition to Jews and Christians, Muslims have also maintained that it is not possible to know which scriptures may or may not be read allegorically. As Ibn Rushd (or Averroes) put it, "it is not possible for general unanimity to be established about allegorical interpretations, which God has made peculiar to scholars. This is self-evident to any fair-minded person" (Peters II 147).

The literal or fundamentalist claim that Eretz Israel belongs to a specific ethnic group, whether it is advanced by scriptural exegetes like Jacques Derrida, Pat Robertson, or the Gush Eminem deserves to be underscored, not because Zionism is reducible to Judaism, but because Zionist Jews and Christians have advanced this claim in opposition to their respective orthodoxies and to the detriment of Arab Christians and Muslims, many of whom have not only lost their ancestral homeland but basic civil and human rights, including the right to live. In Israel's *Declaration of Independence* (1948), the claim

is advanced that lands long held by Arab peoples belong to Israeli Jews by virtue of "natural and historical right" (Findley 3); or, as one offical AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) document puts it, "Israel's international 'birth certificate' was validated by the promise of the Bible" (4). Although many Orthodox Jews do not read the Bible outside of Talmudic mediation, one Biblical passage often cited to substantiate this claim is recorded in the Book of Joshua wherein God (Yahweh) is reputed to have said: "I have allotted to you [Joshua and the Israelites], by your tribes, [the territory] of these nations that remain, and that of all the nations that I have destroyed, from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea" (Joshua 23:1–7). In some cases, figures like Ariel Sharon have even claimed that "Originally Palestine had included Jordan" (Findley 8). In fact, the historical insistence of Israeli political leaders like Sharon, Menachem Begin, and Benyamin Netanyahu that the East Bank (i.e., approximately half of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) rightfully belongs to Jewish peoples has for decades been an important factor in undermining the Middle Eastern peace process. Unlike many contemporary Israeli historians, Derrida himself prefers not to distinguish between Zionism, Orthodox Judaism, Reformed Judaism, and secular varieties of Judaism: it bears repeating that in *Specters of Marxist*, Zionist ideology is consistently described as a "*Jewish* discourse on the Promised Land" or "the *Jewish* prefiguration of the Promised Land [my emphasis]" (60). At no point in *Specters of Marx* will Derrida confirm that Zionism is a ideology in its own right, distinct from more orthodox interpretations of Judaism. Never does Derrida make clear that the Jerusalem figure assumes a logocentric character only for Zionists.

Derrida's "Christian" and homiletic posture in *Specters of Marx* may be illuminated with reference to Augustinian figuration, especially its third or moral level wherein pragmatic action, specifically the necessity of spreading the good news, arises after figurative meaning is ascertained. Christian exegetes, or the church fathers and scriptural authorities, must teach the world the truths that they have discovered. This duty is especially enjoined upon those endowed with the talent of teaching, so that they may bring light to the naïve or less astute. Rhetoric is the handmaiden of exegetical truth-finding. Augustine's rhetorical system, which builds upon Greco-Roman models, subordinates the speaking arts to Biblical exegesis. In *On Christian Teaching*, rhetoric is superseded by homiletics, which becomes a tool for disseminating logocentric philosophy, but never a means of finding truth *in* language. Although he professes no

confidence in Augustine's word-made-flesh, Derrida occasionally slips into "the error" of metaphysics for his readers' sakes because he imagines that they are not up to his expert level. Derrida reluctantly indulges his readers' unhealthy taste for metaphysics, so that he may teach them a needed lesson. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida's conversation with the other is not an exchange between equals but between the one-who-knows and the ones-who-don't-know, but who might possibly be set upon the right path. The one-who-knows demands submission of his potential disciples, especially to his unique messianic ideal, which is the unalterable condition of a "re-politicization," or the condition that will "always remain" (*Specters of Marx* 75). Derrida plays the role of the *rabb* who lays down his weapons, but *as a mere rhetorical strategy*, for there is only a *figurative* invocation of the gesture of Abrahamic hospitality. In reality, the host claiming to be unarmed is the one who is in the possession of universal truth, the most deadly weapon of all.

Although Derrida typically makes only elliptical references to the State of Israel, it is significant that he *does* allegorize the relation between Shakespeare's fictive Denmark and the economic situation of contemporary Denmark. In an early footnote of *Specters of Marx*, Derrida speculates that the medieval kingdom of Denmark prefigures that of modern Denmark. In conceptualizing the possible relation between these two states, one fictive and the other historical, Derrida states, "Ought one to have recalled that in the West, near the end of the European peninsula, Denmark almost became, precisely along with England, the last State of resistance to a certain Europe, that of Maastricht?" (*Specters of Marx* 178 fn 3). Derrida refers here to the modern state of Denmark's near refusal to join the Economic Union in Europe that led to the introduction of the Euro. The implication is that because both England and Denmark are not fully connected in a geographical sense to the continent (or "body") of Europe, they may have been encouraged to imagine themselves as culturally separate from other European nation states, or at least they were more reluctant to join the "conspiracy" of the European Union. This remark is notable not only for its random character—after all, what does Maastricht have to do with Hamlet?—but also because it reveals Derrida's willingness to extrapolate from the imaginary kingdom of the Shakespearean text to the real political entities of Denmark and England.

Derrida therefore encourages us to believe that the kingdom of Denmark in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as well as the capital city of Elsinor, may indeed be read as allegorical markers that illuminate the historical

crises of contemporary nation-states, particularly European ones that imagine they are geographically, if not spiritually, separate from the continent. The question of Denmark's and Elsinor's allegorical potential is nonetheless deflected by Derrida, who quickly asserts, "No, this corollary of the royal head [i.e., Elsinor as medieval capital of Denmark] would be oriented toward *other places* [my emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 178 fn 3). Derrida declines to inform his readers where these "other places" might be. One wonders, for instance, what ostensibly European nation-states may exist that are not fully connected to the continental body? Derrida will, however, offer further elliptical speculations regarding "a *certain* figure of the head [my emphasis]," which is simultaneously described as "capital," "chief," and mere "head" (*Specters of Marx* 178 fn 3). The problem of the figurative capital, which Derrida will only refer to in ellipses, is also the problem of "the war for Jerusalem," the figurative "head." We are also often reminded that the specter is a "revenant," or a thing that has returned (*Specters of Marx* 11). The most powerful revenant in the world today is, of course, the Zionist revenant, or the Jerusalem figure, which began by "returning" to claim a "certain" inheritance. "[A] specter is always a *revenant*," Derrida states, "One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back* [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Specters of Marx* 11). As we have seen, Derrida evasively states that he is "undecided" about allegory ("Marx & Sons" 246), but what he seems to mean is that, as is true of his "oscillation" between Abrahamic Messianism and universal messianicity, or between two laws for two kinds of people, Christian-style allegories may be pressed into service in order to teach a lesson to certain kinds of people, but they must be categorically eschewed in the company of those who know better, or, among those who already belong to the block of the faithful. The third level of patristic hermeneutics, the "ethical" or "moral" meaning of biblical scripture, is important insofar as it reveals to the community of true believers what must be done: or, it enables the practical implementation of scripture in daily life. Derrida encourages his own readers to consider Shakespeare's capital of Elsinor as a "corollary on the royal head" that is "oriented towards other places" (*Specters of Marx* 178 fn 3). The term "corollary" is worth repeating here because it demonstrates Derrida's view that his readers should themselves logically infer the location he implies but dare not utter. Like the Christian fathers with their polysemic Bible, Derrida implements the ambiguous Shakespearean text within a social context that is radically different from its proper historical context *so that a lesson might be taught*. The case of Elsinor, a fictional setting with no obvious connection to the

historical "capital" of Jerusalem, is set before Derrida's readers to elicit their judgment about the modern State of Israel.

If allegory in this sense slightly differs from Christian parable, at least in popular usage (the *OED* defines the former as "extended simile" and the later as "extended metaphor"), they both share a common didactic function; that is, allegory is only *apparently* less didactic than parable; for, in the end, "every parable is an allegory and every allegory a parable" (Fowler 558). Like the "horrible being" deemed fit for deconstructive exorcism, Derrida teaches those Marxists assembled through parable, or he is most "Christian" when teaching edifying lessons about the Jewish state. The other in this instance must be lent a hand in an act of Christian "charity" (*caritas*). To teach the Marxists a lesson, the failed political conspiracy of Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus becomes a model of praxis for disoriented Marxists in the era of the New World Order, most particularly with reference to the State of Israel. Derrida not only theorizes about the crises of the Middle East, he summons through incantation of ritual formulae a host of religious figures in a public assembly of Marxist scholars for whom he volunteers to become a leader or pedagogical guide.

If Derrida must be left to his alterity, Derrida himself does not allow the Christian and Muslim other to be fully other, not only with reference to universal messianicity but also the "symptomatic figure" of Jerusalem. Derrida erroneously assumes that the religious obsession for Jerusalem is identical for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike rather than endemic to Zionists. In *Specters of Marx*, a hypostasis of the Jerusalem figure indeed occurs, although for allegedly "pedagogical" reasons. This is not by any means a necessary hypostasis, but its existence indicates a definite betrayal of deconstruction rather than its "disguised" ontological character, coterminous with messiancity, or the will-to-death. Derrida valorizes a "certain" Marx—the Marx who is secretly Derrida—while stigmatizing another, the Marx who is a closet idealist. Although a logocentric or "heathen" Marx, this other Marx may still be "saved" if converted to a prototypicial thinker of technics. As with the Augustinian system, once exegetical meaning is ascertained in Derrida's allegorical model, it must be taught to the less experienced or astute; in this case, however, its central mechanism is not charity but messianicity (or universal faith). In other words, Derrida occasionally authorizes the hypostasis of certain figures on behalf of the incompetent reader. Finally, Derrida implies that the fictional capital of Elsinor and the kingdom of Denmark in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* prefigure the modern nation state of Israel and its imaginary political capital Jerusalem, for Palestinians, the capital

city of Al-Quds. In "Marx & Sons," Derrida adopts a rhetoric of disarmament, stating that he prefers to come "disarmed" before his Marxist critics. However, no laying down of weapons occurs. Derrida remains fully armed before his interlocutors, who must recognize this is a mere ruse, a veiled war strategy.

CHAPTER 6

Conjuration

In his essay "Marx & Sons," Derrida criticizes Aijaz Ahmad for suggesting that he assumes the identity of Hamlet in *Specters of Marx* and promotes himself as "the Prince of Deconstruction"; however, Ahmad is correct when he suggests that Derrida also adopts the persona of Hamlet to advance his own claims upon the Marxist legacy. The main problem with Ahmad's analysis is that he neglects the other two personas that Derrida adopts, those of Horatio and Marcellus. The power of the voices of the conspirators in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* conjures an apparition of the specter, the voices of the characters Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus. Derrida suggests that each of these distinct voices is necessary to summon the figure-of-speech, which is an impossible time-space conflation. Speaking through each voice at different moments of the perverformative event, Derrida calls forth the Jerusalem figure on behalf of those gathered at this public event. In the opening chapter of *Specters of Marx*, Derrida cites Maurice Blanchot's essay "The End of Philosophy" (1959), which adumbrates the chief features of "the three voices of Marx." Derrida compares Blanchot's essay and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, suggesting that "the three voices" of Marx also speak through the three main conspirators in this play: Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus. These are "the three things of the thing," Derrida suggests (9). These three "voices," "complexes," or "things" are also alluded to in the book's subtitle: Hamlet, who represents *The State of the Debt*; Horatio, who represents *The Work of Mourning*; Marcellus, who represents *The New International*. In his essay "Marx & Sons," Derrida also abbreviates these complexes by referring to them more simply as "Marx," which refers to the Hamlet complex, "philosophy," which refers to the Horatio complex, and "the political," which refers to the Marcellus complex (217–219). The three voices of Marx are roughly equivalent to the three voices of Derrida himself, which he assumes throughout the perverformative

performance that is *Specters of Marx*. Still, none of these personas, complexes, or visors is reducible to Derrida the man: they are merely the masks that he wears, even the mask of the naïve soldier Marcellus (if one is ever "artfully artless"). Each mask that Derrida adopts is not reducible to the man himself. There is a gap between the man and the visor he wears: "I can address the Other only to the extent that there is separation, a dissociation . . ." Derrida insists, "[I]t is the only way for me to take responsibility and make decisions . . ." (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 14–15). In a nod to Immanuel Levinas, Derrida also states, "The figures of the ghost are first of all faces" (*Specters of Marx* 113). But the complex is also called "a matter of masks, helmet[s], and visor[s]" (113). Each mask is a shield (or *problema*), a figurative complex or theoretical problematic. The word "complex" comes from the Latin *complexus*, meaning "to entwine." In the case of what Derrida calls the Marcellus complex, his assertion that one must be naïvely complex (or guilelessly deceptive) reveals how praxis for Derrida is a matter of *feigning* one's naïvety or candor (for instance, claiming to come "disarmed" before one's interlocutors). Despite appearances, political action for Derrida is a calculated gamble that is far from naïve child's play. In terms of praxis, it is also important to remember that each complex is necessarily dependent upon the other two: "[I]t is at the moment when these three questions are tied together that [one] attempt[s] to define the act which, carrying one beyond the question-form of the question, consists in 'taking *responsibility*, in short, committing oneself in a performative fashion [Derrida's emphasis] ("Marx & Sons" 219). Derrida himself acknowledges that he has no theoretical or practical certainty regarding the utility, justice, or even sincerity of this act (220).

In a certain sense, deconstructive political intervention is kind a deliberate hoax or a matter of conjuration. One deceives but in a necessary and "nonmoral" sense. The words "conjure" and "hoax" imply deceiving by fiction or trickery. The word hoax, for instance, is etymologically related to the expression "hocus pocus," a vulgarization of the liturgical Latin phrase *hoc est corpus* (or this is the body). The words hoax and hocus pocus were formulaic and nonsensical phrases that were used by conjurers or magicians in public performances. The expression hocus pocus is also comparable to the term "legerdemain" from the Old French *leger de main*, which means sleight-of-hand, a trick that one plays with one's hands. Derrida himself will often italicize the figurative expressions "*on the one hand*" (*d'une part*) and "*on the other hand*" (*d'autre part*) to draw attention to those places in his texts where he relies upon sleight-of-hand figuration to manufacture

an illusory truth for deliberate political ends. The expression hocus pocus is often evoked in the context of magic shows, when a body or object is made to appear out of thin air, as in pulling a rabbit from a magic hat. Its reference to the Catholic doctrine of transsubstantiation is unmistakable, wherein the priest is said to mystically transform the elements of bread and wine into the actual body of Christ. In the Christian Eucharist, the God-Man appears on stage: Jesus Christ is fully present in the heavenly host. In a farcical parody of the Christian Eucharist, the conjurer utters the expression "hocus pocus" (*hoc est corpus* or "this is the body"), as a body is made to appear on stage. This hoax is also a form of conjuration, a word that comes from the Latin *conjurare*, meaning "to swear together" (from *com-* "together" and *jurare* "to swear"). To conjure means to swear an oath, but it also means to practice magic, especially by legerdemain or sleight-of-hand: The conjurer, like the Catholic priest and magician of hocus pocus, makes something appear before our eyes. To conjure can also mean summoning a devil or evil spirit, especially by uttering a magical incantation. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida will emphasize the etymological meaning of conjure, which is "to summon by an oath" (or a swearing together), and will suggest that the opening scenes of Hamlet constitute an oath-swearing ceremony wherein *Hamlet*'s three main conspirators conjure the appearance of the dead king by the power of the human voice. This scene may fascinate Derrida because it dramatizes the necessary hoax that is deconstruction. As conjurer, Derrida must convince his auditors that they see the invisible word that is spoken and hear the visible word that is written. In its most literal sense, the experience of the impossible that Derrida calls deconstruction refers to the utter impossibility of either seeing the invisible voice or hearing the silent letter. Derrida describes the heard figure as a "paradoxical incorporation" or "a carnal form of spirit," descriptions that equally promote flatly preposterous time-space conflations. In other words, the term figure-of-speech is already so much hocus pocus since the word figure unavoidably implies an anthropomorphism, body, form, or essence that enters the body through the eyes, just as the word speech necessarily implies a wind—or breathed word—that enters the body through the ears. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as a figure of speech.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida's rhetorical task is to convince his readers that they see the invisible and hear the silent. He hopes that he is justified in assuming the mask of the naïve or natural fool to accomplish this end. Derrida will make a fool of himself, so that we may become fools like him: "*Instructions in the art of seeing spirits*: first of

all, one must be transformed into a complete fool [Derrida's emphasis]" (134). Only a fool or original idiot can see a spirit because the spirit is precisely that which *cannot be seen*; and yet, the thing that cannot be seen *must be seen* in order to advance calculated political goals. In certain circumstances, "[w]e must calculate as rigorously as possible," Derrida insists (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 19). The scholar Horatio knows very well that the breath or spirit cannot be seen outside of its effects. It therefore takes a great deal of effort on his part to overcome his powers of reasoning, which rightly tell him that spirits are not objects of sight or transcribed letters. When Hamlet rebukes Horatio by stating "There are more things in heaven and earth . . . / Than are dreamt of in our philosophy" (I.5:174–175), he is simply reminding the bookish intellectual not to get entrapped in academic theories that will get him nowhere. Like the armed solider, the scholar must believe that he sees the invisible spirit, even if he knows this sight is so much foolishness, or be condemned to political irrelevance. In contrast, the naïve soldier Marcellus need not overcome his scholarly scruples. In fact, it is Marcellus who urges Horatio to do the impossible, for "the impossible is, alas, always possible" (*Specters of Marx* 175): he must speak to the figure. Wearing the mask of Marcellus, Derrida states, "*Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio* [Derrida's emphasis]" (176). However, transcribed words cannot be spoken to: only a madman talks to or personifies a written word. To speak to the figure means listening to a voiceless letter, or hearing an utterly still object. The bellowing fool may nonetheless give wind (or breath) to the spiritless letter by reading it aloud and thereby resurrecting it from the dead. The scholar gives spirit to the specter, but this is only part of his task, perhaps the smaller portion. More importantly, Horatio must "adjust speech to sight," or transmute the spoken word into transcribed letters (6). To put it simply, "adjusting speech to sight" means that the scholar's job is to write, or that Horatio is a writer who kills the living word as voiced sound by affixing it to a flattened sheet of paper. This task is also a part of "the work of mourning" for "to mourn" is to be anxious for the dead (from the Latin *memor* or mindful), in this case the dead letter. The writer is the one who is mindful about dead letters. Derrida also describes Horatio's work as an attempt "to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead [Derrida's emphasis]" (9). To be able to "identify bodily remains" suggests exegetical skills of close-reading: one must know how to read, which does not mean merely being literate but a talent that is hard-earned and highly valuable. Derrida's harshest rebukes fall upon those who fail in

their scholarly tasks as readers. Similarly, "localizing the dead" implies putting the written letter in its proper place, *literally* upon a spatial object that is a flattened sheet of paper. Derrida may safely assert that, "the specter is anything but immaterial" because matter is not herein posited as *ding-en-sich* but mere "*hulé*" or wood ("Marx & Sons" 267). Words exist as figures upon the surface of paper that is made from wood-pulp (*Specters of Marx* 152).

The scholar transforms the spoken word into a lifeless figure on wood-paper that he later raises from the dead by reading aloud in public gatherings, precisely as Derrida reads aloud from a prepared script at the Whither Marxism? conference. In such settings, the human voice or trace reverberates off the eardrums of the listeners and enters into the bodies of those in attendance. The voice is a material power or temporal force, rather than a spatial artifact. It exerts a material power that is characterized by air that passes from the lungs through the vocal chords and out of the mouth, blowing like wind into the ears of the other. In Derrida's reading of the oath-swearing scene of *Hamlet*, the three conspirators (Hamlet, Marcellus, and Horatio) summon the ghost of Hamlet's father in discursive or interlocutory exchange, or by the power of their actual breath or speech. Throughout *Specters of Marx*, Derrida reminds his auditors, who are also his readers, of the importance of the human voice in summoning the ghost. For instance, at the opening of his discussion of the diverse roles of *Hamlet*'s three conspirators, Derrida encourages his audience "to take a breath, [o]r let out a sigh; after the expiration itself, for *it is a matter of the spirit* [my emphasis]" (11). What Derrida calls the spirit, the trace, or gramma is synonymous with this powerful wet wind that may evoke a hallucinatory figure, which is said to appear when human beings speaking together summon it with their breathed words. As a secret society, the gathering of the conspirators in *Hamlet* calls forth the double of the dead king with the power of their spoken discourse: that is, the figure is a *figure of speech.*

For diehard believers in the ghost, Derrida's reading of *Hamlet* might be described as a variety of synesthesia, wherein one type of physical stimulation evokes the sensation of another, like Rimbaud's famous invention of the "color of vowels" (*A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green*...). For the more skeptical, the possibility that a figural double may actually be summoned from the cryptic depths of the human body will no doubt seem little more than a collective delusion. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida himself states that one does not "see in flesh and blood this Thing that is not a thing, this thing that is invisible between its apparitions" (6). *If* the ghostly thing is seen at all,

those who hope to see it must realize that they are being asked to see the invisible, or that which cannot be seen: "one must see, at first sight, what does not let itself be seen," Derrida states, "And this is invisibility itself" (149). One must accept that one can do that which cannot be done; and, believing that, one must accept that something has indeed been done; which is to say, one must have enough faith to embrace the truth that is always a lie, namely, that the thing seen is a *thing*. (It is *not* and never will be, for there is no such thing.) Derrida alternately refers to this quasi-religious event as "the spectrality effect" and "the spectrogenic process." Marcellus asks Horatio to speak to the ghost (and later Derrida will ask this of his auditors), which means that Horatio must bring a dead figure back to life, to resurrect the dead letter as an actual living spirit. Through Horatio's skill as reader, he must give the written word a human voice, just as he must deprive the spoken word of breath by converting it into a spatial figure: the spectrality effect implies undoing or subverting the logocentric opposition between dead-letter and living spirit. By urging Horatio to speak to the ghost, Derrida claims that Marcellus "anticipates the day when a scholar would come who can think *beyond* the opposition of presence and non-presence, life and nonlife, spirit and letter, voice and text [my emphasis]" (12). Marcellus calls upon Horatio to animate a living-dead figure, not a merely dead one. The ghost remains a spirit even after its mortification upon a flattened sheet of paper. This word can nonetheless come back from the dead only if there is a scholar or exegete to give it breath. Like the words of the Torah, or at least in the Kabbalah's mystical account of them, Derrida's living dead words enjoy a life that is independent of the modest container of the human head, circulating apart from human intentionality as things that are neither alive nor dead but "mime the living" as "quasi-divinit[ies]," or bogus gods that are nonetheless "cunning, inventive, unpredictable" (153). These skilled mimes becomes sights for human eyes by scholarly legerdemain and *sheer hocus pocus*.

Marcellus urges Horatio to perform this hocus pocus for several possible reasons: first, because Horatio is proficient in Latin, an esoteric language of priests and scholars, that may be uttered in certain ritual settings; second, because to read Latin is to read written words, a technology not available to the illiterate Marcellus; and, third, because Marcellus is more gullible or naïve than Horatio. Scholars work often with texts that adversely affects their relationship with words, encouraging them to succumb to the illusion that words are merely reified things or dead letters without spirit. This is a hazard of the scholarly profession. Those who suffer from this misfortune

include "theoreticians, witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals" (11). Marcellus has this advantage over the scholar: he remains naïve enough to believe that ghosts can actually be spoken to. Marcellus therefore has less trouble making a fool of himself than Horatio. The soldier Marcellus is not able to grasp that truths are actually lies in a nonmoral sense: this is his advantage and disadvantage. For his part, Horatio is regularly buried in texts; he overestimates his eyes and underestimates his ears. "[S]cholars believe that looking is sufficient," Derrida states. "Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the ghost . . ." (11). For scholars like Horatio, words are mistaken as merely spatial texts rather than temporal occurrences. Horatio the scholar traffics in specters. He has lost the habit of speaking to ghosts or "spirits." The Bookman Horatio has completely forgotten about the human voice. (Derrida himself repeatedly reminds us that *Specters of Marx* is a talking-book, not a merely written text.) In contrast, Marcellus is not subject to the forgetting of the voice that is endemic to scholars. Horatio very much depends upon Marcellus because he has been rendered mute by reading too many bad books, possibly Christian books. The complex of Horatio implies a weakness wherein education, that is the reading of books, must be overcome.

At the Whither Marxism? conference, Derrida conjures the Jerusalem figure as a heard word that his auditors are urged to believe is seen with their eyes. The figure is summoned by hocus pocus, a necessary hoax that he perpetuates because the philosopher is compelled to act, whatever his private misgivings. Derrida encourages those who are able to see the Jerusalem ghost to speak to it, but speaking *to* the ghost does not necessarily mean speaking *of* the ghost. In the case of *Specters of Marx*, its most startling silence, or the most obvious dimension of the oath-swearing scene that Derrida ignores, consists in the fact that the three conspirators not only swear together, but they also swear to keep their mouths shut. In fact, Hamlet repeats the injunction to silence eight separate times within the same scene, reminding Horatio and Marcellus that they may not break this oath even by uttering vague phrases or making obscure bodily gestures (I.5:180–187). Their swearing is therefore purposeful: One must not speak of this collectively "seen" figure. The fact that the thing seen cannot be seen as flesh and blood, but it nonetheless sees all those who summon it, is what Derrida calls *the visor effect* . The actual stage direction from Shakespeare's play reads as follows: "*Enter the ghost, clad in complete armour, with a visor raised, and a truncheon in its hand*" (I.I:41–42). Derrida speaks at great length about the visor

effect, but he has nothing to say about, what I shall call here, *the truncheon effect.* The truncheon effect, or the disturbing fact that the specter comes wielding a club, is what undermines the more academic question of the specter's ontological (or "hauntological") status since it may be less a matter of belief in the figurative ghost than the terror of defying the conjurer who summons it and the collective will of the group which upholds that they see it. The seen figure exerts an *absolute* claim upon those who evoke it, rendering the question of its materiality practically irrelevant, a distraction from more pressing matters. As Derrida puts it, the ghost seeks "an essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin" (7). His origin is traceable to the gathering of the conjurer and his fellow conspirators, whose words bind them in a political conspiracy wherein disclosure beyond the hermetic circle could mean death to one or all. "[L]et me conjure you / by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our / youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love . . . ," Hamlet states to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (2.2:281–283). But because these duplicitous conspirators prove faithless in their oaths to Hamlet, they meet the fate that is meted out to all those who violate the injunction to silence: political execution as traitors. Following in the steps of Derrida, I would like then to baptize a new problematic, the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Complex, the visor worn by those conjurors who are killed as informants for breaking faith with their fellow conspirators. In opposition to Derrida's strategically elliptical reading of the oath-swearing scene in Hamlet, I emphasize two issues here: first, the sworn oath includes the injunction to remain silent, and, second, this silence is enforceable by threat of death. The outside interloper, who succeeds in penetrating the hermetic circle of sworn conjurers, is construed by Derrida as a "violator of the pure" (*Of Grammatology* 113). "The mere presence of a spectator is a violation," Derrida asserts. This intruder is an unwelcome guest, an *arrivant* who is marked for death.

Derrida's rhetorical appeal to the helmet effect reveals key assumptions regarding the successful implementation of calculated but unstated political goals. While terms like helmet, mask, shield, and visor are related, they are not identical, and such differences should be underscored. The mask is like a helmet with a slitted visor because both lend to wearers "the power to see without being seen" (*Specters of Marx* 8); however, the mask merely covers the face, whereas the helmet always remains part of the knight's armor: "The helmet effect is not suspended when the visor is raised," Derrida states (8). This is so because, even when the visor is raised, the protective armor still

covers the body. The helmet or cap reveals its terrible power "in a more intensely dramatic fashion" than the mask. To create "the helmet effect"—which is to say, to demonstrate or make a show of one's power—one must "play with [one's] visor" (8). Playing with one's visor reminds all those addressed of one's power because this act draws attention to the existence of the protective armor. If I wear my visor up, my interlocutor is forced to realize that my body cannot be harmed; which is to say, playing with the visor is not aimless. The helmet is also metonymic; or, as Derrida puts it, the helmet "top[s] off the coat of arms and indicate[s] the chief's authority, like the blazon of his nobility" (8). The helmet reminds those present of the specter's nobility and is therefore affiliated with the Hamlet Complex. The Hamlet Complex signifies the voice of Derrida that "marks the name" (9). Derrida argues that the Hamlet Complex underscores the inheritance (or parental debt) from the preceding "generation of skulls or spirits." However, the Hamlet Complex also refers to an inheritance from the *mother*, which Derrida also alludes to as "the foreign debt" (93). Derrida claims in interviews published after *Specters of Marx* that the mother is "a legal fiction" like the father, but in *Specters of Marx*, the mother and her voice are described in terms of the abyssal pre-inheritance (110). Like a wellspring of unfathomable depths, the mother is a blood source. She *is* "at the heart of this analysis of spectral filiation" ("Marx & Sons" 231). She is also "the infinite sea that contains an immense but finite sponge," the sponge that is Hamlet, but also Derrida ("Circumfession" 104). Hamlet's tragedy is that he is "doomed to be a man of right and law" (*Specters of Marx* 21); however, not only Hamlet but the one who wears Hamlet's visor acts on behalf of the mother; or, as Derrida puts it in another context, "the reader will have understood that I am writing for my mother . . ." ("Circumfession" 25). Hamlet himself believes that the only way he can become a man of right and law is "by becoming an inheritor, redresser of wrongs . . . [or] only by castigating, punishing, killing" (*Specters of Marx* 21). The Law of the Father gives him no other choice; and yet, Hamlet's paralysis is also a consequence of the mother's bloody and noble legacy: It stems from a condition that "is *inborn* in him, given *by* his birth as much as *at* his birth [Derrida's emphasis]" (20). The italicized distinction that Derrida makes between the articles "by" (*par*) and "at" (*à*) is crucial in this case because it emphasizes the bloody aspects of Hamlet's senuous-nonsensuous body that is trapped between being and nonbeing, a dilemma that Derrida suggests is encapsulated by Shakespeare's most famous line, "to be or not to be" (11). Derrida does not affirm a metaphysics of the gathered organic body, but he does remind us that we are all leaky blood-filled

"sponges" prior to the trauma of our assertion into language ("Circumfession" 103).

The visor is not the same as the man who sports it, but Derrida suggests that the word cannot finally be dissociated from its bloody maternal origins. Matter may be *hulé* or *materia*, the figurative word inscribed on "wood," but it is also *mater* or "mother": "[S]ir, such answers as I can make, you shall command," Hamlet tells one of the informers, "or rather, as you say, *my mother [shall command].* Therefore no more, but / to the matter. My mother, you say—" (3.2:304–307). All answers that Hamlet makes are in response to the imaginary commands of the mother, commands that the mother will disavow. This bloody sponge draws its nourishment "from the invisible inside" (*Specters of Marx* 10). A "crural" vein expels maternal blood for the writer, and is the artery where Derrida's books "find their inspiration" ("Circumfession" 227–228). The inspired spirit (*spirare* meaning breathe) originates in the blood source of the mother. The "spirit" issues from blood-filled lungs only after it is nourished in the womb of the mother. Derrida states, "I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe" (10). The living-dead word is a word that is written in blood. If the writer is mindful of dead letters, his mourning "mixes [his] prayers and tears with blood" (20), or that which is "most alive" in him (12–13). The word that has undergone its figurative mortification cannot be called dead if it is made of the living blood of the eternal mother, who enables it to live posthumously. Mother thrives after her death in written letters, specifically Hebrew letters (287). In fact, the Hebrew language for Derrida is synonymous with the divine mother (286–287). In a *figurative* sense, mother is not reducible to the actual living mother who births us but is instead a powerful force that dwells within the parasitical sponge. She is "the maternal figure of absolute knowledge," an "eternal survivress" (46), and "the feminine figure of Yahweh" (155). "One must pass through the preinheritance . . . ," Derrida insists, "in order to appropriate the life of a new language or make the revolution" (110).

But Derrida will also insist that we must *forget* about this bloody maternal source. One ends up forgetting this bloody thing, he states, but "this forgetting is only a forgetting for what one must forget will have been indispensable" (110). If the mother is "at the heart of this analysis of spectral affiliation," as Derrida claims, she is not referred to except in cryptic allusions. The near total absence of reference to the mother in *Specters of Marx* does not then occur for lack of space but for calculated rhetorical reasons; that is, Derrida remembers to forget about this bloody survivress in *Specters of Marx.* The ghost

demands a "blind submission to the secret of his origin" (*Specters of Marx* 7), not simply to protect the sworn conspirators and their political machinations, but also to protect the secret of its elemental composition, "'the [bloody maternal] being that is hidden behind [spectral] things'" (191 fn 13). We refer then to a secret within a secret that Derrida will not dare to utter other than to hint at its existence: "The oaths, the calls to swear, the injunctions, and the conjurations . . . suppose a secret to be sure, some impossible testimony, one which cannot and especially must not be exposed in confession . . ." (185 fn 10). In a fatherly spirit, Derrida conceals the bloody truth about the buried crypt or "subterranean prison" (93).

In *Specters of Marx*, conjuration not only implies the summoning of a dead spirit but also its *exorcism*. In other words, the conjurer may summon a ghost precisely to expel it. Derrida describes exorcism in this sense as "a repeating in the mode of an incantation that the dead man is really dead" (48). The written figure is invoked by the conjurer to prove that it is no more than a living-dead word. Expressions of *formulae* like the Bible-based clichés of Fukuyama (i.e., the Promised Land, the Good News, and so on) are incessantly uttered not because the one who utters them actually believes in their existence in any metaphysical sense, but because Derrida longs to unmask their bogus character, thereby depriving them of their power. "Effective exorcism pretends to declare the death only in order to put to death," Derrida states. "In short, it is often a matter of pretending to certify death there where the death certificate is still the performative of an act of war . . ." (48). In other words, Derrida may claim that he has declared war upon the Jerusalem figure, so that this cliché might be exorcised. But if it were in fact true that Derrida seeks to exorcize the Jerusalem figure in *Specters of Marx*, this act could also be construed as a kind of strategic irrationalism or a benign political magic: that is, Derrida may conjure the Jerusalem figure in order to pose one authoritarian dogmatism against another, namely Fukuyama's conjuration of Christian gospel figures against his own more "benign" dogmatism. Derrida may draw attention to Fukuyama's Christian figures to show that they are lifeless clichés, and that he declares war against them in the name of life. However, this is not Derrida's stated intention in this particular instance, for toward the conclusion of *Specters of Marx*, he concedes that his efforts to universalize Messianic terminology finally amount to a refusal of life since they signal his unwillingness to exorcise the ghost of the Jewish Messiah. "Some, and I do not exclude myself," Derrida admits, "will find this despairing 'Messianism' has a curious taste, the taste of death" (169). Derrida sides with death by

relinquishing his duty to exorcise the Messianic ghost, a duty that is enjoined upon the living. Ordinarily, Derrida rejects the Christian mandate that the living must "let the dead bury the dead." "Even if one wanted to, one could not let the dead bury the dead: that has no sense, that is *impossible*," Derrida states. "Only mortals, only the living who are not living gods can bury the dead [Derrida's emphasis]" (174). The dead letter cannot protect other dead letters: the specter may be written in living blood, but it is dependent upon the human voice to mark it. Only the one who is a law or word unto himself could accept such a "naïve" proposition that scripture is irrelevant. The church fathers, who throw in their lots with death, succumb to a phallologocentric ideology that one must normally avoid. In the case of the Messianic and certain related figures, Derrida knows very well that he opts for death like these Christian philosophers. The conjuration of the Jerusalem figure is therefore a public spectacle of Derrida's impotence when it comes to the question of Zion. The very public act of conjuration at this conference merely reinforces the horrific power of a ghost that Derrida can never hope to destroy, whatever his private intentions.

But Derrida does not address the problem of the violent fate of the silent observer, or the one who refuses to join the conspiracy or who is constitutionally unable to swear, and who refuses to be intimidated by the truncheon effect. This unwelcome spectator poses a palpable danger to the gathering of believers because he or she may always disclose the fact that the spirit cannot really be seen, nor can the specter actually be heard. When the ghost of Hamlet's father steals into the bedchamber of Gertrude, another unwelcome *arrivant* is also murdered for his treachery, the old counselor Polonius, and Hamlet threatens to kill his own mother as yet another skeptical witness of the fraudulent ghost's apparition. When the ghost makes his appearance, Gertrude plainly lacks the ability to see or hear it. For the bewildered Gertrude, Hamlet is simply mad (3:4:98). "Alas, how is't with you, / that you do bend your eye on vacancy," she states. "And with the incorporal air do hold discourse? . . . O gentle son, / upon the heat and flame of thy distemper / sprinkle cool patience" (3:4:109–117). When Hamlet realizes that his mother is not deceiving him about her inability to see or hear this specter, he asks: "Do you see nothing there? . . . Nor did you hear nothing?" (3:4:124–128); but, Gertrude maintains that she sees "nothing at all" and hears "nothing but ourselves." In fact, Gertrude seeks to assure Hamlet that this specter is little more than "the coinage of [his] brain" or a "bodiless sensation ecstasy" (3:4:132–133), a disavowal that leaves Hamlet thunderstruck,

but also causes the ghost to steal away. The disavowal of the mother, who is also the one for whom the revolution is staged, is enough to make the bogus ghost depart in shame. Hamlet's conjuration or exorcism of the ghost is finally impotent gesticulation, a useless act that does nothing to expel the ghost, but the mother's refusal to swear sends the ghost back to hell. For Gertrude, the spectral apparition is mere hallucination. Like the pragmatic belief of the soldier Marcellus, Gertrude's disbelief also *works*. In fact, the skepticism of Gertrude is far more efficient than Hamlet's anxious act of exorcism. Gertrude encourages Hamlet to give up his foolish mourning and *let the dead bury the dead*: "Thou know'st 'tis common," she reminds him, "all that lives must die" (I:2:72). For Gertrude, the revolution that is instigated on her behalf, or that is held so that her silenced voice may be restored, does nothing to render her audible. In fact, Hamlet's imprecations almost choke her to death: "Be thou assured," she tells her son, "if words be made of breath, / And breath of life, I have no life to breath" (3:4:186–188).

Derrida's thesis that the mother is also a legal construction or discursive complex, what I call here "the Gertrude Complex," is elided in the pages of *Specters of Marx*. At the event of the Whither Marxism? conference, Derrida does not wear the mask of the mother. Close attention to the text of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reveals this problem by demonstrating how Gertrude is either unable or unwilling to recognize the specter. Exhibiting a profound lack of faith, Hamlet's mother rejects the material word that is nourished in her own blood. The word is denied by its maternal creator, who not only doubts its nobility but its very existence as *hylé* or matter. *The mother refuses to see herself.* At once more pious and more skeptical than Hamlet, Gertrude refrains from swearing upon the bloody thing of her own making. For his part, Hamlet opposes the impious wisdom of the mother by clinging to his deranged belief in the blood's immortality.

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CHAPTER 7

The Secular Trace

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses* (1991) shows how Freud, in spite of his professed atheism, continued to believe that Jewish identity is something that can be inherited through "the blood and nerves" (31). Yerushalmi carefully documents what he calls Freud's "Lamarckianism"—in spite of Freud's firm rejection of Carl Jung's hypothesis of the "collective unconscious." As provocative as this thesis may initially seem, especially in light of prevailing feminist and Marxist readings of Freud, the evidence gathered by Yerushalmi seems irrefutable. "Though Freud does not put it into words, the conclusion is inescapable," Yerushalmi states. "The character traits embedded in the Jewish psyche are themselves transmitted phylogenetically and no longer require religion in order to be sustained" (52). Against Peter Gay's influential reading of Freud as "a godless Jew," Yerushalmi insists that Freud remained a Jew not only as a matter of family history but religious conviction. Yerushalmi's case for Freud's loyalty to historically Jewish religious beliefs turns on a few subtle points of Jewish theology, of which Gay and other non-Jewish critics seem unaware.[1] However, if Yerushalmi's argument is considered in light of Jewish theology, particularly those doctrines that emerge after the Babylonian captivity, it is difficult to refute the case that Yerushalmi builds. This does not mean, however, that Freud should cease to be read as an Enlightenment *philosophe*, as Gay rightly insists (*A Godless Jew* 33–68): It simply means that, if one truly wishes to come to terms with Freud as a thinker, one should not elide the Jewish dimensions of his thought. As a subtext to Yerushalmi's study of Freud, a few basic aspects of Jewish theology should be kept in mind. First, in the historical period after the emergence of the Christian religion, Jewish theologians refuted the Greco-Christian doctrine of the Logos by insisting that the Word should not be thought of as a truly existing, but intangible essence, but one that actually exists in the realm of the senses. First century Rabbis put it

this way: "It is written, 'For this commandment is not in heaven' (Deut. 30:11–12). Moses said to the Israelites, 'Lest you should say, Another Moses is to arise and to bring us another Law from heaven; therefore I make it known to you now that it is not in heaven" (Peters I 31). This doctrine stands as an implicit rebuke to both the Johnnine belief in the Logos, and the later Islamic doctrine of the Heavenly Book. Differentiating themselves from the new Christian sect, the Rabbis insisted that *all* of revelation was given to Moses at Sinai, both the oral and written scriptures, and any others who venture to suggest that they have received a new revelation from Heaven are, in this theology, regarded as heretics. Moses becomes a kind of "Seal of the Prophets" for the Jews, as one says about Muhammad in the Islamic religion. One implication of this belief is that the divine word in Judaism, like *heka* its Egyptian counterpart, is believed to exist in a materialist sense, although this antiessentialist claim does not necessarily divest the word of its divine and autonomous character. In the Zohar, a distinction is made between the exoteric or "outer" garments of the Torah and the word that is unseen but nonetheless existent (Peters II 76). The *ruah* (or spirit) is an animated life force or wind that blows, and the matter of this wind is human saliva, or the matter of the mother. As is true of the concept of the "foreign debt" in Derrida's writings, the blood of the mother is affirmed as that which one inherits from the mother: it is the gift that is not given but transmuted from the pre-symbolic mother. In this "materialist" view of spirit, the mother becomes a kind of primal receptacle or *khoral* womb, rather than a problematic of language. In this sense, the word or spirit cannot be thought apart from the matter of maternal blood, the deadly but also curative *pharmakon* of the human body. Freud attempts to give the veneer of empirical science to his own theology of the "blood and nerves," and Yerushalmi is correct to point out that, if such views are important for Jewish theology, they are certainly not verifiable as a matter of scientific knowledge. In this sense, both Yerushalmi and Emanuel Rice are on target when they suggest that Freud's last book on Moses represents a return "home" to the faith of his childhood. Non-Jewish scholars who are unfamiliar with Jewish theology might see in Freud's later views a kind of scientific failing, a moment when Freud relied upon archaic and problematic data in forming his hypotheses about Jewish identity. However, Yerushalmi rightly points out that this "failing" on Freud's part may not reveal Freud's Jewish heritage in any ethnic sense, but it certainly reveals his belief in a Jewish theology of spirit, or, in what Freud himself calls "the breath of wind (*animus*, *spiritus*,

Hebrew *ruach* = smoke)" (*Moses and Monotheism* 146). Yerushalmi has done a real service to Freudian studies by showing how and where Freud remains "Jewish" in a clearly religious sense, not only as a matter of his personal life history.

However, there are significant differences between Freud and both Yerushalmi and Derrida in their approach to this question. In the first place, Freud may have clung to a belief in Jewish identity as a matter of "blood and nerves," but—unlike Yerushalmi and Derrida—he deliberately sought to reject Jewish doctrines of blood election, which he regarded as a kind of religious psychosis. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud attributes the rise of such doctrines to the ban on graven images, which he argues gives rise to more developed forms of alphabetic literacy than those already existing in Egypt,[2] and he also suggests that this historical development directly contributed to the emergence of the Jewish doctrine of tribal election. "Through the Mosaic prohibition, God was raised to a higher level of spirituality . . . ," Freud states. "All such progress in spirituality results in increasing self-confidence, in making people proud so that they feel superior to those who have remained in the bondage of the senses" (*Moses and Monotheism* 146–147). Freud here attributes the doctrine of election to a fairly simple psychological principle. For instance, the man who diets on a green salad and Perrier gains a feeling of personal superiority when he dines with his friend, who eats a greasy hamburger and sugary soda. Freud claims that, by eschewing Egyptian idols, or any god who can be seen with human eyes, the early followers of Moses came to imagine that they were spiritually superior to other ancient peoples who surrounded them. In this light, it is not difficult to imagine how Freud might have responded to Derrida's relentless attack on "Pagano-European" religion, or the alleged "cult" beliefs of Western Christians; that is, Freud, like Handelman, would most likely see in Derrida's approach a hidden power motive at work. My point here, however, is not to suggest that such a reading of Derrida should be endorsed, but rather to emphasize that one should not rush to conflate the views of Freud and Derrida. Similarly, if Yerushalmi is correct that Freud can, in a religious sense, be construed as a Jewish thinker, this leads Yerushalmi to certain conclusions that do not necessarily follow from his more valid arguments about the Lamarckian elements in Freud's thought. Specifically, Yerushalmi will extract from Freud's writings on the "phylogenetic" aspects of Jewish identity a secret belief in the inextricably Jewish nature of psychoanalysis itself. Addressing Freud in an imaginary letter he writes at his book's conclusion, Yerushalmi states, "I think you [Freud] believed that just as you are a godless Jew,

psychoanalysis is a godless Judaism" (*Freud's Moses* 99). This subtle gesture echoes Derrida's suggestion that the Messianic Jew may become a new universal to replace the Kantian human subject of international law. In this sense, psychoanalysis may indeed be universalized, but only on the condition that every form of human identity imaginable is recast as yet another avatar of the Messianic Jew. Yerushalmi's own Jewish Messianism, in opposition to Freud, is made clear in his rejection of Freud's comments on the Christian religion, specifically those he recorded in *Moses and Monotheism*. Unlike Derrida, who makes some effort to disguise his disdain for the Christian religion, Yerushalmi bluntly attacks Christianity as a religion that seeks to "appropriate" the Jewish doctrine of chosenness (*Freud's Moses* 91). In effect, Yerushalmi depicts Christianity as an "offspring" of Judaism, or as a religion that "stands in an Oedipal relationship to Judaism itself" (92). This view is echoed in Derrida's writings on Christianity, as he often underscores his belief that Judaism is "the single source of the two monotheisms [of Judaism and Christianity]" (*Acts of Religion* 90). Both Yerushalmi and Derrida position Judaism in the powerful role of father against Christianity as a filial upstart. The orthodox Christian view, which like Islam insists that as the "truest" articulation of monotheism, the Christian religion may claim that it is, in fact, "older" than Judaism—which, for Christians, is as a heretical deviation from the true faith—is elided by Derrida, who seems unaware of this tradition. In fact, Derrida even refers to the historically Christian nations of Europe, along with the modern state of Israel, as belonging to "the nations of Israel" (91), by which he seems to mean that *all* "European" nations, including Israel, France, and the United States, come from a common Jewish root. At the conclusion of *Archive Fever*, Derrida is most frank about his belief in the Jewish doctrine of election. His discussion of this question is staged as an inquiry into the justice of Yerushalmi's affirmation of the doctrine of election. "I wonder if [this affirmation] is just," Derrida asks (*Archive Fever* 76); that is, he wonders if Yerushalmi is justified in claiming that the Jews are chosen by God "to remember to remember," or to remember as a "religious imperative"? Derrida "trembles" in hesitation as he reflects upon the justice of this doctrine, and he certainly does not—like Freud—reject it as a delusional group psychosis. Though he equivocates, Derrida finally affirms the doctrine of election, but it must also be clear that he makes no claims about the justice of his act. Instead, Derrida reminds his readers that they too cannot know if his endorsement of this doctrine is just. Such knowledge is simply not available to us. In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, John Caputo puts it

this way: "[Derrida's] religion is his business, his problem, if it is a problem" (279). In this way, Caputo forecloses further inquiry into the political implications of Derrida's private beliefs, despite the fact that Derrida rejects the liberal—and hence latently "Christian"—distinction between the spheres of the public and the private, at least in the case of Israel and the Occupied Territories. The Messianic Jew may be an appropriate sign to subsume all possible forms of human identity, but Derrida's readers, like Caputo, are told that they must submit to this universal figure without probing too deeply into its more paradoxical or "difficult" connotations.

Edward W. Said's *Freud and the Non-European* (2003), which appeared some eight years after Derrida's talk at the Freud archives, can be considered as a response to Derrida and Yerushalmi's reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. In many ways, the Palestinian critic Said is more faithful to Freud's views than either Derrida or Yerushalmi. It is therefore worthwhile to carefully examine Said's response, not only in light of the earlier books by these Jewish critics, but also in light of Jacqueline Rose's response to Said, which is published in the same volume with Said's essay. Rose is a prominent literary critic who responds to Said, not only as a valued colleague in his field, but also as a Jew. At the beginning of his essay, Said reminds his auditors—his essay was originally a lecture given at the Freud House in London—that Freud is a European humanist of a particular era, or that Freud's thought belongs to a particular place and time. Said also warns his listeners of the dangers of reading Freud through the lens of "current postmodern, poststructuralist, [and] postcolonial jargon" (14). Said reminds us that "Freud's was a Eurocentric view of culture" (16). Freud must be historicized, and anything that may be said of his views regarding current political crises is, of course, conjectural. But, the topic of Said's essay is deliberately chosen. His essay is an indirect response to Derrida's *Archive Fever* and Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses*. Although he cites Yerushalmi's book on Freud, Said does not directly cite Derrida's related study, an omission that is striking. It is difficult to imagine, however, that Said did not carefully read *Archive Fever*, and that his own book is not a deliberate refutation of Derrida's. Said's complete silence about Derrida's book on this subject speaks volumes; however, his critical remarks on Yerushalmi's book are a fairly good indicator of how he might have responded to *Archive Fever*. In the backdrop, of course, are previous debates about Freud's religious beliefs, inaugurated by Peter Gay in his provocative study *A Godless Jew* (1987). Both Yerushalmi and Emmanuel Rice in his *Freud and Moses* (1990) seek to establish Freud's Jewish heritage and to

undermine Gay's claims that Freud was a militant atheist. While Gay places emphasis upon Freud's "godlessness," Yerushalmi asserts that the noun "Jew" is at least as important as the adjective "godless" (*Freud's Moses* 116n25). Two competing visions of Freud emerge in these debates, Gay's Freud, who is the European humanist, and Yerushalmi and Rice's Freud, who remains the faithful Jew. By insisting that Freud must be placed in his proper historical context, Said already seems to be taking sides with Gay in this debate: that is, Said countersigns recent readings of Freud as the faithful Jew, and Yerushalmi becomes a marker for Said of this perspective. But, in asserting Freud's commitments to European humanism, which Said wants to suggest is one of Freud's greatest strengths, Said must also distance himself from liberal humanist ideology, which is historically coterminous with the rise of European imperialism. Said affirms Frantz Fanon's critique of liberal humanism, which both Fanon and Said see as a historical failure. As Said points out, however, Fanon necessarily relies upon humanist thought in framing his critique of humanism, or as he underscores the wide gap between Europe's ideals and their failed implementation in history. Fanon recommends the invention of a neo-humanism, or what he calls "the new man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth" (*Wretched of the Earth* 312). In this essay and in many other texts, Said affirms his solidarity with Fanon's neo-humanist project, linking his work and Fanon's to global decolonization movements associated with other postcolonial figures like Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, and Aimé Césaire. In this sense, Said would seem to do little more than offer a postcolonialist affirmation of Gay's reading of Freud. In any event, this is how Jacqueline Rose reads Said's essay in her brief "Response to Edward Said."

Rose claims that Said sees in Freud's writings on human identity the basis for "a new form of nationalism" that she dismisses as both "sanguine" and "unrealistic" ("Response" 77). This view not only elides much of what Said is saying about Freud, it actually distorts the main thrust of his argument. In the first place, Said makes clear his view that Fanon not only argues for a new humanism, he goes much further than this: "I think it is true to say that the gist of Fanon's attack was to include the whole edifice of European humanism itself," Said states, "which proved incapable of going beyond its own invidious limitations" (*Freud and the Non-European* 21–22). Like Fanon, Said suggests that the decolonization process necessarily brings Europe "into contact with cultural, political, and epistemological formations [that are hitherto] undreamed of by [Europeans]" (25). What

Rose misses then is that Said is not simply championing a return to stable conceptions of human identity that characterized Freud's era. The concept of human identity suggested by Said is anything but sanguine. Most crucially, Rose misses how Said assigns a central place to the doctrine of the trace in his writings, but he revises this key Freudian (and Derridean) concept in more authentically "universal" terms. In fact, Said calls the trace the "*secular* wound [my emphasis]" (54). Such a definition is very different from Derrida's efforts to define the trace as Abrahamic wound, a universalism that reinforces particular religious belief systems. By way of contrast, Said will insist upon a *secular* concept of the trace. It should be noted, in this connection, that Derrida dismisses the "secular" as a religious term: "I think that the concept of secularization is a religious concept," Derrida states, "it belongs to a tradition of religious culture. When we have what one calls a 'secularized' something, a secularized concept, it means that it remains religious" (*Deconstruction Engaged* 116). Rose overstates her case that Said offers us a vision of a Freud who is "free of all the conflictual strains of identity" ("Response" 75), and she misreads Said's assertion that "the secular wound [is] the essence of the cosmopolitan" (*Freud* 54). Rose claims that, in reaffirming Freud's doctrine of the secular trace (if this was truly Freud's doctrine and not Said's), Said runs the risk of "idealizing the flaws and fissures of identity" ("Response" 76). Against this view, Rose reminds readers of the necessarily exclusive dimensions of the tribal wound (or shibboleth), or how the inscription not only serves to open the one to the other, but also to alienate the one from others, especially those who bear different tribal or ethnic identities. Rose lauds Said's high-minded idealism, but she suggests that he is naïve about the fuller, more problematic implications of the doctrine of the trace. Said therefore only gives us "half of the story" (75). While Said affirms Freud's efforts to universalize Jewish particularity—namely by affirming the notion of the secular rather than Abrahamic trace—Rose "wonder[s] whether Freud's relationship to his Jewishness, even more than Said has perhaps allowed, does not also partially bear [the] sign and [the] strain [of his Jewish beliefs]" (73). To put it simply, Rose does not believe that the doctrine of the trace can be universalized, a view that is directly refuted by Said.

To fully grasp what is at stake in this debate, we will need not only to look carefully at Said's arguments about Freud and Yerushalmi in this text, but also to historicize Said's intervention into these debates as a secular critic, who hails from a Christian background, but is of Palestinian origin. In this connection, let us take a moment to review

Derrida's argument that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all Abrahamic religions, but that Christianity differs from the other two Abrahamic religions insofar as it remains trapped in an idealist epistemology, or the belief that truth is a matter of visual perception. For Derrida, the Greco-Roman or logocentric aspects of Christianity mean that it is also—unlike Judaism and Islam—a kind of "pagan" religion (*Acts of Religion* 51). But if the "cult" religion of the Greco-Roman Christians can also be described as Abrahamic, this means that it must also be a religion of the trace. There is a sense here in which Derrida is both right and wrong, for Christianity was certainly a religion that practiced circumcision at one time, although this practice was gradually phased out. Paul affirms "literal" circumcision in the *Letter to the Romans*, but only as a religious rite for Jewish Christians. Following the Apostolic period, "literal" circumcision is replaced by the "christening" ceremony, or child baptism with oil and water. However, if one were to insist too vehemently that Christianity is *not* a religion of the Abrahamic *milah*, such an argument would also risk ignoring the subtlety of Paul's comments regarding circumcision. In fact, Paul affirms circumcision for the Jew Timothy but not for the Gentile Titus. Circumcision is superseded by the Eucharist, or by way of figurative or allegorical interpretation of the Abrahamic *milah*, which for Paul is more important than "literal" circumcision. But, Paul does not get rid of circumcision altogether, and its lingering presence in the Christian religion causes debates that are not resolved for many centuries, if they ever are. Said's reaffirmation of a concept of the trace is not necessarily heretical, at least not for most Protestants, but it is certainly anachronistic.

By way of comparison, it may be useful to compare Said's views with those of the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, like Said a postcolonial writer who was raised in a Christian setting. In *The River Between* (1990), Ngugi depicts a drama involving a British missionary who, contrary to the Apostle Paul's teaching, insists that tribal circumcision is sinful, a practice that causes church members to be banished from worship. Ngugi makes the subtle point that the Christian missionary is not himself aware of how his own scriptures provide justification for this ancient practice. In other words, Christianity can potentially accommodate the doctrine of the trace, but it is repressed. Thomas Aquinas will insist that God only allowed it to be practiced in the apostolic period in order to make a clear distinction between the rites of circumcision and communion for the early Christian believers. Paul allegedly kept the practice alive, so the early Christians would not confuse literal and allegorical circumcision. Levinas also

makes the point—which Derrida affirms—that, because Christians gave up the rite of circumcision, they are now reliant upon Jews to remind them of what circumcision actually is; otherwise, allegorical circumcision, and possibly the entire Christian religion, would lose its theological coherence (*Acts of Religion* 90–91). Christians would not know exactly what it was that their religion claimed to supersede. For this reason, Christians are compelled to preserve Jews, but as foreign "hostages" within the Christian religion. In the West today, Christian males are often circumcised but as a medical procedure that is performed in hospitals by doctors, not *mohels*. Jews in the United States and Europe continue to perform this religious rite, as do their Muslim counterparts. If driven by necessity, Muslims in the West will sometimes even go to a Jewish *mohel* to have circumcision performed, and, in places with sparse Jewish populations and no *mohel*, Jews have been known to go to a Muslim imam to have circumcision performed.

Derrida is very right then that religious circumcision persists in Judaism and Islam, and this makes these two religions different from Christianity, although this rite is not intended by Muslims to signify the particular tribal (or "ethnic") status of the circumcised. Islam already has a universalized concept of the trace within it, although Muslims would certainly not call their universalism secular. The point here, however, is that the architectonics of the Christian religion, particularly in its Apostolic phase, include provisions for the rite of circumcision, but it is gradually eliminated from Christian practice, as early Gentiles and Jews begin to go their separate ways. So, when Derrida states that all three religions of the Book are Abrahamic, he is correct in this particular sense. This is just another way of saying that all three Middle Eastern religions affirm the rite of circumcision (or at least did at one time), but obviously there are important differences in the beliefs that are held by the adherents of each Abrahamic faith, regarding this rite. Derrida elides these differences, which may not be important to him, but they are certainly important to Orthodox believers in all three traditions. Should one emphasize the homogeneity or heterogeneity of these traditional beliefs about circumcision? Derrida wants to emphasize their homogeneity, but, in terms of what he means specifically by the Abrahamic—which is circumcision—Christianity is certainly the "least" Abrahamic of the faiths since it has totally given up the rite, and most Christians assert that Melchizedik, who is an Old Testament Messiah figure, is more important than Abraham; this also means, for Christians, that the rite of communion is more important than rite of circumcision.

The Freudian science of psychoanalysis emphasizes the universality of circumcision, which is to say—in Derridean terms—the universality of the Abrahamic. It is extremely unlikely, however, that Freud would wish for his theory to be articulated in this way. When Freud worried that psychoanalysis was a "Jewish science," what he was really asking is the same thing Derrida asks: Should the trauma that results from circumcision—the rite of the inscription, gramma, or "trace"—be construed as an experience that is valid for all peoples everywhere? This is, of course, the same claim that is made by Western philosophers and Greco-Roman Christians with respect to the Platonic concept of the Logos ("Reason" in Aristotle and "Jesus Christ" in the Apostolic church). Derrida wonders, in fact *worries*, if deconstruction too is a "Jewish science." What is interesting about the move that the "Christian" Said makes in his late reading of Freud is that Said definitely affirms the doctrine of the trace. Said's comments in this regard are worth citing at length:

> The strength of this thought [that the founder of Jewish identity was himself a non-European Egyptian] is, I believe, that it can be articulated in and speak to other besieged identities as well—not through dispensing palliatives such as tolerance and compassion but, rather, by attending to it as a troubling, disabling, destabilizing secular wound—the essence of the cosmopolitan, from which there can be no recovery, no state of resolved or Stoic calm, and no utopian reconciliation even within itself. (*Freud and the Non-European* 54)

While Freud worries that psychoanalysis may be a Jewish science, Said is secure in the knowledge that the doctrine of the trace is not the property or invention of any single Middle Eastern tribe. Said knows perfectly well that this rite emerges from within a cultural matrix that is far more ancient than any single religious tradition, and that extends to geographical regions far beyond the borders of Palestine. Freud's anxieties in this respect could simply be the result of his ignorance of Middle Eastern culture, the historical plight of the European Jew in isolation from the lands where many of his customs originated. In fact, it is very likely that Freud would have seen in Said's remarks the validation of psychoanalysis's universality that he sought, but failed to acquire, from his association with the Swiss Protestant Carl Jung. It is worth noting here that, unlike Derrida and Yerushalmi, who link the trace to a particular tribe, the Arab Christian Said confirms Freud's hypothesis that the trace—and therefore the science of psychoanalysis—originates within a world where Jews, far from being thought of as the "chosen" people, are not any more significant than a host of other tribes. In the

Western context, the historically tribal nature of civilization in the Hijaz, even in modern cities like Amman, Damascus, and Al-Quds, is seldom appreciated or even acknowledged. In this context, Jewish identity is often interpreted in tribal terms, but in relation to many other ancient Arab tribes in the region. Though he does not comment directly on the question of tribal identity in the Arab world, Said underscores how, in the historical novel *Akhenaten: Dweller in Truth* (1988), the Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Maufouz does not even refer to Moses or the Jewish people (*Freud and the Non-European* 43). It is not that Maufouz seeks to offend Jewish sentiment; it is simply that Jewish questions are not relevant to his novel's theme. Jung could not give Freud the validation he sought because Jung, like Derrida and Yerushalmi, was too fixated on the question of the Jews' historical difference; however, all of these thinkers—unlike Said—conceptualize the Jews' difference within a *European* context, not a Middle Eastern one. In his statement affirming a universal but secular concept of the trace, Said also distances himself from what he calls "the palliatives of tolerance and compassion," explicitly rejecting, as Fanon does, the mainstays of the European humanist tradition. Said is not therefore merely reinforcing Peter Gay's argument that we think of Freud as an Enlightenment thinker against Yerushalmi's notion of a "Jewish Freud." If Said like Freud clings to a fixed concept of human identity, it is not because he is "sanguine" or "unrealistic" about how traumatized (or circumcised) peoples may react. In her response to Said, Rose ignores how the human subject in Said is nearly always affirmed for pragmatic reasons, specifically in order to gain rights for Palestinians, and for its enduring historicity as a human concept. Another way to say this is that Rose is oblivious to the influence of Theodor W. Adorno on Said, for whom the concept of the human was a historical fact, which could not simply be dismissed by fiat.[3] In response to Rose's views, one might insist to the contrary that there is something quite hard-headed about Said's refusal to give up on the concept of the human subject, even as he rejects the historical legacies of the European humanist tradition. A "Christian" (or "post-Christian") but European thinker like Jung rejects Freud for his "ignorance" of Kant, alleging that Freud is unable to rise above his Jewish heritage. However, a "Christian" (or "post-Christian") but Arab thinker like Said affirms the universality of the doctrine of the trace, which he locates in a wider cultural milieu and claims is the "very essence" of cosmopolitan identity. What Rose misses is how Said responds to Freud as a postcolonial *Arab*, validating Freud's theory of the trace in ways that may have far reaching implications for the future of psychoanalysis. In effect, Said makes the same move that

Ngugi makes in his critique of the fictional British missionary in his novel *The River Between*: Both respond to ethnocentrically European critiques of the African and Middle Eastern rite of circumcision as post-colonial, post-Christian intellectuals, looking back at the religions of their youth with colonized eyes. Like Ngugi, Said can be said to recuperate the Pauline affirmation of the trace that completely dropped out of European Christianity by the time of the medieval period. Without in any way affirming Jewish notions of election, as both Derrida and Yerushalmi do, Said nonetheless affirms the universality of the trace as a secular concept of writing. On the one hand, this move looks like a contradiction to both humanists and Christians; and, on the other hand, to post-humanists and Jews like Rose, it seems Said gives short shrift to the particularity of Jewish identity. But there is something very Arabic, even Islamic (but also Pauline), about Said's affirmation of a "universal" trace. A post-Thomist Christian of the West will certainly be anxious about Said's endorsement of the trace, whereas a Jewish reader like Rose, or any reader who affirms the Jewish doctrine of tribal election, will also be anxious about Said's attempts to secularize this doctrine. Although Said was a steadfastly secular critic, his affirmation of the doctrine of the trace reveals the influence of the Arab world, not Judaism, upon his thinking. Unlike Derrida, for whom the universality of the trace is linked to the particularity of the chosen vocation of the Messianic Jew, Said divests the trace of its Jewish particularity. Said's view of the trace is not necessarily different from the ancient Pauline doctrine, although is it is certainly different from the Thomist view that prevails in Europe to this day. In passing, it should be noted that Said does not necessarily establish the universality of the trace, and I make no claim myself to this effect. What is clear, however, is that Said succeeds in placing Jewish doctrines of the trace within a broader Middle Eastern and African framework, from which they historically emerge. However, the aversion to circumcision in Europe is quite ancient, extending back many millenniums beyond the formation of the Greek and Roman empires. What is potentially confusing is that both the affirmation and rejection of this doctrine can be construed as matters of ethnocentrism. Questions that Said's approach to this doctrine raise are as follows: Is the doctrine of the trace a universal *only* for African and Middle Eastern peoples? What is the historical basis of the long-standing aversion to circumcision in Europe? Said affirms the doctrine of the trace because he claims that it involves a "necessary psychological experience" (*Freud and the Non-European* 54). In other words, Said claims that we are all irreparably wounded or traumatized and must accept this tragic fact. But, as figures like Alice Walker,

Pratibha Parmar, and others have asserted in their fight to eradicate the practice of excision in Africa, is the "necessary trauma" that Said affirms really as necessary as he claims? How is one to read Said's affirmation of the trace in light of Walker and Parmar's belief that "mutilation of any part of the body is unnecessary and causes suffering almost beyond imagining" (*Warrior Marks* 19)? Walker may seem naïve from the more realistic perspectives of psychoanalysis and anthropology, but what are the political implications of Said's resignation to this necessary trauma, particularly for African and Middle Eastern women (also everywhere boys who are regularly submitted to this traumatic rite)? For some, Said's affirmation of the trace may seem conservative in the extreme. The only way around this dilemma is to counter that Said does not necessarily mean the actual rite of circumcision, but to advance such an argument is already to follow the steps of Paul.

Jacqueline Rose misses a great deal in her response to Said. In effect, she countersigns Said's allegedly "humanist" reading of Freud as "Godless" Jew, reasserting Freud's Jewish identity. This gesture seems to be a bit of cosmic pessimism on her part, against Said' lack of "realism," but in fact there are obvious political implications to Rose's vision of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a tribal war that is slated for a perpetual stalemate. Rose basically claims that Said misses how, for Freud, trauma is more significant than a stable concept of human identity, but the reverse is actually true for Said. When Said affirms that the essence of the cosmopolitan is trace or "wound," he acknowledges the experience of trauma as unavoidable and even necessary. However, his gesture is best defined as a strategic essentialism, rather than an Aristotlean essentialism, as Rose implies. This strategic reading of the trace serves as a counterweight to Derrida's thesis that Christians are missing a doctrine of the trace, which implies that Jews and Muslims may have more in common than do Christians and Muslims. In other words, Derrida cannot have it both ways. He cannot claim that Christianity is an Abrahamic religion, and that Christianity also lacks a concept of the trace. If Christianity *is* an Abrahmaic religion, and Derrida insists that it is, then it certainly has a concept of the trace. This is what the post-Christian and Arab critic Said inadvertently affirms in his reading of Freud. Rose claims that Said has too stable an idea of Freudian identity, but the problem is rather this: If there is a doctrine of the trace (or trauma) in all three religions of the Book, one may have established a "universal" in the three Abrahamic traditions, but this universal only accounts for about one half of the world's population; furthermore, Christianity and Islam may both have a concept of trace (a latent concept in the case of the Christian religion), but they

also possess common doctrines of the Logos. Furthermore, when Derrida himself insists that Paul was not so very original in proposing an allegorical reading of circumcision (*Sovereignties in Question* 59), or that the allegorical reading of circumcision existed in Judaism long before the time of Paul (*Acts of Religion* 85), is Derrida not also advancing a subtle "reformist" and "rationalist" argument, one which Maimonides would certainly endorse? Can one therefore say that Judaism does not also have its own Judaized notion of the Logos, not unlike the Islamized Logos of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd? What I would like to emphasize here is that Derrida's doctrine of the trace is problematic because it is dogmatic and exclusive, not because it is foreign or unknown to Christianity and Islam.

This dogmatism is replicated in Rose's response to Said when she claims that Said has "an unrealistic expectation of how traumatized peoples will behave" ("Response" 77). Rose's evocation of realism, in this context, is less a pragmatic assertion than a Machiavellian thesis about "the traumatized history of both sides of the conflict in the Middle East" (77). For Rose, "the historically attested response to trauma is to repeat it" (77); and, she wishes—like Derrida—to underscore how "there is no sociality without violence" (75). The *trait d'union* binds diverse peoples together, but they are "most powerfully and effectively united by what they agree to hate" (75). What passes itself off as political and psychological realism in Rose's response is in fact yet another exclusive theology of the *milah*. The experience of the trace, the trauma that results from its inscription, cannot possibly be overcome. This is the main point of her argument. Said seems to reinforce this brand of pessimism when he states that "there can be no recovery, no state of resolved or Stoic calm" after one undergoes this "necessary psychological experience" (*Freud and the Non-European* 54). The difference is that Said, unlike Rose, insists that solutions may nonetheless be found to current political conflicts in the Middle East. Said imagines that a *secularized* theory of the trace can do far more than Rose will permit. Hence Said poses the following rhetorical question:

> Can [the secular trace] become the not-so-precarious foundation in the land of the Jews and Palestinians of a bi-national state in which Israel and Palestine are parts, rather than antagonists of each other's history and underlying reality? (55)

Said leaves no ambiguity in his response. "I myself believe so," he states (55). His reason for this belief is that this condition is "more

general in the non-European world than [Freud] suspected" (55). Certainly, it is more general in the Middle East, for reasons already adumbrated here. What must be emphasized, however, is that Rose not only rejects the optimism of Said's thesis, she also rejects the way in which he "secularizes" or proposes a more "general" theory of the trace. While affirming the irreducibility of the trace, Said proposes in the same breath that it may be allegorically transcended. His argument is quintessentially Pauline in its logic, the Paul of *Letter to the Romans*, who retains literal and figurative circumcision but concedes that the former is finally subordinate to the later. Rose's resistance to this critical gesture replays the historically Jewish rejection of allegorical interpretation in the Christian West. Her view is coterminous with Derrida's evasiveness on the question of allegory, about which he insists that he is "undecided" ("Marx & Sons" 246). Rose, like Derrida, decides not to decide about allegory, but to leave the question suspended. We must be "realistic" about the current situation in the Middle East; that is, we must, like Freud himself, come to accept that we are all damaged goods (Rose "Response" 78). Rose claims that Said only gives "one side of the story" in his theory of the secular trace; however, I would insist here that it is Rose who does not give us the full story of Freud's views about trauma. The same can be said for the readings of Freud's trace offered by Yerushalmi and Derrida, who—while rightly reminding us of the Jewish dimensions of Freud's thought—neglect to fully historicize his thought, as recommended by Said. The debate about Freud's Judaism, which has led to provocative studies like Gay's *A Godless Jew* and Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses*, has occurred because both parties have legitimate cases to make. Another way to say this is that, Freud also remained committed to a secular worldview, not unlike Said, and that "secularity" for Freud was certainly not—as it is for Derrida—a disguised form of religion. If Gay is uninformed about the subtleties of Jewish theology, he too has done a great service to Freudian studies by reminding us of Freud's commitments to the ideals of the liberal enlightenment. The Lamarckian Freud, who is sketched out by Yerushalmi, also never swerved from his lifelong belief in what he called "our God Logos" (*Future of an Illusion* 54). "The psychoanalyst's god logos is not omnipotent," Gay comments, "but he is infinitely superior to all other deities" (*A Godless Jew* 65). As opposed to the "demon" or "volcanic" god Yahweh, whom Freud caricatures in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud preferred the god Logos, for this more general—or *secular*—deity "promised far less and delivered far more" (65). Ironically, at the time that Gay's study appears in 1987, a number of years before

studies by Yerushalmi, Derrida, Rice, and others are written, Gay is just as concerned to debunk scholarship exaggerating Freud's Judaism, as he is to criticize the viewpoints of Marxist and Christian psychoanalysts who wish to emphasize Freud's sporadic observations that psychoanalysis is "essentially a cure through love" (83). Psychoanalysts like Oskar Pfister, who was a close associate of Freud's, went so far as to remark that "a better Christian never was" than Freud, postulating that "Jesus, not Freud, [was] the first psychoanalyst" (85). The Protestant theologian Paul Tillich similarly emphasized the centrality of "love" to Freud's thought, which he construed as "desire purged through sublimation" (84). As in the case of those critics who wish to exaggerate the significance of the Jewish elements in Freud's thought, Gay criticizes Freud's readers like Pfister and Tillich, for their lopsided construction of a "Christian" Freud.

However, I am not suggesting here that Said, like Pfister and Tillich, offers a "Christian" reading of Freud, one that a Jewish critic like Rose naturally rejects, but it should be clear that the hermeneutic strategy implied by Said's notion of the secular trace—the transcendence of the "literal" or the particularly Jewish *milah* in favor of a more generalized concept of the secular trace—obviously and unavoidably reenacts Paul's allegorical maneuver in the *Letter to the Romans*, the hermeneutic model that is perfected by Augustine in his *On Christian Teaching*. The guiding principle in all Christian exegesis, after Augustine, is charity (or "love of God and Neighbor"), what Jesus believed were the most important of the Mosaic commandments. But, as Derrida himself points out, this reading strategy was known to Jewish exegetes long *before* the time of Paul and Augustine: arguably, this allegorical reading method is every bit as much a "Jewish" way of interpreting literary texts, as it is Christian or Islamic. What I am suggesting then in relation to Rose's reading of Said, as well as Derrida's dogmatic "indecision" with respect to the concept of allegory, is that—in the particular setting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—the refusal of this basic allegorical move has unavoidable political implications. To accept the Freudian doctrine of the secular trace in this setting, if it truly is Freud's doctrine, would be tantamount to accepting a more generalized (or secularized) concept of what it means to be a citizen in the modern state of Israeli and the Occupied Territories. While Said prefers the word secular to liberal, he also intends by the term secular the historically liberal ideal that the realms of the religious and political should be kept separate. Derrida too affirms a "disassociation of the political and theological" but only in the case of Islamic Algeria, not Israel-Palestine (*Acts of*

Religion 306). In the case of the later, "citizenship" remains a matter of one's ethnic or religious identity, not one's place of residence, as is true of the liberal democratic nations of the West. This is then the politics of the Abrahamic *milah*: Allegory must be denied, or left vaguely unresolved, in order to preserve Jewish particularity; or, to accept an allegorical reading of the Abrahamic trace means that Jewish specificity will inevitably be subsumed by a secular or liberal democratic form of national identity. While Said places all his hopes on this possibility, Derrida can only tolerate this thought if the "generalized" subject is first particularized as "Messianic Jew." It goes without saying that Derrida's thesis will not seem terribly persuasive to his Arab Christian or Muslim readers.

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CHAPTER 8

The Double Gesture

Derrida's views on the university are complex and can easily be misunderstood. A typically reactionary response to his position is that he offers an "irrational" or "anarchist" critique of the Kantian university by annihilating its philosophical grounds. But, Derrida unequivocally affirms what he calls "a new university Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*]" (*Eyes of the University* 132), as well as "the imperative[s] of professional rigor and competence" (150). It cannot therefore be said that Derrida encourages faculty to derail the historical project of the Enlightenment, as Jürgen Habermas has famously suggested, or that he seeks to undermine the Kantian architectonics of the modern university. On the contrary, Derrida suggests that today's faculty fail in their basic duties to their students by refusing to assume responsibilities that have historically defined teaching and philosophy in the West. Derrida's views, in this regard, echo those of Heidegger in his 1929 lecture "What is Metaphysics?"; that is, both Derrida and Heidegger suggest that the modern university has become oblivious to metaphysics itself, or to the originary question of Nothingness in Heideggerian terms, or *différance* in Derridean terms. Both thinkers therefore seek to recall faculty to the responsibility of acknowledging the limitations of competent reason. In a "double gesture," Derrida affirms the necessity of a pedagogy of competency, but he also calls for its vigilant deconstruction, or, the critical dismantling (*analaein*) of competency. It is not correct then to say that Derrida is not invested in fostering student competencies in the modern university: The problem is rather that the teaching of competency today is far too modest a goal for the university professor. To more fully appreciate Derrida's critique of the modern university, it may be helpful to recall that Derrida, like Freud, attempts to offer a materialist account of the human body, or that he insists that both the specter (or "seen" word) and spirit (or "heard" word) are "anything but immaterial" ("Marx &

Sons" 267). His critique of the university entitled "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils" anticipates his later, more detailed discussion of vision, hearing, and blindness, which he published ten years later in his book *Memoirs of the Blind* (1991). Not unlike what he attempts in this later work, Derrida argues that the Western university, and indeed the Greek philosophical tradition since the time of Plato, construes truth as the visual perception of objective form but, in doing so, forgets that there is a good that comes before the truth of competency. This "good" is not what Heidegger called *aletheia*, or the truth as unconcealment of the Being of beings, but is akin to what Levinas means by "ethics," or our groundless relation to the other. In Platonic thinking the transcendental ideal is inextricably linked to the sight of form, or to a concept of truth as an enduring and radiant light that is seen by human eyes. According to Plato's *Timaeus*, the mind's eye sees a truth that cannot actually be seen, and this operation is not to be conflated with the sight of the actual eyes that encounter radiant visual forms in the fallen realm of becoming. So, for Plato, there are two kinds of eyes, or two ways of seeing: There is a seeing with the eye of the mind and a seeing with the ocular eyeballs that are embedded in the human skull. To exclusively teach one's students academic competencies, faculty inevitably perpetuate the rationalist and logocentric assumption that truth may only be defined as a matter of correct vision, ratio, or integrity. For Plato, as for the Western tradition in general, the essential form that appears in the external world is already present in the very body of the man who sees it. But, Plato acknowledges that there is also *khora*, or the invisible receptacle, which is necessary for visual form to appear; that is, even for Plato—the thinker who first postulated truth as correct representation—it can be said that there is no competent perception of form without Non-Being (or *différance*). Derrida therefore asks if a pedagogy emphasizing the competent perception of form without regard for *différance* finally amounts to a form of professional irresponsibility. "To know how to learn," Derrida states, "and learn how to know, sight, intelligence, and memory are not enough" (*Eyes of the University* 131). Beyond the competency of sight, "we must also know how to hear and to listen" (131). Derrida's writings on the university encourage faculty to ask if students today can actively hear and listen to others, especially those others who are not imagined in advance to be ideal replicas—or mimicries—of themselves. For Derrida, a truly responsible pedagogy would include the annulment of a purely visual competency in favor of an "acompetency" that Derrida describes as an experience of blindness. Faculty fail in their

responsibility to their students insofar as they elide their duties to blindness and instead limit themselves to the teaching of truth as a matter of dry, unblinking, and "correct" vision. The chief problem with the university today, for Derrida, is that faculty irresponsibly eschew inquiry into the absent grounds of their own teaching philosophies, and this fault of omission leads to many regrettable if predicable consequences.

Before proceeding with my analysis of Derrida's pedagogical philosophy, I will first define what Derrida means by the term "competency" and then offer two actual examples of academic competencies, both which are drawn from my own experiences as an English professor in an American university. The etymology of the word competency in the *American Heritage Dictionary* traces its history to the Middle English term "adequate," from the Old French, which is drawn from the Latin *competent*, the present participle of *competere*, which means "to be suitable." Competency is defined both in the *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *OED* as "suitability," "adequacy," a "meeting together," or "symmetry." In Plato, truth is characterized as a union between representation in thought and the thing itself. Heidegger often underscores that, after Plato, the pre-Socratic definition of truth as *aletheia* (or unconcealment) "comes under the yoke of the idea" (*Pathmarks* 176). Following Heidegger, Derrida assumes the same while seeking to distance himself from Heidegger's fascination with a concept of truth as radiant light. However, both Heidegger and Derrida agree that, after Plato, "the essence of truth gives up its fundamental trait of hiddenness" (176). In the Western metaphysical tradition, truth thereafter comes to mean correctness, competency, or ratio; and, in this respect, Heidegger faults even Nietzsche for his "agreement with the traditional essence of truth as the correctness of assertion (Logos)" (179). The suggestion that truth is a matter of competency, or the correct perception of visual form, follows in this Platonic tradition. In the English department where I presently teach, faculty were required during the 2006–2007 academic year, as a part of a university-wide accreditation process, to teach their students two "competencies" that could be verified by extradepartmental agencies with empirical data. Following a brief discussion, English faculty voted to approve two specific competencies to be measured during two separate academic quarters. The first competency selected by department faculty, which was taught in the fall quarter of 2006, was the competency of contextual analysis. The department defined this competency as follows: "Context refers to the elements which surround an object or process under study, such as a text, image, event, act, utterance,

word or idea." In responding to this definition, English faculty generally interpreted "context" to mean yet more texts that augmented understanding of the text under study rather than the abyssal blank spaces that, for Derrida, are necessary for the text's appearance. For Derrida, the empty receptacle that most faculty called context would be impervious to rational analysis, especially as a demonstrable competency. To put it in Heideggerian terms, "it remains wholly impossible for us to make the nothing into an object" (*Pathmarks* 85). What is hidden, or veiled from student perception, is not a known or seen truth that can be subjected to rational analysis, but only revealed in a manner that cannot be calculated. To ask students to demonstrate competency in taking apart or "undoing" something that has no existence in any objective sense, or is not an enduring presence that can be seen by the eyes, is to ask them to do the impossible. In his critique of Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason,[1] asserting that self-consistency is the path to truth, Heidegger states that, "The commonly cited rule of all thinking, the proposition that contradiction is to be avoided, universal 'logic' itself lays low . . ." (85). This is so, Heidegger was able to show, "for thinking, which is always thinking about something, must act in a way contrary to its own essence when it thinks of the nothing" (85). Following Heidegger, Derrida points out that reason cannot itself "give an account of the principle of reason" (*Eyes of the University* 137). Reason short-circuits when it is confronted with nothingness, *khora*, or *différance*. However, if students cannot competently measure either the invisible or inaudible, they can nonetheless gain a realistic understanding of the limitations of rational analysis. They can come to realize that context cannot be forcibly brought out into the open by subjecting it to competent inquiry. What might be underscored then is a student's lack of presumption or blindness, in fact, the annulment of rational competency, construed here as an unexamined or naïve essentialism.

The second competency that was endorsed by the English department and implemented during winter quarter 2007 was the competency of revision. The competency of revision was defined as follows: "Revision, a 'new or second sight,' refers to the active reconsideration or rewriting of an image, text or idea from a changed or more informed position. Revision may occur in reading, viewing, thinking or composing and may be demonstrated by speech, action or writing. Revision connotes a shift in perspective and/or an increased depth of understanding." Notably absent from this departmentally ratified definition of revision is any reference to who it is that wields the power of truthful representation. In ontological terms, this definition of

revision certainly presumes that truth reveals itself as an enduring presence that can be visually apprehended. The teacher is imagined as an eyewitness to this event; that is, the teacher knows the place where truth can be seen and wishes to lead his or her students to the place where it may once again be unconcealed. "Truth" in this belief system is a matter of perception, the vision of objective form on the horizon. Students are required by faculty to adjust their flawed vision; that is, students are believed to be a priori deficient in the art of seeing. They must therefore learn how to fix their eyes upon the formal truth that the professor claims that he or she has seen and now wishes them to see. The instructor is the powerful man or woman with keen eyes who corrects the faulty eyesight of his or her deficient students. Correct or "competent" vision is the sight that enables ratio or equilibrium to be established between internal and external form. Clarity of vision occurs when both internal and external form is constellated as radiant light: or, when the fire of the Logos that burns in the mind of the man or woman who sees collides with the radiant fire of the form that appears on the horizon. In Hegelian terms, the meeting of these forms occurs upon the lens of the teacher's eyes. Nevertheless, if one were to insist too emphatically upon the literality of this alleged event, the ocular instructor would insist that the use of words like "vision" and "revision" are merely figurative. There is the eye, and then there is the mind's eye. The mind's eye is imagined as a figure of a transcendental experience, one that defies sensory description. The Logos, as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and other key figures define it, is a transcendental and immortal seed "in the bone's marrow" (*Timaeus* 101). The powerful Cyclops eye of the teacher who sees is a strikingly phallic figure. This is why Derrida cautions against what he calls "the monocular stare of a narcissistic Cyclops" (*Memoirs of the Blind* 57). "For this Cyclops eye sees nothing," Derrida states, "nothing but an eye that it thus prevents from seeing anything at all" (57). The Cyclops eye "sees nothing" other than the sight of itself as blind. The hard-eyed professor fears the diminishment of sight because he associates blindness, listening, and hearing with castration. The ocular teacher eschews the responsibility that comes before competency in fear that it will diminish his authority in the classroom. As the man claiming to have been present when truth was unconcealed as radiant form, the ocular teacher wishes to protect his institutional power as eyewitness, thereby guarding his right to testify. The competent teacher of revision teaches revision because he fears his own castration.

A pedagogy that emphasizes student competencies would seem therefore to be an oppressive and paternalistic pedagogy. Derrida

himself does not mince words on this question, stating bluntly his view that, "Today's teaching establishment perpetuates a crime against life understood as the living feminine: disfiguration disfigures the maternal tongue, profanation profanes its body" (*Ear of the Other* 21). The fact remains, however, that there are many feminist faculty in the university who fully support a pedagogy of competency. In this regard, Derrida distinguishes between a historically "reactive" (or "phallic") form of feminism and a feminism that asserts that there is no, one "single, completely essential place" for woman in the university classroom (168).[2] One may say then that a teaching philosophy that emphasizes visual competency risks becoming a misogynistic pedagogy, just as it risks excluding various other forms of alterity that may threaten the professor's institutional authority. I would like therefore to adumbrate a few concerns that Derrida raises with respect to the failure of faculty to assume their full responsibilities to their students by limiting their professional duties to the teaching of purely analytical notions of truth as the correct apprehension of form; and, I would like also to adumbrate a few of my own concerns in relation to the teaching of competencies in the English department in U.S. academe. In raising my own concerns, I will compare Derrida's remarks on pedagogical responsibility with those of Edward W. Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who have both written persuasively on this question. Though Derrida is certainly at odds with Said with respect to his political views in various arenas, he comes closest to Said in his critique of current university pedagogy in the West. In fact, Derrida's critique of the hyperrationalist character of today's university can lend conceptual rigor to Said's own critique of Orientalism in the Western university. While the tone of Derrida's critique tends to be less grim than Said's, he nonetheless reiterates Said's concerns regarding the dehumanizing aspects of current university pedagogy. Though Derrida himself is often accused of promoting an "antihumanist" philosophy, his writings on the university, like those of Said, urge faculty to consider the actual human costs of their competent pedagogy. "What is terrifying about an animal with hard eyes and a dry glance," Derrida states, "is that it always sees. Man can lower the sheath, adjust the diaphragm, narrow his sight, the better to hear, remember, and learn" (132). In *Specters of Marx*, this is what Derrida calls the visor effect, or the lowering of the shield or visor in order to remind one's interlocutor of one's irreducible difference. The potential danger, for Derrida, is that the university—the authoritative and rational institution that never blinks—may become a cruel and "hard-eyed animal" (132). In his *Orientalism* (1978), Said

also underscores the ruthlessly visual aspects of Western-based writing on the Arab world, which he describes as a powerful discourse aiming to deny agency to the Oriental object, or what Anwar Abdel Malek calls *Homo Aegypticus*: "The Orient is watched . . ." Said emphasizes, whereas "the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached . . ." (*Orientalism* 103). While the white European man of vision is endowed with tremendous power of agency, the inert object of his powerful and unblinking gaze—not unlike the female nude in the history of European painting[3]—may only modestly lower his eyes in response to this omniscient gaze. Critics of Said complain that his writings on Orientalism tend to divest the objects of this discourse of any meaningful agency, and that Said is less convincing when he proposes that oppositional intellectuals like Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Nelson Mandela, and others should be allegorized as token figures of resistance.[4] Derrida's criticisms of the university, I would suggest, offer a compelling way of rethinking what is perhaps too hastily characterized—even by Said himself—as an inescapable "paradox" in Said's approach to the problem of agency in his theory of Orientalism (339): that is, Said's poststructuralist analysis of Orientalism is said to be undermined by his anachronistic commitments to an "old-fashioned" humanism.[5] Ironically, however, Said and Derrida are at one in their criticisms of the dehumanizing aspects of the competent gaze of the university professor. A pedagogy of listening and hearing, which is finally a pedagogy of alterity or otherness, can potentially empower the object of Orientalist and other essentializing forms of discourse, although Said—unlike Derrida—tends to be silent on matters of orality, never really seeking to develop an alternative pedagogy emphasizing the importance of both listening and hearing. Said's own pedagogy focuses almost exclusively on the study of written texts, and he makes no apologies for his interest in the spectral word, rather than its invisible or spoken counterpart. As a professor trained in the United States, Said certainly inherits his discipline's obsession with the spectral aspects of the English language, accepting the hegemonic view that English should, first and foremost, be taught and analyzed as a dead, written language and not also as a living or spoken word.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who is more directly influenced by Derrida than Said, has perhaps most compellingly developed a pedagogy of alterity, applying Derrida's deconstruction of the modern university to the diverse fields of women's, postcolonial, and minority studies. One valuable aspect of Spivak's work is that she shows that there is a relation between a pedagogy emphasizing the teaching of

competency, yet ignoring the matter of alterity, or the sightless relation to the other, and the historical struggles of marginalized peoples to gain the political power to represent themselves within the Western university. If truth in the hyperrational university is correct representation, the question Spivak's work provokes us to ask is not "Who is in possession of the Truth of competency?" but rather "Who today wields the power to represent the absolute Other within the university?"[6] Following both Marx and Derrida, Spivak distinguishes between two meanings of representation, definitions that are elided in the English language but are implied in the German terms *Vertretung*, which means "political representation" or "representation as 'proxy' or stand-in" and *Darstellung*, which means "representation as image or portrait." "Treading in your shoes, wearing your shoes, that's *Vertretung*…" Spivak states. "*Darstellung—Dar* [means] 'there,' [and] *Stellen* is 'to place,' so [it means] placing there" (*Postcolonial Critic* 108). In Derrida's own terminology, this is the "double sense of representation by delegation and a theatrical representation" (*Eyes of the University* 86). A certified or competent authority is deemed qualified to formally represent the other within the institution, or to "hang a portrait on the wall" of the other, or, in some rare cases, to even represent the self as other, and the basis of this authority is the professional competency that has been awarded to this individual by the institution. "The modern dominance of the principle of reason had to go hand in hand with the interpretation of the essence of beings as *objects*," Derrida asserts, "an object present as representation, an object placed and positioned *before* a subject [Derrida's emphasis]" (139). The powerful man of reason, the man who says "I," is actually seeking to "ensure his own technical mastery over the totality of what is" (139). However, the "Eye/I" who gazes upon the dehumanized object of his own making is resolutely silent about the abysmal grounds of his own authority. But, as Heidegger points out, "every metaphysical question can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is also there within the question. From this we conclude that metaphysical inquiry must be posed as a whole and from the essential position of the existence [*Dasein*] that questions" (*Pathmarks* 82). Although Derrida and Spivak generally refrain from references to the human being as *Dasein*, Heidegger's insistence upon the place of the questioner within the question is implied in Spivak's insistence that representation is more than a matter of mere competent image-making, or of "hanging a portrait upon the wall." "There is no neutral or natural place in teaching," Derrida states (*Who's Afraid of Philosophy?* 69) "The [pedagogical] question is always posed by someone who, at a

given moment, in a language, in a place, etc., represents a program and a strategy (which is by definition inaccessible to individual and conscious, representable control)" (89). The "Being-There" of the teacher who hangs up the portrait for his or her students to observe is inescapable. Derrida emphasizes, and is followed in this respect by Spivak, that "the principle of reason installs its empire only to the extent that the abyssal question of the being that is hiding within it remains hidden . . ." (*Eyes of the University* 139). In the empire of reason, the social and political basis of the institution's power is muted or simply assumed; in fact, it is almost never brought into the framework of rational inquiry, for to do so not only risks short-circuiting competent reason, it also risks recalling the historical fact of the institution's inauguration, a memory that threatens to destabilize the power structure of the institution, and yet there is no institution that escapes the fact that it was once founded as a political act. The competent professor prefers to believe that the institution is founded once and for all, thereafter remaining a perfectly autonomous system without need for a living outside. This professor is the man or woman authorized by the institution to hang up the portrait of the other on the wall: All other claims to representational authority as delegation may be dismissed with a wave of the hand. Competent representation does not bother its head about representation as a "treading in the shoes" of the other, which refers to an authorizing power that is wholly outside its reach. But to require nothing more than the correct representation of otherness within the university divests the other of otherness, instead converting the other into a dead object for the gaze of the competent and "hard-eyed" professor. In the rational university of the West, competency alone is required of faculty, but one may not ask if there is any ground to professional competency that is external to the institution's own power of authorization. To do so requires an appeal to an outside that the institution rightly perceives to be a threat to its authorizing power. Reason conservatively censors inquiry into the matter of representation as a matter of proxy in fear that the power of the institution itself will be destabilized; that is, the institution responds to its own living outside—in fact, its very basis for existence—by folding inward upon itself, rejecting what Derrida calls "the language of the living feminine" in preference for the language of death, or the written history of dead forms (*Ear of the Other* 21).

Despite Spivak's unambiguous rejection of racial essentialism, her deconstructive affirmation of a living feminine "outside" to institutional authority nonetheless renders her suspect to those who feel threatened by the political implications of her position. Hence it is

sometimes suggested that Spivak's views about the importance of representation as delegation harbor what Jean-Paul Sartre once called "an anti-racist racism" (*Orphée Noir* xl).[7] However, Spivak and Derrida both are post-Hegelian thinkers, which is to say they both seek to undermine *all* essentialist definitions of race, class, and gender in their respective pedagogies, even as they are aware that it is finally impossible to escape some form of essentializing. Spivak, for instance, makes very clear her belief that "knowledge is sustained and made possible by irreducible difference and not identity" (*In Other Worlds* 254). "Difference" means here more than just spatial differences between the printed words of the text but also temporal deferring, "time lags," or differences in time. The temporal deference of truth, however, occurs in the world of sound, not in the world of the written and spatial word, or the word that is exclusively seen as a visual form. Spivak distinguishes between representation as a matter of political delegation and theatrical representation, but she also insists that these two distinct forms of representation are inextricably interrelated; that is, the teacher who performs the political act of holding up the portrait for the student to observe is inevitably a symbolic representation of some political constituency or another, it is just that the university only requires that the teacher who represents the correct or competent truth, or the truth as a matter of correct representation, to be loyal to itself alone. It is an axiomatic of the Kantian university that the institution should strive to be an autonomous site that is not in need of any living "outside" to sustain it. In fact, Kant goes as far as to dream of a purely rational language that may be spoken within the university, an abstract language that would be emptied of diachronic history. This dream of a perfect language is paternalistic fantasy of an order without need for the khoral or maternal receptacle, which is necessary for the appearance of visual forms. If the rational modern university ignores the problem of *différance*, which is to say, the problem of nothingness, Plato himself acknowledges a third order that is beyond the realms of Being and becoming, which he calls *khora* in his dialogue *Timaeus*. By affirming that there *is* nothingness (or *différance*), one also unavoidably affirms the "is" that is Being itself, rather than nothingness alone. "Being and the nothing do belong together," Heidegger insists, "not because both—from the viewpoint of the Hegelian concept of thought—agree in their indeterminateness and immediacy, but rather because being itself is essentially finite and manifests itself only in the transcendence of a *Dasein* (or existence) that is held out into the nothing" (*Pathmarks* 94–95). *Différance* is not disguised essence but the necessary condition for the appearance

of all form. Derrida and Spivak are certainly aware of this basic metaphysical principle, and their affirmation of the university's "outside" is not intended to reinforce an essentialized subjectivity in order to promote an antiracist racism. "Deconstruction, if one wants a formula," Spivak states, "is, among other things, a persistent critique of what one cannot *not* want" (*The Spivak Reader* 28). For Spivak, as for Derrida, there is no permanently enduring essence or "intact kernel," as Derrida himself puts it, only the irreducible desire for the intact kernel. "The desire for the intact kernel is desire itself, which is to say that it is irreducible . . ." Derrida states. "The *ananke* is that there is no intact kernal and there has never been one" (*Ear of the Other* 115). Derrida describes *ananke* as a synonym for Necessity with a capital "N" (116). Spivak too speaks of necessity as that "which we cannot *not* desire [Sipvak's emphasis]" (*The Spivak Reader* 7). "You cannot simply assert, 'I will be anti-essentialist' and make that stick," Spivak insists, "for you cannot *not* be an essentialist to some degree" (7). When it comes to the question of *ananke*, Derrida and Spivak echo the perspectives of existential Marxists like Jean-Paul Sartre, Fredric Jameson, and others who have also been influenced by phenomenological hermeneutics, especially Heidegger. Sartre, for instance, describes the economic base of Marxist theory as "lack" or "scarcity." Following Sartre, Jameson calls history an "absent cause" and describes the Marxist concept of the mode-of-production as "a gestalt organized around some central absence" (*The Prison-House of Language* 35); or, perhaps even more provocatively, Jameson asks, "In history what is the basic unit? The individual, the period, the nation? No one is sure, but what difference does it make? Historical investigations may be pursued without a final decision on this point" (15). Despite important differences in their views, Sartre, Jameson, Derrida, and Spivak converge in their descriptions of Necessity, and, in this, they follow Marx, who described history as "the struggle to wrestle a realm of freedom from the realm of necessity" (*Capital, Vol. III* 820). What Derrida calls Necessity then is not a metaphysical presence but a painful absence that is felt so acutely that it necessitates the appearance of form. Marx himself described seven or eight forms of social organization that he called the "modes of productions," or forms that are necessarily brought into the realm of being as a means of coping with the unavoidable problem of scarcity.[8] When Spivak states her view that we "cannot *not* be essentialist to some degree," she is not merely commenting upon a philosophical truism—that is, the claim that there is no metaphysical truth is itself a truth claim—but that we find ourselves compelled to act due to the actual circumstances of our personal and

professional lives. "[H]istory is a storying," Spivak states, "secondarily also by the arrangement and interpretation of 'facts,' and facts are *facta*, past participle of *facio*, things that are made—made from conventional standards of truth-establishing, so that you can get a hold of 'what really happened'" (*The Spivak Reader* 26). It is only by gaining a grasp of such facts that one is able to tell a different story, to take history into one's own hands and tell a new story oneself. The "real" is not then a metaphysical presence, but an urgent circumstance that compels us into action, or forces us into a political act of storytelling. For instance, as Derrida narrates his own professional experiences in the academy in his essay "Punctuations," which was his formal thesis defense delivered at the Sorbonne in 1980, he describes how actual historical circumstances in France influenced his writings over several years. Derrida speaks of what he preferred to write when he first began his thesis, and then he tells us what he was actually compelled to write, as a result of various politics events that occurred, especially those linked to May 1968. "Necessity says that one must always yield," Derrida states, "always go [*se rendre*] wherever it calls. Even if it means never arriving" (*Eyes of the University* 116). The "real" for Derrida is "hauntological" rather than "ontological," but its hauntological status does not imply that Derrida believes it is possible to escape the experience of Necessity. As Jameson puts it, "History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis…" (*The Political Unconscious* 102).

Spivak's insists upon the importance of representation as delegation, or a treading in one's own shoes, because she is aware that we do not all undergo the exact same experiences of history. Necessity leaves its mark in each one of us in irreducible and distinct ways. What Derrida calls the "trace" is also a traumatic wound that we receive from the other, but if we are all wounded, in the sense that Said affirms when he evokes the concept of the "secular trace," we are not necessarily wounded in identical ways. The experience of the historical is the experience of the scar or wound. The trace of the other irreducibly marks us in a manner that is impossible to ignore, for the trace is precisely that which cannot be willed out of existence. As a case in point, when Derrida calls attention to his own "little black and very Arab" identity, he alludes to an irreducible experience of the body that is beyond deconstruction, for one cannot really transcend what Fanon called the "fact" of blackness, at least not now. Phenotype is not a matter of who I am in any essentialist sense but rather how I am repeatedly signed by the other. "Heidegger reminds us that the analytic of *Dasein* is neither an anthropology, an ethics nor a metaphysics," Derrida

states. "With respect to any definition, position or evaluation of these fields, the *Dasein* is neuter" (*Ear of the Other* 179). In Heidegger's own language: "Selfhood is the presupposition for the possibility of being an 'I,' the later only ever being disclosed in the 'you.' Never, however, is selfhood relative to a 'you,' but rather—because it first makes all this possible—is neutral with respect to being an 'I' and being a 'you,' and above all with respect to such things as 'sexuality' " (*Pathmarks* 122). Even more pointedly, Heidegger insists that, "All statements of essence in an ontological analytic of the Dasein in the human being take this being from the outset in such neutrality" (122). Derrida makes this point about Dasein with respect to the question of gender and its ultimate undecidability, and what is true of Derrida's notion of gender is also true for his notion of race: one's "race" is finally determined by the other, not by oneself. "I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexual marked voices . . .," Derrida states, "[of a] mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each 'individual,' whether he be classified as 'man' or 'woman' " (184). The key then to understanding a deconstructive concept of race, as also pertains to a deconstructive concept of gender, is to hold fast to the notion that race is not an in-dwelling essence, but a trace of the real (or *ananke*). As a university professor I may blithely deconstruct racial essentialism, assuring my students that race is little more than an Aristotelian myth, but this does not mean that my students, by virtue of having acquired this knowledge, will be delivered from the painful experience of racial discrimination, and that certain students—especially students of color in most U.S. academic settings—will suffer from this painful "fact" more acutely than others. The fact of blackness remains beyond deconstruction, even if there is no such thing as a black metaphysical essence. If this is true, however, then a pedagogy that seeks to do more than merely "hang a portrait" of the other on the wall indeed seems to be called for, even if the hyperrationalist institution resolutely validates only those competencies that finally amount to "dead" representations of the other. Deconstruction seeks to show how what is often presumed to be natural—for instance, the university classroom—is the end result of a careful and deliberate construction: "By naturalizing, by affecting to consider as natural what is not and has never been natural, one neutralizes . . ." Derrida states. "One conceals, rather, an effect of neutrality, the active intervention of a force and a machinery" (*Who's Afraid of Philosophy?* 69). It is not inappropriate then for teachers and students to consider how it is that they came to be where they are and what the effects of their

activity might be upon those whom they represent, especially in settings where those represented do not enjoy powers of self-representation. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx states of "Orientals," "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." Said takes this ironic comment as his point of departure for his study of Orientalism, citing this maxim as emblematic of the Western attitude to the other throughout history. Because the other is not competent to represent himself, he must be lent a helping hand by those who imagine that they are better suited to the task.

Derrida himself states, "Each man, and each woman must commit his or her own singularity, the untranslatable factor of his or her life and death" (*Ear of the Other* 169). Derrida's views, in this regard, parallel those of Said, who in his often-cited "Introduction" to *Orientalism*, speaks of the teacher's necessary "personal investment" in his or her teaching, or what he also calls "the personal dimension" to teaching. Here, Said refers to Antonio Gramsci's notion of the trace in his *Prison Notebooks*. In Gramsci's words, "*The starting point* of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory [my emphasis]" (*Prison Notebooks* 324). The gramma is the historical wound that lingers in our very bodies: it cannot be washed away with soap and water. In Derridean terms, the shibboleth is a mark that allows us entry into some communities, while inevitably excluding us from others. For Gramsci and for Said, the necessary starting point for *any* critical endeavor is to "compile an inventory of the traces" that history has left within us (*Orientalism* 25). "Knowing thyself," or "committing to one's own singularity," in Derridean terms, does not imply discovering the truth of one's indwelling essence, but it does mean honestly taking stock of one's actual experiences as well as knowing when to "stop short," as Spivak puts it, once one has reached the furthest limitations of one's actual experiences. By becoming more aware of our limitations, we can begin to cultivate the "art of blinking," as Derrida puts it; which is to say, the art of averting our own gaze so that the other might have the chance to be wholly other, rather than a reified or dead object of our own construction. "One of the first things to do," Spivak states, "is to think through the limits of one's power" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 19). This is a hard lesson for many of Spivak's more privileged students, especially at an institution like Columbia University, but it is an indispensable starting point for responsible critical analysis. As she remarks in an interview, her white male students in particular may feel threatened by her

teaching: "I am only a bourgeois white male, I can't speak," she sometimes hears (*The Postcolonial Critic* 62). However, applying Derrida's pedagogical teachings to the U.S. context, Spivak states: "I ask the U.S. student: 'What do you think is the inscription that allows *you* to think the world without any preparation? What sort of coding has produced *this* subject? [Spivak's emphasis]" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 19). As hard as this may be for many to accept, Spivak works hard to ensure that the lesson is not a destructive or disabling one for her students. "This is not a paralyzing thing to teach," she insists. "In fact, when a student is told that responsibility means proceeding from the limits of one's own power, the student understands it quite differently from being told, 'Look, you can't do all of this' " (19). In other words, Spivak offers a teaching philosophy that seeks to empower students by showing them when and how they must give up the power of representation; that is, giving up control, in both Derrida and Spivak's respective pedagogies, is a lesson that empowers rather than disables the student. "Derrida calls this a responsibility to the trace of the other," Spivak states (8). "Deconstruction is not an exposure of error, not a tabulation of error," she insists, "logocentrism is not a pathology, nor is the metaphorical closure a prison to be overthrown by violent means" (130). This is what Derrida means when he states that, "the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work" (*Of Grammatology* 24). If it does *not* fall prey to its own work, if it is a ruse to destroy the other or to usurp the rightful place of the other, it is something other than deconstruction. Though Derrida himself is more cautious in his articulation of this aspect of deconstruction, Spivak states that, "a short word for this might be 'love' " (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 130). One stops short out of "love" of the other, not to enact a disguised form of aggression.

What Spivak call love can arguably be translated into Heideggerian terms as "freedom" or a "letting be," a leaving of the other to his or her irreducible alterity. For Heidegger, the phrase "to let beings be" does not imply a neglect of the other, but an active engagement with the other, which allows others the freedom "to be the beings [that] they are" (*Pathmarks* 144). "To let be—that is, to let beings be as the beings that they are—means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself" (144). But the originary Greek notion of truth as an open region in which the other is left to his or her alterity, Heidegger insists, "contains the directive to rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of statements

[or competency]…" (144). "Philosophical thinking is gentle releasement that does not renounce the concealment of beings as a whole," Heidegger states. "Philosophical thinking is especially the stern and resolute openness that does not disrupt the concealing, but entreats its unbroken essence into the open region of understanding and thus into its own truth" (152). As we have seen, Spivak and Derrida do not, like Heidegger, speak of "unbroken essences," but they are both influenced by Heidegger's notion of freedom as a "letting be." Derrida's discussion of university responsibility, in fact, is especially indebted to Heidegger's "On the Essence of the Ground" (*Der Staz vom Grund*), which is cited several times in Derrida's "The Principle of Reason," his talk delivered at Cornell University in 1983. In fact, Derrida's own discussion of university responsibility takes the conclusion of Heidegger's talk, originally written in 1928, as the starting point for his own reflections on faculty responsibilities in the modern university. Here, Heidegger defines freedom as "the ground of the ground" or "the *abyss of ground* [*Ab-grund*] in Dasein [Heidegger's emphasis]" (134). "Dasein—although finding itself in the midst of beings and pervasively attuned by them," Heidegger asserts, "is, as *free* potentiality for being, *thrown* among beings [Heidegger's emphasis]" (134). It is not, however, until the final sentence of Heidegger's essay where Heidegger articulates what will become the key Derridean themes of listening, hearing, and absolute alterity: "[O]nly being able to *listen* into the distance awakens Dasein as a self to the response of the other Dasein in whose company [*Mitsein*] it can surrender its I-ness as to attain itself as an authentic self [my emphasis]" (135). In Spivak's shorthand, "stopping short" is the surest way to "know thyself," as well as to form an alliance with the other, what she calls a "bonding in difference."

In Derrida's title "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils," he puns on the word the pupil, which can mean both "student" and the very "pupil" of the human eye. Here, Derrida encourages us to wonder how the university might look in the eyes of its students—for instance, those students whom the university marks as "other"—but he also draws attention to the irreducibly visual nature of "the principle of reason" itself. Reason is what is seen, what can be competently represented or rendered. Here, Derrida evokes the Heideggerian critique of Leibniz, who was to have an enormous influence on Kant, for instance in shaping the Kantian model of the university. Heidegger points out that, for Leibniz, there are two main or "first" principles in all human reasoning, the principle of noncontradiction and the principle of rendering reason. Following Heidegger,

Derrida carefully examines these first principles, suggesting that the modern university has very selectively interpreted these principles, especially the latter, affirming only the necessity of "rendering reason" in Spivak's sense of "hanging a portrait on the wall." As Heidegger puts it, "In its traditional form and role, the principle of reason has remained stuck in a trivialized form that necessarily entails that we first of all illuminate everything that has the character of a grounding principle" (*Pathmarks* 133). The principle of reason, that it must be "rendered" or re-presented, has strictly meant that, "every being has its reason [ground]" (132). Derrida performs an etymology of the English phrase "to render reason," showing how it can mean to give reason back, to yield reason, and to give reason. "Any one of the three," Derrida states, "could mean to give grounds for one's thoughts and assertions," (*Eyes of the University* 292); which is to say, to correctly re-present one's ideas in a perceptible form. Here, we have the traditional definition of truth as "*veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus* [truth is the adequation of intellect to thing]" (*Pathmarks* 138); or, truth implies the competent representation of idea as objective form. Derrida points out, however, that to "render reason" can also mean "to give an account of one's acts or conduct, when summoned to do so: to be held accountable and to speak accordingly" (*Eyes of the University* 292). Rendering reason, in this sense, has nothing whatsoever to do with an idea or "portrait that one hangs on the wall" and that appears in the pupil of the human eye. Instead, it suggests the necessity of exercising one's responsibility to the other, which involves the invisible word that is intended for the human ear, not the pupil of the eye. "The word is not seen," Derrida states, "it has to be heard and listened to, this apostrophe that enjoins us to respond to the principle of reason" (136). By requiring faculty to teach competencies, the Western university therefore demands that professors "render reason" in the sense of "hanging a portrait upon the wall," but it is resolutely silent about faculty duties to "render reason" in this other sense; that is, to offer any responsible accounting of why it is that reason itself must be rendered. To do so, would require faculty to ponder the matter of alterity, or their responsibility to explain to the other why it is that reason must, in the first place, be rendered. This is what Derrida calls, elsewhere, "the thinking of the 'yes' *before* philosophy, *before* the question even, *before* research and critique [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Who's Afraid of Philosophy* 13). "This thinking can, one can even think that it *must*, lead precisely to philosophy," Derrida states. "It can do so from the moment that, in the form of a duty or debt, it already finds itself *committed*, inscribed in the space open and closed

by this *pledge*—given to the other, received from the other [Derrida's emphasis]" (13). The problem with a pedagogy of competence is that it is literally irresponsible, that it does not wish to acknowledge its duty to *respond*—or to render a reason for reason—to those others whom it proposes to instruct. In neglecting this duty, it neglects the most basic requirements of philosophy from the time of its earliest origins in ancient Greece. "[T]he response to the call of the principle of reason is thus a response to the Aristotelian requirements," Derrida points out, "those of metaphysics, of first philosophy, of the search for 'roots,' 'principles,' and 'causes'" (*Eyes of the University* 137). Though Derrida is sometimes criticized for promoting an "obscurest" and "irrational" philosophy, he justifiably asks: "Who is more faithful to reason's call, who hears it with a keener ear, who better sees the difference, the one who offers questions in return and tries to think through the possibility of that summons, or the one who does not want to hear any question about the reason for reason?" (138). He also rightly points out—as the examples of competency requirements in my own university and department shows—that the neglect of this responsibility is nearly universal within the contemporary university of the West: "Nowhere, within the university as such, is anyone wondering from where that call (*Auspruch*) of reason is voiced," Derrida states, "nowhere is anyone inquiring into the origin of that demand for grounds, for reason that is to be provided, rendered, delivered" (140).

Why might one want to follow Derrida's advice, in this regard, and affirm the responsibility to render reason in this other, neglected sense? Thus far, we have discussed the pedagogy of competency in relation to fostering a greater awareness and appreciation for otherness, especially in the U.S. academic setting where a "new Orientalism," to cite Spivak, has emerged since the early 1990s (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 57). However, Derrida's inquiry into this question is framed with specific reference to the problem of the U.S.'s university's relation to, what he calls, "multinational military-industrial complexes or techno-economic networks, indeed international techno-military networks that are apparently multi- or trans- national in form" (*Eyes of the University* 141). Derrida makes clear his view that current forms of university pedagogy, even as they are resolutely silent about the questions of the "why?," the "for whom?," and the "to what end?," are nonetheless political and utilitarian to the core. "[I]t is impossible, now more than ever," Derrida states, "to dissociate the work we do, within one discipline or several, from a reflection on the political and institutional conditions of that work" (129). Derrida adumbrates just

a few of the ways that the military may press even the most theoretical and nonpoliticized academic disciplines into the service of promoting war, including "literature, poetry, the arts, and fiction" (143). Speaking in 1983, when the U.S. military budget was modest in comparison to its budget in the early twenty-first century, Derrida ponders the implications for the university, which is funded by a government that spends "two million dollars a minute . . . for armaments" (143). More recently, my own university in the United States has requested that faculty teach verifiable competencies, at a time when the U.S. military is currently involved in various conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, and other regions. Within such a context, Kant's wish to demarcate the university as a social sphere that enjoys perfect autonomy, even if this autonomy exists only within what Kant describes as the legislative or "lower faculties," cannot even be dismissed as naïve or delusional. Today, the time-honored notion that the university is an autonomous place of perfect uselessness, thriving in a world apart from the messy realities of history, is simply "bad-faith," as Sartre might have put it. This is why the professor is nowhere more political than when he loudly proclaims his lack of politics. The modern university reveals its loyalty to the military state precisely by asserting its illusory autonomy from the state and its wars. However, by teaching competencies that it imagines are specific skills, but emptied of ideological "content," to put it in Hegelian terms, the university tips its hat to the utilitarian goals of the military state it services. "*They do not wish to know how their discipline has been constituted*," Derrida states, "since the beginning of the nineteenth century and under the watchful vigilance of the principle of reason [my emphasis]" (147). In this way, the university professor can ensure his or her own economic survival, perpetuating the existence of the institution in its current form, while disavowing responsibilities that have historically defined the role of the teacher for more than two thousand years. In the process, the student gains greater competency, which in this context means hard-eyed analytical skills and an implacable deafness to the voice of the other.

It is safe to predict, however, that those who suggest that the university must assume responsibilities beyond the state-mandated duty to render reason in the narrow sense of competent representation will be criticized for offering an "irrational," "obscurantism," "nihilistic," and "anarchistic" teaching philosophy. As he states in his talk on the modern university at Cornell, Derrida has himself often been accused of such things by the "great professors or the representatives of prestigious institutions . . . [who] heap insults, and say whatever comes

into their heads on the subjects of texts that they obviously have never opened or that they have encountered through mediocre journalism…" (147). Is Derrida, however, truly proposing a "nihilistic" pedagogy? Is this a fair criticism? Derrida counters such criticisms by stating that it is precisely those who refuse to affirm the right—which is to say, *duty*—to philosophy, who finally succumb to "obscurantism" and "nihilism" (147). In fact, it is only by affirming what is alternately called Non-Being, nothingness, the nil, the *khora*, or *différance* that one is able to transcend *mere* nihilism, which is to say, a form of reason that fears inquiry into the reasons for its own existence. The moment that one says "there *is khora*," one necessarily affirms the "is," or the realm of being that is suspended over the abyss of nothingness. Leibniz's rational principle of noncontradiction breaks down when it attempts to respond to the statement that "there *is* nothingness (or *différance*)," for how can there be a thing that is no thing? In their respective talks on the university, Heidegger and Derrida comment on the rationalist formula that "*nihil est sine ratione*" or "nothing is without reason." For Heidegger and Derrida, however, the statement that "nothing is without reason" necessarily implies that nothingness is a domain that is off limits to reason. By affirming Non-Being, or *différance*, one affirms that reason must be responsible to its own reason for being, which is to say, one has a duty to explain to the other why reason (or logos)—rather than nothing—*is*. The ocular professor dons the mask of competent reason but is thoroughly irrational in his desire to know absolutely nothing of the nothing: he flees from the abyss of nothingness, which is the source of so much anxiety, in favor of a nihilistic pedagogy fraudulently passing itself off as "reasonable." It is precisely the "competent" professor who is "afraid of philosophy" to cite the title of Derrida's book on the university. "Tell me nothing of the nothing," the "rational' teacher states with irritation. But this demand that we refrain from speaking of nothingness is also and unavoidably the metaphysical affirmation of *différance*. In asserting that nothing should not be spoken of, the "competent" professor parrots the originary metaphysical affirmation that one may not assign any objective attributes to nothingness; that is, the nothing cannot ever be reified or become a thing. In refusing discussion of the nothing, the competent but ignorant professor affirms the nothing, but only in a dismissive or negative way; that is, one may not bring up the question of *différance* in the presence of the competent professor, who irritably censors discourse on the nothing, which he anxiously perceives as a threat. In order to transcend the *mere* nihilism of the "competent" professor, Derrida *actively* affirms

the nothing or *différance*, rather than arrogantly dismissing it. This is why Derrida describes deconstruction as *affirmation*, as opposed to the confused nihilism of the competent professor. Saying "yes," for Derrida, means saying "yes" to the nothing, or *différance*, so that there can be something *new* rather than the endless circulation of dead forms.

The "double gesture" then means that faculty must indeed teach competence, including what Derrida calls, "the most serious tradition of the university," but it also means that faculty have a duty to teach their students how to "think the abyss" (150). One cannot teach the abyss without also teaching necessary competencies. One cannot "play one risk off against another, the barrier against the abyss, the abyss against the barrier" (150). "Thinking requires *both* the principle of reason and what is beyond the principle of reason, the *arche* and an-archy [Derrida's emphasis]," as Derrida puts it (153). In today's university, however, when the teaching of student competencies is the only faculty duty that matters, it is perhaps more necessary than ever for those who work in academe to resist the transformation of the university into a utilitarian instrument of the military state, while recognizing, however, that there is no university that does not serve identifiable social and political ends. This is the sense in which faculty today have an urgent responsibility to be "irresponsible" to the state's demands to say nothing of nothingness. "[I]rresponsiblity toward the state can be demanded by philosophy's responsibility to its own law," Derrida states, "or the responsibility of *thinking*…[Derrida's emphasis]" (*Who's Afraid of Philosophy?* 41); or, in his paraphrase of Nietzsche, "One must not have viewpoints alone, but also thoughts!" (*Eyes of the University* 152). In a similar statement, Derrida observes that, "An essential and mandatory incompetence, a structural nonknowledge, constructs the concept of philosophy as metaphysics or the science of sciences" (62). "[T]he content of historical and positive knowledge is not required," Derrida asserts, "as shocking as this might appear. [Such knowledge always] remains external to the philosophical act as such" (62). Like Heidegger, Derrida appeals to a freedom that is freer than the circumscribed freedom of dead spectral objectivity (66).

In various texts, Derrida comments on the U.S. academic environment in relation to political issues of multinational capitalism, the military industrial complex in the United States, and, in his later years, American foreign policy, specifically wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Derrida's writings on the liberal democratic university of the West are linked to his particular situation as a French citizen and

academic, and he was reluctant to directly intervene within the American academic context. Instead, Derrida suggests that it is primarily the responsibility of U.S. academics to address debates that are specific to their own national setting. Derrida himself very diligently performed his own professional duties with respect to his long-standing role as a French academic, and he urges American professors to do the same. In previous chapters, I have written critically of Derrida's political views on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but my analyses of Derrida's writings have not been undertaken because I believe that his texts are unworthy of careful consideration. While I certainly disagree with Derrida's approach to what he calls "the war for Jerusalem," I also must recognize that, whatever U.S. academics like me may say about Derrida's views of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, he was not the citizen of the nation that is most responsible for the prolonged duration of this conflict, nor was he the citizen of the nation that is responsible for the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite Derrida's misguided approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, he offered valuable if sometimes problematic critiques of both the pro-war policies of George W. Bush and the U.S. media's response to the attacks of 9/11. As a French citizen, Derrida's views were perhaps not controversial within a French or European setting, but they were nonetheless welcomed by American academics who were opposed to these wars from the outset. In a professional setting where complicity and guilty silence are the order of the day, Derrida's criticisms of the U.S.'s rogue adventurism in the Middle East and elsewhere provides a modest opening for theoretical debate within academe. Though written more than two decades ago, Derrida's writings on the liberal democratic university also provide a way of both theorizing and actively resisting the prevailing culture of silent complicity in the United States, a silence that inevitably links the teaching and research that is now being performed in American universities with what is happening in faraway places like the Occupied Territories, Iraq, and Afghanistan. For this reason and many others, faculty in the United States and elsewhere cannot afford to ignore Derrida's writings on the university.

CHAPTER 9

Realism without Realism

In *The Politics of Friendship* (1997), Derrida describes the democratic as a pact between a band of brothers that is made in the name of the father. Derrida's approach to this question cannot be fully appreciated without reference to Sigmund Freud's controversial book, *Totem and Taboo* (1918), which Derrida relies upon as a kind of ur-text offering a reasonably accurate description of humanity's earliest forms of social relations. The problem of the democratic, Derrida will seek to demonstrate, is first and foremost the problem of the brother clan, which is also the problem of the dead father and absent sister—and all of these complex problems precede the emergence of idiosyncratically Greek forms of democracy in Athens. The question of the brother clan is also inseparable from the emergence of Greek philosophy, which Derrida describes as an essentialist theory of the friend. I will argue here that despite its apologetic approach toward latently Zionist concepts of the citizen, *The Politics of Friendship* offers a powerful means of deconstructing political realism in current U.S. foreign policy, especially hegemonic articulations of realist doctrines that continue to influence U.S. involvement in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. Derrida carefully avoids discussing recent global events in his lengthy book on friendship, but his reasons for bracketing off ostensibly more urgent political matters in this text tend to be epistemological, rather than partisan in nature.[1] In contrast to the fact-driven approach of Noam Chomsky, Derrida shows that it is not enough to criticize the shortcomings of U.S. foreign policy with reference to a rigidly idealized standard of human behavior. Instead, one must also show why it is that the reasonable human standard that idealists like Chomsky tirelessly affirm can degenerate into an objectivist irrationalism, which can be as dangerous as realist articulations of the democratic. In response to Chomsky's efforts to bring current U.S. foreign policy to its senses, Derrida observes that, "It is not a criticism of [Chomsky's] courageous works to wish for a more developed political thought within them,

especially with regard to the history, structure, and 'logic' of the concept of sovereignty" (*Rogues* 102). Chomsky's oppositional critique of U.S. foreign policy, which is based in the speculative belief that human ethics are biological essences that are "hardwired" into the human psyche,[2] ironically does not fail to censor philosophical inquiry into the abyssal grounds of human reason. Unlike Chomsky, Derrida does not accept the notion that ethics are a matter of moral competence. He therefore contests Chomsky's view that the democratic critique of democracy must in each and every instance be accessible to any "ordinary fifteen-year old" (*Understanding Power* 137).[3] "[C]an one and/or must one speak democratically of democracy?" Derrida asks (*Rogues* 71). Does not Chomsky's insistence that philosophers like Derrida be required to speak "democratically" of the democratic already promote an antidemocratic and tautological logic that inevitably censors inquiry into the unarticulated reasons why it is that U.S. policy makers must be more reasonable? I will suggest here that both Chomsky and Derrida offer valuable analyses of political realism in U.S. foreign policy, and that the contributions of both of these important thinkers cannot be ignored—despite Chomksy's unfortunate claim that deconstruction is a "fraud" (*Understanding Power* 231). Certainly, Derrida must be read against himself, largely due to the ethnocentric bias in his approach; however, it would be a mistake to neglect what is worth preserving in his theoretical writings on political realism on this basis alone. At the heart of Derrida's own theory of realism is his deconstruction of Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* (1932), which is a text that has influenced the writings of figures like Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger, both of whom have directly or indirectly shaped U.S. foreign policy since World War II; hence, in the pages that follow, Derrida's careful analysis of Schmitt's decisionism will be examined, insofar as Schmitt's theory of the enemy can be said to influence U.S. foreign policy today.

To do so, however, it will first be necessary to survey Freud's influential theory of the brother clan, which Derrida builds upon in his analysis of the democratic. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud develops his own myth of writing's origins, one that is as fascinating as Plato's legendary tale of the Egyptian god Thoth in *The Phaedrus*. Citing the anthropological studies of Garcilaso de La Vega, Max Müller, Herbert Spenser, and others, Freud argues that the tribal totem, which is the distinct mark of a clan or tribe, originates in the practice of name-giving. For Freud, the totem is merely another word for the name of the father, which is violently cut into the human body. The totem is therefore yet another word for tribal scaring, including circumcision.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud also investigates the origins of incest dread, which he claims is a universal feature of all human societies, and he argues that there are absolutely no biological or "natural" reasons why incest dread is so uniform in the human species.[4] As a result, Freud takes what he calls a Darwinian view regarding incest dread, by advancing the hypothesis that when human beings once lived in primal and ape-like hordes, the strongest of the males would arrogate to himself exclusive rights to sexual intercourse with the females of the horde, including his own daughters, a right that was denied to the weaker males. In doing so, the strongest male not only fostered resentment against him from his sons, he also drove his sons into homosocial relations with one another and into forming a conspiracy against him, so that they might gain access to the females of the horde. In time, the various brothers banded together to overthrow the father, savagely killing him and cannibalistically consuming his body. However, because they sincerely admired the father and also felt some affection for him, this violent action led them to feel remorseful for their actions. The totem or tribal marking of the father was preserved in honor of the absent father, and the brothers agreed among themselves to equally share the females of the horde, rather than allow one powerful male to ever again claim such exclusive rights for himself. For Freud, the decisive moment occurred when the brothers made a pact not to kill one another, in the same way that they killed their father, but instead to now share the females among themselves, as well as to honor the memory of the dead father by preserving his totem. Freud suggests that this moment marked the historical emergence of democratic social systems in the human species, or the shift away from the brutal rule of the father horde toward the more "democratic" rule of the brother clan. Following Freud, Derrida argues that reflexively fratrocentric articulations of the democratic, from prehistorical times to the present, reveal a deeply unconscious process that is secretly at work in all human societies.

In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida inquires into the unconscious reasons why brothers sometimes choose to form loving bonds with one another and sometimes choose to kill one another. In Heideggerian terms, the goal of dialectics in Greek philosophy is to lovingly put questions to one's friend, or figurative brother, in order that the Being of his being may become manifest as an event in time. Philosophical truth only reveals itself in a context of loving dialogue with one's friend, so that the true essence that is hidden in the friend may make itself known. Hence, philosophy can justifiably be called a theory of the friend, one that depends upon the other's living presence while

also suggesting, somewhat paradoxically, that he can still be loved in his absence, or after his death. What counts in this tradition is the act of loving the friend, not one's being loved by the friend. Conversely, Schmitt's theory of the enemy, or what is also called decisionism, asserts that the enemy's living presence is necessary in order that the Being of his being may also make itself manifest as an event in time. The enemy is the figurative brother who has the power to interrogate the friend with hateful yet impersonal questions. The desire for the friend, which for Plato is a sublated form of eroticism, finds its uncanny double in Schmitt's notion of absolute hostility, which implies that—like Platonic love—one's hatred for the other may also become idealized as pure spirit. This means, however, that the theory of the enemy and the theory of the friend are ultimately inseparable: or that it is impossible to articulate a coherent theory of the enemy without also implying a theory of the friend, nor can one ever articulate a theory of the friend without implying the existence of the enemy, who is, finally, the brother whom I hate. The philosophical tradition of the West has always implied an essentialist metaphysics of the enemy although, for the most part, a theory of the enemy was simply assumed rather than explicitly articulated. It is for this reason that the writings of Carl Schmitt are important today, despite the shameful history of his opportunistic involvement with the Nazis and despite significant shortcomings in his theory of the enemy. Following in the lineage of other famous pessimists like Machiavelli, Joseph Marie de Maistre, Thomas Hobbes, and others, Schmitt's offers the most perplexing and yet most extensively developed theory of the enemy ever written. The haunting similarities between the political views of Schmitt, Heidegger, and Derrida also make of Schmitt a figure that neither Derrida nor his readers can afford to ignore. In fact, Derrida's critique of Marx in *Specters of Marx* draws from Schmitt's prior critique of Marxist-Leninism, especially Schmitt's suggestion that Marx tended to essentialize the bourgeoisie.

In Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, which Derrida extensively critiques in *Specters of Marx*, Fukuyama surveys and critiques many of the key tenants of realist thought, citing the work of those who have exerted the most influence on U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II. Figures that Fukuyama cites include giants of realism like Morgenthau, Kissinger, George Kennan, and Rienhold Niebuhr. In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Fukuyama asserts that—at the "end of history"—realist thought in U.S. foreign policy will no longer prove to be viable and proposes that U.S. policy makers accordingly adjust their views to accommodate a

world in which liberal democratic forms of government will reign triumphant. While the very phrase "the end of history" certainly rings hollow in the post 9/11 era, Fukuyama should nonetheless be applauded for attempting to rethink political realism and for inaugurating philosophical debate into the urgent question of realism's ongoing viability. Fukuyama identifies the key tenants of political realism in U.S. foreign policy, which are worth repeating here. First, Fukuyama states, realists assert that "insecurity is a universal and permanent feature of the international order due to the latter's abidingly anarchic character" (*The End of History* 247). Second, realists assert that, "the immediate goal of international politics is power" (247). Realist ideology is based in the assumption that international politics is *permanently* unstable and anarchistic. This view presupposes that nothing like a stable form of international law will ever emerge in human history, and that the nations of the earth had best adapt to this fact and act accordingly. Realists are as adamant as Schmitt that there will *always* be a "concept of the political." Moreover, they assert that the United States is well advised to seek as much political power as possible, rather than find itself at the mercy of those nations that wield power. Morgenthau concludes that, "it is in the very nature of politics to compel the actor on the political scene to use ideologies in order to disguise the immediate goal of his action"—which is power (*Politics Among Nations* 13). The main function of political discourse, both on the domestic front and abroad, is to legitimate national efforts to reach this goal. Although the concept of power in realist thought can sometimes take on frankly spiritualist connotations, it is mainly calculated in terms of military force; or, as Fukuyama puts it, "the true coin of the realm in international politics [for the realist] is military power" (*The End of History* 249). What realists call "power" always translates into actual weapons that can be used to kill one's enemy. Friends in realist foreign policy are therefore not determined on the basis of their shared belief systems or political ideologies, but according to their actual military power. For realists, one may dispense with rhetorical utterances or proclamations of political friendship made by the leaders of other nations and instead focus all one's attention on the military arsenals of one's foreign interlocutor, who is believed to be a potential enemy. It is often observed, for instance, that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East did not become tilted toward Israel until after the Six-Day War of 1967 when the Israeli army decimated the collective armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in less than a week. Although Israeli Jews share obvious cultural affinities with the West, particularly Ashkenazi Jews, the decisive factor in

terms of shaping U.S. foreign policy toward Israel was not the fact that many European Jews enjoy Mozart, Rembrandt, and Bordeaux wine, but the impressive power of Israel's military. As Fukuyama points out, realists believe that, "military capability—the quantities of tanks, planes, and guns—are not as fickle [as the moods of one's stated friends], but constitute in themselves indicators of intent" (249). Finally, political realists who have shaped U.S. foreign policy have uniformly insisted that moral considerations have absolutely no place in the foreign policy decision-making process. Although Morgenthau was perhaps the most instrumental theorist in advancing the argument against moral pacifism in foreign policy, it was Reinhold Niebuhr who articulated the most influential critique of pacifism, especially among Christian conservatives in the United States during the last five decades. In his influential book *Christianity and Power Politics* (1940), Niebuhr attacks Christian forms of pacifism as "heretical" (5). In fact, Niebuhr states bluntly that, "there is not the slightest support in [Christian] Scripture for the doctrine of non-violence" (10). Niebuhr's pessimistic views about pacifism, the inherent depravity of all humanity, and the contradictions of liberalism echo those of Schmitt in many remarkable ways.[5] Like Schmitt, Niebuhr distinguishes liberalism from democracy, affirming the necessity of the latter while totally rejecting the former. For Niebuhr, liberal forms of democracy are problematic because they assume "a faith in the essential goodness of man and the possibility of completely rational behavior" (84). Niebuhr also suggests that democracy is a regrettable but "perennial" necessity, due to the requirement that checks be placed upon government power; however, he speculates that liberalism will, in the end, prove to be "no more than a passing middle-class illusion in a brief period of expanding capitalism" (84). Like Schmitt, Niebuhr was a conservative Christian who insisted upon the inherent sinfulness of all humanity, implying the need for a messianic savior to redeem humanity's sins. "The mystery of evil is beyond the power of solution," Niebuhr states (5). In liberal ideology, he observes, "the Christian idea of original sin is ruled out a priori. This [may be] understandable enough in a non-Christian world. What is absurd is that modern Christianity should have accepted this modern rejection of the doctrine of original sin with such pathetic eagerness" (37).

In relation to the Abrahamic religions, it is worth underscoring that only the Christian religion vigorously maintains a doctrine of original sin. Though Judaism and Islam include doctrines of sin, to be sure, their respective theologies do not assert the need for a savior to take humanity's sins upon himself. Following Paul, most Christians,

whether they are Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant insist that, "all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). In relation to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, this difference is significant since many Muslims have little to no awareness of the profoundly "pessimistic" nature of realist views of humanity, which tend to be based in a Christian theology of original sin. While it is easy to dismiss a political theorist like Schmitt because of his association with the Nazis, it becomes less easy to ignore his essentialist theory of the enemy when it becomes clear that Schmitt's views are remarkably similar to those of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Kenan, who have no shortage of heirs among current policy makers in the United States. As a matter of fact, the Nazi view that Schmitt himself was a "heretical" Nazi is probably more accurate than the reactionary view of critics like Stephen Holmes, who have suggested that Schmitt was one of the main political architects of the Nazi party (*The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* 38–39). As a case in point, it may be instructive to more closely examine Niebuhr's statement that "there is not the slightest support in Scripture for the doctrine of non-violence" (*Christianity and Power Politics* 10), in light of Schmitt's parallel theory of the absolute enemy. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt points out that Christ's injunction to love ones enemies refers only to one's private adversaries, not one's public enemies (29). In a brief account of Schmitt's theory of the enemy, George Schwab provides helpful historical context to Schmitt's views, by pointing out that a "neighbor" for the ancient Israelites meant only a fellow Israelite. "In Deuteronomy," Schwab notes, "the 'others' are usually those people who stand in the way of God's chosen people in their journey to the Holy Land. . . . The Israelites did not find it necessary to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants . . ." ("Enemy or Foe" 195). Schwab also observes that the foes of the Israelites, as well as those of the Greeks and Romans, were indiscriminately killed and their property confiscated. The same can be said for Christians during the medieval period, during which Christians clearly differentiated between those who were their private and public enemies. Christ's command to love one's enemies, Schmitt observes, reads in Latin "*diligite inimicos vestros*," and not "*diligite hostes vestros*" (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27). Schmitt's rigorous distinction between the *inimicus*, or the private enemy, and the *hostis*, or the public foe, is one that indeed holds up to close scrutiny from a scripturally based Christian perspective, and it lends further support to Niebuhr's claims that Christian pacifism is a "heretical" deviation of the Christian faith. Schmitt and Schwab both show how changes in the German and

English language with regard to the words "enemy" reveal evolving attitudes toward the enemy, especially at the close of the medieval period. According to the *OED*, the English word for foe "is an adversary in deadly feudal or mortal combat"; hence the enemy-foe (or private adversary-public adversary) distinction in the English language, which has gradually faded from memory, would accord with the *hostis-inimicus* distinction in Latin, the *polémios-echtrós* distinction in Greek, and the *ojeb-soneh* distinction in Hebrew. Schwab suggests that it is not until the period of the Enlightenment that a firm distinction is drawn between combatants and noncombatants, as well as between combat and noncombat areas of military engagement; furthermore, it is during this same era that the obligation to give quarter to one's enemy emerged in European society, which meant that "killing or wounding a properly identified enemy soldier who had laid down his arms was [now] unlawful, and that prisoners of war had to be treated humanely . . ." (199). Hence, it is only with the era of the Enlightenment that the notion of "civilized" and "rational" warfare emerges, which for Schmitt is a laughable contradiction in terms, or an irrational rationalism.

Schmitt himself uses the German word *Fiend* in the enemy rather than foe sense, as Schwab points out, "since Schmitt identified himself with the epoch of the national sovereign state with its *jus publicum Europeaeum*" (*The Concept of the Political* 26). Unlike Enlightenment figures such as George Washington, who famously gave quarter to all enemies during the American Revolutionary War, Schmitt argues that the Enlightenment idea of a "rational" or "just" war is a hopeless absurdity. "There exists no rational purpose . . . which could justify men in killing each other . . ." Schmitt insists (49). When the Enlightenment introduces the distinction between combatant and non-combatant, the foe is reduced to the male combatant in the camp of the enemy, upon whom, in proper circumstances, one is required to show mercy. By calling the enemy *Fiend*, Schmitt acknowledges that he lives at a different historical moment than that of the Israelites, Greeks, Romans, and so on, but he would have us know that he is not fooled for an instant about what it means to have a true foe; that is, Schmitt is not suggesting that humanity should return to a time when the combatant-noncombatant distinction did not exist. Schmitt goes along with the idea of "enlightened" and "civilized" rules of warfare, while still smiling at the very notion, but he nonetheless insists that one cannot finally convert all one's mortal foes into mere enemies. At some level, one is always going to have a foe, the essential or real enemy, the absolute other who must be killed in combat. This never

goes away for Schmitt. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt states, "The justification of war does not reside in its being fought for ideals or norms of justice, but in its being fought against a *real* enemy [my emphasis]" (49). The notion that there is a "real enemy" obviously suggests an essentialist concept of the enemy, which is an issue that Derrida will carefully examine. "What always matters," Schmitt insists, "is only the possibility of conflict" (40); or, in another formulation of this thesis, Schmitt states: "The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the *real* possibility of physical killing . . . War is the existential negation of the enemy . . . It does not have to be common, normal, something ideal, or desirable. But it must nevertheless remain a *real* possibility for as long as the concept of the enemy remains valid [my emphasis]" (33). The true enemy for Schmitt is simply "the other' or "the stranger." "It is sufficient for his nature that [the enemy] is, in a specially intense way, *existentially something different and alien*," Schmitt states, "so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible [my emphasis]" (27).

Like all political realists, Schmitt scoffs at the liberal idea that humanity is naturally good or innocent. "One could test all theories of state and political ideas," Schmitt states, "according to their anthropology and thereby classify these as to whether they consciously or unconsciously presuppose man to be by nature evil or by nature good" (*The Concept of the Political* 58). Unlike Rousseau, who championed notions of humanity's ultimate perfectability, Schmitt insists that man is a "dangerous and dynamic being" (61); or, to cite de Maistre, "[liberals] boast of their enlightenment, but they know nothing because they do not know themselves" (*Considérations sur la France* 256). If they did, de Maistre insists, they would know that "*l'homme est mauvais, horriblement mauvais* [Man is evil, horribly evil]!" (*Soirées* I 72). However, to insist that man is evil in a natural sense does not necessarily imply that the very essence of man is evil. The essence that reveals itself in hand-to-hand combat, for Schmitt, remains an essence of the Good; or, as Derrida puts it, spirit in Schmitt's theory of the enemy remains "on the side of life" (*Politics of Friendship* 136). "[T]he real possibility of putting-to-death (execution), which is an irreducible condition of the political, and indeed the ontological structure of human existence," Derrida states, "means for Schmitt neither an ontology of death or of dying nor a serious consideration of nothingness . . ." (136). In orthodox Catholic theology, from the time of Augustine to the present, it will be remembered, evil is defined as the absence of form, or a disruptive element that has absolutely no ontological character. Evil

in Christian doctrine does not have any thing-like attributes. Evil is instead akin to what Plotinus once called "matter," which is an objectless object or the most degraded possible idea of a "thing," which does not exist in any ontological sense. This definition of evil suggests that everything that is suitable for receiving a form is necessarily good; otherwise, it would not exist in the first place, for God creates nothing that is not good. As Thomas Aquinas pointed out, even the hideously misshapen and monstrous remains good, albeit lacking in proportion. Radical evil therefore disrupts form, but it is nowhere be found within the ontological universe. Umberto Eco puts it this way: "The [Thomist] object is ontologically ready to be judged beautiful" (*Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* 119). For Schmitt as well, the heart of man is certainly evil, but—as is also true for orthodox Christians—the image that is believed to be inscribed upon the "fleshly tablets of the heart" is absolutely good (2 Corinthians 3:2–3). To cite Niehubr again, "Though Christ is the true norm (the 'second Adam') for every man, every man is also in some sense a crucifier of Christ" (*Christianity and Power Politics* 2). Like Niehubr, Schmitt does not suggest that the essence of the public enemy is evil, only that the enemy is different. "If *the* political is to exist," as Derrida states, "one must know who everyone is, who is a friend, and who is an enemy, and this knowing is not in the mode of theoretical knowledge but in one of a practical identification: knowing consists here in knowing how to identify the friend and the enemy [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Politics of Friendship* 116). The essence of the enemy is not therefore evil, but, for Schmitt, the enemy is nonetheless the other who reveals himself as absolute other. He is *not*, however, the private neighbor whom Christ commands us to love: We are therefore justified in killing our public enemy, if the political society that we inhabit defines him as our enemy. It is even our political duty to kill this enemy, as responsible members of society. According to Schmitt, one should not even hate this public enemy, for personal hatred belongs to the realm of the private, which implies that any private animosity that one might bear for the public enemy would simply reveal one's own confusion: instead the hostility that one feels for the enemy should be a "pure" or impersonal form of hostility. In fact, in one's personal life, one might even feel great affection and respect for the enemy. Between periodic wars, for instance, one might go out and have a glass of champagne or exchange pleasantries with the enemy. What Schmitt worries about is the erosion of clear distinctions between friends and enemies in the sphere of the political. He worries what will happen to humanity once it is no longer

possible to recognize one's public enemies, or what will happen to humanity when everyone is leveled into the category of the same (i.e., the category of the human). Schmitt's theory of the enemy underscores the importance of our ability to *recognize* our public enemies, and for this reason, his theory of the enemy is finally more Hegelian than it is Heideggerian, at least in Derrida's reading. The battle between enemies is a battle for *recognition*. It is a pitting of life against life, or "spirit against spirit"—not life against death, or absolute nonbeing, in any Heideggerian sense. Derrida characterizes Schmitt's latent Hegelianism as follows: "Life can only love life, even when it is opposed to itself. One should therefore ([although] Schmitt does not say so) 'love' one's enemy, at least in so far as he is living" (*Politics of Friendship* 136). Schmitt does not say that one should love one's enemies. He does say, however, that one should feel a form of spiritualized animosity for one's enemies.

Drawing from the work of Emil Benveniste, Derrida points out that the Greek root of the word "philosophy" may not necessarily imply a concept of love that is purely disinterested or without ambivalence, as it has traditionally been understood in the West. Derrida agrees with Benveniste that, "the whole problem of *phílos* deserves a full examination" (98). In contrast to the traditional understanding of this ancient word, Derrida wishes to show that *phílos* is "linked to hospitality" (98). But, if this is so, it is also linked to the deconstructive themes of the host, the hostage, hospitality, and hostility. "The guest is *phílos*," Derrida states. "*Phileín* is to 'hospitize.' *Phileîn*, *philótes* imply the exchanged oath, *phílema* the embrace hailing or welcoming the guest" (98). One point that Schmitt makes, which Derrida endorses, is that the Greek form of love that is called *phílos* is not the same as the love that Christians refer to as *agape*, or a noneroticized love of the private neighbor. In Derrida's reading of Schmitt, we might say then that if one should feel *agape* love for one's neighbor, the proper feeling for one's enemy—who is emphatically not one's private neighbor—would be a hyperbolic form of hostility that is actually a powerful expression of the love that is called hospitality. Elsewhere, Derrida coins the word "hostipitality," merging the words "hostility" and "hospitality," to make this same point (*Acts of Religion* 358). Philosophy for Derrida is, in effect, the theory of hostipitality. If Derrida is correct, what is traditionally called philosophy may be a far more dangerous undertaking than has been commonly acknowledged. Derrida's reading suggests that the "loving" relation to the other that is called philosophy involves a risky exchange with the guest that is fraught with perils. As Heidegger might put it, the Being

of being of the other in this exchange becomes unconcealed as a temporal event, and the consequences of this event are anything but certain. Although Derrida denies that this event ever actually occurs, he insists that one cannot *not* long for it to occur. "As soon as one needs or desires one's enemies, only friends can be counted—" Derrida states, "—this includes the enemies, and vice versa—and here madness looms" (*Politics of Friendship* 33). Friends and enemies are necessarily identified as a means of arresting this madness, but no definitive essence of the friend or enemy ever becomes unconcealed. In contrast, Schmitt affirms that this event *does* occur, or that the enemy reveals himself in mortal combat, but he also insists upon the need for a sovereign "decider," or an exceptional individual, who can—prior to the outbreak of hostilities—bring needed order by identifying the public enemy. Here, Schmitt follows the teachings of de Maistre, who similarly insisted that political communities cannot live without a sovereign decider who is empowered to place a necessary limit upon our boundless potential to kill the other (*Du Pape* 167); and, he is followed in his turn by political realists as recent as George W. Bush, who on various occasions has asserted his rights as "decider" with respect to the U.S.-led war in Iraq.[6] If war provides the circumstances whereby the enemy can be correctly identified, political collectives rely upon the leadership of a decider as a bulwark against chaos, or as means of maintaining order and preventing the outbreak of anarchy. Although everyone is potentially a decider, Schmitt does not believe that it is desirable that everyone becomes a sovereign, for if each individual were granted absolute equal rights in deciding upon the identity of the enemy, the final result would be the proliferation of wars without end. As Paul Hirst puts it, "Schmitt's concept of the exception [in which a sovereign must decide] is neither nihilistic nor anarchistic; it is concerned with the preservation of the state and the defense of legitimately-constituted government and the stable institutions of society" ("Schmitt's Decisionism" 20). The decider is therefore the democratically chosen leader who is empowered to determine the exceptional circumstance, which is a matter that cannot be left in the hands of every individual; for Schmitt, only the decider should be granted the power to make political decisions regarding the identity of the public enemy. Schmitt believes that a world order that is based upon a universal concept of equal human rights, wherein each individual is imagined to be an empowered decider, will eventually become an anarchistic nightmare. An international alliance of nations like the United Nations, Schmitt insists, "does not eliminate the possibility of wars, just as it does not abolish states" (*Concept of the*

Political 56). Instead, he argues that Kantian organizations like the League of Nations and the United Nations "introduce new possibilities for wars, permit [even more] wars to take place, sanction coalition wars, and by legitimizing and sanctioning certain wars sweep away many obstacles to war" (56). The very idea that such an international alliance could promote fair governance between the nations of the world, Schmitt suggests, relies upon a gross misunderstanding of the concept of the political. As Schmitt sees it, the U.N. is a kind of hoax that is perpetuated by the strong nations of the world upon the weaker nations. His view, in this regard, is certainly echoed by many of the architects and leading figures of realism in U.S. foreign policy making, who have tended to regard the U.N. as little more than a tool for promoting unilateral policies protecting U.S. interests abroad. In the cold war era, for instance, Morgenthau once observed that, "the international government of the United Nations, stripped of its legal trimmings . . . is really the international government of the United States and the Soviet Union acting in unison" (*Politics Among Nations* 481). Like Schmitt, Morgenthau also feared the notion of a common human standard in adjudicating international law, like those that are ascribed in the U.N.'s founding legal documents: "Under the assumptions of collective security," Morgenthau stated, ". . . a device intent upon making war impossible ends by making war universal" (418). Schmitt shares with U.S. realists like Morgenthau a concern that the universal human standard embedded in documents like the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights will erode healthy distinctions that are necessary for stable relations between adversarial nation states. However, Schmitt brings to this discussion a theoretical rigor that is lacking in the writings of Morgenthau, Kenan, Niehubr, and Kissinger. "[A]ll political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning," Schmitt points out. "They are focused on a specific conflict and are bound to a concrete situation; the result (which manifests itself in war or revolution) is a friend-enemy grouping, and they turn into empty and *ghostlike abstractions* when this situation disappears [my emphasis]" (*The Concept of the Political* 30).

In order to distance himself from Schmitt's decisionism, Derrida argues that Schmitt is finally more Hegelian than Heideggerian, or that Schmitt's theory lacks "a serious consideration of nothingness" or Non-Being (*Politics of Friendship* 136). Derrida illustrates this point by citing Schmitt's observation that "a life confronted with nothing more than death is no longer life; it is pure impotence and distress" (136). It is necessary for Derrida to differentiate Schmitt from Heidegger, not only because of common themes in their writings, but also due to the

historical relation between Heidegger and Schmitt, both of whom became willing accomplices of the Nazi Party. Given the circumstances, as well as the fact that Heidegger himself found much of value in Schmitt's views about warfare, it is inadvisable to ignore obvious similarities in their views about the virtues of combat, and to not ask if Derrida does not hold similar views.[7] Derrida himself offers a rather complicated analysis of the Schmitt-Heidegger nexus, stating that "among the many themes of the chiasmus through which the Heideggerian and Schmittian discourse intersect in a distancing and opposition, there is not only the theme of technics . . . , there is also the theme of death" (*The Politics of Friendship* 135–136). At this point, however, Derrida insists that the similarities between Schmitt and Heidegger end. Yet, elsewhere, in seeking also to distance himself from Heidegger, Derrida insists that, "Heideggerian deconstruction . . . never really opposed logocentrism or even *logos*" (*Rogues* 173). "Indeed, it is often, on the contrary, in the name of a more 'originary' reinterpretation of *logos* that it carried out the deconstruction of classical ontology or ontotheology" (173), Derrida states. But if this is true, it is certainly more difficult to maintain that Schmitt's logocentrism is so very different from Heidegger's, as Derrida wishes to maintain. In fact, there is a sense in which Schmitt's theory of the enemy may be described as a theoretical attempt to recover the ontological grounds of the forgotten foe—who is secretly the friend. What the "early" Heidegger laments as "the forgetting of being" is coterminous with Schmitt's writings on Europe's forgetting of the primordial foe. However, it is fair enough to assert that Derrida, while influenced by both Heidegger and Schmitt also seeks to chart a very different course in his own writings. In both cases, what Derrida wishes to criticize is Schmitt and Heidegger's common belief that "the kernel of things" was conclusively revealed as an event in time (*The Politics of Friendship* 128).[8] The revelation of the Being of beings is something that one cannot *not* want, Derrida argues, but he also insists that the revelatory event that Heidegger calls *alethia*, and that Schmitt calls "the extreme consequence" of the friend-enemy grouping, has never actually happened in human history. For Derrida, the most revealing passage in all of Schmitt's writings—and quite possibly the catalyst for Derrida's own theory of spectrality—is Schmitt's statement that, without the friend-enemy grouping, all major political concepts risk becoming "empty and *ghostlike* abstractions [my emphasis]" (*The Concept of the Political* 30). The transformation of the concrete enemy into the spectral enemy is, Derrida asserts, "the political crime" that Schmitt most fears (*Politics of Friendship* ix). Following Nietzsche, however, Derrida

deliberately commits this "political crime," which is to say, Derrida seeks to deconstruct essentialist concepts of both the friend and the enemy in order to chart a very different path from that of Schmitt.

If read as a confrontation with U.S. foreign policy in the critical tradition of Chomsky, Said, and others, Derrida's theoretical analysis of Schmitt offers a great deal that may be practically applied for those who wish to bring an end to American realpolitik. Furthermore, Derrida's characteristic bias in theorizing what he calls the Abrahamic, following Louis Massignon, does not significantly vitiate his powerful analysis of Schmitt and, by extension, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. In fact, it is not until the publication of *Specters of Marx*, which is written shortly after *The Politics of Friendship*, that Derrida first takes an explicitly pro-Zionist position, albeit one that most of his Marxist critics ignored. In *The Politics of Friendship*, however, Derrida's ethnocentric bias is implied in his fleeting references to the Messianic and in his deconstruction of Greek concepts of the citizen. Matters linked to the question of Islam are largely kept on the peripheries of this text, and then mostly referenced in response to direct comments that Schmitt himself makes about Islam. As stated previously, Derrida builds upon Freud's theory of the rise of the brother clan and its link to the development of democratic forms of government. While "democracy" is certainly a Greek word, with a distinct and irreducible etymology, what Derrida means by this term is not necessarily reducible to the Greek setting. For Derrida, the historical rise of the brother-clan in Greece also occurs in many similar ancient contexts, including the lands of the Abrahamic religions. Furthermore, Derrida suggests that there is no necessary reason why the word democracy must be preserved to theorize the problematic of the democratic (*The Politics of Friendship* 105). Derrida's inclusive use of the term democracy, or the rule of the brother clan, is significant because, in broadening this term's applicability to other ancient cultures, he is able to imply that the contemporary Western concept of the citizen is virtually interchangeable with the far more ancient concept of the brother. If this is so, however, then the European concept of the citizen, for instance the Kantian subject that is inscribed in the most important legal documents of the West, may be criticized as equally problematic as the Israeli concepts of the "citizen"; that is, the ethnoreligious and exclusive Israeli concept of the citizen is only apparently more irrational than its Greek counterpart. In his post 9/11 book *Rogues*, Derrida retrospectively describes *The Politics of Friendship*, in these terms: "I tried in [this book] to deconstruct . . . the Greek, Abrahamic, Jewish, but especially Christian and Islamic privileging of the figure of the

brother in ethics, law, and politics, and particularly in a certain democratic model" (*Rogues* 57–58). Derrida's statement is revealing, not only with respect to the ambitious scope of his book, but also with respect to the strangely redundant formulation of his theme. If Derrida will deconstruct the Abrahamic, why must he also tell us that he will deconstruct the "Jewish, but *especially* Christian, and Islamic" approach to the question of the brother? There is the problematic of the Abrahamic, Derrida suggests, and it includes the Abrahamic religions of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, but the Jewish religion must never be confused with the other two Abrahamic religions. The Christian and Islamic religions are "especially" targeted for deconstructive analysis, Derrida implies, here and elsewhere, because these "later" Abrahamic faiths are far more vulnerable to the logocentric psychosis than their "older" sibling. For Derrida, the Greek brother-citizen is a figurative brother, born of the same figurative mother or soil that nurtures all brothers in the political collective. Hence, Derrida states, "*All* politics and *all* policies, *all* political discourses on 'birth,' misuse what can in this regard be only a belief…[or] can only tend towards an act of faith [my emphasis]" (*The Politics of Friendship* 93). In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida states even more bluntly his view that "a citizenship does not spring up just like that. It is not natural" (16). Certainly, Derrida's logic is irrefutable in a broad theoretical sense, but it remains to be asked if the Kantian concept of the citizen is truly the same as that of the Israeli concept of the citizen. Here, Derrida's reference to what he calls faith is certainly problematic, since he means faith in a more general sense, as a matter of credit or belief; but, in his writings on religion, in *Specters of Marx* and elsewhere, Derrida insists that faith can also mean a specific dogma, doctrine, or authoritative religious law. As Derrida himself insists, faith in this later sense can and must be deconstructed: It only remains to be said that Derrida does not take the necessary step of deconstructing the dogmatically Jewish concept of the Israeli citizen although he paradoxically calls for "the emergence of a laic subjectivity" within the Islamic context (*Rogues* 33).[9] However, once it is clearly acknowledged that Derrida's deconstruction of the Kantian citizen within an African and Middle Eastern context is indefensible—or that, Derrida promotes a strategic double-standard in favor of Israel—one can later return to his deconstruction of political realism and deploy it for very different ends. In fact, there is a sense in which global events following 9/11 propel Derrida into a more direct confrontation with U.S. foreign policy, which undermines his prior interventions on behalf of the Israeli state. It is clear, for instance, that if one were to evoke what

Derrida calls a "laic subjectivity" with respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and not only with respect to postcolonial Algeria, Derrida's approach to the "war for Jerusalem" would suddenly look a lot more like that of Chomsky, Said, Azmi Bishara, Zev Sternhell, Israel Shahak, and other advocates of a progressive and "laic"—which is to say, *liberal*—solution to this conflict.

Once this contradiction is acknowledged, critics of U.S. foreign policy can with greater confidence draw from Derrida's deconstruction of political realism, setting aside his partisan theorization of the laic citizen, which in no way detracts from his thoughtful critique of realism. Certainly there is an urgent need to deconstruct realist ideology, and Derrida rightly observes that Chomsky's critique of current U.S. foreign policy lacks a theory of sovereignty. Chomsky naïvely imagines that human reason is always equivalent to the Absolute Good, whereas Derrida shows that the rational standard that Chomsky relies upon to measure U.S. foreign policy is necessary, but not necessarily Good. Because Chomsky hastily dismisses deconstructive inquiry as a kind of "fraud," even though he frankly admits his inability to comprehend it, he fails to appreciate how deconstruction can undermine realist ideology by destabilizing its most basic conceptual coordinates. By deliberately committing the political "crime" that Schmitt most feared—that is, by deconstructing the metaphysical concept of the enemy—Derrida reveals the profoundly illogical logic of the realists. This is an important contribution to critical theory because it is precisely the ideology of political realism that governs U.S. foreign policy in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Derrida's analysis of realism not only enables the further deconstruction of U.S. foreign policy, it can also provide his readers with a tool for predicting future conflicts between the United States and nations like Iran, China, North Korea, and so on. Although Chomsky's detailed analyses of U.S. foreign policy are also invaluable indices of what one may expect in the years to come, they fail to provide mature reflection upon human ethics and rationality, both of which Chomsky assumes to be mysterious, biological structures of the mind that do not merit theoretical discussion. In contrast, Derrida offers a rich and detailed discussion of the foundations of political realism, which is attentive to complex problems of ethics, faith, and reason within Western philosophical and religious traditions. Because Chomsky cannot give a reason why reason must be rendered, he is left with no recourse in philosophical debates about realism other than to claim that he is right about U.S. foreign policy because he is right.

As Derrida asserts in his critique of the post-Kantian or "competent" university, one might say in response to Chomsky that philosophy is a basic democratic right, not an academic luxury. But, if this is so, then the right to philosophy obviously includes the right to philosophical inquiry into the problem of the Platonic *khora*, Non-Being, nothingness, or *différance*. The problem of Non-Being's existence, or lack thereof, Derrida reminds us, also implies that incompetence will always remain an irreducible "requirement" of philosophical inquiry. "An essential and mandatory incompetence, a structural nonknowledge, constructs the concept of philosophy as metaphysics or the science of science . . ." Derrida observes. "By rights, precisely, the content of historical and positive knowledge is not required, as shocking as this may appear" (*Who's Afraid of Philosophy?* 62). This is a key philosophical problematic of which Chomsky is totally oblivious. Because he is oblivious to the problem of Non-Being, Chomsky inevitably promotes a spatialized concept of the self, which is to say that he cannot account for temporality, or the meaning of Being—which is death. In short, Chomksy's theory of the rational self completely lacks an ontological dimension. "Undoubtedly, the subjectivity of a subject, already never decides anything . . ." Derrida rightly reminds us. "*A theory of the subject is incapable of accounting for the slightest decision* [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Politics of Friendship* 68). This is precisely what Derrida means when he states that Chomsky's critique of U.S. foreign policy lacks a theory of sovereignty. As a result of this omission, the ethical standard by which Chomsky critiques U.S. foreign policy is merely descriptive, if not closed off to the possibility of a future that is different. Chomsky rightly criticizes U.S. policy makers for their neglect of ethics, but he fails to understand that there is a necessary element of uncertainty in all decision-making processes. In other words, Chomsky ignores the role of the unconscious in human affairs; or, he fails to appreciate that a human decision "involves the unconscious and nevertheless remains responsible" (*Politics of Friendship* 69).

If Chomsky made even a half-hearted effort to read Derrida, he might learn that reason is unavoidably exclusive, or that there is an inevitable process of censorship at work whenever the appeal to rationality is made in order to justify one's ethical decisions. Perhaps Derrida's most important contribution to the critique of political realism consists in his insight that the logic of "dangerous supplement" is at work in the friend-enemy distinction, as well as in the democratic privileging of the brother at the expense of the sister. Because Chomsky imagines that reason is an Absolute Good that precedes interlocutionary exchange, he fails to comprehend that the

exercise of reason inevitably enacts a form of political violence against the other, in spite of all our best intentions. "As soon as there is the One," Derrida states, "there is murder, wounding, traumatism" (*Archive Fever* 78). Whenever a human decision is made, and decisions cannot *not* be made, some form of injustice will be enacted. Chomsky implies that it is possible to escape this necessary violence, even as he himself violently excludes philosophers like Derrida from rational consideration and debate. Chomksy is also unaware that whatever it is that comes to be violently excluded by competent reason, or competent ethics, will inevitably haunt the same structure that promotes itself as ethical truth. Whatever is excluded in rational or ethical discourse, or by the exercise of rational sovereignty, ends up inhabiting the very structure that excludes it. The haunting of sovereign reason follows the logic of the dangerous supplement in ways that are wholly predicable, thanks to the discoveries of Derrida. As Barbara Harlow points out in her introduction to *Dissemination*, Derrida reading of the dangerous supplement reveals "a revolution in the very logic of meaning" ("Translator's Introduction" xiii). With respect to Derrida's deconstruction of the democratic, there are two senses in which he shows this logic to be at work. First, Derrida shows that the democratic privileges the figure of the brother, but sometimes allows the sister to participate, if only as an honorary brother. In her brief response to *The Politics of Friendship*, Spivak ponders one of the main questions raised by Derrida's book: "Can democracy—invariably claimed as a politics, or perhaps the politics of friendship—function without a logofratrocentric notion of collectivity? With the sister allowed in rarely, or only as an honorary brother?" (*The Death of a Discipline* 32). Derrida and Spivak both observe that we have scarcely begun to reflect upon the uncertain consequences of "inserting women as women into the question of friendship" (32). Second, as we have already seen, Derrida shows that the figure of the enemy haunts philosophical discourse as the "dangerous supplement" of the friend. Because this is so, philosophy has always implied a theory of the enemy, who is conceptualized as the illegitimate and excluded brother. This insight has enormous implications for realist thought although it is difficult to appreciate what they may be, if deconstruction is not allowed a fair hearing, simply because it cannot be understood by the "ordinary fifteen year-old" reader.

Chomsky's critique of realism is problematic insofar as he implies that it is possible to make a completely righteous choice in the realm of the political. An ethically "competent" analysis of U.S. foreign policy must include the deconstructive insight that every time a political

choice is made, something is going to be unfairly excluded. While it is certainly desirable to criticize U.S. policy makers insofar as they fail to satisfy traditional standards of human rights, a certain cautiousness, if not outright skepticism, about idealized ethics must always be maintained. Derrida reminds us that the intentions of the other are always hidden from us. This is as true for idealists, as it is for those who assert that there are no enduring essences, only *différance*. What Derrida calls deconstruction is not a recipe for political inaction, nor is it a useful tool for the impatient or self-righteous. One *must* act, as Derrida insists, but with the full awareness of our own vulnerabilities and shortcomings. True ethics in politics are not then a matter of competent ethical insight, as Chomsky suggests, but an honest acknowledgment of our own limitations.

CHAPTER 10

The Wordless Yes

There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves.

—*Claudius, from Shakespeare's* Hamlet

In his concluding remarks to Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vatimo's *Religion* (1998), Hans-Georg Gadamer paternalistically refers to Derrida's commentary on the *khora* as a kind of "game" that his younger colleague enjoys playing, a harmless pastime that one must not take too seriously. Gadamer's response recalls Plato's views in *The Phaedrus*, where Socrates cautions us that writing is a mere playing around with words, an idle occupation to wile away the time, as opposed to the more serious business of "sowing seeds," or speaking and teaching in the present. In the same brief response, Gadamer adds that he does not value etymological investigation as much as his younger colleague, or his former teacher Martin Heidegger.[1] For Gadamer, deconstructive investigation of a word's history can also become a matter of mere child's play, a kind of amusing diversion for the intellectually restless. Gadamer implies that there is no use in further debating the matter, since those who are convinced of these games' intrinsic value will surely not give them up, just because he feels otherwise. The brevity of Gadamer's response stands as a warning to all those who enter into the game of deconstruction, yet remain unconvinced by its strange logic. To read Derrida well, perhaps to even understand Derrida at all, requires that one enter deeply into the logic of the game, possibly losing one's way in the complex labyrinth of its rules. But, whatever else one might say, it is certain that Derrida himself earnestly believes in the game he plays, and that he is a man of considerable integrity and adult seriousness. How then could Gadamer dismiss such a formidable man as "childish"? Unlike Derrida, Heidegger also does not play around with the Platonic *khora*, hence

he is only criticized by Gadamer for his inordinate interest in Greek etymologies. Heidegger only briefly alludes to the *khora* in his various writings, rather than subjecting it to tireless deconstructive inquiry, contenting himself with simple descriptions of *khora* as "spacing" and the chaotic abyss. Although Derrida alleges that Heidegger too tells a story about *khora*, and a Cartesian story at that, what is most notable about Heidegger's "story" of the *khora* is its brevity. In this respect, Gadamer seems then to be following the advice of his famous teacher: Keep it brief when it comes to *khora*.

Derrida is anything but brief when speaking of *khora*, or, in Plato's formulation, "the eternal and indestructible space" that is the receptacle of unchanging form and its sensual copy (*Timaeus* 71). For Derrida, *khora* is instead a matter for careful and extended—even frankly religious—exegesis. Sure, Derrida too tells a story about *khora*, but he tells a story about the futility of telling stories about her, and he tells a long-winded one at that. Other than simply walk away from Derrida's game, following the lead of Gadamer, how does one respond to the complex dilemma that Derrida's reading of the *khora* poses? What I will suggest here is that Derrida in his least vigilant moments theologizes *khora* as a god-term, one that he defines in maternal terms. *Khora* is occasionally synonymous with what, elsewhere, Derrida will call, "that feminine figure of Yahweh who remains so strange and so familiar to me" ("Circumfession" 155). Although Derrida would no doubt want to underscore the irreducibility of the words "*Khora*" and "Yahweh," they are also fair translations of one another, if the possibility of translation is to be allowed at all, not unlike the similar but obviously different words for spirit, that is, *spiritus*, *Geist*, *pnuema*, and *ruah*. Derrida allows all of these terms to be employed as acceptable translations of the word "spirit" in his book *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1989), without, of course, asserting that they are all the "same." I am not, in other words, suggesting that the terms *khora* and Yahweh are identical terms, for obviously *khora* is a Greek word while Yahweh is a Hebraic word, each with distinct etymologies, but Derrida's references to these terms suggest that they can serve as interlingual translations of one another.[2] As Derrida himself states, "the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist" ("Circumfession" 155). To "pass for an atheist," however, is to wear the mask of the atheist, or to pretend to be an atheist while secretly remaining a believer; hence, Derrida will in the same breath affirm his deeply felt belief in an "omnipresent God," one that he honors in his own "absolved, absolutely private language" (155). This thinking

of writing as absence—or of God as "invisible writing"—is arguably a spiritualist theology, as Michel Foucault once suggested (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 27). While not reducible to orthodox Judaism, Derrida's private theology cannot finally be articulated outside its established historical framework; or, as Elisa New has also suggested, deconstruction's "association with a particular history must disable its claims to a grammatical universality" ("Pharaoh's Birthstool" 35). What both Judaism and Derridean deconstruction share is a reaction against the visualist hegemony of the Christian West, the Greco-Roman conception of truth as Idealized form or visual archetype. If the question of philosophy and skepticism in general presupposes sight, or the privilege of sight, the vow of Derrida presupposes hearing, ears that are necessary to receive the good news that blows.

For Derrida, the "first word" of language is not then the Johnnine Logos, but what he calls the "*sometimes* wordless word, which we name the 'yes' [my emphasis]" (*Of Spirit* 130). Sometimes this wordless word is for Derrida pure *différance*, the spacing necessary for the play of signification, while in other instances he describes it as substantialist spirit or a wet wind of bodily fluids that blows into one's ears. To his credit, Derrida regularly acknowledges this necessary oscillation in his writings, for instance, when he states that, "the gage [or *pledge*] always engages in language—and so always in a [specific] language (*Of Spirit* 130). The wordless "yes" is a "yes" that is already saturated with the bloody matter of *khora*. However, Derrida will also affirm a more general hypothesis, what he calls the more abstract, dry, or "Heideggerian option," the *Zusage* or nonspecific pledge. In Derrida's reading of this Heideggerian factum, the pledge is defined as the more arid "accord, acquiescing, trust or confidence" that necessarily comes before all questioning, all knowledge, and all philosophy (*Acts of Religion* 95). Unlike Derrida, Heidegger refuses to link the *Zusage* or pledge to any of the Abrahamic religions, insisting that Abrahamic theology should not be confused with the philosophy of the ancient Greek world. Heidegger famously insisted that the idea of a Christian philosophy is as absurd as a "squared circle." Derrida, on the other hand, affirms the wordless pledge's viability as a "general" structure, but he also reserves his own private beliefs about the pledge's Abrahamic character, implying that Heidegger would not even know what the *Zusage* (or pledge) were if it not for the Biblical prophets. In effect, Derrida wants to have it both ways: the "general" pledge is always already a trace of the Abrahamic covenant.

For Derrida, philosophy's question is subordinate to the matter of spirit, which is sometimes pure wordlessness and at other times the

crude and bloody *physis* of *khora* (who is secretly Yahweh). The speaking that we call questioning is engaged by the pledge "in a responsibility [that] it has not chosen and which assigns it even its liberty" (130). One is elected or duty bound to this spiritualized and "wordless" word, which is "given [to us] before any other event" (130), and which circumscribes our freedom, even if there is no way of recalling this event to human memory. "[W]e are linked by a faith which defeats any narrative," Derrida insists. Once we have submitted to the ordeal of the name, a "retrospective upheaval can seem to dictate a new order," Derrida states. "One would say, for example, that now everything has to be begun again, taking as the point of departure the en-gage [*l'engage*: cf. *langage*] of the *Zusage*, so as to construct a quite different discourse, open a quite different path of thought . . . , and remove—a highly ambiguous gesture—the remnant of *Aufklärung* which still slumbered in the privilege of the question [rather than the wordless vow]" (*Of Spirit* 130–131). The Derridean vow therefore displaces the philosophical question. Derrida preserves the question, but he puts it in its proper place: "the question is not suspended but sustained *by* this other piety," he suggests, "[it is] *held* and [made] dependent upon it" (133). Philosophy's question is not dismissed by Derrida though it is subordinated to faith in the wordless yes. The hearing of wind as invisible spirit triumphs over questioning. The utterance of the yes is heard. It is a matter of the mouth's transmission of wind as a spiritualized liquid that blows into the folded space of the ear. The ear is in fact a *khora*-like vagina or maternal receptacle, as is the Derridean mouth, from which the wind as liquid spirit issues. The windy circuit blows from mouth to ear. Philosophy's hegemony of the eyes, which implies a seeing that is an observing of truth as form, is now overthrown by the deconstructive hegemony of the ears. In this new order, truth is no longer appearance, but the hearing-and-heeding of an occulted spirit. In *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida will put it this way, "[I]n the case of the blind man, hearing goes *farther* than the hand, which goes *farther* than the eye [Derrida's emphasis]" (16). The call-to-justice must be heard as a divine voice reverberating off the eardrums, albeit a "weak voice" in John Caputo's formulation, but the weak voice of God that calls us to justice is infinitely stronger than any mortal power. In his frankly theological reading of Derrida, Caputo cites Paul to this effect: "God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25). Caputo interprets this to mean, "The power of powerlessness, the power of a weak force, is the force without power [that is] exerted by an unconditional claim" (*The Weakness of God* 29).[3] The deceptive weakness of this voice, a favorite

adjective for both Derrida and Caputo, nonetheless remains the greatest force in the universe. But this spiritual force both is and is not a physical force: it all depends on the pedagogical needs of the faithful. To have faith, one must close one's eyes and heed this powerfully weak voice, allowing its properties to blow into one's ears. The eyes must be closed, for "*skepsis* has to do with the eyes," Derrida states (*Memoirs of the Dead* 1). In groping about in the dark, the hand feels cautiously, fearful of tumbling into an abyss: "Standing on his own two feet, a blind man explores by feeling out an area that he must recognize without yet cognizing it" (4). As opposed to the seeing men or philosophers, those men who know because they have seen, deconstructive thinkers with blind faith "are apprehensive about space, they apprehend it with their groping, wandering hands; they draw in this space in a way that is at once cautious and bold; they calculate, they count on the invisible" (5). In effect, they count on *khora*. Derrida criticizes Descartes for asserting that "error is first of all a belief, or rather, an *opinion*: consisting in acquiescing, in saying yes, in *opining* [from 'optics'] too early" (13). Derrida counters Descartes by asserting that to *not* heed the wordless voice that calls is to fall prey to the worst form of deception, for one must always and necessarily say yes to the wordless voice before seeing. The appropriate posture of faith, the correct response of the faithful who hear the call, is respectful gratitude: "The fidelity of faith matters more than representation, whose movement this fidelity commands and thus precedes. And faith, in the moment proper to it, is blind" (*Memoirs of the Blind* 30).

Faith may be blind, but it is not therefore deaf. What Derrida affirms as seeing is also a form of hearing. Derrida would have us hear the invisible "yes" with the mind's ear, rather than see the visible specter with the mind's eye. Vision itself is a form of hearing although less valued for it may lead to an impious skepticism. Hearing, on the other hand, can escape this evil, if the ears are made small enough to sift out the bad spirit or blood. This is, alas, impossible to accomplish in the final analysis, for Derrida knows that the pledge is not simply passed down in language as a general proposition, but in the specificity of a particular language that we inherit. There is always a mouth and ear. In affirming the ear's priority, Derrida is at one with more orthodox articulations of the Jewish faith, which have tended to emphasize the importance of hearing over seeing, even Talmud over Torah. In *Slayers of Moses* (1982), Handleman underscores this affinity between Judaism and deconstruction: "The invisible is manifested through sound and the divine word does not become 'fulfilled' or hypostatized into a present being. Revelation is not appearance" (34).

Receiving the word or spirit as wind is an operation involving mouth and ear, but also a trembling motion of the body and is the appropriate manner of reciting and receiving *Écriture*. Hearing is superior not merely complementary to seeing, since visual characters, no matter how abstract they may be, still endure as objective forms on the horizon. Heidegger's conception of truth as *aletheia*, or the truth that is unconcealed as temporal event for the eyes, reaffirms the priority of the visual, or what Derrida will stigmatize as a form of "Platonic speleology" (*Memoirs of the Blind* 55). "The lucidity of this speleology," Derrida states, "carries within it another blind man, not the [Platonic] cave dweller, the blind man deep down, but the one who closes his eyes to *this* blindness—*right here* [Derrida's emphasis]" (55). Despite Heidegger's affirmation of the *Zusage*, or his appreciation of the pious pledge that precedes philosophy's question, Heidegger remains for Derrida a thinker who is blind to blindness, the necessary blindness of the faithful. This is a point both Derrida and Caputo will insist upon: Heidegger was wrong to suggest that philosophy has nothing to do with faith.[4] Derrida seeks a radical overthrowing of the impiously visual, or any skeptical thinking of truth as an archetypal form that is seen by the eye. The Greco-Christian hegemony of vision is overthrown in a revolution inaugurating a radically new order, the reign of the wordless vow, pledge, or promise.

Yet, Derrida acknowledges that "it is difficult to dissociate absolutely *pneuma* from heat and fire, even if the source of that heat and fire remains as 'natural' as the sun" (*Of Spirit* 137). Fire and wind are two of the four primal elements, along with earth and water, which Plato believed to comprise the totality of the fluctuating elements in the realm of becoming. Plato's *Timaeus* is probably the most important ancient text on the question of the primal elements, but Aristotle's "Of Spirit" also links fire with vapor and gas, which are the natural effects of fire and heat, a description that suggests that fire and liquid are also interchangeable. The ancient Greek conception of fire as liquid complicates Derrida's stigmatizing of the visual, since Plato, Aristotle, and Derrida are in accord that a transcendental liquid remains the most apt metaphor for describing the wordless word. The eye's tear, the liquid of the eye, is for Plato already an admixture of fire and water: "When another kind of fire [outside the body] with a faster motion falls on the visual ray and penetrates it right up to the eyes it forces apart and dissolves the passages in the eyes, and causes the discharge of a mass of fire and water which we call a tear" (*Timaeus* 94–95). There is no significant disagreement then between Plato and Derrida with respect to the question of the composition of the actual

tear, which for Plato can alternately manifest itself in the elements of fire, the light of fire, or water. When Derrida suggests that our tears can cause a kind of blindness, a blindness enabling us to see the true light, he is merely reaffirming one of the most basic tenants of Platonic and Christian thought. In fact, Derrida will go so far as to reject the Freudian reduction of blindness to castration, for blindness in this religious sense is also a way of seeing, but a seeing that sees the inner light of faith, or a seeing that is finally a blurry-eyed hearing of the weak and wordless call of the other. In the end, seeing and hearing are the same, but Derrida will not therefore cease to affirm the priority of the ear and mouth.

For Derrida, the true operation of divine grace lies somewhere deeper within the folds of the mind's invisible ear, rather than its indwelling *viseo* (or mind's eye). When Derrida speaks of the crude word, of "what is demanded of us by what's crude" ("Circumfession" 3), he draws from the Platonic conception of the word as a bloody couplet of liquid and fire, only, for Derrida there is this important difference: "[khoral] blood delivers itself all alone" (12). Derrida therefore challenges the beliefs of those who affirm seeing-truth as radiant form on the horizon—in other words, historically Greco-Christian forms of faith—in order to affirm yet another culturally specific articulation of faith, which he describes as a form of blindness that is necessary so that the aural trace may enter the receptacle of the human ear. Yet, Plato displaces the metaphor of fire in preference to a transcendental seed that is described as a fluid of the body before it becomes fire. Derrida too affirms the hegemony of a transcendental liquid although he wants to divest this seed of its testicular or masculine attributes. Whether we are talking about blood, milk, sweat, or tears, the spirit of Derrida's *khora* remains a maternal spirit: *Khora*'s matter is the matter of the mother. In "A Silkworm of One's Own," Derrida describes this liquid as a feminine ejaculation that is a watery seed but one that does not issue from the male testes. The "silkworm of one's own" is a kind of feminine penis, and the ejaculation of this penis is feminine. In his reading of Heidegger, Derrida never suggests that the seed is anything other than a wordless liquid, emphasizing its ultimately feminine character; that is, Derrida affirms the metaphor of the seed's liquidity. The deconstructive critic must be resigned to metaphors of the word as a spiritualized body fluid. Despite its exclusively feminine character, this word is both god-term and liquid-wind, and, in this respect, Derrida is at one with Plato and Aristotle.

In *The Timaeus*, Plato describes this transcendental seed, which he claims resides in every human being, as a kind of bone marrow that is

also a seed. The Platonic seed of the marrow, also described as fire, is linked to the Egyptian figure of the pyramid, or the geometric triangle. Derrida divests this seed of its masculine attributes, but it does not cease to be supernatural following this deconstructive operation. In "Circumfession," the transcendental seed is frankly theologized as the "feminine figure of Yahweh" (155), but in theologizing blood in this way Derrida has by no means exorcised the more Heideggerian and Christian figure of fire, which is why he also describes his Judeo-Christian "circumfession" as a "playing [around] with fire [also blood, or liquid fire]" (123). In Plato's *Timaeus*, blood is said to be red because of fire, the fluids of the body intermingled with the fire that burns at the center of the human head, around which our thoughts orbit like planets. But, for Derrida too, the bloody matter of the mother is a powerful volcanic fire, a crude, bodily oil that can easily erupt. If Heidegger doesn't get out of fire, neither does Derrida, although the fire of Derrida is also Torah, the fire that no fire can ever destroy, whereas Heidegger is criticized for clinging to the idolatrous form for the human eye, potentially, the apparition of the Crucified God-Man, who nullified the ban on graven images. Derrida's debate with Heidegger is therefore doubly marked by the theological, first, by Heidegger's latent Christianity, which Derrida wishes to expose, and, second, by Derrida's latent Judaism, which he wishes to conceal.

Moreover, Derrida is aware that the enflamed voice that calls is not always and necessarily a morally virtuous one. This is perhaps the most difficult question that Derrida ponders in *Of Spirit*, his provocative reading of Heidegger. Derrida paraphrases Heidegger's definition of evil spirit as a "destitution" of spirit that is also "a movement proper to spirit, proceeding from within [spirit]" (*Of Spirit* 62). In later comments, for instance, in his recorded response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Derrida will speak of this spiritual destitution as a form of "auto-immunity," an irruption in the spirit or in the name (*Philosophy in a Time of Terror* 98). "[A] sort of evil genius . . . slips into spirit's monologue to haunt it," Derrida states, "ventriloquizing it and thus dooming it to a sort of self-persecuting disidentification" (*Of Spirit* 62). Extrapolating from Heidegger's definition of evil, Derrida also characterizes the demonic as a form of Luciferian pride. Evil spirit circulates from mouth to ear and back again due to "the certainty of the *cogito* in the position of the subjectum . . . [which is characterized by the] absence of originary questioning, scientific methodologism, leveling, predominance of the quantitative, of extension and of number—so many motifs which are 'Cartesian' in type" (*Of Spirit* 62). Spiritual evil, or demonic genius, involves for Heidegger,

as well as for Derrida, a thinking of evil as the "torment of spirit" or as a "destructive malignity" (46). Derrida interprets Heidegger's concept of evil spirit as an existential resignation to evil, a refusal to exorcise evil spirit, qualifying his own definition through spiritualizing the demonic as a form of autoimmunity. One may speak then of a terrible war that rages within "spirit" (*geist*), also *pneuma*, or *spiritus*. Here, Derrida draws from Roman Jacobson's distinction between interlingual, intersemiotic, and intralingual translation (i.e., translation between different languages, between different media, and within a single language). Derrida wishes to underscore intralingual translation, or the interpretation of "linguistic signs by means of other signs of the *same* language [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Acts of Religion* 110). Derrida envisions a war of translation taking place even within single, isolated utterances, which are divided against themselves, forever at odds with themselves. Within the names of spirit, *geist*, or *psyche*, a war rages, Derrida insists, just as a war can also be said to occur within the very name of God: "[T]he proper name of God (given by God) is divided enough in the tongue, already, to signify also, confusedly, 'confusion.' And the war that he declares has raged within his name: divided, bifid, ambivalent, polysemic: God deconstructing' " (*Acts of Religion* 108).

Hence, Derrida affirms that what he calls "spirit" may certainly be deconstructed, since it is a name like all other names, a name that is forever at war with itself. But Derrida also insists that names like *khora* or Yahweh remain "forever untranslatable, a fact that may lead one to conclude that [they do] not strictly belong, for the same reason as the other words of language, to the system of language" (*Acts of Religion* 109). God-terms like *khora* and Yahweh are divided against themselves without ceasing to remain god-terms, or theological guarantees of language. Derrida seeks to deconstruct Heideggerian spirit (*geist*), by showing that spirit cannot be purely good in the way that Heidegger wishes it to be. In other words, there *is* always a spirit of evil. The voice that calls to us, the name of the voice that calls, is already more than one: It is a spirit that is forever at war with itself. For this reason, one may even speak of the duty of violence, or the duty to open one's ears to the demonic spirit of evil. Derrida, like Nietzsche, will warn us to make our ears small, to not give shelter to every wind that blows (*Ear of the Other* 34–35). However, he also believes that one may not *not* give shelter to evil spirit. The spirit of evil will certainly find its way into the portals of the ears. It will certainly poison the heart, the places where the treasures of the spirit are stored. This is unavoidable. Derrida acknowledges this, even as he

affirms the right to nonresponse. To plug up one's ears, to refuse to let this evil wind blow into one's ears, will not solve the problem. One *must* hear and speak, and this speaking must be a pious form of questioning that comes after one hears the spirit that is divided against itself. Derrida states that the wordless call comes before questioning, but he does not thereby annul the necessity of hearing or questioning. Quite the contrary. It is therefore difficult to make any clear-cut distinctions between Derrida's profession of an ethicless or groundless ethics of deconstruction ("ethics" being here a problematic term at best), and the ethics that are affirmed by Heidegger, who believes that demonic spirit is an absence of questioning, an impiety of spirit. It's just that Derrida seems more resigned to the spirit of evil, or that he has a greater "taste for death," whereas Heidegger prefers to flee from the problematic of spirit. When it comes to evil spirit, Heidegger prefers to be brief.

What Heidegger and Derrida share is an aversion for the *cogito ego sum*. Their primary target is the self-assured Cartesian Man, the man who claims to know and therefore dispenses with further self-questioning. This man is the first figure marked for deconstruction. It is safe to assert then that, although not expressed in identical terms, the demonic impulse is defined by both Derrida and Heidegger as an impious heeding of the evil call to refuse questioning, a capitulation to the thesis. To obey this evil call or spirit is to deny our very Being. In his paraphrasing of Heidegger, Derrida asks: "Now who are we? Here, let us not forget, we are first and only determined from the opening to the *question of Being*. Even if Being must be given to us for that to be the case, we are only at this point, and know of 'us' only this: the power or rather the possibility of questioning, the experience of the question [Derrida's emphasis]" (*Of Spirit* 17). The refusal of the question, the unquestioning and impious positing of a logical thesis, is defined by Derrida as receptivity to evil spirit, effectively a denial of who we are in any ontological sense. But Derrida also argues that, while Heidegger recognizes that evil (*das Böse*) is spiritual (*geistlich*), Heidegger nonetheless attempts "to save a purity internal to spirit" (10). Certainly, Derrida's point is valid, but it remains to be asked if Derrida himself is not also concerned "to save a purity internal to spirit" (10)? Is it possible that he could not be anxious *not* to do so, not without capitulating to evil spirit? In fact, is there not something disturbing about the suggestion that Derrida may himself be more resigned to spiritual evil than Heidegger? What rescues Derrida's spirit from evil is the Good Mother. This is why Derrida does not refrain from affirming a theology of the maternal spirit, also

the divine blood or heart of the mother. Derrida wishes to preserve an identifiable blood inheritance, what he calls the "maternal debt," rather than affirm the "bad blood" of the mother ("Circumfession" 227). One wonders, however, what *is* "bad blood"? How does one keep one's blood from being corrupted? Here, we venture upon a path where speaking seems to be fraught with peril. In fact, it is possible that Derrida projects his deepest theological dilemma onto Heidegger. In other words, it may not simply be Heidegger who wishes to preserve the purity of spirit, separating out a holy or pure spirit from the spirit of evil, but Derrida also cannot *not* want to affirm a holy spirit, albeit one he defines in maternal terms as pure maternal blood, over and against a spirit of evil, or bad blood. It is not possible for him *not* to want to affirm the good mother, and he knows that this is the case, hence his tears.

It is instructive then to consider what it is that Derrida rejects about Heideggerian spirit, which for him tends to be more specter than spirit, or a ghost that is seen by the eyes although also a flame that can scald the tongue and ears. In *Of Spirit*, Derrida states frankly that he finds "problematical" the interpretation of *khora* that Heidegger advances in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Of Spirit* 8). But, it is in his short essay "Khora" where Derrida more fully develops this critique of Heidegger's reading of *khora*, albeit mostly in footnotes. It is also important to note that Heidegger's reference to *khora* in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* is hardly a page in length, and Heideggerian *khora*, in Derrida's reading of it, is also compared to the chaos or abyss that opens when Being is unconcealed as a temporal event. *Khora* is therefore closely associated with the Heideggerian concept of truth, or *aletheia*. To this end, the first volume of Heidegger's major work on Nietzsche is quoted as follows: "Chaos, *khaos, khaine*, signifies the yawning [*das Gähnen*], the gaping, that which splits in two [*Auseinanderklaffende*]. We understand khaos in close connection with an original interpretation of the essence of the *aletheia* inasmuch as it is the abyss which opens" (cited in *On the Name* 148n4 [original citation *Nietzsche I* 350]). Derrida also cites Heidegger's reference to *khora* in *What is Called Thinking*, where Heidegger states: "[Plato] says that between beings and Being there is [*bestehe*] the khorismos; the khora is the locus, the site, the place [*Ort.*]. Plato means to say: beings and Beings are differently placed [*sind verschieden geortet*]. Thus when Plato gives thought to the Khorismas, to the different location of beings and Being, he is asking for the totally different place [*nach dem ganz anderen Ort*] of Being, as against the place of beings" (Heidegger *What is Called Thinking?* 227).

Derrida contests both the Heideggerian reading of *khora* and Heidegger's use of the term spirit, but it is questionable, if the differences between these thinkers are more important than their similarities. Derrida suggests that, for Heidegger, *khora* is first and foremost a matter of vision, a concept that is linked to his conception of truth as *aletheia*, or the unconcealment of the Being of beings. In Heidegger's writings, Derrida insists, *khora* is too exclusively associated with sight, perception, retrospection, or fire, the enormous problematic of spirit as fire. By way of contrast, Derrida prefers to emphasize the more fluid aspects of *khora*. If *aletheia* is truth, for Heidegger (at least for the early Heidegger), this truth remains a mythological logos.[5] Phenomenological Hermeneutics, like Egypto-Greco Hermeticism, turns on the cult belief that truth is a matter of revelation, not reason. For the early Heidegger, revelation is a matter of sight. Now, *khora* for both Heidegger and Derrida is nonetheless an abyss, although Derrida implies that Heidegger is "too hasty" in identifying *khora* with the abyss of space, especially the abyss of the eye (*On the Name* 103). For Derrida, Heidegger fails in his reading of *khora* insofar as he "yield[s] to [a kind of] teleological retrospection" (93). Derrida means this in at least two senses: on the one hand, Heidegger yields to the impulse to tell stories about *khora*, something Derrida acknowledges is impossible to resist, but Heidegger is also reproached for his alleged unconsciousness in yielding to this impulse. On the other hand, Derrida underscores the spectral dimensions of Heidegger's storytelling about *khora*. One cannot *not* tell stories about *khora*, but one should be aware of this fact, even as one tells yet another story about her/it; furthermore, one should be careful about the kind of stories one tells, more careful than Heidegger, in any event. Derrida suggests that Heidegger narrates yet another story about *khora*, but that story for Derrida is too "retrospective," literally a looking-backward or seeing-backward, or *mise-en-abîme*. For Heidegger, *khora* is something to be seen, whereas Derrida wants to emphasize that there is first an abyss of the ear, an abyss that comes before this abyss of the eye. By linking *khora* so closely, even exclusively with *aletheia*, and the khaos it conceals, Heidegger tells a story about *khora*, a highly visual one, but he also gives *khora* a name, the name of the chaos that lies concealed beyond the revelation of truth as *aletheia*, or the unconcealment of the Being of beings. One problem with this story about *khora* is that it potentially subordinates *khora* as "the *extensio* of the *res extensa*" in a Cartesian sense; that is, a reading of *khora* that obliterates temporality, or that sees time as a yet another form of space. According to Derrida, Heidegger states that Plato's *khora* " 'prepares' the Cartesian

space" (*On the Name* 109), but for Derrida, Plato's *khora* is not all that simple. There is a forgetting of Plato's *khora* in the Western philosophical tradition, that is for sure, but if one closely reads *The Timaeus*, Derrida suggests, one may find a far more complex articulation of it than Heidegger allows. Derrida knows that he too tells another story about *khora*, but he wants us to believe that his story offers a richer account. Derrida's account may very well be richer, but it must be remembered that Heidegger himself kept it brief when it came to *khora* (possibly deliberately, like his pupil Gadamer), and certainly his account of the eye's abyss is not very different from Derrida's, especially the version that is offered in Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*. Here Derrida discusses *khora* in relation to the drawing of the self-portrait as a "transcendental *retrait* or withdrawl [that] at once calls for and forbids the self-portrait" (*Memoirs of the Blind* 57). Derrida states, "Certain self-portraits of Henri Fantin-Latour show this [Heideggerian and spectral problematic]... There is on the one hand [*d'une part*] the monocular stare of a narcissistic cyclops: a single eye open, the right one, fixed firmly on its own image. It will not let it go... The staring eye always resembles an eye of the blind" (57). This is because the eye that sees only sees the abyss, certainly not the revelation of truth as presence.

Against the truth of the abysmal Cyclop's eye, Derrida advocate for the truth of blindness, or the abyss of the ear and mouth, which is Derrida's private truth, or a way of thinking the truth as blindness. The truth of ear and mouth, the windy circuit of ear to mouth, involves hands groping in darkness, a hearing and heeding of the wordless call. It involves a forgetting of the eye that never really sees. This call implies an abyssal opening that emits a powerful wind, a liquid wind that ushers from the deepest recesses of our being. Derrida therefore prefers to speak of what he calls *aperspective*, the annulment of perspective, a seeing that "cannot be 'thought' in the specular or speculative mode" (*Memoirs of the Blind* 53). Appreciatively citing Augustine's *Confessions*, Derrida affirms the seeing of a light or fire that can only be seen with "invisible eyes": "[T]he true Light is the Light that Tobit saw... though his eyes were blind" (118–119). In a similar vein, Derrida appreciates Augustine's concern for *concupiscentia oculorum*, or Augustine's refusal to succumb to the allurements of the eye, the marvelous external forms that tempt the eye, rewritten by Derrida as the ocular sin of Cartesian presumption. Like Augustine, Derrida does not claim that all Christian painting should be condemned "so long as conversion saves it" (119); or, the truth of the eyes may be redeemed if it is recast as the truth of the ears. "Divine

vision" is not a seeing with the eyes, far from it, but one may speak of it as "vision," so long as it is clear that vision doesn't mean seeing. The only eyes that see are the eyes of water, eyes that are blinded by our tears of compassion for the other. "[I]f tears come to the eyes," Derrida states, "if they well up in them, and if they can also veil sight, perhaps they can reveal, in the very course of this experience, in the coursing of water, an essence of the eye, of man's eye" (*Memoirs of the Blind* 126). Derrida will put it this way, "Deep down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep" (126). The *aletheia*, or "truth of the eyes" would not be the vision of the objective form that shines forth with radiant light, but this essential bodily fluid that wells up from the divine maternal heart, the compassionate and life-giving fluids of the mother. "The revelatory or apocalyptic blindness, the blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes, would be the gaze veiled by tears," Derrida states. "It neither sees nor does not see: it is indifferent to its blurred vision" (127). If all of this sounds very edifying, it is nonetheless unwise to elide the fact that Derrida's proposed concept of truth as tears of compassion is neither more nor less truthful than Heidegger's concept of spirit as fire. Instead, Derrida has merely displaced one essentializing metaphor for another; that is, whether we are speaking of Derrida's deconstructive "quasi-atheism" or Augustine's Neo-Platonic articulation of the Christian faith, in both cases "a sort of allegory makes corporeal vision conform to divine vision" (*Memoirs of the Blind* 119). Derrida will even go so far as to say that, "[s]uch an allegorical conversion would recall a relation of resemblance between the human eye and this divine eye that is at once the only source of light, visibility itself, and the place of monocular vision" (119).

But why then does Derrida take Heidegger to task for preferring to define spirit as fire? Why does Derrida work so hard to distance himself from a concept of spirit as fire? What is really at stake in Derrida's critique of Heideggerian spirit? It is not that Derrida refuses to think of spirit as fire, in fact he alludes to and affirms the long-standing tradition of Jewish thought that has defined spirit, holy breath, or *ruah*, as fire (*Of Spirit* 101). Derrida also knows, in fact he states very frankly, that "*ruah* can also, like the German *Geist* [spirit] carry evil within it" (101). *Ruah* "can become *ruah raa*," Derrida states, "the evil spirit" (101). In fact, Heidegger is reproached because he remains silent about the Hebraic concept of spirit as *ruah*, one that Derrida believes is as important in the history of the West as the Greek *pneuma*, the Latin *spiritus*, and the German *Geist*. Heidegger's exclusion of the Abrahamic *ruah*, whether one means *ruah* or *ruah raa*

(good blood or bad blood) becomes, in this reading, a politically motivated closing of ranks against the Jews. Derrida holds Heidegger accountable for excluding Jewish conceptions of spirit. As a case in point, Derrida alludes to St. Paul's distinction in the *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (2:14) between *pneuma* and *psyche*, which Derrida asserts corresponds between the Jewish *ruah* and *néphéch*, for Heidegger *Geist* [spirit] and *Seele* [soul] (101). While Derrida's claims in this respect are certainly valid, there are two points worth making here: first, Derrida's concern in this instance is not to annul parallels between Greco-Christian and Judaic thought, but precisely to establish them, to show that—with respect to the spirit-soul distinction—Greco-Christian, Heideggerian, and Judaic thought are essentially at one. But this also implies, as Gadamer has suggested, that Derrida's religious thought can be unproblematically compared to Neo-Platonic beliefs about the One and the divine ("Dialogues in Capri" 210). In this specific case, it is Derrida himself who makes the comparison. Second, Derrida's critique of the Heideggerian concept of spirit does not finally seem to amount to much more than a form of special pleading, an effort to reestablish the rightful place of Hebraic spirit or *ruah* in Western philosophical history. Certainly, Derrida is justified in making this case. When one reflects upon the sorry history of Heidegger's involvement with Nazism, his frank admiration for Hitler, Derrida's intervention comes as a needed corrective, a useful reminder of how philosophy can be used to serve dubious ends. Derrida restores Jewish spirit to its rightful place, a seat at the table of the European Union, or what Ajaz Ahmed calls in his reading of *Specters of Marx* "a white man's club" ("Reconciling Derrida" 101). But, if Jewish spirit has regained its seat at the table, Derrida is largely silent with respect to Afro-Egyptian, Islamic, and other non-European concepts of spirit. What is at stake for Derrida in his critique of Heidegger is a specifically *Jewish* notion of spirit, which he feels has wrongly been excluded. Derrida wants us to know that the Christian West owes a debt of gratitude to Jewish spirit, rather than the short-shrifting it receives from Heidegger.

Derrida's thesis will nonetheless leave certain of his readers cold, for instance, those other Others who remain excluded from the white Christian club, even as Jewish spirit now regains its rightful place. But Derrida also suggests that, should Jewish *ruah* receive its proper due, then it is not only the deconstructive thinker and his "coreligionary, the Messianic Jew," who will be able to join the Greco-Christian hymn, but also Arab and African Muslims "and some [unspecified] others" (*Of Spirit* 111). In effect, the figure of the Messianic Jew

herein becomes the allegorical representative of every other Other in the world, who is not already Greco-Christian. If one wants to know anything further about Arab and African concepts of spirit, Derrida suggests, one need look no further than that of the Messianic Jew: "I'm not certain that the Moslem and some others wouldn't join the concert or the hymn," Derrida states (111). Derrida's forecast regarding the enthusiasm of "the Muslim and some others" in this instance is naïve at best. While the Jew remains irreducible *shibboleth*, as Derrida puts it (*Sovereignties In Question* 50), all other African and Middle Eastern ethnic groups are herein recast as Messianic Jews, ostensibly as a matter of historical "justice." Whatever his motivations, Derrida ignores the historical relation between Egypto-African concepts of spirit and the Jewish concept of spirit that becomes their metonymic proxy. In other words, Derrida speaks as a "black Arab Jew," but he also makes a Jew of all other blacks and Arabs. This is a question that will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter. For now, it must suffice to note that there are a host of competing concepts of spirit besides the better known Hebraic *ruah*, some of which are more ancient, and all of which merit comparison with Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Hebraic terms for spirit. For now, however, this much may be said: Derrida, like many other African and Middle Eastern peoples, professes an indifference to rational truth as seeing. But speaking for Derrida also comes before writing. Now, the spectral word for the eyes can be animated in his thought system, but black ink is not therefore maternal blood, or a bodily fluid that blows into the ear. Derrida dreams of signs that are written in blood: "I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe," Derrida tells us ("Circumfession" 10). But, when the specter of black ink enters the body on the wet lens of the eye, this figure inevitably plunges into the murky and abysmal pools of the receptacle that is *khora*. The eyes are eyes of water, although body fluids for Derrida can also become fire, if we mean by that, the water-fire couplet of blood. Derrida reacts against the firey, Greco-Roman archetype, or against the notion of truth as *aletheia*.

But, Derrida's reading of *khora* does not therefore call into question every notion of transcendental origin. Derrida teaches that there is nothing outside the text, but taken literally, this deconstructive slogan can be translated to mean that "there is no getting outside the spirit of the mother." In Greco-Christian thought, the Logos is the name of an ideal form that is believed to be an invisible and spectral form for the eyes. One dreams, above all, of seeing this transcendental word. In Derridan thought, by way of contrast, one dreams of hearing the word of *khora*. It is perhaps for this reason that Spivak

acknowledges that "there is not much *theoretical* difference between pure essence and pure difference [Spivak's emphasis]" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 20). In Derrida's reading of Plato's *Timaeus*, the term *khora* becomes a substitute, or interlingual translation for the Biblical term Yahweh. Derrida gives to God the name of "the nameable-unnameable" (*Acts of Religion* 65); or when Derrida resorts to naming the unnameable God, *khora* is one of the names he gives to "the One [who is] without name" (*Acts of Religion* 100).

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CHAPTER 11

Deconstruction and the African Trace

We peddle neither
the Quran of Muhammad,
nor the Gospel of Mary's son,
nor the Torah of Moses.
Don't look for us in these places....
Our dreams lie further south,
where the milky wake of stars
washes into the roots of the abyss...

—Hawad, "Anarchy's Delirious Trek"

Although deconstructive concepts of the word are homologous with Egypto-African ones, Derrida's critique of Western philosophy excludes the later in favor of Abrahamic ones, especially Jewish articulations of the trace as *ruah* (holy breath) and *milah* (the Abrahamic name that is cut into flesh). Derrida's suggestion that we may not know what messianicity is without the revealed Abrahamic religions is not then a matter of simple vacillation on his part: It serves identifiable political goals that further the interests of members of a particular ethnic group, but undermine those of many other African and Middle Eastern peoples. Derrida ignores the fact that the deconstructive concept of the word as a "dangerous supplement" (or autonomous *pharmakon*) is not only attributable to Greek thinkers like Gorgias, Socrates, and Plato but is anticipated by far more ancient Egyptian, "black," or African concepts of the word. The well-documented history of Islamo-Arabic imperial ventures in the Sahel, East Africa, and other regions of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the history of indigenous African peoples' successes in repelling such efforts, reveals differences between Islamic articulations of the Word as Heavenly Book

and far more ancient notions of the word as a magical, autonomous, or occulted body fluid, differences that are elided in Derrida's theory of "globallatinization." The recorded history of African regions that have been in contact with the culture of the ancient Egyptians, especially as documented in scribal texts like *The Tarîkh al-Sudan* and *The Tarîkh al-fettâch*, as well as in transcribed griot narratives like *The Epic of Son Jara* and *The Epic of Askiya Muhammad*, and many other important documents from the Sahel zone, show that both Abrahamic and logocentric ideologies of the word have often been repelled by African peoples, even in cases where ethnic groups like the Songhay, Bozo, Bamana, Djioula, and Dogon were forcibly converted to Islam (for instance, during the nineteenth century jihad of El Hadj Umar Tall).[1] In fact, a great number of West Africa texts show that Platonized varieties of the Abrahamic religions, especially Islam and Christianity, have been comfortably assimilated into preexisting religious and tribal systems without significantly altering the far more ancient belief systems of the new converts.[2] Obvious examples in the Sahel zone include the Songhay, Dogon, Tuareg, and Mossi peoples, to mention only a few groups, each with its own ancient, fascinating, and complex history of the word; however, one might also include Sahelian Jewish peoples among those African peoples who have successfully resisted logocentric ideologies emanating from outside the region. While Derrida harshly criticizes Maimonides for transforming Jewish religion into a variety of Greco-Roman philosophy, he elides countless historical instances in which African and Middle Eastern groups, including many Northwest African Jews, resisted the Platonizing of their cherished belief systems. Derrida's elision of these many other "heretical" ethnic groups, both Jewish and non-Jewish, is not incidental, or a matter of cultural ignorance, but a calculated attempt to secure a privileged place for Jewish religious thought within the history of European philosophy, one that Derrida insists is the Jews' rightful patrimony. To assert that Derrida might have developed a more inclusive articulation of deconstruction, one that would further the interests of many other excluded others, is not, however, to criticize him for failing to recover an archaic form of lost consciousness, but for ignoring the actual living cultures of many Northwest African peoples today. Derrida's criticisms of Heidegger's politically motivated silence regarding Jewish concepts of the word as *ruah* in order to promote the interests of a particular ethnic group (in Heidegger's case, Germanic peoples during the era of the Third Reich), are therefore fully applicable to Derrida's own writings on the question of European and Jewish spirit. John Caputo too deliberately forecloses

discussion of African concepts of the word when he dismisses the important research of Martin Bernal in a single footnote that is notable for its facile self-assurance.[3] Not unlike Heidegger, who is disingenuously silent regarding the Jewish concept of spirit, Derrida and Caputo also exclude African and Middle Eastern concepts of spirit that are every bit as deserving of critical consideration as the Jewish one. In doing so, they tend to perpetuate the mystifying and inaccurate notions that the concept of spirit as divine breath (*ruah* in the Hebraic) was uniquely articulated by Jewish peoples and that the rite of circumcision began with the Abrahamic covenant, claims that are historically inaccurate.

In *The Slayers of Moses,* Handelman shows how the Genesis account of the world's creation by way of an act of divine speech ("God said, 'Let there be light . . .' ") challenges the basic ontological premises of Greco-Christian thought. Yet, Handelman too is silent regarding the creation theology of the ancient Egyptians. Whatever one's views about Freud's thesis that Moses was an Egyptian, it is simply a matter of historical fact that the Egyptians believed that it was the creator god Ammon-Ra who brought forth the universe, including various other Egyptian gods, by way of an act of divine speech. In numerous ancient texts, Ammon-Ra is said to have masturbated with his fist and then placed his divine semen into his mouth, after which he spat forth the other Egyptian gods into existence.[4] Ammon-Ra's oldest son, who is named Heka or "the Magician" is sometimes hypostatized into an actual god in various texts, for instance when he is given the proper name "Heka," but the word *heka* [], like the Hebraic word *ruah*, which it historically precedes, is also the Egyptian word for divine breath, magic, wind, word, or spirit (te Velde "The God Heka in Egyptian Theology" 177). The meaning of *heka* is virtually identical to the Hebraic word *ruah*, which Derrida seeks to restore to the European pantheon of spirits in his book on Heidegger, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, while ignoring *heka* and other African concepts of the word. The description of the trace as a divine seed infusing the world of things is also an important aspect of this creation tale. In the Western philosophical tradition recorded in Plato's *Timaeus*, the divine *Logos* is metaphorically conflated with a "seed in the marrow of the bone" (101), one that, in the Platonic account, is idealized as a truly existing yet intangible essence. However, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, and in the Christian gospels, as well as in the Hadith of the Islamic scriptural tradition, the parable of a sower who sows his seed into fertile soil is transmitted, in each case a sower who is an allegory of the teacher of truth. In *Dissemination*, as well as *Of Grammatology*,

Derrida offers commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, which refers to legends of writing's Egyptian origins, which Plato attributes to the Egyptian god Thoth, offering analyses of the materialized *logos* as it undergoes its historical transformation into a transcendental ideal word; however, Derrida at no point suggests that the Jewish notion of *ruah* may derive from, or is in any way related to, its Egyptian antecedent. In fact, Derrida creates a metonymic parataxis in his book *Of Spirit*, in which he subordinates every other Egypto-African concept of spirit to the Jewish *ruah*.

In *Dissemination*, Derrida briefly alludes to Gorgias's famous "Encomium to Helen," wherein the *logos* is described as a kind of magical *pharmakon* that enchants Helen, hence exonerating her for any responsibility in setting off the Trojan war. The spoken word here, as opposed to Plato's presentation of it in *The Phaedrus*, is identified with the dangerous medicinal properties of the autoimmune supplement, which is vilified in Western philosophy. Although Derrida refers to various Egyptian texts in both *Dissemination* and *Of Grammatology*, he never makes the obvious comparison between the Egyptian and pre-Socratic concept of the word as *logos*. In *Dissemination*, for instance, Derrida states that, "the *pharmakon* always penetrates like a liquid; it is absorbed, drunk, introduced into the inside . . . Liquid is the element of the *pharmakon*" (152). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida similarly observes that, "the text is spit out. It is like a discourse in which the unities model themselves after excrement, a secretion . . . [S]aliva is [therefore] the element which sticks the unities together" (161). Now, if one takes seriously Derrida's statement that spirit and specter are "anything but immaterial" ("Marx & Sons" 267), one can only conclude that spirit is indeed matter (or *mater*) for Derrida, a commingling of the wind of the lungs with the mouth's saliva. This liquid "text" is nonetheless an occulted force that circulates of its own volition outside the "small container of the human head" (*Specters of Marx* 171). The concept of the occulted trace in Derrida is not only prefigured in Gorgias's "Encomium to Helen," it is commonly reiterated in many ancient Egyptian texts, which describe the word as a magical and dangerous substance that, like the divine word-seed of Ammon-Ra, is first and foremost a potent bodily fluid. The Egyptian sorcerer's most powerful magic is the utterance from the abysmal coil of the body, an incantation that can both cure and disable once it is introduced into the ear of the other. Te Velde observes that *heka* is not only a creative force that can cure the sick but can also harm those who are healthy: "The Egyptians were aware that unordered creative energy was also at work [in the

universe]," te Velde states. "Sometimes we read of evil *heka* or the need of protecting oneself against the *heka* of others" (185). As Derrida points out, Socrates's death by poisoning is construed by those more conservative Greeks who reject idealized notions of the *Logos* as a form of punishment that fits the crime: that is, the "sorcerer" Socrates poisoned the youth of Athens by expectorating lethal words into their ears; hence he must drink the same poison that he has served to others (*Dissemination* 126–127). In *The Book of Coming Forth By Day*, the pious scribe Ani swears that he will not drink urine or eat feces, propositions that seem bizarre to readers today. Yet when it is clear that the ancient Egyptians construed the body's fluids as magical and dangerous substances, not unlike the deconstructive notion of the occulted trace, Ani's heartfelt oaths make perfectly good sense. The Egyptian sorcerer consumed such bodily substances as a means of increasing his own occult power, a practice associated with the evil arts. In the Osiris cycle, which was the central mythic ritual performed for thousands of years along the Nile River, the Egyptian god Horus, who was the son of Osiris, defeated his uncle Seth by tricking him into consuming his semen, which was disguised in the dressing on his lettuce. According to this view, when the fluids of the other commingle with our own, whether they enter our bodies via the portals of the ears or the mouth, the actual composition of the body is changed. If the spoken word (or spirit) *is* matter—a proposition that seems difficult to accept in the West after twenty-five centuries of Platonic hegemony—it can be nothing other than the very fluids of the body, which are inherited from the mother (what Derrida refers to as the "maternal debt"). Although it is impossible to see the spoken trace, its lack of visible properties does not imply that it is lacking in materiality, merely that it is a trace that is destined for the ears rather than the eyes.

In Cheick Oumar Sissoko's beautifully filmed version of the Genesis tale, set in Northern Mali and entitled simply *La Genèse* (1999), the Biblical character Esau is not coincidentally played by Mali's most famous singer, Salif Keita, the Mande nobleman who "debased" himself in the eyes of his family by becoming a griot, or an epic performer who sings the praises of the Mande nobility. However, the Biblical tale of fraternal struggle between Esau and Isaac is arguably a mere innovation upon the far older Osirian monomyth, referred to by contemporary Egyptologists as the "Hamlet constellation,"[5] in which Horus and Seth's battle for prestige leads to the creation of a clear social hierarchy wherein one of the rivals must come to acknowledge, as Seth does again and again, which of the

two blood relatives is destined to be the sovereign nobleman. The victor in this contest is the brother who manages to keep his blood pure, that is, the brother who remains literally uncontaminated by the bodily secretions of the other (i.e., word, breath, semen, spirit, wind, saliva, etc.). In the Biblical tale, which is reenacted in Sissoko's film, Isaac tricks his older brother Esau into exchanging his birthright for a bowl of soup that he prepares, much as Horus tricks Seth into consuming his bodily fluids. However, the Abrahamic narrative of fraternal struggle between Isaac and Esau is the more recent, if not derivative, account, one that is prefigured in the Afro-Egyptian version by some two thousand years. In the Christian gospels, Jesus's rejection of this more ancient thinking of the word as occult substance is also dramatically emphasized in the *Book of Matthew*, when Jesus is reputed to have stated, "It is not what enters one's mouth that defiles that person; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one . . . Do you not realize that everything that enters into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled into the latrine" (15:11–17). Matthew reports that Jesus makes this statement when he, like the reviled brother Esau, eats out of the bowl of those of lower social standing than himself, in this case the despised tax collectors for the Romans in ancient Palestine. Within such a setting, as is true throughout many parts of Egypt and Africa today, one eats with one's right hand, unavoidably "contaminating" the communal eating bowl with one's saliva (even if one is extremely careful to do otherwise).[6] In making this utterance, Jesus scandalizes those more traditional—yet paradoxically "unorthodox"—Jews who are present, for he therein denies hegemonic articulations of the word as a powerful bodily fluid or occult substance. When such references are placed in their proper historical context, they lose a great deal of their enigmatic character. Although Jesus seems to reject theologies of the word as a dangerous and occulted bodily substance, the gospels also include a tale in which Jesus spits upon the ground and then rubs the mud-salve of his spittle into the eyes of a blind man in order to cure him (Mark 8:22–26). The Quran too refers to a miracle in which Jesus is reputed to have breathed upon the likeness of a clay bird, which then became animated and flew into the sky (5:110–112).[7] Such references may point to the persistence of occult beliefs about the trace in the aftermath of Greek and Roman efforts to colonize Palestine and other parts of the Middle East. According to Fatmina Mernissi, as previously noted, the Prophet Muhammad also decrees that Muslim men should not banish their menstruating wives from prayerful assembly, suggesting that Islamic views on this question set

the Muslims of Medina apart from their Jewish neighbors. Such questions are obviously complex and call for further analysis in light of nascent Christian and Islamic doctrines, as well as Jewish theology in the early Christian era;[8] however, my point here is simply that Derrida's materialist articulation of the autonomous trace does not emerge from within a cultural vacuum. The Hebraic concept of *ruah*, which can also be *ruah raa* (or evil spirit), is certainly not a strange historical anomaly that is articulated only by Jewish peoples, but merely another term for an ancient, "materialist," and broadly shared thinking of the occulted trace.

It bears repeating that this non-logocentric thinking of the trace is not an archaic form of lost historical consciousness over which one might feel nostalgic, nor is it one that Egyptologists and Africanist scholars should seek to creatively reconstruct, but a matter of empirical observation of actual African realities today. Much of Africa continues to feel the influence of the ancient Egyptians, just as European society continues to be affected by the legacies of the ancient Greeks and Romans; however, for a wide variety of reasons—some a matter of racial politics, others simple ignorance—scholarly attempts to demonstrate the legacy of the ancient Egyptians in Africa are often greeted with skepticism, if not outright scorn. For purposes of this study, we will leave the question of ancient Egypt's ongoing influence upon the African continent suspended. It suffices here merely to underscore the obvious structural affinities between deconstructive, Judaic, ancient Egyptian, and current West African concepts of the trace. I am content to merely assert that terms like the ancient Egyptian *heka*, the Mande *nyama*, the Soninke *ñaxamala*, the Wolof *ñeeño*, the Fulfulde *nyeenyo*, the Toucouleur-Fulfulde *nyaama*, and many similar African terms for what Derrida calls the "trace" are virtually interchangeable with the Jewish term *ruah*, as well as with deconstructive concepts of "spirit" and "specter" that are employed in texts like *Specters of Marx* and *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*; furthermore, as I have already stated, Derrida elides these coterminous concepts of the trace in order to promote an exclusive, if not ethnocentric, politics. Although one might demonstrate parallels between the Derridean concept of the trace, the Judaic *ruah-ruah-raa* and *milah*, and other similar terms that are commonly employed across the African continent, especially in cultures within and bordering the Saharan Desert, my focus here is on the Mande concept of *nyama* and more generally the Mande world of the Bamana, Soninke, Khassonke, Maninka, and other related ethnic groups; however, my argument also applies to "deep" Sahelian society at large, especially the ancient

civilizations established along the Djioliba River (or the upper Niger Delta). A quick glance at any contemporary map will show that this region lies directly south of Algeria, where Derrida was raised; in fact, Mali borders Algeria although it is worth noting that there are no actual borders between these nation-states, which even today are freely traversed by nomadic Tuaregs. Those who have even a passing familiarity with the history of this region will know that the Songhay Empire of the Askiyas was destroyed in the sixteenth century by renegade Spanish-Christian mercenaries of the Pasha of Fez, who transformed regional centers like Timbuktu and Gao into vassals of Arabs who ruled from the north. Certainly, the national boundaries in Northwest Africa that were originally drawn by French colonialists in the nineteenth century reflect the political interests of the French far more than they do the cultural realities of those peoples living in the region. Furthermore, as documented in *The Tarîkh al-fettâch*, Jewish peoples have long inhabited this region, as well as further north on the Algerian coast, quite possibly from the time of the Roman destruction of Herod's Temple.[9]

The Fulani or Peulh, whom Yambo Ouologuem provocatively refers to at the "Black Jews" of West Africa in his controversial novel *Le devoir de violence* (1968), have sometimes been assigned a Palestinian origin in Africanist scholarship, although Africanist scholars more commonly attribute to them a Yemeni origin. French colonialist ethnographers have even suggested that they might have been a "renegade" band of Hebrew slaves, who refused to return to Palestine in the era when Moses led the revolt against the ancient Egyptians. Fulani authors like Al Hajj Sékou Tall dislike being compared to Jews because such comparisons tend to reinforce Judeo-Christian claims to the "elder" Jewish brother ("The Origins of the Fulani" 16). However, one need not be too deeply steeped in the teachings of Jewish esoteric scriptural traditions to quickly grasp that texts like Amadou Hampâté Bâ's *Kaïdara* (1988), a Fulani oral epic and transcription of an initiation rite, is also a mnemonic device to memorize a West African variant of the Kabbalah. While it is difficult to state with any precision exactly when Jewish peoples first migrated into the region, it is certain that they have played an important part in contributing to the cultural history of the region. It is nonetheless doubtful that they were more than secondary agents in shaping what Thomas Hale and Paul Stoller have called "deep Sahelian culture" ("Oral Art, Society, and Survival in the Sahel Zone" 165), or what the Burkinabè scholar Joseph Paré similarly calls "sahelity" (*sahelité*) (Wise and Paré "Introduction" 2); which is to say, the Sahel is an

extraordinarily complex and multilayered society, but its deepest strata—which was certainly in contact with the culture of ancient Egypt—has remained relatively unaffected by the more recent overlays of the external agents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The diggings of Roderick and Susan McIntosh in Jenne-Jeno, which have been instrumental in shaping Hale and Stoller's concept of deep Sahelian culture, suggest that trading between Egypt and the Sahel's oldest known city may have taken place before the time of Christ ("The Inland Niger Delta before the Empire of Mali: Evidence from Jenne-Jeno" 1–22). The hybrid "aquifer" of deep Sahelian culture must not neglect Egyptian and Judaic cultural influences, but it must also not exaggerate their importance. In other words, Djenné was probably not a long lost Egyptian city, as Felix DuBois once imagined (*Timbuktu the Mysterious* 148), but it nonetheless could not have avoided contact with ancient Egypt, especially during an era when the Sahara Desert was far less arid. Cheick Anta Diop's work on the Fulani shows that the Sahel's so-called black-Arabs are the principle African heirs to Egyptian civilization, but the Fulani are also widely described as *arrivants* to the Sahel who probably migrated to the region some one thousand years ago. The cultural influence of Egypt, while strengthened by the coming of the Fulani, is also exceeded by the impact of this important ethnic group. In his *Griots and Griottes*, Hale speculates on possible links between griots and Jews, examining the numerous references to griots as Jews in literature about Africa, but Hale concludes that, "it seems unlikely that there is a link" (83). I would second Hale's conclusion that the references to the griot as a kind of Sahelian Jew are specious. References in European travel literature to the *nyamakala* as Jews are probably little more than markers of local anti-Semitism, a way of insulting the griot, much as Ouologuem enjoys poking fun at Fulani chiefdoms in Northern Mali. It is nonetheless significant that the *nyamakala* have so often been described as Jews, in light of undeniable parallels between Judaic and Sahelian concepts of writing. If it is true that the Hebraic term *ruah* is interchangeable with the Mande term *nyama*, as I am suggesting here, then there would seem to be a basis for theoretical comparison of Jews and Sahelian peoples beyond the misleading historical references to griots as Jews that Hale catalogues. Similarities between *ruah* and *nyama* are certainly more than coincidental, but this does not mean that Judaism in any way directly influenced the beliefs of the *nyamakala*. Scholars of Judeo-Christian heritage tend to position Jewish peoples in the role of elder sibling in the Jewish-Christian relation, imagining their Muslim brethren as the youngest of the three

siblings. However, the earliest monotheism was not that of Abraham but the fanatical Egyptian Pharaoh, Akenaten. The Egyptian practice of circumcision also long predates the advent of Jewish religion, which imagines its beginnings in the Abrahamic covenant. The master term in our parataxis is most likely the Egyptian *heka*, not the Hebraic *ruah*, although I prefer to leave this question open-ended. The most that one should say is that the *nyamakala* resemblance to Jews is probably due to Sahelian and Jewish peoples' influence from a common African source, most likely an Egyptian or Nubian one.

Much has been learned in the last few decades regarding Sahelian concepts of the word, particularly in the aftermath of Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), which generated a great deal of interest in the figure of griot or West African bard.[10] The growing fame of Sahelian musicians such as Salif Keita, Baba Maal, Diabaté Toumani, Oumarou Sangaré, and Ali Farka Touré, has also contributed to a growing fascination with West African musical traditions in Europe and the United States. However, the Mande griot (*djelu*) (or "singing man," in Mungo Park's formulation) is actually only one member of a "caste" that includes blacksmiths (*numu*), tanners (*garanke*), hunters (*donzo*), basket-weavers (*fina*), and Islamic griots (*funé*). The Mande name for this social group is the *nyamakala*, the root of which is the Mande word *nyama*, sometimes translated as "occult means" or "power." Many studies have been devoted to the Mande concept of *nyama*, including attempts like those of Charles S. Bird, Martha B. Kendall, and Kalilou Tera to provide Africanist scholars with its etymology. In "Etymologies of Nyamakala," Bird, Kendall, and Tera report that a defining criteria of the *nyamakala* is the ability to manifest *majigi*, the Mande word for magic (31). They list several meanings for *nyama* as follows: "Evil or satanic; morally neutral; dangerous; polluting; energizing or animating; necessary for action; or indicative of imperfect self-control" (28). *Nyama* can also mean filth, waste, garbage, or refuge. Father Joseph Henry writes, "*Nyama* is a force, a power, or if one prefers, an energy, a fluid possessed by every man, every animal, every living being" (27). John William Johnson, who transcribed *The Epic of Son-Jara*, describes an incident he observed in which a Mande woman asked a griot for a blessing by holding out her hands so that he could spit in them. The woman then rubbed the spittle over her face in order to fully benefit from this blessing. "In Mali," Johnson states, "incantations over various libations are generally terminated by spitting into the mixture before it is consumed. The moisture of the spittle vitalizes the power of the brew" (124). Hoffman also states that the saliva of the griot, because it is infused with *nyama*, is believed to possess

curative properties (169). If the *nyama* of the griot can cure those who are ill, it can also disable them. Hoffman therefore documents the more lethal dimensions of the *nyama* of the griots, stating that it was through her study the words of the griots of Kita, in Southern Mali that she learned "how dangerous, even deadly, the *nyama* of talk can be" (37). In fact, one generally pays the griot to desist from singing one's praises, imploring him or her to take the terrible *nyama* away. This is not simply because it is embarrassing to have one's name praised in public, but because of the griot's relative occult power. Two particularly noteworthy incidents in *The Tarikh al fettâch* also illustrate the historical clash between ancient Sahelian views regarding saliva, especially that of sovereign rulers, and more "orthodox" Islamic views regarding the transcendental or Heavenly Book. In one well-known incident during a clash with "pagan" Mossi peoples, the utterance of the Askiya Muhammad is said to be so powerful that it causes a tree to be uprooted from the ground, which then smashes the Mossi's most powerful cult fetish (French 135/Arabic 70). In another case, the Askiya Dawud, whose very spittle is preserved by an attending eunuch, is described as frothing at the mouth and spitting into his garment sleeves in a cult ceremony. When observed by visiting Arab Muslims, who recoil in horror at what they see, the Askiya Dawud assures his foreign guests that he has not been deprived of his powers of reason, but that he "rules over madmen, the impious, and the proud" hence he is sometimes compelled to go along with such "impious" ceremonies (French 209/Arabic 114). In the first case, the Askiya Muhammad defeats a "pagan" people to the south in Ouagadougou, but only by relying upon the occult magic with which he is endowed, as a result of his "pagan" mother's milk.[11] In the second instance, the Askiya Dawud tacitly acknowledges to his Arab Muslim guests that, as sovereign ruler of the Songhay peoples, he has no choice but to respect the well-established beliefs of his people, beliefs that are commonly affirmed today in the modern streets of Gao and, indeed, further along the crook of the Niger River, past Wanzarbé and even beyond Niamey.[12] The *Tarîkh al-Sudan*, recently translated into English by John Hunwick also, includes a description of sixteenth century conjuration practices among the Songhay, wherein the utterance of the name of an enemy, accompanied by the drum sound of a gourd floating in water, evokes an image (or "double") of the man whose name is ritually enunciated. When the ghost of the man magically appears, his legs are shackled and a spear is driven through his chest. The author of the *Tarîkh al-Sudan*, although a pious Muslim, believes that this conjuration rite causes the instant

death of the man whose double is evoked (see Hunwick *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* 141). While such conjuration practices may seem uncanny to outside observers, they continue to play an important role in the lives of many Sahelian peoples today, including devout Muslims like the Umarian Tidjaniya who continue to summon the doubles of the living, the dead, and even the unborn in the context of group prayer meetings.[13] Although some European observers, like the Askiya Dawud's Arab Muslim guests, have mistakenly concluded that West African beliefs about *nyama* are somehow associated with Satanism,[14] *nyama* is actually a medicinal property that is itself neither good nor evil but potentially both at the same time. Derrida's notion of the volcanic trace of Yahweh as "bifid," a spiritual force that is profoundly divided against itself, may also be unproblematically applied to the Soninke *ñaxamala*, which is perhaps the oldest known Sahelian term for this powerful fluid (see Derrida's *Acts of Religion* 108). (The ancient Soninke, also referred to as the Wakuri in *The Tarîkh al-fettâch* and the *Tarikh al-Sudan*, is the name of the Sahelian nobility and founders of the Ghana Empire, which predates both the Mande Dynasty of Sundiata Keita and Songhay Dynasty of the Askiyas.) In his recent, encyclopedic study of the West African griot, Hale catalogues various narratives of the griot's origin, concluding that, "blood appears as a common feature of all these stories of origin and reinforces the close association between the griot and a significant social taboo" (*Griots and Griottes* 64). Sahelian legends of the griot's earliest beginnings commonly recount the tale of two brothers, one of whom cuts off a piece of his flesh from his leg to feed to his starving younger sibling. As a result of performing this abhorrent act, the younger brother who unwittingly eats the flesh of his brother must now assume the identity of the griot, or the one who is required to loudly sing the praises of the sibling whose blood remains "pure." The taboo against consuming the fluids of the other increases one's occult power in this context as it does in the context of ancient Egypt, but at the price of diminishing one's standing in society, even transforming one into a social outcast.

The griot is not only a "singing man," but also an important cultural figure who, like the Jewish *mohel*, presides over circumcision rites. Unlike writing in the Christian and Islamic religions, the writing of the *nyamakala* is not grounded by an absent word that is inscribed upon an invisible receptacle. To describe the *nyamakala* as writers, however, does not imply that those who belong to this social group write in a strictly metaphorical sense, or that their speaking is merely "like" writing and does not involve actual inscription, for, the

nyamakala of the Sahel certainly engage in a wide range of signifying practices, including participation in name-giving, tribal cutting, and scarification ceremonies. The corollary of the elocutionary utterance is the signatory event, or the marking of the here-now of the *nyamakala*. The scribes leaves his signature upon the other as a means of opening the one to the other, or interpolating the other into an external order that is far greater than the one. In the Sahelian context, the most important signatory corollaries of *nyama* are the rites of tribal scarification and circumcision. "Writing" in the Sahel therefore implies a complex system of naming through violent inscription upon the body. Sahelian naming ceremonies and circumcision rites are one and the same, for the *nyamakala*'s violent inscription upon the flesh of the other assigns to the other a legitimate and predetermined identity within a well-established social order. The violence of the one is annulled by the violence of the mark that is traumatically introduced from the outside. The one is marked as a guarantee of rights, privileges, legal protection, and identity. This is why the Umarian cultural figure Al Hajj Sekou Tall defends tribal scarring as the guarantee of personal freedom:

> Circumcision and excision [*taadordy* in Fulfulde; *ban'ngo* in Moré, *boly* in Bambara] warrant promotions for the young (girls and boys). Besides these two practices, there is teeth-sharpening, tattooing and scarification of the skin at precise places on the body (the stomach, shoulders, temples, lips, forehead, cheeks), all of which function as symbols and remain the only true means to concretely and solemnly consecrate the promotion of those individuals selected; that is, they guarantee the appurtenance of the group as a collective body, or as a socially ratified entity. Ritual promotion is thus at one with the question of Human Rights. Such rights are concretized within these contexts *to the child's advantage*, especially the Right to Education. In these ways, the young and old partake of intimate communion with the patrons of the collective body or the socially ratified group. These practices constitute for the young their *supreme right* to receive an education and instruction in the ways of their people. At the same time, they signify the young's readiness to take on the responsibilities that go along with this right. From the moment she undergoes excision, the young girl gains the *right* to insert herself into the realm of womankind, enjoying all the benefits therein entailed [Tall's emphasis]. (Tall "Key Concepts and Traditional African Society" 58)

The *nyamakala* cannot give a name to the other without this necessary act of violence. Furthermore, the violent literacy of the *nyamakala* is both artful and deliberate. It signifies a violence that

reduces the selfishness of the one by inserting the one into a symbolic order of the two. Tall points out that the colonialist efforts to destroy such rites have "been accompanied by profound losses" (59). Modern Sahelian peoples who discontinue such rites, he argues, often find that they have lost far more than they have gained by accepting the European colonizer's stigmatizing of these hallowed customs. Tall therefore insists that such customs are absolutely essential to the social health of contemporary Sahelian society. "As the disobedience and transgression of traditional laws and practices have increased," Tall states, "so we have seen increased migrations, conflicts among clans, ethnic groups or tribes, and, in our day, the homelessness of juvenile delinquents" (59). Tall's "humanist" reading of tribal scarring as a "guarantee" of human rights is coterminous with Said's notion of the secular trace as a trauma that is the guarantee of one's membership within the larger human community. The question of Derrida's reluctance to allow Jewish identity to be secularized—which is to say, "Christianized" in Derrida's view—also echoes debates in the Sahel today regarding the appropriateness of circumcision and tribal scarring in the contemporary national context. In Burkina Faso, for instance, the custom of marking one's face among the Fulani, Mossi, and Bobo, to mention only a view groups, indeed fosters the social cohesiveness affirmed by Tall, but it also tends to undermine national efforts to construct a unified sense of Burkinabè identity. For this reason, government officials dwelling in Ouagadougou have sometimes sought to extirpate such customs. One is motivated in such instances not necessarily out of humanitarian concerns for the elimination of traumatizing rites like scarification and excision, but as a pragmatic matter of nation building. (It goes without saying that, at least in the case of male children, such rites are neither more nor less "humane" than current circumcision practices among Jews and Christians in the West or Arabs in the Middle East.) As Caputo enjoys pointing out, Derrida refrained from circumcising his own sons although he wrote his most moving work about his own traumatic experience of circumcision, an experience that he could have imagined only in retrospect. Such contradictions reveal Derrida's ambivalence about such rites, an ambivalence that is not shared by Tall, a Fulani Muslim of the Umarian Tidjaniya. Unlike Derrida, Tall affirms the idiomatic and traumatizing rite, as well as its transcendence in humanist terms. Derrida, by way of contrast, would like for Jewish circumcision to serve as an appropriate metonymy for *all* forms of tribal cutting, including those that historically precede the Abrahamic *milah*. "To say 'all poets are Jews' is to state something that both

marks and annuls the marks of a circumcision . . . ," Derrida states in his commentary on Paul Celan. "All those who deal with or inhabit language as poets are Jews—but in a tropic sense" (*Sovereignties in Question* 54). The trope is herein affirmed, but only after it is catachrestically reinscribed as a uniquely Jewish wound.

In addition to the Egypto-African practice of marking the body, a practice that long predates the Abrahamic *milah*, amulet writing in the Sahel offers further evidence of the ancientness and complexity of signifying practices in West Africa that persist into the present. Amulets in the Sahel are commonly believed to be infused with *nyama* and are inextricably linked to the speaking practices of the griot (Hoffman 37). For instance, every object in Mande society is infused with *nyama*, but certain objects possess more *nyama* than others (72). The amulet that is prepared by the *nyamakala*, for instance the griot or hunter, is a particularly potent, if not lethal, object. When the oral word is affixed as a visual image upon a writing surface, it may be seen by the eyes, but the living-dead word of the *nyamakala* is not a word that has been crucified and awaits its resurrection by fiat of the priestly voice; nor is it the becoming flesh of a Book that is all books. The *nyama* writing that is the amulet suggests the autonomy of the inscribed word as a force that is embedded within the mark while not being limited to it. The Egyptian hieroglyph, like the Sahelian amulet, manifests occult power within the actual letter, which is imagined as a living-dead fetish. Erik Hornung observes, "The gods may indeed inhabit representations as they may inhabit any image, but their true form is 'hidden' and 'mysterious,' as Egyptian texts emphasize continually. Attributes may allude to the natures of deities and indicate that a deity is present, but no god is comprehended totally in his attributes" (*Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* 117). The Sahelian amulet reveals the persistence of a signifying culture that has undergone centuries of repression in both the East and West. In an article published in 1905, the Egyptologist Sir Alan Gardiner postulated that Semitic writing systems, which are the prototype of all later alphabetic writing systems, originated in the Egyptian hieroglyphic system, arguing that the hieroglyphs live on, though in transmuted form, in Latin based writing systems (16). In this light, the West's repression of the hieroglyphic image, following the Judaic or Mosaic ban on graven images, is not finally separable from the repression of a way of thinking about writing that is far older than both the Abrahamic religions and Greek philosophy. The most obvious examples of the persistence of occult writing beliefs in Africa and the Middle East, extending far beyond the Sahelian context, include the

manufacture of the Hand of Fatima (the Egyptian hieroglyph for the Latin letter "K"), the Eye of Horus, or a charm to ward off the evil eye (the Egyptian hieroglyph for the Latin letter "O"), and the Coptic cross (the Egyptian hieroglyph for the Latin letter "T"). Although commonly dismissed as a form of superstition in the Judeo-Christian West, the writing of the amulet too reveals a complex way of thinking about language that evades many of the contradictions of the Platonic parataxis of Logos. It is not then a question of asserting the truth of *nyama*-writing over and against the truth of Platonic understandings of writing: both offer competing theologies of language that can neither be proven nor refuted.

More recent forms of literacy in the Sahel must also be differentiated from the ancient literacy of the *nyamakala*, specifically those imported into the Sahel by Arab and European imperialists. Quranic literacy is not the same as the literacy of the *nyamakala*. Though Islamic orientations to literacy in the Sahel are of enormous significance, especially in the case of writers like Ouologuem, Chiekh Amadou Kane, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, and many others, the Quranic Word is grounded by a parataxis of a Book that is an invisible ground. The Book in the Seventh Heaven, which is exoterically symbolized by the cube (or *ka'ba*) that resides in the heart of Makkah (i.e., the outward pilgrimage as opposed to the greater journey within), anchors the elocutionary utterance of the Muslim as he or she recites the Quran (Lings 37). This is why the written Quran is not even the Quran but a *mus'haf*, or merely written copy. Like the orphan son that is writing within Platonic thought, the reified text in Islam exists at a second remove from this essential or metaphysical ground as a copy of a copy. Al-Ghazali, for instance, will affirm the Johnnine doctrine of the Logos although he will disassociate this concept from anthropomorphic imagery (Peters *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* 161–162). The *nyamakala*'s orientation to the word is profoundly different from that of Muslims like al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Sina. The abysmal no-place of the mother's heart produces the image of the book as a ghostly simulacrum of itself. It should not surprise us then that the coming of Islam to the Sahel inaugurated intense conflicts between the *nyamakala* and Arab Muslim missionaries to the region (Hale *Griots and Griottes* 64–66). One thousand years of Islamic influence have not, of course, left Sahelian culture unaffected. Though many griots today are also pious Muslims, the literacy of the *nyamakala* and Muslims is extraordinarily incongruous. The religious syncretisms that have arisen from the intermingling of these profoundly different thought systems are partly what make the Sahel

such a complex and fascinating society. The more recent introduction of typographic literacy from Europe has also affected Sahelian society although in far less dramatic ways. From the time of Mungo Park to the present, attempts by Europeans to develop industrial forms of literacy have met with only limited success in the Sahel. As Walter J. Ong suggests, West African society enters into the era of electronic media without having undergone the interiorization of print media that theorists of orality-literacy contrasts like Ong, Havelock, and others have described. To speak of orality-literacy contrasts in this way, however, is really to underscore the cultural significance of typography, which has proven to be of limited relevance within the Sahel zone. If West Africa remains a "verbomotor society" to quote Marcel Jousse, it is so in part because the technology of typographic print has never gained much ground. Important exceptions include sites of proselytizing by Euro-American Protestants, who have promulgated their own religious and culturally specific beliefs about the magical printed word, the fetish of the industrial book. By way of contrast, the Sahelian literacy invoked here refers to a far more ancient form of writing, which is difficult to disassociate from the oral word, or to imagine simply as a spatial or reified artifact, as is the case in the Protestant religion. Roman Catholicism too has made inroads in places like Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Mali, implying yet another external form of literacy that is in no way reducible to either of the above. All of these forms of literacy must be carefully distinguished in order to appreciate important differences in the wide range of signifying practices of the *nyamakala*.

As stated in a previous chapter, many people who live in the Sahel have limited contact with either alphabetic or typographic texts. The Burkinabè poet Titinga Pacéré speaks of the "cultural literature" of the Sahel, by which he means the ability to "read" and interpret the language of the masks, the talking drums, dance, and other ancient forms of "literacy" of the Mossi people (*Le langage des masques et des tam-tams* 83). As Ong points out, there are no true "primary oral cultures" anywhere in the world today, meaning cultures unaffected by the impact of alphabetic literacy, rather than "literacy" in Pacéré's broader sense (*Orality and Literacy* 11). In the Sahelian context, Derrida's suggestion that there is a more basic truth that precedes Platonic and logocentric notions of truth as competence (or "correct perception"), what Derrida alternately will call the vow, oath, promise, or covenant, does not in this setting seem terribly revolutionary. In fact, in West Africa, the Heideggerian *Zusage* may seem little more than an obvious truism, a basic precondition for all interaction with

the other. In a setting where one does not reflexively draw up written contracts to ensure that one's word will be honored, the promise to uphold one's vows is essential not only to ensure social stability, but also basic human survival in a climate that is extremely harsh and even "homicidal" to cite Joseph Ki-Zerbo ("Preface" 5–6). It is extremely difficult for most Europeans and North Americans to imagine the economic and environmental hardships endured by the peoples of this region, who have fended off the crises of drought, famine, disease, desertification, and other ecological catastrophes for centuries. In the Sahel zone, Heidegger's *Zusage* seems less "Teutonic perversity" and theoretical irritant than a basic fact of life, an elemental value that is necessary for human survival. The deconstructive notion of truth, like the Sahelian one, does not mean being in literal possession of it, as if the truthful word was a scepter that one might hold in one's hands, but instead honoring one's sacred vows to the other. Certainly, the covenant articulated in *The Book of Genesis* offers us an important example of this non-logocentric concept of truth, but the Abrahamic covenant is no more the historical invention of the Jews than is the ancient rite of circumcision. Both the Abrahamic covenant and the violent *milah* that accompanies it originate from within a cultural matrix that is far older and much more diverse than the relatively myopic world of the Biblical prophets.

In the *Tarîkh al-fettâch*, al Hajj Mahmud Kâti repeatedly alludes to the inaugural vows of the Askiya Muhammad in the fifteenth century, which are made at the tombstone of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina (French 132/Arabic 69). According to Kâti, it is the failure of the Askiya Muhammad's descendants to honor these vows that leads to the ultimate collapse of the Songhay Empire. As true for Derrida and Heidegger, the fact for Kâti is not "simply a fact" (Derrida *Of Spirit* 40). The "fact" is rather a ringing reaffirmation of the inaugural "yes," a promise that the other can depend upon as a matter of life and death. Nothing is more uncertain than the knowledge that the other will indeed honor his word, and yet it is absolutely essential in the Sahel that the other do so, for the survival of one's very life, as well as the life of one's dependents, may require it. In the *Tarîkh al-fettâch*, Kâti describes himself as an eyewitness to the breaking of the inaugural oaths of the Askiya Muhammad (French 143/Arabic 75). When the sons of the Askiya violate the trust that enabled the founding of the Songhay Empire, the inevitable result is the demise of social order leading to anarchy, the battle of all-against-all. By way of contrast, Kâti provides his readers with copious illustrations of the Askiya Muhammad's fidelity to his vows, even at great personal expense and

even when it humiliates him to remember his vows before his vassals (French 118/Arabic 61). Derrida associates the ring of the spoken "yes" of the wedding vow with the actual ring that is worn as a symbol of the religious oath. In "Circumfession," Derrida also links the wedding ring to the phallic remainder (*le reste*) of human flesh following the rite of circumcision. Among Egyptian Muslims and Sephardic Jews, the ring of flesh that remains is traditionally preserved as a token of the vow, much as the wedding ring functions as a symbolic reminder of the marital vow. In Europe and the United States, by way of contrast, the ring's association with the phallus and the rite of circumcision, as well as the uttered vow, is virtually unknown.

Derrida's description in "Circumfession" of the phallic ring (or "remainder" [*le reste*]), which is preserved following the rite of circumcision, vividly reminds us of one of the ring's long forgotten symbolic functions. Non-Jewish readers in Europe and the United States in particular can deepen their understanding of historical rites of circumcision through careful study of this thoughtful book by Derrida. But granting this book the appreciation it deserves should not prevent his readers from placing this text within its proper historical and cultural setting; that is, the life-world of Northwest Africa, especially Egypt, the Maghreb, and the Sahel. The earliest references to the phallic ring in this setting occur in various Egyptian Books of the Dead, including inscriptions on various temple walls along the Nile, which obsessively recount the tale of Osiris's murder, also known as the Egyptian "mono-myth," or "Hamlet constellation." After Osiris is murdered by Seth, his body is hacked into multiple pieces and then strew along various sites on the Nile River. With the help of the jackal Annubis, also known as the "mummifier," the goddess Isis gathers Osiris's body parts, so that she might resurrect him through her sexual healing powers. In several variants of this ancient tale, a mysterious fish that swims the length of the Nile swallows up the phallus of Osiris, the last of the body parts to be retrieved by the goddess Isis and the jackal Annubis. When the phallus is found in the belly of the fish, Osiris can at last be fully re-membered and then reborn in the figure of his son Horus. Early Christians appropriate fish iconography from ancient Egypt, as in the case of the Papal miter, as well as the various similar miters of other ecclesiastics. However, nearly every region that was in contact with Egypt has its own variants upon the tale of the fish with the ring in its belly. In the Abrahamic religions, the historical figure of Solomon, who is deeply steeped in Egyptian magical practices, is most closely associated with marvelous tales of the fish with the ring in its belly, sometimes described as a djinn or a

water-sprite. In Tabari's *Commentary* on the Quran, a fish-djinn steals Solomon's signet ring and usurps his rightful place on the throne of Israel for forty days, until the fish reveals that he is an imposter by violating blood taboos, showing that he is impure (Peters *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Vol. 1* 52–53). The *Tarîkh al-fettâch* also records that the Islamic "founders" of the Songhay Empire (in fact, Arab immigrants from Yemen although they claim to be from Medina, which is the dwelling place of the Prophet Muhammad) discover upon their arrival in the Takur, or Sahelian West Africa, that a giant fish rules the Songhay people from a throne in Gâo. Each day, this fish swims up from the waters of the Niger and takes his seat upon his throne, before returning to his underwater kingdom in the evening. The great fish, who claims that he only fears Suleiman (or, Solomon, the son of David), must be killed before the newcomers in the Sahel from Arabia can rule in his place (French 50/Arabic 30). To this day, Songhay women of the Upper Niger Delta wear a gold ring in their nose as a symbol of the great fish, which is associated with Songhay sorcery practices. In *The Epic of Askiya Muhammad*, the fish-djinn that rules his underwater kingdom at the bottom of the Djoliba River (literally, "the river of the griots" but known outside the region as the Niger River), is identified as the djinn father of Askiya Muhammad, who gives to his son his signet ring in order that he may partake of his occult power (21). This djinn or water-sprite is effectively a cult figure that symbolizes the literal breath of the spoken oath, a wet-wind that blows into the ear of the other. The Djoliba is named for the griot, the "singing man" who is the consummate master of the occult word, or *nyama*. In this context, the "deconstructive" themes of the ring, the vow (or Heideggerian *Zusage*), Jewish *ruah*, the Abrahamic *milah*, the remainder (*le reste*), among other essential deconstructive themes are certainly well-known, if not commonplace. Furthermore, the obvious affinities between these cultural traditions should certainly not be construed as a matter of quasi-religious or archetypal structures of the "collective unconscious," in any Jungian or Freudian sense,[15] but a far simpler matter of "historical contamination," as Fredric Jameson has suggested,[16] given the well-documented history of these related cultures' interactions with one another. By way of contrast, Derrida promotes the religious myth of Jewish exceptionalism for his readers in Europe and the United States, by failing to compare and historicize major "deconstructive" themes that, by rights, belong to *all* the diverse peoples of the Maghreb, Sahel, Egypt, and elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East.

There is, of course, a long history of various ethnic groups in Northwest Africa asserting their alleged "chosen" or unique status, especially to empower themselves at the expense of their rivals. In *Le devoir de violence*, Ouologuem parodies the Toucouleur Fulani's claims to ethnic superiority over the Dogon, Bozo, and other Sahelian groups by calling them the "black Jews" of West Africa. As stated previously, the Toucouleur Fulani often assert that they are "black Arabs," rather than the "black Jews," and the descendents of an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. Al Hajj Sékou Tall, for instance, claims that the Fulani are one of the three "white" ethnic groups of West Africa, along with the Arabs and Tuaregs to the North ("The Origins of the Fulani" 15–16). During the colonial era, the French preferred for Fulani chiefdoms to rule over other local groups like the Dogon, partly because they could read and write in Arabic, a language that was already spoken by French colonial administrators. Ouologuem, who is himself of Dogon origin, therefore criticizes the Toucouleur Fulani's claims to exceptional status, by way of their so-called white or Arabic blood, which offered to them obvious political advantages during the colonial era. To this day, the chief of Bandiagara, which is the largest Dogon village in Northern Mali, is a Toucouleur Fulani and descendent of Al Hajj Umar Tall, the nineteenth century jihadist who forcibly converted many Dogon to Islam. This example offers but one small case in point. Important texts like *The Tarîkh al-fettâch* and *The Epic of Askiya Muhammad* show that social dramas surrounding issues of blood, nobility, divine election, and the maternal debt are among the most enduring themes of the cultural documents of Northwest Africa. In *The Epic of Askiya Muhammad*, for instance, the contemporary griot Nouhou Malio suggests that the Songhay Empire of the Askiyas collapses because Soumala Kassaye, the heir of the Askiya Muhammad, marries a slave woman of ignoble blood, who gives birth to a son of "mixed" origins. This act alienates the Songhay nobility, who more conservatively insist that the elite rulers of the Songhay Dynasty must preserve the integrity of their noble blood. Soumala Kassaye's son reveals his own "impurity" by showing his willingness to drink from a bowl of fetid water, not unlike the Abrahamic figure Esau who trades his birthright for a "mess of potage" (*The Epic of Askiya Muhammad* 60). The *Tarîkh al-fettâch* too assumes the a priori "fact" of the blood's nobility; that is, this text affirms the noble status of the Wakuri, or those Songhay who are the ancestors of the founders of the Ghana Empire, who are also described as "not black" (French 78/Arabic 42). What one might call "racism" among the Songhay nobility does not, however, imply an

Aristotelian or European essentialism; hence, references to the Wakuri's "whiteness" may be misleading. Although Aristotle certainly has been read and studied for many centuries throughout Africa and the Middle East, his influence in this respect—not unlike the Islamic theology of the Heavenly Book—is a relatively late historical development, especially in the Sahel zone. The fact remains that the Wakuri's claims to elected status on the basis of the blood that they inherit from their mothers are hardly more attractive than European racial typologies, which divide the diverse peoples of the earth into essentialist categories like Homo-Africanus, Homo-Aegypticus, Homo-Sinicus, and so on.

Derrida's admission that he would like to spend "an eternity" meditating upon exceptionalist articulations of Judaism in *Archive Fever* (76–77), as well as his admitted "taste for death" with respect to Jewish doctrines of the Messiah in *Specters of Marx* (169), are certainly comparable to the Wakuri's power claims to noble birth or blood, as well as the Toucouleur Fulani's historical efforts to gain leverage over the Dogon, Bozo, and Sorkho, or other *négraille* in Ouologuem's famous coinage (*Le devoir de violence* 25). However, claims to elected status, even when deliberately muted or disguised, are unattractive for obvious reasons, especially to those who happen to find themselves penalized for the milk that they drank at their mother's breast (*The Epic of Askiya Mohammed* 60). This is perhaps why Derrida's criticisms of apartheid in South Africa, as well as his various efforts to affiliate himself with fellow Africans, while no doubt welcomed, may not seem terribly courageous or inspirational to some. If Derrida, on the other hand, had spoken with far less reticence about current forms of racism against Sephardic Jews and Israeli Arabs in Israel, as well as the poisonous doctrines of Jewish groups like the Messianic Zionists and the Gush Eminem, it might have lent greater credibility to deconstructive practices within African and Middle Eastern contexts. This is so, for it would have meant that Derrida was also willing to deconstruct Jewish claims to a privileged status. However, I would insist here that such failings on Derrida's part should not prevent his African and Middle Eastern readers, as well as his many admirers in Europe, the United States, from careful study of his many contributions to contemporary critical thought. Though Derrida's political bias in favor of a particular ethnic group may disappoint and even alienate some of his readers, his failings in this respect are a small matter compared to the West's scandalous ignorance of the rich, diverse, and ancient cultures of Africa and the Middle East.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Two significant exceptions are Werner Hamacher's "Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity Language and Derrida's *Specters of Marx*" and Aijaz Ahmad's "Reconciling Derrida: 'Specters of Marx' and Deconstructive Politics" although neither link this question to Derrida's African heritage or political commitments.
2. The term "perverformative" is discussed in Derrida's "Marx & Sons"; also, see Werner Hamacher's "Lingua Amissa."
3. See, for instance, the interview "Bonding in Difference" in *Spivak Reader.*
4. Nations listed were as follows: "China, Russia, Armenia, Poland, Romania, Mexico, Germany, France, the United States, and elsewhere" (*Specters of Marx* ix).
5. In opposition to Handleman, it must be said that Zeus, not Moses, seems to be the more fundamental target for Derrida.
6. See Pacéré's "Saglego: or Drum Poem (For the Sahel)."
7. See Rouch's *La religion et la magie Songhay;* Stoller's *Embodying Colonial Memories, The Taste of Things Ethnographic,* and *Sensuous Scholarship;* and Hale's *Scribe, Griot, Novelist.*

Chapter 2

1. It is worth noting that, since Vatican II, Catholic woman are also no longer required to wear a veil during mass.

Chapter 3

1. Evelyn Shakir, in her book *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (1997), probes this question in her chapter entitled "Color and Religion." "Arab Americans come in a range of colors," Shakir states. "Some are nearly as dark as sub-Saharan Africans, a few are blond and blue-eyed, most—eyes brown, hair dark, skin tending to olive—occupy that middle ground shared by other Mediterranean peoples" (112). In the United States especially, those Arabs who have a "wheaty" phenotype often find it far more difficult to assimilate into American culture, regardless of their religion. A

wheaty phenotype can be a marker of difference that dramatically affects the lives of "Arab" Jews, Christians, and Muslims, a fact that is too seldom acknowledged in the Levantine setting. As Shakir points out, "Dark pigmentation and, especially, dark body hair have traditionally been sources of shame to girls [and boys] growing up in the United States" (112).

2. In this case, Derrida speaks specifically of his love for "pure French" and his lifelong embarrassment over his latent "southern" or "French Algerian" accent. He acknowledges that he is "not proud" of his love for, what he calls, "pure" French, but he acknowledges in this case his embarrassment of his African origins. "It is the only impure 'purity' for which I dare confess a taste. It is a pronounced taste for a certain pronunciation. I have never ceased learning, especially when teaching, to speak softly, a difficult task for a 'pied noir' . . ." (*Monolingualism of the Other* 47).
3. I heard Derrida make this statement during a course he taught at the University of California, Irvine in Spring 1992, entitled The Rhetoric of Cannibalism. I have not been able to locate an exact written equivalent in his various writings.
4. See Hegel's *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings* (New York: Harper & Row Cloister Books, 1961). Also see Derrida's *Glas* and Captuo's "Hegel and the Jews" in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (230–243).
5. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud comments that Jewish circumcision was a "particularly clumsy invention" because it was a rite already in use by millions of Egyptians (54). Freud states: "The fact that circumcision was native to the Egyptians could not possibly have been unknown to the Israelites who created the text of the Bible" (54).
6. See Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1958).
7. The obvious exception is the minority Shia sect (about 20 percent of the global Muslim population), which affirms the elected blood lineage of the Mahdi, who will come from the ancestors of Ali and Fatima (the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad).
8. It is worth noting that the Talmud also refers to Alexander the Great. This reference is cited and discussed in some detail in Emanuel Rice's *Freud and Moses* (18–20).
9. As the anonymous author of the "Manifesto of the Arab Nationalists" wrote in 1932, "Unite then and help one another, and do not say, O ye Muslims: This is a Christian, and this is a Jew, for you are all God's dependents, and religion is for God alone . . . O ye Christians and Jewish Arabs combine with your brethren the Muslim Arabs" ("Announcement to the Arabs" 83–88).
10. One of the most beloved and widely quoted passages of Sufi literature is Ibn 'Arabi's poem "Bewilderment, Love, Madness," which

reads: "I profess the religion of love; / Wherever its caravan turns along the way, / that is the belief, / the faith I keep."

11. It is inconceivable that Derrida could have been unaware that Said wrote extensively on Massignon: in fact, Derrida's lectures on Massignon were delivered in the U.S. university, where Said was a figure of major importance in critical theory.
12. However, many of the Tuareg in the region of the Sahel where Foucauld lived were not Muslim. The Tuareg have increasingly converted to Islam in the last century although a significant number still view Arab Islam as an imperializing force, much like French Catholicism.
13. The spectacular failures of Arab nationalism, especially its Ba'athist articulation, are discussed in my essay "Introduction: Arabism Now," in *Whither Arabism?* Edited by Christopher Wise and Paul James (forthcoming).

Chapter 5

1. Judaism also affirms figurative interpretation of the heart's circumcision. When the human heart becomes hardened, as in the case of the Pharaoh in Exodus, God is implored to "circumcise" or remove the outward shell of the heart of the believer.
2. Richard Popkin and David Katz trace the fascinating history of Messianism in American culture in their *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (1998). Popkin and Katz's study implies the need for further comparative analysis of Messianism in the Occupied Territories and the United States. It also may place Derrida in a kind of unexpected trajectory with figures like Rabbi Kook, David Koresh, Joseph Smith, and Timothy McVeigh.
3. Christians are similarly charged with altering the revealed teachings of "The Prophet Jesus." For instance, when Jesus promises that a "comforter" will be sent in his wake, Muslims believe that Christians either altered or misconstrued his original meaning. This belief is held because the Aramaic word for "Paraclete"—understood by Christians to mean the "Holy Spirit"—is "Ahmed," which is one of the names of Muhammad. The Islamic view generally accords with the critique of the Trinity that pervades the teachings of the Quran.

Chapter 7

1. In his *Moses the Egyptian* (1997), Jan Assman states, "I find the emphasis which Yerushalmi and others have recently laid on Freud's Jewishness somewhat distorting with regard to his position as he constructs it in *Moses and Monotheism*. As far as *Moses and Monotheism* is

concerned, I agree with Peter Gay in seeing Freud more on the side of the *philosophes* than that of the Rabbis" (253).

2. Freud is probably responding to Alan Gardiner's landmark article, "The Egyptian Origin of the Semitic Alphabet," published in 1916, documenting the discovery of the Proto-Sinaitic alphabet, which arguably established a direct link between alphabetic forms of writing in Egypt and more abstract forms of alphabetic literacy that developed in various "Phoenician" locales. Debate about Freud's positing of an Egyptian identity to Moses have obscured the fact that he implies that Jewish peoples, under the leadership of Moses, were the inventors of alphabetic literacy, or at least the less representational form of the alphabetic literacy that developed outside of Egypt.
3. Said devoted a great deal of attention to Adorno in his later writings, especially Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1997). In opposition to the Heideggerian deconstruction of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, Adorno deliberately affirmed an Hegelian-Marxian concept of the subject as a persistent structure that could be sublated, but not dissolved. For more in this regard, see especially Adorno's essay "Subject and Object" in *The Frankfurt School Reader* (497–511).

Chapter 8

1. Leibniz, *The Monadology*, trans. R. Latta, 1951: "The Principle of Sufficient Reason in virtue of which we hold that there can be no fact real or existing, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons usually cannot be known by us" (236).
2. Jacqueline Rose among others has critiqued Derrida's evocation of the feminine as a means of describing this "outside"; Spivak has, however, offered a persuasive defense of Derrida in this regard, while agreeing with some aspects of Rose's critique (in fact, Rose's own critique is based, to some extent, on Spivak's own views). See "Feminism and Deconstruction" in Spivak's *Outside in the Teaching Machine* and Rose's *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986).
3. See John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (London and New York: Penguin: 1972).
4. See Christopher Wise, "The Actuality of Frantz Fanon: Critical Fanonism, Thomas Sankara, and Islamic 'Resurgence,'" in *Arena Journal*, No. 12 (1998): 129–142.
5. The most notable response came in James Clifford's chapter "On Orientalism" in *Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988: 255–276.
6. My formulation is, to some extent, a deliberate oversimplification of Spivak's views, for she also encourages her students to ask not only "who has power in the order of marginality . . . and who is deprived of it . . . But to look rather for the pattern of the modifications which the

relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 59).

7. See Fanon's often-cited reception of this text in *Black Skin, White Masks* (132–134).
8. The "law" that Derrida calls *ananke* or Necessity, and that Spivak refers to as "that which we cannot *not* desire" is obviously subject to the criticism that Derridean deconstruction, like Marxism with its theory of the base-superstructure, may finally offer a kind of economic determinism. Derrida himself would like to suggest that his own view, unlike Marx's in some places, generally escapes becoming a form of idealism, a view that most of his Marxist critics do not accept. In her essay "Ghostwriting," Spivak states that she does not find Derrida's view that Marx was a "closet idealist" to be convincing; but this is an oversimplification of Derrida's criticisms of Marx (hence, Derrida's irritation with Spivak's response to *Specters of Marx*). Both Marx's concept of the economic base and Derrida's statements about *ananke* are articulated within a Greek philosophical tradition, which implies that their writings are in some sense dependent upon the same idealism from which they seek to disassociate themselves. As Jameson might put it, this is the sense in which history itself will extract its vengeance upon all those who imagine that they may completely break with it.

Chapter 9

1. Derrida himself states, "we have deliberately refrained from recourse to 'illustrations' to 'actualize' our analyses or in an attempt to demonstrate their necessity today, by delving into the most spectacular 'news' on political scenes: local, national, European, or worldwide. We have done so through a concern with sobriety: first, we do not want to exploit that which, as it were, screens out reflection by projecting itself with the pathetic and 'sensational' violence of images on to a too easily mediatizable scene. Then again, these examples are in the mind, heart, and imagination of anyone who would be interested in the problems we are dealing with here; such people, let us hope, will have found the path of these mediations by themselves. Lastly, the overabundance of such 'illustrations' would have swamped the least of our sentences . . ." (*Politics of Friendship* 272).
2. Chomsky asserts that, "just from the conditions of moral judgment, I don't see how it can fail to be true that moral values are basically rooted in our nature—I think that must be true . . . [A] serious proposal for such a [moral] system, I think, would be that it might be something like what we know about language—and a lot is known. For example, there is a framework of basic, fundamental principles of language that are invariant in the species, they're just fixed in our biological nature somehow—they hold for all languages, and they allow

for only a very limited degree of modification, which comes from early experience. Then as soon as those wired-in options for variation are fixed, children have a whole linguistic system which allows them to say new things . . . [W]e really don't know what the fundamental principles of moral judgment actually *are*, but we have very good reason to believe they're *there* [Chomsky's emphasis]" (*Understanding Power* 359–360).

3. "Whenever I hear a four-syllable word I get skeptical," Chomsky states, "because I want to make sure you can say it in monosyllables . . . But when I read, you know, Derrida, or Lacan, or Althusser, or any of these—I just don't understand it. It's like words passing in front of my eyes: I can't follow the arguments . . ." (*Understanding Power* 229–231).
4. Freud quickly dismisses the notion that incest dread developed in human society because the "primitive races very soon observe[d] the dangers with which inbreeding threatened their race" (*Totem and Taboo* 161). Instead, Freud argues that, "the harmful consequences of inbreeding are not established beyond all doubt even today and in man they can only be shown with difficulty" (161).
5. Schmitt's critique of pacifism echoes his critique of Marxist-Leninism: "Nothing can escape the logic of the political," he states. "If pacifist hostility toward war were so strong as to drive pacifists into a war against nonpacifists, in a war against war, that would prove that pacifism truly possesses political energy because it is sufficiently strong to group men according to friend and enemy. If, in fact, the will to abolish war is so strong that it no longer shuns war, then it has become a political motive . . ." (*The Concept of the Political* 36).
6. For instance, on April 18, 2006, Bush stated, regarding the future tenure of embattled Pentagon chief Donald Rumself: "I listen to all voices, but mine is the final decision. And Don Rumsfeld is doing a fine job. He's not only transforming the military, he's fighting a war on terror. He's helping us fight a war on terror. I have strong confidence in Don Rumsfeld. I hear the voices, and I read the front page, and I know the speculation. But I'm the decider, and I decide what is best." Bush made similar statements with regard to his role in escalating troop involvement in the war in Iraq in fall 2007.
7. In a letter written by Heidegger to Schmitt, whom Heidegger recruited to teach at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger appreciatively cites Schmitt's use of Heraclitus's Fragment 53, "War is the father of all things, the king of all things. Some he proves to be gods, others men; some he makes slaves, others free" (see "Heidegger and Schmitt: The Bottom Line" 153).
8. Also, see Derrida's *Ear of the Other* (115–116).
9. Derrida's choice of the term "laic subjectivity" is certainly curious. The word "laic" comes from the Latin *laicus* and Greek *laiko*, meaning "of the people." In the Christian West, it is of course opposed to

the word "clergy," or one who has taken holy orders. It should be noted that, within the Islamic context, where there are no actual clergy, the concept of the laic is certainly problematic. In fact, despite his insistence that the term "secularity" is a religious terms, which is why he assiduously avoids it, Derrida would probably have done better to use the term "secular" in this context, which is less obviously Christian than the term laic.

Chapter 10

1. Gadamer states, "In general, I do not hold etymologies to be of such great importance. Neither Heidegger nor Derrida has yet succeed in convincing me that an etymology can tell us something important if what is uncovered does not somehow continue to speak to us in the living language of today. This is the case even if the etymology is correct, whatever 'correct' may mean in this context" ("Dialogues in Capri" 200–201).
2. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida states, "In a sense, nothing is untranslatable; but *in another sense*, everything is untranslatable; translation is another word for the impossible [Derrida's emphasis]" (56–57).
3. In another passage that is unusual enough to merit citation, Caputo interprets Isaiah 29:14; "Therefore I will again deal with this people in surprising and wondrous fashion: The wisdom of the wise men shall perish and the understanding of its prudent men be hid" as "I will deconstruct the metaphysics of presence of the strong onto-theologians, sayeth the Lord God" (*The Weakness of God* 47–48).
4. In effect, Derrida suggests that Heidegger is unconsciously Christian, for instance, citing an early letter of Heidegger's, written in 1921, where Heidegger states: "I am a 'Christian theologian'" (*Acts of Religion* 94). The implication is that Heidegger, like Derrida, has his own "secret" religious faith, which Derrida wishes to reveal. Derrida qualifies his suggestion by stating that "[Heidegger's] declaration would merit extended interpretation and certainly does not amount to a simple declaration of faith" (94). However, Derrida states that it doesn't exclude this possibility either. To put it crudely, Derrida wants to suggest that Heidegger is a Christian version of himself. This is probably why Derrida is troubled when Heidegger asserts that "belief *in general* has no place in the experience or the act of thinking *in general* [Derrida's emphasis]" (95). Derrida is alarmed at Heidegger's refusal to affirm a transcendental theology of the pledge. Against Heidegger's more agnostic refusal to explicitly affirm any particular Abrahamic religion, Derrida's writings on the vow imply a specifically Jewish theology of the Abrahamic covenant, which Derrida wants his readers to understand is a matter of "universal" truth (rather than religious faith).

5. In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2005), Derrida makes this point most explicit when he states, "Heideggerian deconstruction (*Destruktion*) never really opposed logocentrism or even *logos*. Indeed it is often, on the contrary, in the name of a more 'originary' reinterpretation of logos that it carried out the deconstruction of classical ontology or ontotheology . . . I have recalled in several places that the theme and word *Destruktion* designated in Luther a desedimentation of instituted theology (one could also say ontotheology) in the service of a more originary truth of Scripture. Heideigger was obviously a great reader of Luther. But despite my enormous respect for this great tradition, the deconstruction that concerns me does not belong, in any way, and this is more than obvious, to the same filiation. It is precisely this difference that I attempt, although not without difficulty, to be sure, to articulate" (173–174).

Chapter 11

1. The texts above in some sense form an arbitrary list, given the wealth of documents from the Sahel that one might cite, both from the early Islamic period (i.e., as far back as a thousand years ago) and the present, to which one might make reference in supporting the argument presented here. It is scandalous how little is known about the unread texts of Northwest Africa in Europe, the United States, the Arab world, and even across Africa itself. The work of restoring, cataloguing, and digitalizing the copious manuscripts of Timbuktu, Ouâdane, Chinguetti, Kano, Djenné, and other important archival sites has hardly begun, much less their translation into English, as well as annotation, and careful study. Some of these texts are written in Arabic, some in Ajami (an African language with an Arabic alphabet), and some are even written in European languages like Greek and Spanish. However, the *Tarîkh al-Sudan* and *Tarîkh al-fettâch* are texts that have been known in Europe for more than a hundred years now, although they have only recently been translated into the English language. John Hunwick recently translated the *Tarîkh al-Sudan* into English; Hala Abu Taleb and I are also currently preparing an English language translation of *The Tarîkh al-fêttach*. In the case of the Mande epic of the cultural hero Sundiata Keita, which is also well known outside the region, I refer readers to John Williams Johnson's accessible transcription of Fa-Digi Sisòko's version of the tale of the famous founder of the Mande empire. Thomas Hale also recently transcribed Nouhou Malio's version of the Songhay epic of "Mamar Kassaye" under the title of *The Epic of Askiya Muhmmad* (1996). Also see Hale's comparative study *Scribe, Griot, Novelist* (1990), where this epic first appeared.
2. Scholars of Sahelian West Africa, from both inside and outside the region, have argued that the ancient culture of this region has remained

relatively unaffected by both French Catholic and Arab Islamic incursions in the region. For further information in this regard, see Thomas Hale and Paul Stoller's "Oral Art, Society, and Survival in the Sahel Zone"; Roderick J. and Susan McIntosh's "The Inland Niger Delta Before the Empire of Mali: Evidence from Jenne-Jeno" and "Finding Jenne-Jeno, West Africa's Oldest City"; and Joseph Paré and Christopher Wise's "Introduction: The Land of the Blood-Boiling Sun." While Hale and Stoller invoke the concept of "deep Sahelian culture" in discussing this ancient and non-Abrahamic culture, Paré and R.E.L.I.S. (Réseau d'Etudes Littéraires Sahéliennes, or Network for the Study of Sahelian Literatures) scholars have endorsed the concept of *sahelité* (or sahelity).

3. In *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, Caputo states as follows, "Nothing guarantees that an argument that appeals to us in no small part because it is impudent, unorthodox, and de-centering will not come undone from the sheer pressure of traditional scholarship. From what I can judge, the jury appears to be in and the verdict is bad for Bernal's delicious suggestion [that Athena was black] (it would have driven Heidegger over the edge!). Indeed, had Athena/Neith hailed from Egypt at all, as the myth at the beginning of the *Timaeus* suggests—which not a lot of scholars believe—she would be at best a little on the swarthy side, like St. Augustine, not a sub-Saharan Nubian" (88). The trial that Caputo stages in this footnote makes clear that he has not even bothered to read Bernal's study, even as he endorses the so-called verdict against Bernal. For instance, if he had, he would have known that Bernal himself was ambivalent about the title of his book, or that the question of Athena's "blackness" is not what is really at stake.
4. Thomas Hare's *Re-Membering Osiris* (1999) offers the first sustained critical effort to apply poststructuralist theory to ancient Egyptian forms of representation. As Hare points out, Egyptology as a discipline has not really assimilated the lessons of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida although Eric Hornung in particular has made some efforts in this direction, particularly in theorizing the problem of nonbeing in the thought of the ancient Egyptians (see Hornung's now classic text *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* [1982]). Note also that Geoff Bennington has posed the question of Derrida's possible "Egyptian" heritage in his playful essay "Mosaic Fragment: What if Derrida were an Egyptian . . ." (1994).
5. See Jan Assman's *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (96–97).
6. In West Africa today, it is considered a blessing to eat out of the same bowl as a devout marabout (or Muslim "holy man") as a means of gaining some his *barakah* from him. Johnson suggests that, in this context, the Islamic notion of *barakah* is interchangeable with the Mande word *nyama* (*The Epic of Son-Jara* 9).
7. The Quran evokes this miracle of Jesus to illustrate why the Prophet Muhammad refused to perform similar miracles. The Quran states that those who disbelieved in Jesus's prophet vocation asserted this

miracle was nothing "but plain sorcery." This passage in the Quran is important, for it offers yet more evidence of the early Islamic rejection of Judaic, Egyptian, and other forms of pre-Abrahamic "magic." As te Veldt points out, the Egyptian word *heka* also persists in the Egyptian Coptic version of the Book of Acts of the New Testament in reference to Simon Magnus, the sorcerer who sought to buy the gifts of the holy spirit with money in the mistaken belief that the apostles performed a new form of sorcery that he too wished to learn (Acts 8:11–12). See te Veldt (176).

8. For more in this regard, see my article "Nyama and Heka: African Concepts of the Word."
9. Besides Al Hajj Mahmud Kâti's *The Tarîkh al-fettâch*, the best available resource on this history is John Hunwick's recent study *Jews of a Saharan Oasis*.
10. See Patrick R. McNaughton's *The Mande Blacksmiths* (1988), Thomas Hale's *Scribe, Griot, Novelist: Narrative Interpreters of the Songhay Empire* (1990) and *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (1998), Stephen Belcher's *Epic Traditions of Africa* (1999), and Barbara G. Hoffman's *Griots At War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande* (2001). One might also cite the work of anthropologists such as Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen, Jean Rouch, Paul Stoller, and others, all of whom have documented the vitality of occult religious systems in the Sahel today. Numerous West African writers have similarly attested to the persistence of ancient Sahelian beliefs about the word, such as Titinga Frederic Pacéré, Cheikh Anta Diop, El Hadj Sékou Tall, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Hawad, to cite only a few emblematic figures.
11. In both the *Tarîkh al-fettâch* and the *Epic of Askiya Muhammad*, the mother of the Askiya Muhammad is identified as Kassaye, who is also the central figure in Songhay sorcery religions of the Sahel. For further information regarding contemporary cult practices associated with Kassaye, see Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes' *In Sorcery's Shadow* (1987).
12. The most important site associated with sorcery practices among the Songhay of Gao is the Rose Dunes, the same island located not from the capitol where the Askiya Muhammad was banished for many years by the son who overthrew him.
13. See my discussion of Tidjaniya rites in "Yambo Ouologuem Among the Tidjaniya."
14. One example is Father Joseph Henry, a nineteenth-century Catholic missionary, who described *nyama* as a kind of "Satanic fluid." See Henry's *L'âme d'un peuple africain: Les Bambara*, which was published in 1910. It goes without saying that Sahelian views of *nyama*, as true of ancient Egyptian views of *heka*, long predate the emergence of Satanism cults, which are historically linked to the Abrahamic religions.

15. Although Freud rejects Jung's hypothesis of the "collective unconscious," he nonetheless comes close to endorsing a concept of an "inborn mental residue of primeval times" in *Moses and Monotheism* (170). Freud's hypothesis in this regard is no more compelling than Jung's.
16. See Jameson's "The State of the Subject" (22).

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