DECONSTRUCTION IS AMERICA;
OR, DERRIDA'S EMPIRE

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"Algeria was never occupied."[1]

Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*

•1. Who Reads Derrida Anyway?

•1.1

I want to begin by asking three questions about the philosophy of Jacques Derrida that I don't think have ever been adequately addressed.

My first question goes back to something that Jacques Rancière said in an interview around the year 2000. I should note first that Rancière is one of the great unacknowledged Derrideans, a philosopher whose core arguments often work by transposing into a directly political key positions that Derrida was taking in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Derrida is typically thought to have taken an ethico-political turn late in his life, but much of the interest of Rancière's project lies in how effortlessly he devises an emancipatory or radically democratic program just by epitomizing the lessons of the supposedly pre-political Derrida. Rancière's writings on aesthetics have been a boon to the many of us who

had been thinking all along that deconstruction could stand to be quite a bit more than vulgar than it was, though I don't think anyone could have predicted that it would be Rancière who would be keeping Derrida's thought in front of us even after the latter's death in 2004, or that deconstruction would survive into the present mostly in this post-Maoist vulgate, weaponized and *plump*.

Here, then, is Derrida on the whetstone. In an interview published as "The Distribution of the Sensible," Rancière is asked to explain how novels and plays and maybe paintings can assist in the struggle against a managerial pseudo-politics. How does art equip us against the administered society? The first point to understand, Rancière responds, is that literature is not speech. It is important, indeed, to resist speech as celebrated by Plato, because the spoken word establishes fixed identities and fixed spaces. If you celebrate speech as opposed to writing, it's because you want to know at all times who you are talking to and where you both are. Conversation to that extent always has a kind of police function, allowing me to visually ID my auditors and thus generating the position of the appropriate addressee   language meant for some persons and not others.   Speech is language under surveillance. But write out that same language on a page (or elsewhere) and everything changes. Script and the printed text don't try to pin anyone down, establishing instead a "regime"   really a non-regime   "based in the indetermination of identities, the delegitimation of positions of speech, the deregulation of partitions of space and time." We often think of language as best when it is living and intimate: words spoken to a lover, arguments shared around a seminar table, the poet we finally get to hear read her works out loud. But it is Derrida's signature argument, here adapted by Rancière, that language is never really intimate in

these ways   that it is always adrift, separated at once from the person who speaks or writes it, from the person to whom it is addressed, and from the things in the world that it putatively names. The words you speak and write aren't really yours; nor can you ever be sure they will carry the meanings you intend them to have; nor can you guarantee that they will reach the people for whom they were devised, or that they will reach only them. Derrida's core claim is that this is nothing to worry about   that, on the contrary, a liberated philosophy will have to keep faith with a language thus unfixed. Rancière's way of getting at this   and this is the formulation that deserves our close attention   is to ask us to consider the "equality that comes to pass on a written page, available as it is to everyone's eyes."[2]

Writing is egalitarian and radically democratic because anyone can look at it. If I point out now that the premise of this claim is incorrect   that not everyone has the seeing eyes to pore over a printed page   then it immediately becomes unclear how to assess deconstruction in this form. You don't have to feel outrage on behalf of the blind to feel that there is a problem here. Knowing that blind people exist, and presuming that Rancière knows about them, too, how are we to assess his claim? If it can't mean what it says   "available to everyone's eyes"   then what does it mean instead? And while we're at it, what is the status in the vaunted critique of phonocentrism of people whose lives are for whatever reason sound-centered?   people, in the first instance, who don't read, a group that would include most blind people, since current estimates indicate that fewer than one in ten ever bother to learn Braille. You might be tempted to shrug off the problem as negligible, by declaring the three to four percent of the population who are in some sense or another blind irrelevant to the project

of deconstruction, but then your impatience would suggest the magnitude of the problem, which is that deconstruction, in order to preserve the conceit of its "everyone," has to declare some people extraneous to its program.

But then why are we talking about blind people? Rancière almost certainly isn't referring to eyesight. He's not talking about the freedom that comes into being when we look at a written page; he's talking about the freedom that comes into being when we *read* one, and interpretive charity would demand that we not parse his words with this exasperating literalness. What is at stake in deconstruction is not the freedom of the sighted, but the freedom of readers. *The written page is available to everyone's eyes, and what they do with those eyes is read*. But then, of course, this revised claim is even harder to defend than the first. Interpretive charity only aggravates the issue. A philosopher might just about get away with the claim that anyone can look at writing not strictly true, but true-ish. It is, however, ridiculous to claim that everyone can read the writing that they (almost) all see. A few numbers will bring the problem into focus: Current estimates suggest that roughly one in five adults in the US are functionally illiterate, meaning that they cannot without assistance perform the readerly tasks that a bureaucratic society routinely expects of them. So what is *their* status in deconstruction? But then Rancière is actually presuming higher literacy the paragraph in question is mostly about Flaubert, so he has to be premising his claim on people who can read nineteenth-century novels in which case the percentage of adults in the US eliminated from his "everyone" rises to roughly seventy-five percent. What we'll want to take away from this the starting-point, I would offer, of any clear thinking about Derrida and the Derrideans is that deconstruction has secreted away

within itself, as its precondition, a major historical event, which is the arrival of mass literacy in Western Europe and the United States after 1850, which event it then daintifies into the fiction of a universal literacy: *Writing is available to everyone*.[3]

But then rather than write off Rancière's argument as a pious mistake, it would be more revealing to consider the ways in which it is inconsistently right. The easiest way to bring historical thinking to bear upon deconstruction would be to point out that it was closer to the truth in 2000 than it had been in 1800. That's what it might mean to say that deconstruction's claims are covertly historical   that they require a France that has existed in some centuries, maybe two, but not in most. And then, of course, the point would have to be repeated in a geographical register: Deconstruction is truer in some places than it is in others plausible in those places (and only in those places) where one can just about say that *everyone has access to writing*. A philosophy, then, for Seattle and Minneapolis, but less so for Long Beach, CA or Mesa, AZ; for Norway and Finland, but not for Niger or Afghanistan. The claims of deconstruction realize themselves unevenly upon the planet.

When Derrida offers his own version of Rancière's argument in "Plato's Pharmacy," his English-language translator assigns him the word "anyone" rather than "everyone." "Isn't writing … essentially democratic? … ready to do anything, to lend [itself] to anyone." One wonders whether that switch matters from "everyone" to "anyone." Derrida is doing something complicated here. He has been calling attention to the ways in which speech, unlike writing, is radically localized (or can be readily mistaken as such); it is uttered and sprangles briefly, just

here, within earshot, and then vanishes. His point is that the permanence of writing — the ability of language once written to live on as a kind of object — makes it impossible to localize in this fashion, hence impossible to control. Writing will tend to travel, especially in the print marketplace (which thereby reveals itself as deconstruction's second great historical object, alongside mass literacy), and so find its way into new situations, unenvisioned by its authors, where it will be read in ways that these could not have anticipated and are powerless to countermand. Derrida's way of putting this is to say that writing is "errant … wandering … uprooted … unattached to any house or country." A drifter, a hobo, a train-jumper, homeless…[4]

At the same time, and as an extension of this point, Derrida is arguing that this writing-on-the-move cannot tell a reader what it means. No text can comment learnedly on itself, sparing the reader the labor of interpretation, since any self-commentary will re-join the text upon which it remarks, as text, and so require interpretation in its own right. Your favorite book will never pull you to one side and obligingly say something other than what it said the first time you read it — something fresh, something less oblique and roundabout: *OK, you want me to break it down for you*? Most saliently, no text can tell you what lies before or behind its own writing. If a book were a person, we would say of him that "he doesn't even know who he is, what his identity — if he has one — might be, what his name is, what his father's name is. He repeats the same thing every time he is questioned on the street corner, but he can no longer repeat his origin."[5] Not just a homeless person, then, but a crazed and amnesiac homeless person.

There's more. Derrida is also interested in the ability of writing to outlive its authors, and what's distinctive about his position is that he thinks of this ability not as an extension of an author's powers into posterity, a major poet's claim upon the future, but only as further evidence of how little control a given author had to begin with. Writing inevitably leaves authors behind, projecting itself into scenarios where they simply cannot follow. His way of putting this is to say that the death of the author is implicit in all writing—that a patch of language cannot count as writing if it ceases to be intelligible upon its author's death—and that it, by contrast, is the creature that *will not die*, a thing "not completely dead: the living dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath."[6] A zombie, in short—a homeless, crazed, and amnesiac zombie.

This brings us back to the "anyone." *Writing is essentially democratic, ready to do anything, to lend itself to anyone.* If en reprise you hear a certain erotics in this last phrase, that's only as it should be: Writing, as praised by deconstruction, is nothing if not game—slutty, DTF and not just sometimes, "giving itself equally to all pleasures" while "wandering in the streets."[7] Here's the puzzle: The subject of deconstruction is simultaneously the person capable of reading *A Sentimental Education*, bizarrely misrendered as *l'homme universel*, and this homeless, crazed, and amnesiac zombie-whore, not easily mistaken for a librarian or associate professor of Romance languages. And yet perhaps this position is less ambiguous than I've just made it sound, provided we realize that what's being named here as "the subject of deconstruction" is not, in fact, a single position, but rather two distinct positions—the co-subjects of deconstruction: the reader plus (an anthropomorphized) writing, though it would be

important to recognize that we-who-are-now-reading remain in the dominant position. We are precisely not the zombie-whore; we are the ones who indifferently fuck the nameless runaway. Still, even though writing thus allegorized is not a generalizable type — not an image of universal humanity, since most of us live in homes and deny ourselves at least some pleasures — it (he? probably she?) nonetheless re-stages the claim to universality in precisely the terms that Rancière will take over, as the wanton's promise of universal access. Radical democracy means never getting to say no.

The word "anyone" promises a lack of discrimination — writing will open itself to anyone and most certainly to us, the anonymous johns of écriture — and this is what can make it sound like a Jacobin term, the pronoun of the democratic revolutions, their promise of capoyarchy or rule-by-who-knows?. And yet the word "anyone" at the same time insinuates limitations, and this in two different ways. It is almost always spoken over atop contextual assumptions, referring back to an established set, whose members one is declaring equivalent for some particular purpose. "Anyone" usually means "any member of the relevant group, which I don't need to spell out to you." This is a limitation that also afflicts "everyone," which tends to be contextually bound in just this way: "Everyone" rarely means *tous le monde*, but then neither does *tous le monde*. It's just that the word "anyone" introduces a further limitation that it doesn't share with "everyone," which we can flush out simply by making them the subjects of the same sentence: You ask, "Who do you want at the party?" And I might respond: "I don't care. Everyone can come." But then I might respond: "I don't care. Anyone can come." That I don't care is the coin of my democratic indifference; it is what makes me the sans-culottes of this weekend's festivity. But if I say the latter — that

"anyone can come"   I probably mean any subset of what was already an implicitly bounded group, any thirty of some possible hundred, but not everybody. The sentence "anyone can come" might even house the concession that we don't have room for everybody, that if *everybody* came, we would run out of gin. Not everybody, but anybody.

So that leads to my first question, which is: What do we make of deconstruction's claim that writing is available to anyone? Or that literature is? And that question, once asked, generates at least two additional, closely related variants:

Can anyone be a Derridean?

Can everyone?

•1.2

When a Derridean says that *everyone has access to writing*, part of the problem is conceptual, but part of the problem is more rudimentary than that, hence more nagging, since in that claim we find our first indication that deconstruction invites us to believe things that are not true. Here's another: A moment's reflection should be enough to show that a contempt for writing simply is not the hallmark of the entire Western intellectual tradition. If you've read around in deconstruction, you have been told repeatedly that it is   you have been told that we must rally to writing, that we must rescue it from an almost universal opprobrium   and if you have come to accept that idea through sheer repetition, it might be worth pausing to consider again whether you actually take it to be accurate. So ask yourself: Do our most widely shared intellectual traditions train us to distrust

writing? The point isn't entirely far-fetched. It seems true enough that scholars working in the modern academic disciplines do not like having to contend with their own writing practices; they would prefer not to consider their writing *as* writing or to acknowledge what we might for the sake of convenience call the literary features of their output. Historians don't like to be told that they are arranging the data of the past into well established narrative genres or that these genres determine what they write at least as much as whatever they last photocopied in the archives. Chemists and physicists don't like to be shown that something in their prose remains stubbornly figurative and non-formalizable. No-one, scholar or not, much likes to consider the ways in which the words with which we make sense of the world are artificial fictional, if you like, or poetic   that words are contrivances for endlessly fabricating distinctions where there were none, all of which could and eventually will be different. It is perhaps a bit peculiar to call this bundle of verbal anxieties "the suppression of writing," but the anxieties surely exist, and it is useful to call them something.

But then maybe that formulation "the suppression of writing" isn't just peculiar. Maybe it's worse. Derrida's readings of Plato, Rousseau and Husserl are all, taken serially, quite convincing, as is his grand re-staging of the old Hegelian idea that everything is mediated and nothing directly given. The question in front of us is whether these readings add up to the insight that Plato and Rousseau are the *representative* figures in European philosophy, that everything in Western metaphysics, including the ordinary language infiltrated by that metaphysics, defaults back to the banishment of the poets. And if we give in to the idea that in some sense or another Westerners just can't deal with

writing, then how do we account for the scripturalism of most Christian churches, or for the writerliness of the old humanist, grammar-school curriculum, or for the centrality of ancient languages to the nineteenth-century European university? It was the innovation, in fact, of twentieth-century linguistics to stick up for the study of spoken language against what the new discipline saw as centuries of overweening textualism the obsession of Orientalists and classicists with the scribal cultures of antiquity. Grammatology, which Derrida presented as a new science struggling to be born, is perhaps better grasped as the disguise assumed by a refurbished philology, whose authority it attempts to restore. And what of bureaucracy, as both word and social form? Would a society that had comprehensively disempowered writing need a term that meant "rule by writing desk"? Of course, the very word, which has always been an epithet, could itself be understood as an instance of Europe's deep contempt for writing as further evidence of our collective determination to shame writers and writing whenever they become powerful. So am I meant to give up, as logocentric, the critique of bureaucracy? Is deconstruction a bureauphilia?

And what, finally, of the great ideologies of civilization? It's enough to round up some commonplaces on the topic: "The invention of writing was one of the great advances in civilization." "Whereas historians argue on what exactly civilization is, writing, cities, agriculture, government, religion and art are usually on the list." Online, you can cue up a lecture course on "Writing and Civilization," though you may not need to if you've already worked through the dozen or so webpages grouped under "Writing and the Development of Civilization." If, conversely, you can't be bothered, you might download and sign your name to a college

essay called "Writing and the Rise of Civilization." The word "civilization" is paired so often with the word "writing" that it can seem to absorb this other into itself, referring not just to the cities of its etymology, or to the making urbane of once unsettled places, but also to text and the expansion into new territories of scroll, book, or document. But then does this latter   grammification, we might call it, or scriptification   really have nothing to do with Western metaphysics? Do we really think that European intellectual traditions need to be called to account for having placed *insufficient* emphasis on civilization-which-is-to-say-writing? If writing is the opposite of metaphysics, and writing and civilization are closely linked, then does that mean that civilization, too, is un-metaphysical and so exempt from deconstructive scrutiny? If you find yourself answering no to these questions, then you might be coming round to the idea that Derrida, by sticking up in some general way for writing, can't have been attacking Western metaphysics, if such a thing exists, which I doubt.[8]

At this point, if not sooner, the learned Derridean interrupts to object that this simply isn't what Derrida meant   that when he offered his theory of *écriture*, he wasn't talking about writing in any of its accepted senses and certainly not in this Babylonian one, that deconstruction has no interest in that Victorian progression from cuneiform to hieroglyphics to ancient Hebrew (or "Phoenician" or "West Semitic") and onto the Greek alphabet. When deconstruction speaks of "writing," it doesn't mean what Derrida used to call "writing in the narrow sense," but something like the unfixed quality of all language, the tendency of language to head out in all directions in the way that mass mailings paradigmatically do. And when it speaks of the suppression of

writing, it means the tendency of most language, including most written language, to pretend that it is more stable and transparent than it actually is. Deconstruction might indeed wish to rescue writing, or bring it out into the open, but only in this second, wholly specialized sense. To this one can only respond that the word "writing" is a truly terrible way of making that point, depending as it does on a sharp break with ordinary usage that the Derridean is condemned to explain and re-explain and explain again. Deconstruction is the philosophy that licenses a permanent and predictable confusion between the usual meanings of the word "writing" and what the Derrideans, when pressed, will tell you they mean by it. It is that system of thought that allows a defense of civilization to hitch a ride on what it insists is at one level only a defense of Mallarmé and Joyce. The Derrideans cannot reasonably expect us to bracket out the everyday associations that accompany their master term. Hence my second question: Derrida says that we People of the Book are the ones who repress writing. But we don't repress writing. So who are deconstruction's real targets?

•1.3

A third question: What would it take to remain faithful to deconstruction now, when Derrida is being read less and less, when his name has in large part vanished from the bibliographies and syllabi? How does one set about being a Derridean after Derrida? This is in the first instance an uncomplicated question about the specificity of Derrida's procedures. How do thinking people even know that they are Derrideans (and not, say, Levinasians or Heideggerians)? Why might a person insist still on

reading Derrida, rather than one of the several thinkers that his thought to some degree resembles? Among the many benefits of the disbanding of post-structuralism as an intellectual formation has been a certain opportunity it affords. With even radical philosophers largely de-cathected from the ideologeme of "Theory," it has been easier to insist on the distinctive features of each of the many philosophical (and anti-philosophical) projects that had been indiscriminately indexed under that name. Now might be the time to disaggregate deconstruction from the period when every English-speaking graduate student in literature was producing vaguely Marxist, Barthes-loving, Lacano-Derridean analyses of discipline and the simulacrum.

This turns out to be harder than it sounds. The difficulty is that Derrida really does share most of his positions with other philosophers. The indistinct borders of deconstruction weren't just the flattening effect of including it in intro courses and literary-theory anthologies. Nearly every argument that one associates with deconstruction could be assigned to other theorists, and not just piecemeal, but as an ensemble. This obstacle has a name, in fact, which is Adorno. Deconstruction so often presents itself as a replay of negative dialectics that one can legitimately wonder whether having mastered the intricacies of the one, it's worth the effort to read up on the other. Having gone to the trouble to learn Swedish, are you going to bother studying Norwegian?

Here, then, is the biography of a much taught twentieth-century theorist, a Jew whose life was thrown into turmoil by World War II, and who performed much of the philosophical invention for which he is best known in the United States, first

on the east coast, but mostly, having followed a colleague west, in California.

-The philosopher begins his career by writing a dissertation about Husserl, in which thesis he demonstrates that phenomenology was premised on the fantasy of an impossible immediacy, a determination perhaps dishonest, certainly doomed to coax thought into shedding its unsheddable mediations and via that shedding to recover some naked and pre-theoretical term. This work on Husserl will furnish the argument to which the philosopher's later essays obsessively return the idea, to wit, that there is always something in thought which disrupts its seeming immediacy, its claim to have successfully seized the world in language.

-He goes on to propose, as a counter to this philosophy of spurious immediacy, a method by which students would insert themselves into established intellectual systems in order to "dismantle" them from the inside, a dismantling that promises to open any given philosophy to its other, thereby unleashing "the multiplicity of the different," releasing this latter from "the compulsive character of logic" or *logos*. The theorist, unsure now whether he wants to even go by the name "philosopher," calls for a new intellectual commitment to the particular, the specific, and the singular, though on the understanding that one will never be able to hold on to such non-concepts in language, that they will always elude the language we bring to bear upon them.[9]

-At the same time, the no-longer-philosopher proposes a radical ethics to accompany this program of dismantling: an ethics of non-identity anchored, first, in the giving of gifts-beyond-exchange, in gifts understood as the practice of singularity or the

incommensurable; anchored, second, in radical hospitality or the welcoming of "the guest who comes from afar," of finding "joy in utmost distance," of the menacing stranger who, observed a second time, is "transfigured into a rescuing angel"; and anchored, third, in the nebulous messianism already suggested by that last phrase   in the possibility, that is, of a great Event that we can do nothing to bring about.[10]

The conundrum, of course, is that this biography, not all that skeletal, could serve equally well for Derrida or Adorno; the language I've just quoted is all Adorno's, but equivalent formulations could be supplied for Derrida and nothing else would have to change.[11] And it's not clear that those verbal substitutions would matter much. The puzzle of this one-size-fits-both vita is compounded when we discover each philosopher's master term in the other's writing. The surprise of finding Adorno talking about deconstructing logical compulsion in 1966 is matched by the surprise of finding Derrida expounding on the doctrine of non-identity in 1968. The term "deconstruction" is usually thought of as an adaptation of Heidegger's *Destruktion*, which was the older philosopher's word for the work of clearing away the accrued meanings of ordinary language's most metaphysically overloaded locutions. But Adorno's *demontieren* means "to disassemble," "dismount," or "deinstall," and is, unlike *Destruktion*, not easily misinterpreted to mean "obliterate" or "lay waste." That's enough to place it quite a bit nearer to "deconstruction." And yet the real interest of the word lies elsewhere. For the German language does offer a native synonym to the Latinate *demontieren* (or *Demontage*, its more common noun form)   and that would be *abbauen*, literally to "de-build" or "de-construct." But in the 1940s and '50s, the word *Demontage* took on

some specific political associations in Germany, where it referred to the dismantling of German factories and the reallocation of heavy machinery to the Allies, mostly to the Soviets. It is a word, then, that when Adorno was writing carried strong associations with reparations and de-militarization, and his use of that term invites us to regard negative dialectics as the extension into philosophy of those projects: as restitution and the planned de-industrialization of thought, a Potsdam Agreement for the *Ding an sich*.[12]

Derrida, meanwhile, places deconstruction in the service of what he, no less than Adorno, calls "non-identity." What you'll want to notice is that Adorno's term sometimes appears in Derrida's writing in the spot where you had been expecting to see "differance." The ibis-headed man who delivered writing to the Egyptians asks to be understood as "the god of non-identity," because writing properly understood is a matter not of fixed things stably named, but of "nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance." Readers will have to learn to spot a given text's "non-identity with itself," and in doing so they will have begun to resist "the raging quest for identity" that otherwise pervades thought. Deconstruction is an ongoing lesson in "not giving in to proximity or identification."[13] It has become common in the scholarship to refer to Adorno's thinking as "the philosophy of non-identity," but that's a term he should by all rights have to share with Derrida. A common commitment to non-identity offers to render the two identical.

Nor do the affinities end there. If it is one kind of surprise to find Adorno and Derrida swapping their keywords, it is another kind of surprise to find them collectivizing even their more local

word-choices and passing claims. Adorno published his essay "Heliotrope" in 1955; Derrida published "The Flowers of Rhetoric: The Heliotrope" in 1971.[14] Here's Adorno in translation: "The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder" that objects in *ihrem Begriff nicht aufgehen*, they don't melt into their concepts like pedestrians into a crowd; they don't go up in conceptual smoke; they don't evanesce. Derrida, meanwhile, agrees with the proposition that "the *Logos* can never englobe everything. There is always something which escapes, something different, other and opaque which refuses to be totalized into a homogeneous entity."[15] Or again, the most infamous sentence in *Minima Moralia* declares that "Homosexuality is totalitarian." You can imagine that the queer theorists have made a habit of going after that one; it can seem like Exhibit A for anyone arguing that homophobia lurks at the heart even of one's most emancipation-minded allies. It has often been necessary to explain that Adorno, at least, was making an impeccably queer point: If you embrace a radical ethics of non-identity and alterity, then you have no choice but fret about the possibility that homosexuality is a "desire for the same." The etymology alone has got to make you wonder. You can't frame an erotic practice as "homosexuality" and not face the philosophical baggage of the "homo-". And it seems clear enough that some man-loving subcultures, though never many, have been premised on the exclusion of both women and femininity, hence on the exaggerated and obligatory machismo of the clone, &c, which from a queer-Adornian perspective we would have to object to as a kind of identity-love. And so we pick up Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* and find him arguing in just these terms that

logocentrism's drive for purity is incarnated by "the essential and essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality."[16]

We can describe the problem in front of us a few different ways. It's all a bit flummoxing. Most of what we know as deconstruction, the arguments that have been reported to us as its core tenets, are actually re-statements of Adornian positions. Book-length primers on Derrida can cover a lot of ground and barely even begin to explain ideas that are specific to their chosen philosopher. So again: What would it mean in the present to stay loyal to Derrida, singularly and precisely Derrida? Or if you prefer: What are the positions that you can derive from deconstruction that you can't reach as readily via negative dialectics? We already know enough to say that these distinctively Derridean positions won't be the ones you probably filiate to his name. It will be other positions   the precepts of an un-discussed Derrideanism. So what is that other deconstruction?

Those, then, are my three questions: Can anyone and everyone be a Derridean? Who are deconstruction's true adversaries   who or what is it out to discredit, if not Western metaphysics? And what does it mean to be a Derridean rather than a generic post-structuralist or negative dialectician? Those queries are most expediently posed together for the simple reason that they all have the same answer; or that the answer to each opens up onto the others'; or that the answer to the second question, in particular, will make answers #1 and #3 fall into place. If we can figure out who Derrida took to be his real rivals rather than his official ones, then we will know who is not welcome in deconstruction, which we will then be able to distinguish from theoretical programs that do not share those enemies.

•2. THE DECONSTRUCTIVE UNIVERSAL

•2.1

Whether or not you take to deconstruction has always had a lot to do with how you feel about universals in any of that word's related senses: how you feel, for one, about metaphysical universals, abstract characteristics shared by individual objects or persons; but also how you feel about universals in some distinctively Hegelian sense, master categories and higher abstractions, as opposed to secondary categories and lesser abstractions, the order rather than the genus; and then, too, how you feel about ethical and political universalism, which asks that our institutions give priority to characteristics that all people (in all times and all places) might be thought to have in common. Your views on such matters are germane because Derrida's single most famous argument is, in fact, universal in scope, pullulatingly so. If you're going to be a Derridean, the first argument that you're going to have to take on board is that there is no philosophically defensible distinction to be drawn between writing and speech, that all language is writing, and that all people (and peoples) must be thought of as possessing *écriture*. That's the universalism: *Writing is everywhere; everyone has it*. Derrida, of course, offers reasons for thinking this. His proposition is that we typically (and incorrectly) think of writing as more mediated than speech. I might, for instance, worry that if spoken words copy things, and writing copies words, then all written documents, even original ones, are going to have the smudgy, deteriorating quality of

second-generation photocopies. Speech removes me from the object; and writing removes me further still. A Derridean counters this anxiety simply by honing in on the phrases I've just written that "spoken words copy things" or that "speech removes me from the object" in order to make the point that speech is *already* mediation, already the arbitrary coding of the world, already constructed out of a network of differences, gaps, or non-positivities. Words emerging from a mouth aren't any more tethered to their objects than words emerging from an ink cartridge, which means that we will have to give up the fantasy that one type of language can keep us close to things while the other will cost us the world.

Similarly, you might think of writing as uniquely decontextualizing. Once recorded, words strung together in one place and time can be encountered in any other place or (subsequent) time. But then spoken language isn't nearly as place-bound as we unthinkingly take it to be, since people often remember speech they've heard and go about their lives and move about and eventually re-speak it. Writing travels, true enough, but so does quoted speech; there is no world without recording devices. Or again, you might think that spoken language keeps listeners closer to a speaker's intentions or private understandings, if only because they can interrupt him when he's being unclear and ask him what he was trying to say. But there aren't any grounds for thinking that spoken language is less in need of interpretation than the written kind, and if consulted, a living, yakking, disambiguating speaker-in-the-room can only produce more speech, equidistant from his intentions and requiring interpretation in turn.

What we'll want to notice now is that nothing in this explanation strictly requires Derrida to claim that all language is writing. In fact, the argument would probably be more perspicuous without that provocation, without, I mean, your always having mentally to substitute for the word *écriture* the notion that all language displays some-but-not-all of the features conventionally associated with writing. Eventually some philosopher is likely to want to reform deconstruction along these lines, by insisting on perspicacity, stripping away as gratuitous the doctrine of universal writing and then seeing what's left or what else has to change in the absence of an ecumenicized *écriture*. But anyone wanting to account for the peculiarity of really existing Derrideanism doesn't have that option. Far from seeming expendable, the needless apotheosis of *écriture* that drive to say it's-all-writing and actually mean something a little different or to say it's-all-writing even when your argument doesn't strictly demand it can easily seem like one of deconstruction's most salient features.

Writing, this is all to say, is at the center of deconstruction's bid for universalism, and yet its status as a universal is open to question. Even within the framework generated by Derrida himself, one has to wonder whether writing hasn't been trickishly generalized. At the very least, we'll want to describe Derrida's procedure here, which is to extract a particularized term from the semantic stratum where we are used to encountering it and insert it instead into the place of the universal. At the formal level, to claim that *all language is writing* is akin to claiming that *all vehicles are pushcarts* or *all buildings are pyramids*. That this procedure introduces problems that Derrida cannot solve should be apparent as soon as you notice that writing, even having been

promoted to the status of universal, sometimes persists in his arguments as particular all the same — as writing-writing, book-and-document writing, "writing in the narrow sense" — at which moments *écriture* is called upon to function as a subset of itself. In deconstruction, we have an encompassing term, writing-which-means-the-sum-of-all-language, under which we can class a second term, which is … writing. *All vehicles are pushcarts, and then some of them are also pushcarts*.

The consequences of this will be hard to reckon if we don't pause first to consider the several different ways that one could deal with writing or language as a universal term — or, indeed, the different ways one could deal with universals of any kind. It will be easier, that is, to say what Derrida is up to if we know which nearby philosophical options he is refusing.

It might help, for instance, to clear up a few misconceptions about the status of universals in Hegelian philosophy. Hegel, after all, is not quite the aloof, god's-eye philosopher of *Geist* and *Weltgeschichte* that casually hostile readers take him to be. He is in various senses a universalist, to be sure, but this point is easy to overstate, since one of the concerns that most obviously fuels dialectical thinking is a discomfort over the ways in which non-dialectical philosophers get universals wrong, mostly by approaching them too abruptly. Among the core tenets of dialectical philosophy is the notion that universals cannot manifest themselves directly in the world. You can phrase this point in illuminatingly trivial terms — that no entity can be a bird, immediately and nakedly avian, without also being, say, a goose — as long as you realize that the payoff for this claim is above all ethical and political: that no-one can be human without

specification, that no-one can instantiate mind or spirit except by pursuing some particular practice, that no-one is the abstract and Vitruvian bearer of rights and freedoms, &c.[17]

From out of dialectics, therefore, even in its classical form, it is not hard to extract some moderately anti-universalist positions, the second of which would state that individuals cannot be directly linked to their universals, but are better understood as passing through an always extendable set of intermediate categories. I am standing in western Ireland in December, looking at a creature with wings and feathers, fairly big for such an alate thing, with a white face atop a long black neck, and a variously grey, elongated body. For almost no purposes will it be enough to say that this x is an "animal" or a "bird." It probably won't even be enough to say that it is a "goose," once one realizes just how high a floor in the taxonomical edifice that designation actually occupies. We might loosely think of geese as forming a species, but they don't; there are species of goose, but no species "goose." Nor are they properly thought of as a genus, one story up, but rather as what zoologists call a tribe or even a subfamily. An attentive person, in this context, is one who can introduce additional determinations, who will know that this x is not just a bird but a goose, and not just a goose but a barnacle goose; she might even know that the latter is itself a kind of black goose. One way to appreciate what Hegel is after here is to keep alive in yourself a sense of surprise that even the word "goose" is more abstract than you probably thought and is best approached patiently and stepwise. About *écriture*, then, a Hegelian would have to say that there can be no writing as such, without instantiation, and further, that no collection of words can be grasped as writing without passing through a set of intermediate

terms, which in this case would let the mind loose in the encyclopedia of textual genres: birthday card, saint's life, personal ad, ransom note, presidential signing statement, silver fork novel, and so on.

Perhaps the least appreciated point about dialectics is that it is at heart an anti-reductionism, a way of combating the mind's tendency to seek explanations at one degree of abstraction at the expense of other explanations involving other degrees of abstraction. Let's say, to consider a Marxist offshoot of this Hegelian program, that I am sitting down to write a book about the English Revolution. And let's say further that I want to show how Atlantic merchants English men trading with the Caribbean and the east coast of North America   played a central and hitherto underappreciated role in the upheavals that overtook England, Scotland, and Ireland in the 1640s. I won't be able to make that case if I can't tell you about those merchants in individuated detail, if I don't know their biographies, if I can't account for the choices they made month for month, some of which choices included rising against their king and disestablishing the national church. I have to be able to tell you about Maurice Thomson and Matthew Craddock and Samuel Vassall. At the same, though, I won't be able to understand what these men were after if I don't understand the groups into which they formed or the institutions that housed their projects   the corporations (set off against rival enterprises), the dissenting sects (each set off against the others and all of them set off against the Church of England), the often unformalized political factions. Similarly, I'm going to need a robust account of the new colonial-capitalist economy in the Atlantic in which all of these men operated, and to which all English, Scottish, and Irish people

were increasingly connected, though at meaningfully different removes   and what I will need to show about this economy is that it introduced imperatives and constraints of its own that none of the actors in the 1640s, whether grasped as individuals or as groups, could simply defy. Just as important, I will need to make clear how each of these explanatory modes requires the other two, how each, if you like, houses the others within itself. Maurice Thomson and Matthew Craddock don't come to me as mere data or as singletons, not as "individuals," but as individuated within various groups   within the Providence Island Company, perhaps, or English Baptistry   as also within the Atlantic economy as a whole. But those same groups, meanwhile, are plainly made up of these individuals, while also taking on individuated profiles of their own when positioned across from one another within the Atlantic economy at large. This economy at large, meanwhile, is from some perspective nothing but the networked aggregate of those individuals arranged in those groups.

The task of Hegelian (and Hegelian-Marxist) thought is thus to find the individual and the particular in the universal; but also to find the individual and the universal in the particular; and then to find the particular and the universal in the individual. The idea is precisely to avoid the reduction to the universal or impetuous argument-to-system for which Hegelianism is often mistaken. At the same time, however, Hegelianism cautions against explanations that would lock in at the level of the intermediate category; if revolutions are the day's topic, then such part-explanations would be the usual business of social history, the history not of persons but of groups and institutions, revealed here to be a reduction to the particular. And then, of course, the methodological individualism beloved of the it's-more-

complicated school of academic history-writing, which prides itself on its own version of anti-reductionism, stands indicted here as a reduction to the deinstitutionalized and un-mediated individual.[18]

Adorno's philosophy of non-identity, then, is best thought of not as breaking with Hegel but rather as radicalizing the anti-universalist strain that was indigenous to dialectics all along. This isn't to say that Adorno's revisions don't present subtleties of their own. The trick to coming to terms with Adorno is to grasp that he is *not* a nominalist, a point that requires us to concede the insufficiently considered possibility of an anti-universalism that does not go back to Ockham. Negative dialectics asks us to oppose universals, in that term's various senses, but not because these are fake or just names. The point is complicated: There is, in fact, a nominalist *moment* in Adorno's thinking, which does sometimes describe concepts as herding singular objects into undifferentiated droves, asking us to fret about the penalties we pay for this most ordinary of all cognitive procedures, the heedless aggregation involved in all naming. It's just that Adorno is also interested in the ways in which objects (and persons) really can be deprived of their singularity, in actuality and not just in thought, by mass production or by unified institutions or by standardization across increasingly vast regions of the planet. The administered society, by flooding the world with generic objects, makes real the abstraction that had hitherto been merely verbal or conceptual. The standardized planet is the world remade in the image of language, a world in which language has at last become adequate to things, but only because the latter have become as indefinite as the perfunctory mono-terms with which we have always identified them. Universals in Adorno thus occur on two

levels   both as verbal abstractions and as real ones   and it is his outlandish hunch that the universals of one level are best resisted *on the other level*, that one might be able to turn back the accelerating protocols of standardization   that one could prevent Body Shops from being built in Warsaw or the entry of Pizza Hut into Guangdong if only one could disable abstraction at its cognitive source, in words and concepts. The vocation of negative dialectics is thus to terminate universals, sometimes via aesthetics, mostly via a re-jigged dialectics capable of bringing thought up against the unthought specificity of things.[19]

Any guide to critical theory will tell you that Adorno's is one of the great anti-universalisms in the history of philosophy. And a careful reading of Hegel should show that even orthodox dialectics produces an argued-through critique of *das Allgemeine*. Saying as much now should bring into view the first of the features that makes Derrida distinctive, which is that he is *not* an anti-universalist to nearly the same degree.

•2.2

-Set alongside the philosophers he most resembles, Derrida stands out as more *universalist, and not less so*. This obviously flies in the face of that wisdom which takes it for granted that any Parisian alive in 1968 must have been an anti-universalist, even though May's most famous chant began with the words *Nous sommes tous*…. You might, in other words, have filed Derrida away as just one more member of the anti-universalist band, and yet his commitment to the general and all-inclusive is easily established. What we'll want to see now is not only that the ascension of writing to the place of "all language" is departicularizing, hence a

reorientation towards the universal, but also that this procedure is typical of deconstruction, which is perhaps most succinctly thought of as a machine for abolishing distinctions. Writing exists in deconstruction both as particular (as writing-writing) and as universal (as *écriture*), but commands our admiration almost only in that second, less accustomed role, the priority accorded which licenses deconstruction's rather striking inattention to intermediate categories.

It is the drive to departicularize that we encounter, for instance, in a 1980 essay of Derrida's called "The Law of Genre," which argues like so: I won't recognize a novel as a novel unless the book somehow or other announces itself as such. The most obvious way for this to happen is for someone just to stick the word "novel" on the title page, as European publishers often do. But this boundary-word, in the front matter, on the edge of the fiction proper, is not itself part of the novel. The scrap of language that establishes the fiction's identity is an add-on, not a part of the fiction's unity, and so already a contamination or a breaking of the text's membrane. A thing is not itself where it names itself. Identity, which we might have thought of as that property most intrinsic to a thing, is established only at the thing's borders and as a crack in that very identity. It should be said: This argument, as presented by Derrida, is not entirely convincing and would at the very least require more elaboration than he is willing to give. What about, say, superhero movies? Do they only become superhero movies once they have announced themselves as such, via a supplement? What if I stumble upon one while channel-surfing and recognize its genre? I suppose I might think "Oh, it's a superhero movie" or some semi-verbal version thereof. Is that then the addendum that negates the superhero movie qua

superhero movie? But Derrida's argument, even if not wholly persuasive, is enough to account for the thorough-going indifference to genre on display in his writings on literature. Derrida finds a lot of interesting things to say about Kafka without caring that he wrote *Erzählungen* or tales and without wondering what makes these different from "short stories" or about why so many German speakers have gone in for them. He can hold forth for ninety minutes on Joyce's *Ulysses* without even bothering to point out that the text in question is a peculiar kind of novel; indeed, he pauses only long enough to suggest that it's not really a novel, or that it's a not-novel.[20] The reading protocols of deconstruction are designed to establish that individual words or perhaps individual formulations and in some cases individual texts are each in some direct and undifferentiated way "writing"; Derridean reading returns each formerly particularized lyric or fable back to the flux of *écriture*. "I shall not say this drama, this epic, this novel, this novella or this *récit*, certainly not this *récit*."[21]

Nor do individuated terms fare any better in deconstruction. The doctrine of the death of the author that Derrida shares with Roland Barthes is meant to block one of the lazier ways in which readers try to house writing under the rubric of the individual. Some of his later lectures and interviews do, it's true, speak of "singularity," but he says almost nothing about this latter, except to note that we have an impossible obligation to think it. Deconstruction, this is to say, provides no method for bringing the mind up close to singularities while spending thousands of pages spelling out its preferred versions of universalism. Here is one place, in fact, where the distinction between Adorno and Derrida is especially clear, since negative dialectics puts itself forward as just such a method, as a chase after the differentiae. A

first pass over Adorno's arguments could make it sound like he's talking about differance in an almost Derridean sense. I name an object and its singularity slips away from me, since whatever concept I bring to bear upon it names its commonalties with other objects and not its unrepeatability. So I rouse myself and try again, determined to do something more than call the object by name, attempting a finer description. But this doesn't help, because the language I summon to this end the idiom I devise for this *x*'s grain and distinguishing nuance is no less abstract than the crudely categorizing name I wanted to go beyond. I am noting nuances, perhaps, but shareable ones. The words I bring to bear on the differentiae install new genera, which produce new differentiae, and ever onwards, unsolvably. That Adornian ever-onwards is a close cousin to differance, though it also one of Zeno's paradoxes, recast as defeatist epistemology. What's different about Adorno is that he thinks he has worked out a way to halt this process, to interrupt differance, not by enhancing language such that it succeeds, but precisely by forcing it to fail and then scanning for the object amidst this verbal ruin and inadequacy, glimpsing the unthought *x* in the rubble of its abandoned descriptions.

That's not Derrida's way. Notionally, it should be easy to talk about deconstruction's universalism, which was never all that hidden. There's this: "The secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects *all signifieds in general.*" And also this: "Writing is not a sign of a sign, *except if one says it of all signs*, which would be more profoundly true." Of one important claim in *Of Grammatology* (an argument concerning "the obliteration of the proper"), Derrida pauses to note: "This proposition is universal in essence and can be produced a priori."[22] One could

go on. But deconstruction has been annexed for so long to a generically anti-universalist (or anti-humanist or anti-totalizing) program that we will have to work hard to hear the globalizing claims that come attached to nearly all of deconstruction's keywords.

That list starts with "differance," which is precisely not difference, but difference bracketed and rendered elusive, a barred and unachievable nominalism, handing the never really singular term back to the motion of universal *écriture*. Next comes the term "archécriture," for which Derrida himself offers the term "generalized writing" as synonym and gloss.[23] The concept of "dissemination," meanwhile, ends up turning universalism into a reading method, setting out from the simple fact that books travel unpredictably. You publish a book and don't know where it is going to end up, and you don't know how future readers are going to read it, which is to say how they are going to construe it. You can't guess the purposes to which any patch of language might someday be put, even when that language is (or was) in some sense your own something *you* wrote. What's more, books, especially after print and all the more so after industrialized print, come in very many copies, so readings will proliferate unpredictably as copies and readers multiply.

We'll understand deconstruction better if we can see now that it takes this argument from the annals of book history, still more or less Gutenbergian, and redoes it in philosophical and utopian form, asking us to bear in mind how any given instance of language might function in places other than here and times other than now, and asking equally that we read with an orientation towards the future. Step one is to look again at

whatever sentence or paragraph is now in front of you and think about how it might mean otherwise   what kind of interpretations it might yet bear other than the one that you intuitively gravitate towards. Derrida is sometimes misread as arguing that meaning is entirely free-floating, that any sentence can be made to mean pretty much anything at all, that the sentence reading "The right of the people to be secure in their persons shall not be violated" could, by force of will, be taken to mean "California forecasters are warning against a shortage of clementines this holiday season." But this isn't, in fact, how Derrideans read. The task is, rather, to flush out the determinate ambiguities of any particular text   multiple readings, for sure, but each of them defensible by the ordinary protocols of philology and literary criticism. Over-ingenuity isn't quite the problem that deconstruction's adversaries have taken it to be. But to this observation we have to append one important asterisk: I can begin listing the various interpretations that a given sentence might reasonably bear in the present, and I might adduce a few readings that depend on a word's etymology, and so carry the freight of the verbal past. But I can't know about future meanings, for the simple reason that I can't predict how the language will have changed some many generations from now and how, in particular, it will have changed around *this* sentence. The words now in front of me might eventually carry meanings   or, more likely, associations   that I have no way of guessing. This is what Derrideans mean when they say that the full set of meanings is always deferred or when they suggest that we in the present should defer unassumingly to future readers, that we should not insist on the rightness of our renderings and the preemptive falseness of theirs. Not only will the future read differently; we will arrive at that future, and *its*

future will read differently. The moment will never come when all the meanings are gathered.[24] The project of deconstruction, then, is to generate in the present some of those potential readings, to centuplicate constructions beyond the commonsensical, in order to loosen the grip of the past and its settled understandings, to reach out to multiple readers, handing the text over to the future and setting its language back in motion. Deconstructive reading, then, is pitched against the interpretation offered by any particular reader in any particular location at any particular point in time. This is scripto-universalism in practice   reading that has turned its broad-spectrum antennae towards what Derrida calls the "non-localizable voice."[25]

But then perhaps this isn't yet to say much, since a person could reasonably object that when the conversation turns to philosophy, abstract and globalizing claims aren't much of a distinguishing mark. Some readers, it's true, are going to find it illuminating to hear that deconstruction is negative dialectics with the universalism put back in, but it is really *only* over and against Adorno that a philosopher's universalism will invite special comment. One might reasonably wonder, then, whether there is anything distinctive about the way in which deconstruction treats universals, something that sets Derrida apart not only from Adorno, but also from the Kantians and the Thomists. Two observations drift into view.

•2.3

-Derrida's method is to take already universalist positions and make them even more universalist. That claim might, I realize, sound perplexing and Cantorian in Derrida, terms that already

encompass everything, that are already without limit, routinely cede ground to other terms even larger than themselves   so one would do well to proceed carefully here, with the aid of an example. It is at this point that it becomes necessary to consider the religious dimensions of Derrida's arguments. The many commentators who wish to identify a specifically Jewish Derrida have a number of places they can look. The figure of errant writing is one strong indicator: writing as the traveling, anti-nationalist, cosmopolitan term. In "Plato's Pharmacy," the translator, when describing such writing, can't help but use the word "wandering" six or seven times, and if on Derrida's behalf, you find yourself talking about "wandering text," then you have simply slotted writing into the position of medieval folklore's most famous Jew. Nor is it hard to get from "dissemination" to "diaspora." All writing is scattered and in exile, all writing exists in the condition of the Jew, all writing is Jewish. The matter gets more complicated, though, when the scholars turn their attention to Derrida's debts to Levinas, which such Judaizing arguments almost always do. The Levinasian Derrida is the Jewish Derrida   we will need to consider the possibility, at least, that this is exactly wrong. Derrida does, indeed, seem to have borrowed a great deal from Levinas's account of Talmudic reading. One almost wishes to say that deconstruction circa 1975 was a matter of Levinasian reading strategies put to Adornian ends. But then Derrida's tack was to make about *all* writing arguments that Levinas makes only about Jewish scripture. His vocation was to universalize the Levinasian stance, which is to say that he was always in the Christian position. His are the pages in which formerly Jewish arguments cast off their Judaism.

Derrida's fondness for a broadly Christian idiom is hard to miss for anyone not determined to read past it. He says that he prefers a political framework that goes back to the "Jewish-Christian-Muslim, but above all Christian, tradition." Asked about the ancient sources of his philosophy, he responds by saying that he considers his "own thought, paradoxically, as neither Greek nor Jewish" and to this one need merely respond that such thinking is less paradoxical than it is Pauline: In deconstruction, there is neither Jew nor Gentile.[26] It is that apostolic strain that rises to the surface in Derrida's later thinking, after 1990, as his output re-organizes itself around four related ideas: 1) the indiscriminate love of one's fellows; 2) the messiah; 3) the absolute gift, the other name for which is grace; and 4) antinomianism or moral life beyond the law. The first of these retains a citable Jewish precedent in the form of Levinas, while any of those others, in a polemical context, would count as Christian, each more so than the last, to the point where even the first gets pulled into the Nazarene orbit, and alterity reverts back to *agape*.

If it is nonetheless a mistake to categorize Derrida as a Christian thinker, then this is because he makes a point of disassociating his gospel of messianism and love-not-law from the specificities of Christian history and Christian institutions. He says, for instance, that deconstruction is a matter of "faith," which at a religious studies conference would be enough to give his doctrine a Christian cast and, indeed, a specifically Protestant one but then immediately repudiates the particularizing force of that word. Deconstruction breeds faith, but faith of no definite kind "pure faith which is neither Christian nor Jewish nor Islamic nor Buddhist etc."[27] Or consider the word "messianicity," one of Derrida's most revealing coinages and self-evacuating in

much the manner of "pure faith": from Jesus Christ to the general category of "messiah" (all saviors or anointed ones) to the "messianic" (or messiah-like) to "messianicity" (the condition of having some messiah-like features). Derrideans do not seek a messiah; they seek only messianicity. The disciple's particular allegiance to Haile Selassie or Sabbatai Zevi gives way to what Derrida himself calls "the universal structure" of "the messianic in general" an ambient orientation to the future or mood of unspecified expectancy that is "without content and without identifiable messiah."[28] What we'll want to see now is that this purging of content is Derrida's typical procedure that deconstruction's vaunted overcoming of binaries is mostly a search for redemptive abstractions of this kind, lifting the already aloft, refining already generalized concepts into even more recondite noumena, from which former distinctions have been irrigated. And yet this overcoming of Christianity its de-particularizing reinvention as vacantly faithful messianicity nonetheless preserves Christianity in two distinct ways. For even once purified, the terms retain the imprint of the religious history from which they have been abstracted. You can't speak the words "pure faith" and not expect some people to hear *sola fide*. More: The universalizing operation is itself Christian, recalling as it does the Pauline church's inaugural act, which was to devise a not-quite-Judaism for Jews and non-Jews alike. Deconstruction's program is in this sense to perform the Christian operation upon itself, to re-universalize Christianity by evacuating it of all its particular claims, thereby making it available to Christians and non-Christians alike.

•**2.4**

That's one way in which Derrida's handling of universals is distinctive. The second way is this:

-Derrida is content to call his universalism "impossible" and thus to give up on the hard work of making it real in this-worldly practices and institutions. This is the big lesson of Derrida's Marx book that Marx was too materialist, that we have to learn to talk again about specters, spectrality, ghosts, *Geist*, the disembodied, the appearance of the non-material. This last might sound like a return to Hegel less matter, more *Geist* and it's true that Derrida turns out to be in most respects a more loyal Hegelian than he ever was a Heideggerian (and certainly more of a Hegelian than a Marxist). But then if we keep reading in *Specters of Marx*, it will turn out that Hegel himself was too materialist for Derrida's purposes, for the simple reason that dialectical philosophy expects concepts to actualize themselves in the world. The Hegelians are endlessly interested in the simple fact that whoever first thought up the idea of the basket also took the trouble to weave one that baskets did *not* remain notional or imagined. The very first philosophers did not require us to maintain our unskilled orientation to the basket, declaring our listless fidelity to the basket-yet-to-come. But in *Specters,* Derrida is attacking the very idea of reality the idea, I mean, that we should give priority to the really existing, to the real versions of things rather than to their ideational forms. He gives a couple of different reasons for this.

First, concepts names things in their perfect, utopian, and impossible forms. The democracy-to-come is an impossible democracy, and we should probably take his use of the word

"impossible" at face value. We can approximate the impossible concept, but we shouldn't expect ever to match it, and in that case, the philosopher remains the guardian of the idea in its rigor and its purity—the friend and lover of the concept that is too beautiful to live in this world. One wonders at this point how many practicing Derrideans know themselves to be neo-Platonists, which is as good a shorthand as any for philosophers who go in for otherworldly claims of this kind. Neo-Platonism, after all, lives in the to-come: democracy-to-come (which will never come), justice-to-come (which will never come, which cannot abide in this world, to which we are committed, but only as a super-egoized impossibility, a perpetual, shame-inducing summons to do what you cannot do). Reading Derrida in sequence, you get to watch his anti-philosophical, anti-Platonic writing-beyond-the-father turn into a Platonic bad conscience, and *not* by shedding its former self, but by learning to function as both at the same time: as anti-Oedipal superego and antinomian nomos, emptying out any given philosophical norm, but only so that it can function as sheer, maddening, exorbitant norm—pure evacuated normativity—without the content that would in fact limit it.

Second, any version of reality comes at the expense of the possible. Anything you build is the negation of the many other things you could have built but didn't. Unlike actuality, différance and dissemination are committed to keeping the possibilities alive, letting them run riot, not establishing monopolies on the future. Once we've learned to reject the textual tyranny of the authoritative interpretation, we have to radicalize that program, take it outside the text (I know, I know), and reject the tyranny of actuality itself. Any institution in which you attempted to make the concept real would block out other possible instantiations of

the concept. This democracy turns its back on all the other hypothetical democracies. I drain the concept in the very process of giving it body and strength. The only way to keep the concept going   to keep it mobile and flexible and vital   is to let it remain disembodied, so that it can always insinuate new possibilities. Any particular way of loving is a betrayal of all the other different ways one might have loved; it forsakes the entire set minus itself. But the concept of love, precisely *because* an abstraction, is always beyond the way you are currently loving. Indeed, it is beyond all the ways people currently love. It brings with it the invitation to innovate or to mutate or to leap. The concept is always the plus-one   but only to the extent that it refuses to be actualized.

Here, then, is an especially telling passage from *Specters*:

If we have been insisting so much since the beginning on the logic of the ghost, it is because it points toward a thinking of the event that necessarily exceeds a binary or dialectical logic, the logic that distinguishes or opposes ... actuality ... and ideality (regulating or absolute non-presence). This logic of ... actuality seems to be of limited pertinence....[29]

I take this to mean that Hegel is doing us a disservice in forcing us to distinguish between the real and the merely theoretical, between the actualized and the un-actualized or the not-yet actualized. Hegel thinks, of course, that he is being dialectical. The concept-made-real is a fused category; it is the union of mind and the world, the mind-world. Derrida won't accept this solution, because its dissolved binary requires that we keep a second binary intact, the antithesis of the actual vs. the merely possible. And so what Derrida is trying to imagine is an additional *Aufhebung* or

alternatively fused term: whatever is at once actual and potential, something that doesn't force us to choose between the actualized and the non-actualized, even something like an actualized non-actuality.

A plainer version: Derrida's recommendation is that we learn how to build institutions (and devise practices) that don't set out to exhaust potentiality, that don't establish a monopoly on (or of) the real   something on the order of a building that doesn't insist on being one way rather than another. This would be a ghost building, since the ghost is, among other things, Derrida's term for whatever splits the difference between the real and the ideational. This is the moment where I need to say that Derrida's anti-Marxism, if that's what this is, isn't glib or stupid. He thinks that genuine freedom and justice would require spectral non-institutions of this kind: virtual institutions. If we are committed to freedom then we will be committed to *not* making the world one way rather than another, and Derrida thinks that this last is what Marxists and Hegelians have never understood. The question of course is whether we could build such buildings. How? And could we build ghost institutions? Real-but-not-real institutions? Real-but-not-real colleges? Real-but-not-real economies? Real-but-not real governments? How do you build something without building Some Thing?

•3. PRACTICING DECONSTRUCTION

•3.1

We can keep the questions rolling. To ask what it is that Derrideans mean to build is to inquire about the status of deconstruction in the world. Can deconstruction without betraying itself appear in the guise of its antithesis, which is construction? Derrida never tired of saying that deconstruction was not a negative philosophy, that it was fundamentally affirmative, cultivating in its readers a capacity to greet the future (rather than to fear it) and to welcome whatever or whoever seems on first appearance outlandish and inimical: "Deconstruction always presupposes affirmation"; "I would even say that it never proceeds without love."[30] But let us wonder: Does the one-who-affirms also *make* something?   something at least semi-enduring, something that other people could also grab hold of and put to their purposes or perhaps to our now shared purposes of mutual affirmation? Which, indeed, are the practices and institutions that can foster in me what Derrida calls an "openness to the other"?[31] And is there anything that can help me act on that aperture? Who or what are the agents and instruments of deconstruction?

All I'm trying to say is that once Derrida has helped us see that we bear the responsibility to welcome the stranger, it would also be nice to have someplace for him to sleep. It is around such questions, upon attempting to devise a deconstruction that is more than attitudinal, that Derrida's thinking most obviously generates a series of puzzles. It is in the first instance easy enough to see why some socialists and feminists and neo-Jacobins have been drawn to deconstruction and above all to the concept of

dissemination, which from one vantage is just another name for the literate multitude, *die Leser aller Länder*. If I start from the idea that writing always exists in many hands at once, then I am ceding the accustomed power of the philosopher (or literary scholar or Supreme Court justice) to preside over interpretation by announcing what the text really means. I am interested rather in what my unseen, inglorious fellows might be thinking or saying or arguing about that same bit of writing and trying to guess the verbal materials that might make possible the alternative practices of these many others.[32] At the same time, however, deconstruction means to convene a cadre of expert readers who can proleptically perform the multiple meanings that would otherwise emerge but slowly and in historical time, as a given text traveled its unpredictable circuit. And Derrida insists that such reading-with-the-multitude is difficult, arduously so, probably too difficult for you: *We don't know how to read yet … Has anyone ever really read anything? … There are perhaps a dozen good readers in the world*. Deconstruction posits at one and the same time the splendidly indiscriminate mass of transnational readers the bookish mobility and its own class of adepts, the aristocrats of *écriture* who are able to encompass in themselves the vastness of possible readings, to carry and indeed preempt dissemination by dint of their own resourceful verbality.

But that's not the end of it. Deconstruction faces one kind of paradox when it settles on a fixed set of agents and another kind when it refuses thus to settle. The problem in this second case involves some of Derrida's most characteristic formulations, all of those *sans*-constructions and multifarious to-comes, since it is via such phrasing that deconstruction most obviously evades the problem of its bearers and real-world deputies. We might

consider again the matter of deconstruction's "messianism without identifiable messiah," which one leading U.S. Derridean parses like so: "Were the Messiah ever to show up in the flesh … that would be a disaster. The effect would be to shut down the very structure of time and history, to close off the structure of hope, desire, expectation, promise, in short, of the future."[33] What we'll want to see is that the hatred for Jesus on display in these sentences   and this from a Christian theologian   is likewise a hatred of practice and of the completed emancipatory act. We are being requested to prefer the hope for justice to justice itself. Radical philosophers have hitherto done more than interpret the world; the point is not to change it. In 1988, Demi Moore starred in *The Seventh Sign*, a movie about the End of Days, in which Christ himself appears to urge his prophet to *stop* the Second Coming   to prevent God from redeeming the world   to perpetuate a world that the movie itself can't help but depict as cruel and damaged and unfed. It's a remarkable conceit: In *The Seventh Sign*, Jesus returns so as not to return, at which point the *parousia* slips into the position that action movies typically reserve for pandemics or alien invasions   the position, I mean, of the Big Threat. Hollywood, like deconstruction, can conceive of the redeemed society only as an extinction event: *Jesus is coming! He must be stopped!* Here's Derrida: "I would like him to come, I hope that he will come, … and at the same time, I am scared. I do not want what I want, and I would like the coming of the Messiah to be infinitely postponed."[34]

The important point, then, as we watch Derrida's near-Christianity tip over into this manifestly anti-Christian position, is to see how the same reversal happens over and over again in deconstruction, and always around those without-terms. The

problem is succinctly explained: A rarefied messianicity in the abstract requires us to despise any particular messiah. The Derrideans can't afford to have that slot filled. The next step is to extend this point to utopias of all kinds. It's easy to imagine a Derridean utopianism without utopias, which would in practice be doggedly anti-utopian, because it would have to oppose the construction of any fair and egalitarian institutions in particular. But then one would also have to oppose all "others" on similar grounds. The messiah, indeed, is sometimes referred to as the *tout autre*, the entirely other, and messianicity is supposed to name the possibility of a future that will be unforeseeably unlike the present not another time, but an othertime so I am, in fact, only reformulating the point just made, by extending it to alterity in its ordinary, non-temporal mode. If we need a messianism without messiahs, then presumably we also need an alterity without others, too, because no particular other can maintain the purity of alterity-as-empty-slot. Any identifiable other begins shedding his or her alterity in the act of identification, starting with those possessive pronouns. If I know that the alterity in question is *her* alterity, then I already know too much. One could make this point dialectically; I just said "identify," after all, and Hegelian reciprocity games quickly produce the other-as-same. But one can also make the point experientially: People don't stay radically unknown to us. In this case, the dialectical and the experiential go together rather neatly: For me to be able to name somebody as an other, he or she has to be within my field of experience, and at that point, it is going to be difficult for the person in question to remain truly alien. My commitment to alterity thus requires me to reject all concrete others as insufficiently other, at which point the doctrine of alterity

becomes just one more metaphysical system   another philosophy asking me to expel others rather than welcome them   and deconstruction hangs its head before its own wagging finger.

What, after all, are Derrideans to *do*, while abiding in paradox and stepping up their devotion to unrealizable hyper-abstractions? Once you've worked your way through *Glas*, how do you actively deliver yourself over to the momentum of non-presence? Those questions do, in fact, have answers. Derrida, this is to say, does finally identify at least three institutions capable of carrying non-identity into the world, however imperfectly   three vehicles of differance   and simply naming this trio will be the tidiest way of distinguishing deconstruction from negative dialectics, since none of the three serves a utopian or proto-messianic function in Adorno. They are 1) writing, 2) capitalism, and 3) empire. Let's just take them one by one.

•3.2. THE REAL UNIVERSAL, NO. 1

-Deconstruction aligns itself with writing, with a universal and impossible language. That writing is emancipatory is the only one of these three claims that shouldn't be in the least bit surprising; it is the argument, in fact, with which deconstruction is most often associated. If the point is nonetheless worth restating now, this is in order to give each of us the chance to consider afresh whether we actually believe in the redemptive ubiquity of *écriture*, whether we are convinced that there spills constantly from our mouths and out our fingertips the force of non-identity and therapeutic instability. Writing in "Plato's Pharmacy" is the straying, playful, patricidal, atheistic, radically democratic outlaw and anarchist   the Bonnot Gang in twenty-six letters and five diacritics. The

words I write and speak will always betray-which-is-to-say-save me, cheerfully undermining my declamatory pretense, shielding me from my own authoritarianism, rescuing me by preventing my expert self from functioning successfully as dogmatist or despot. Deconstruction invites us to set up camp in "the place where discourses can no longer dominate," though if you read around in Derrida at all, you'll realize before long that this place is everywhere, that language never actually wields power over us, however prone we are to invest words with a specious authority that we could just as soon withhold.[35]

This view might be right, but what we'll want to see is that the Derridean can come to this position only by setting aside an equally compelling body of scholarship, *viz.* the historical sociology that finds in writing a force for standardization, stabilization, and new types of class hierarchy. It seems at least plausible that it was writing that carried some once localized god into new regions, demanding uniform reverence for the book-god at the expense of sundry resident sylphs and godkins. We have some good reasons, indeed, for believing that textual religion, like textual law, goes in for authorized versions, exact copies, and the sanctity (or binding quality) of the fixed word, making possible enforceable orthodoxies, shackling the present to the quotable past, with the written document serving as bulwark against eclecticism and improvisation. In Anglo-Saxon England, meanwhile, fields that counted as private property, having owners in something like the modern sense, under the permanent control of a named person who could transfer them at will, were called "bookland." In order to declare deconstruction correct, we have to be able to say, implausibly, that a world with scripts canons,

for a start, and legal codes and catechisms   is if anything even more miscellaneous than a world without them.[36]

Sometimes, it's true, the Weberian account of writing obtrudes into Derrida's argument as a goad or quellable doubt. At one point, he says that he wants to write with a "multiplicity of levels or tones" even though "the 'dominant' demand always requires, or so people want to make us believe, more linearity, cursivity, flattening."[37] What jumps out in that statement are its two hesitations or qualifications: the scare quotes around "dominant", plus "the demand" that might actually just be a trick perpetrated by *das Man*. Is homogenization happening or not? Derrida doesn't seem to know. Something, it's true, seems to be pushing towards a flat and uniform world, though how far this process has advanced it is impossible to say. Uniformity might *only* be a demand   unfulfilled, unheeded. And even that demand might be a fiction, a misread signal, an order we thought we heard but that no-one actually gave. It is vexing to find Derrida so noncommittal on this issue, since the status of deconstruction changes drastically depending on which of these positions you adopt. For if language has become standardized   or is itself an agent of standardization   then deconstruction steps forward as a militant project to reverse an entrenched historical process, in a manner that would align it with Marxism, anarchism, the critique of bureaucracy, and so on. But if language, *per contra*, has not been standardized   if it is, indeed, incapable of standardization   then it becomes hard to see why deconstruction would have any urgency or what exactly it takes itself to be doing, since you needn't attempt a multiplicity of levels and tones if you think this is the organic character of all language anyway. "Attempting" simply wouldn't enter it. "A message," Derrida says elsewhere,

"never remains intact," and what that means is: *There is no standardization*.[38] An utterance always refracts. A world united (i.e., not really united) around a single book the New Testament, say would be difficult to distinguish from a many-scriptured and partially bookless world. The world was no less varied after Christian colonization and the nineteenth-century missionary movements than it was before it. If language cannot be standardized, if its multifariousness is guaranteed, then deconstruction ceases to be a project and so shrinks down to the status of mere demonstration, the pedagogical performance of a known and unchangeable truth, an old chemistry experiment performed every year in front of high-school juniors.

•3.3 THE REAL UNIVERSAL, NO. 2

-Deconstruction aligns itself with market society, with a universal and impossible commerce. Derrida is never more appealingly stringent than when trying to devise an action wholly outside the exchange relation, which would require as its occasion an object beyond the commodity form. An act for which you get nothing in return: *giving* is what we call that, except let's take it seriously for once. "Nothing in return" means we can't be exchanging gifts, not even on a delay, so Christmas presents won't count, and neither will birthday packages, since the buttercup yellow stand mixer I present to you in February will come back to me as a vintage tweed overcoat seven months later. If I am really giving something, I can't expect a counter-gift as recompense, but then I can't expect anything else either: neither gratitude, certainly, nor a favor, nor the admiration of onlookers. Better, then, that I give the gift anonymously, since anonymity will make me hard to repay,

though there remains the risk that I might, in my role as secret giver, bask in the diffuse wonder and room-searching thankfulness of the one opening the parcel, so better still that I not be there for the giving, even incognito (because the other's confused smile will feel to me like compensation, and if there's compensation, then   no gift). Even in this last scenario, of course, I might tickle myself by *imagining* the delight felt by the beneficiary of my shrouded largesse, so better if that person doesn't even know it to be a gift. It is only by disguising the gift as something other than what it is that I cease to impose the obligation of gratitude. A gift stops being a gift when it can be named as such. Only the non-gift is a gift. But then the last remaining problem is that *I* will know it to be a gift even so, and this is a problem because I am bound to congratulate myself for having pulled off this feat of generosity. The satisfaction I take in my ethical handiwork will be my last remaining compensation, and once again, the gift will vanish. It is not enough, therefore, that the other not know the gift to be a gift. I can't know it either. That's a gift, the only gift: an object given by someone who doesn't know herself to be a donor to someone who doesn't know himself to be a recipient.[39]

It's a remarkable argument and all the prompt one needs to recall the several passages across his corpus where Derrida seems to lead deconstruction outside of the marketplace. One thinks of the splendid, stinging attack on copyright at the beginning of *Limited Inc*   an attack, that is, on writing as personal possession and saleable article, for which Derrida means to substitute a theory of collective authorship and the text as commons. In the same vein, there's this, from *Monolingualism of the Other*: "But who exactly possesses [language]? And whom does it possess? Is

language in possession, ever a possessing or possessed possession … like a piece of personal property?"[40] Language resists all efforts to treat it as one's own. It can't be in the least surprising, then, that literature is Derrida's one plausible candidate for the impossible and utopian gift, perhaps its only real-world incarnation. *Ecriture* "surpasses the phantasm of return and marks the death of the signatory or the non-return of the legacy, the non-benefit, therefore a certain condition of the gift   in the writing itself."[41]

The only plausible candidate? Maybe that isn't so clear. Empirically, this claim is perhaps a bit silly. The rigorism that otherwise characterizes Derrida's argument about the gift   the moral severity that allows him to say that no gift is *really* a gift   has now disappeared, since nearly all writers (all writers?) *do* expect and get a return for their writing: payment, status, teaching jobs, tenure, praise, fans, although perhaps we can make Derrida's argument more specific: When the text gets disseminated, *some* of the encounters it generates will have the character of the impossible   will be gifts, maybe the only gifts   via the people who read me that I don't know and didn't even foresee and who conversely know nothing about me, who never reimburse or even talk back to me. With any luck, they will read a copy of my book without dust jacket or title page, meaning: They won't even be able to praise me by name, to cite me approvingly or raise my reputation with third parties. That's probably what Derrida was arguing all along.

The problem with this is that by the time I imagine someone finding my book without my name on it, I am no longer conceiving of myself as engaged in a practice. I am returning

rather to the impossible and the utopian   not real literature as the realization of the impossible gift, but impossible literature as the non-realization of the impossible gift. At the very least, Derrida has to abstract these fleeting and hypothetical encounters from out of a fairly mundane culture of print, publishing, and literacy that has compensation and exchange built into it at multiple levels. But then perhaps the problem is equally that he has not done nearly *enough* to abstract writing-as-gift from ordinary print culture. I just wrote that the text can begin to function as a gift only once disseminated, and the primary vector of such dissemination in any society that we have known is the print marketplace. Anyone wanting to think concretely about deconstruction will need experimentally to excise the word "dissemination" every time that it appears in Derrida's writing and silently substitute the word "distribution," which is its mundanely commercial equivalent. Even the gift arrives mostly via warehousing middlemen and trans-Pacific shipping containers.

It is from out of materials like these last that Derrida builds one of the screwiest arguments in the annals of critical theory, which is nothing less than an Adornian defense of global capitalism. Here's how that works. We'll need first to hold in mind the point just made. Derrida's account of dissemination has always worked best within the literary marketplace, though it does not strictly presuppose it, since the mere technology of writing is enough to ensure the unpredictable survival and circulation of texts. All the same, dissemination kicks into high gear   is realized to some higher degree   in the marketplace. Consider almost any book now sitting on your desk and you'll be forced to conclude that it was the marketplace that did most of the work of dissemination. The book-as-commodity almost certainly traveled

further than it did in its aftermarket existence as possession or shared good. To that extent, dissemination always works best as an argument about the print commodity. And yet Derrida sometimes takes himself to be talking about gifts, objects that are beyond exchange, which gives us the following puzzle: If the text is a paradigm for the gift, and the disseminated text is also paradigmatically a commodity, then gift and commodity have collapsed back into each other. Derrida's perfect gift and non-commodity comes to us still in the form of its opposite.

At the end of *Given Time*, the first of his two gift books, Derrida steps forward to argue this point without camouflage. People like Aristotle want to regulate trade in the name of householding, but Derrida isn't having it, and this on the anti-domestic grounds that we often associate with queer militancy, because the home is a closed space and hearth-warmed penitentiary and to that extent immoral. The home is the very paradigm of identity-thought   you can find Adorno and sundry others arguing the same case. The ethics of deconstruction therefore requires that we not have homes or at least that we leave our homes unguarded, and if we are to do this, then we will have to promise not to pursue Athenian *oeconomy*, which supports an old and paternalist fantasy about well-governed homesteads. Here's Derrida: "Nothing … can happen in the family … in the sealed enclosure, which is moreover unimaginable, of the restricted, absolutely restricted economy."[42]   So we need an alternative, an open house, one name for which is hospitality. Its other name is accumulation. The way to bid the world welcome to practice non-identity or what used to be called the freedom of the house   is to reject Aristotle's preferred option (thrift, careful expenditure, housewifery for men) and embrace the alternative he

rejects, which is the aggressive pursuit of wealth, Greek *chresmatics* or getting rich, which will transform your hitherto tedious dwelling into one more permeable node in the planetary circulation of goods. Derrida, this is all to say, concludes one of his major books by arguing that receptivity to the other requires global trade. "As soon as there is monetary sign … the *oikos* is opened…. This is at the same time its orginary ruin and the chance for any kind of hospitality. … the chance for the gift itself."[43] Derrida's chief candidate for the role of non-commodity is thus a certain type of commodity, the kind from Brazil or Vietnam, circulating anonymously, untethered from its origins just like text, which for deconstruction has paradigmatically been commercialized text anyway. Firm judgments, national economies, and many types of narrative are closed, hence malign. Open are 1) aporia or the skeptical suspension of judgment; 2) global markets; and 3) poetry and poetic principles of literary interpretation, of a kind that can be brought to bear even upon narrative.

Deconstruction is radical ethics served up as an apology for deregulated markets, though it is difficult to know how to square its vindication of the unrestricted economy with Derrida's rather persistent rejection of exchange and equivalence. Perhaps like so: It's clear enough that at the edges of the print marketplace, there are lots of relatively de-commodified ways of running into books, in libraries, discard piles, or recycle sheds; pirated online; on the bookshelves of friends. If scrutinized, these all turn out still to be dependent on the literary commodity each of those pathways includes an act of exchange somewhere further up the chain   but this shouldn't stop us from saying that they are in the first instance non-commercial. A book calls to me from someplace other than a shop; I take it. That seems to be Derrida's model for

the text as gift. And it's possible that he thinks of the global commodity-gift in the same way. I might, in relatively de-commodified form, happen across an object that was produced for a subcontractor by a Bangladeshi. Maybe at a tag sale. And that would be my opening to justice.

At this point, there lights up a long sequence of passages, from across three decades of writing, in which Derrida aligns deconstruction with markets or money or the commodity. I'll point to three of them briefly. A fourth demands closer consideration.

•Platonists often argue that there need to be wise people who can make judgments concerning good and bad, benefit and harm   people, that is, who can discern the ethical implications and political effects of proposed innovations. That's an argument that Derrida unsurprisingly rejects, though what is nonetheless easy to overlook is Derrida's active recasting of Plato's position into an anachronistically commercial language: "it is the King who will give [writing] its value, who will set the price of what, in the act of receiving, he constitutes or institutes."[44] That sentence, it has to be said, is rather strange, because there is very little to suggest an economic reading in the passage from Plato to which Derrida is responding. In other words, Derrida has had to introduce the economic register, which arrives in the form of an accusation: The king is the one who, believing himself possessed of moral insight, makes ethico-political judgments, which are akin to price-fixing. And having framed his complaint in pecuniary terms, Derrida has given himself no choice but to produce an alternative that will also work in such terms, a policy that is at once textual and economic. The emancipated and mobile writing

that he theorizes in "Plato's Pharmacy" is thus a textuality that has slipped loose from commercial controls, a deregulated *écriture* around which buyers and sellers will without supervision set the terms for what is good and bad. Or rather: Literature is itself the low-tariff marketplace of language, in which language circulates freely, without monopolies or trade restrictions.

•The ghost is the textbook Derridean term, the present absence, the spirit in quasi-corporeal form, the body-spirit, outside of categories, outside the regime of knowledge or discourse something we cannot claim in the usual fashion to name or know: "One does not know [the ghost]: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. … this Thing that is not a thing."[45] Very early in *Specters of Marx*, during one of that book's first bits of free association, Derrida makes clear that the commodity is, if we follow Marx, ghost-like in just this sense: a non-sensuous sensuous thing. And Derrida is right about Marx; *Capital*, *Volume One* famously speaks of "the phantomlike objectivity of the commodity."[46] But then if Derrida is sticking up for the ghost as the disruptive and redemptively unclassifiable term, if, that is, we are to prefer spectral versions of things to their mundanely tangible and daylit forms, and if commodities are apparitional in the relevant sense, then Derrida has got to be sticking up for the latter, too for commodities and deconstruction's putative reconciliation with Marxism shows itself, not for the last time, to be happier inside markets than outside of them.

•In the great lecture on "Differance," Derrida says he finds it striking that the word *difference*, in French, never actually

means "deferral" (even though the underlying verb can mean "defer"). Nor does *difference* mean *polemos*, as in "difference of opinion," an English formulation that doesn't come readily to French speakers. That is the situation that Derrida means to remedy by proposing that we swap in an -a- for that second -e-. *Differance* will mean all three at once: dissimilarity, postponement, and conflict. Later in the lecture, he revisits the second on the list, noting that the economic meaning of "deferral" is especially important to him. Language has the structure of an economic delay: delayed satisfaction, the deferred realization of profit on an investment, and so on. We should pause here to note that this last is a meaning he might have come across in French anthropology. The verb "defer" shows up with these meanings in Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, whom we know Derrida read closely and who in turn had borrowed it from an important monograph on pre-modern Chinese kinship. Lévi-Strauss was eager to distinguish between different types of exchange, and especially between, first, one-off trades, two-term swaps that have at least some of the characteristics of bartering, and, second, the kind of extended chains and complicated, interlacing transactions common to market societies *and* many societies of the gift. The first he and the sinologist called *chassé-croisé*, which means "crossover" or "back-and-forth," though it also a move in French country-dancing, which tempts one to translate it as "do-si-do." The second he called *échanges différés.*[47] Or rather, Granet, Lévi-Strauss's source, had called it "deferred exchange." Lévi-Strauss preferred to call it "generalized" as opposed to "restricted" exchange. And this brings us back, via a different route, to the final pages of *Given Time*. Differance absorbs as one of its

meanings the unrestricted economy, the trade that only ever opens up onto another trade   exchange without end.

•The paper of Derrida's that most often gets misread is probably "White Mythology." Again and again, one comes across experts claiming that the main argument of that essay is that philosophy cannot cleanse itself of metaphor. It is hard to pin this misunderstanding on Derrida, who is clearer than usual about what he's arguing: He begins the essay by saying that this notion   no non-metaphorical philosophy!   is the point that everyone knows already and then spends the remainder of his time making the opposite case, which is that the entire language of metaphor is metaphysical, that by talking about metaphor rather than about concepts one is not leaving philosophy behind. In other words, the essay's takeaway is that the literary types should stop gloating, that their preferred (putatively non-philosophical) approach to language does *not* exempt them from the European intellect's contaminating legacies. *Pensée sauvage* mind in the wild, thinking outside the philosophical West   is what's at stake in that essay, only not in the way that a first-time reader might think. It's precisely the position that Derrida is out to *defeat*, though his named targets are not so much anthropologists as the historical philologists who thought you could peel away all the vernacular and philosophical abstractions in language until you reached the original, tribal names for things   the first terms and positivities. He is claiming that this can't be done   that there is no logic of the concrete to be accessed by tracing abstractions back to the metaphors, flinty and palpable, from which these were originally derived; that thinking tangibly has never been an option; that there has only ever been abstraction and this from word one.

Granted, before readers can get to this argument, they will have to make it through a confetti-spray of puns and mad troping. The essay's very first post-titular word is "Exergue," appearing above the first paragraph, as a chapter heading, and meaning several things at once.[48] It's a French word dating to the seventeenth century, a bit of concocted pseudo-Greek approximating the phrase *hors d'oeuvre*, "outside the work," which means that we can take it, if we like, as meaning "preface" or even "starter." This isn't the word's definition of record, however. A big English dictionary will tell you that "exergue" is a term from numismatics, in which capacity, as a piece of hobbyists' jargon, it means the small text printed caption-like on a coin   "inscription," then   except among English coin-collectors the meaning shifted early on to mean not the inscription itself but the space, beneath the emperor's head or liberty torch, into which the inscription got stamped. "Exergue" thus means either words on coins or the coin itself understood as a space for writing.

There are now two arguments we have to be able to hold together: first, that language is never concrete, not even when pre-philosophical, if that word is even allowed; and second, that we can usefully think about writing in the context of money or perhaps that we would do well to think of writing as money-like. Words cannot be concrete because they have to be able to circulate; they have to be usable in multiple contexts   this is the sense in which they are like coins. Observations that Derrida makes first about florins and guilders he therefore invites us to transfer over to language: Old coins were vulnerable to wear-and-tear; we should be thinking about the slow effacement, through regular handling, of design and motto, their gradual reduction back to metal, bare and un-signifying. Derrida's point is that you

can't profit from a circulating something a common noun or Mercury dime if you're not prepared to risk a degree of abstraction, and not just a one-time abstraction, but an ongoing slide into higher abstraction. Rather than trying to recover the concrete terms that supposedly lie sedimented behind our philosophical concepts, we should commit ourselves to this course of de-specification, which is the fate of all much-handled things. This is perhaps the baldest instance of Derrida's characteristic resolve to solve philosophical problems by shifting thought to higher levels of generality. It's just this the image he produces to telegraph that solution has never been more striking: Thinking does not begin in concretion and lapse into empty form. It begins in abstraction and becomes even more abstract, and the paradigm for this process, once completed, is a ground-away coin, a denarius whose symbols and national designations have been effaced a kind of global hyper-currency, in other words, not backed by any metropolitan treasury, ministerially unsigned, undenominated an impossible coin, you might say, because no transnational currency currently exists, until you realize that all that Derrida is describing is raw specie, undifferentiated bullion an ingot.[49]

It's important to be clear about this: For Derrida, such un-differentiation is the utopian condition of both money and language, because, at least as a thought experiment, it would allow for maximal and frictionless circulation, maximal delocalization, without borders or translators or currency-exchange kiosks. The philologists think that they can trace the word *nous* back to something that a goatherd once witnessed in the northern Peloponnesus, and Derrida's response is to claim that language has never been aboriginal in this way   that it is, indeed, better for

us that it never be aboriginal, localized, non-commercial. This last idea should help us understand why Derrida calls the essay "White Mythology." A century ago, Anatole France, arguing in the indigenist-philological mode that Derrida rejects, asked his readers to think of philosophy as *mythos* alienated from itself, a system of thought with mythic origins that, however, did not know itself to be mythical, burying its underlying concretion in layer upon layer of false ideation. In a sense, that notion is a way of denouncing philosophy, and yet it also posits a mostly unrecognized continuity between myth and school-wisdom, suggesting, indeed, that something telluric remains intact even in the loftiest of modern thought-systems. A talented philologist should be able to pick up Kant or Malebranche and make him speak myth again, by tracing the philosopher's attenuated concepts back to their primeval and non-philosophical roots. If, having done this, we then return to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as written, it will look to us not like great philosophy, but rather like "anemic mythology"   that's how France put it.[50] Hence Derrida's title: It is Anatole France's philosophy-as-blood-sick-folklore that the essay renames "white mythology," and it is that latter concept that Derrida means to vindicate. Blankness is deconstruction's path to redemption. This cannot be said often enough. The essay "White Mythology" was written in defense of its eponym, though even here what matters to Derrida is not so much the "mythology," which is the word he took over from Anatole France, as the "white," which is the word he introduced of his own volition. Onwards, says the Derridean … no going back … forwards … into the whiteness. Mush.

•4. Deconstruction Unmoored

•4.1 The Real Universal, No. 3

-*Deconstruction aligns itself with the history of the European empires, with a universal and impossible colonization*. That's a claim likely to be met with more than customary suspicion, so I'd like to present the clearest evidence for this without delay. What I mean to show you is that deconstruction is an extrapolation from colonial history. Anyone inclined to doubt this should read out loud the following sentences, all of them from *Monolingualism of the Other*.

•Most of what we say about "situations of 'colonial' alienation or historical servitude … also carries well beyond these determinate conditions."

•"It would be the exemplarity [of colonialism] … that allows one to read in a more dazzling, intense, or even traumatic manner the truth of a universal necessity."

•"I would not like to make too easy use of the world 'colonialism.' All culture is originally colonial."[51]

These three sentences non-continuous; a motif not an instance should suffice to establish a first point: Deconstruction would have us believe that colonialism is a universal and permanent condition or even that we have to face up to an ontologized colonialism from which no liberation is possible. *Monolingualism* was first published in 1996, and goes back to a lecture that Derrida gave in Louisiana in 1992, so it might be tempting to think of this colonial register as a novelty, an unusual feature of his late thinking, maybe even as an anomaly. One is

powerfully reminded, however, of an interview that Derrida gave to a feminist interlocutor in 1981. He was arguing, on party-line anti-humanist grounds, that women were wrong to seek liberation and agency, because such pseudo-goods would merely render them metaphysical. Emancipation, that is, would simply ensconce women in the bad illusions of Western personhood, from which they would still have to seek non-identity and alterity. This is the nuance of Derrida's argument: Liberation may not be possible, but then neither is it desirable.[52] And so in *Monolingualism*, Derrida just comes out and says that "emancipation" and national "revolution" are a "trick," the suggestion being that colonization is the just and true condition   the ethical condition, having to speak a language that is not really your own, an alien language, in a manner that renders you open to the other. It is possible, of course, to say that "liberation is a trick" and mean that the various freedom movements have mostly failed that many achieved freedoms have been insufficiently liberating, that what passed for independence in Jamaica in 1962 or Zimbabwe in 1980 was not, in fact, the unhobbling that it promised to be. That Derrida is arguing nothing of the sort should be clear if we linger for a bit over the word "alien." We all live in conditions of "colonial alienation"   that, too, sounds like a complaint, like an outmoded snippet of existentialist melancholy, but only until you recall that "alienation," in Derrida, is a condition to be embraced (because a name for what binds me to the not-I). Language is colonial because my relation even to my native tongue is "asymmetrical" that's Derrida's word; in language, we are "always for the other, from the other, kept by the other."[53] And this position of being kept is, of course, what deconstruction has to offer by way of virtue; it is the stance from which one pursues justice and perhaps

already a form of justice itself. Derrida: "I always surrender to language."[54] People who are actually colonized let's call them "colonized in the narrow sense" are thus closer to a certain wisdom, provided they know how to submit to that status, how not to struggle, how to follow Derrida by surrendering. Derrida is admirably upfront about the point: The "language of the other" will sometimes be "the language of the master or colonist."[55] This might be "unsettling," but deconstruction can't help with that. Anti-imperialism is immoral to the extent that it invites a subject people to shed their responsibilities to something alien.[56]

This is the instant when one is tempted to start blabbing the established facts of Derrida's personal history: that he was *pied noir*; that he threw his lot in with the French when Algerian independence came; that he served in the French military, in Algeria, during the Algerian War; that he wrote a nineteen-page letter to Pierre Nora defending the accomplishments of French settler society.[57] (Derrida was thirty-one when he wrote that letter, in case you're wondering whether the letter in question counts as juvenilia.) By themselves, though, such biographical data won't tell us much; it's not clear what they are supposed to disclose about his published writing. We don't have to supply Derrida's missing biography for him, however we don't have to excavate the life behind the writing since there is a lot we can say about how Derrida stages his life in that writing. Deconstruction is at its most revealing when it comes closest to autobiography. Sometimes, not often, the philosopher speaks about his own childhood and in doing so improvises for deconstruction the kind of sociological account that Marxists and others would otherwise feel compelled to cart in from the outside: *This is where*

deconstruction came from; these are the historical and political circumstances that gave rise to my thinking.

In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida wants to account for himself and his philosophy in openly national-ethnic terms. It might be easiest at this point just to reach for a question: What nationality is Derrida? *French*, one replies without needing to think about it, having spent many decades now talking about "French philosophers" and "French intellectuals" and "French theory." But then how would Derrida himself answer that question? That's harder to answer; not "French," at any rate, at least not always and not without provisos. In *Monolingualism*, he assigns himself three different ethnicities, which then get superimposed on one another in complicated ways. This will take some explaining:

First, he calls himself "Franco-Maghrebi."[58] This jumps out because it's a term that usually refers to North Africans living in France and so suggests that Derrida, in an unexpected moment of solidarity with the banlieues, is actively identifying with immigrants and their kin. It's the sort of formulation that would make a *beur* of any French-born deconstructionist.[59] As such, it calls to mind those rare passages in the early Derrida where he doesn't only inveigh against "Western metaphysics," but actually points to non-Western alternatives. There is something big right at the beginning of *Grammatology* that doesn't usually feature in presentations of Derrida's core arguments. As of 1968, one of the categories that most interested Derrida that, indeed, consistently roused his ire was "phonocentric writing," writing that wanted to be close to speech, which mostly meant "alphabetic writing" or any script that mimicked phonemes.[60] This was the

particular (and un-Heideggerian) way in which the younger Derrida thought the Greeks had ruined everything: Western writing was infected with self-loathing by its very alphabet. His attention thus turned, though only fitfully, to non-alphabetic writing systems, to the point where he was briefly claiming to prefer Chinese characters or the mixed writing systems of the ancient world.[61] When Derrida calls himself "Franco-Maghrebi," then, we have to hear him as fessing up that he is not comfortably or wholly French, nor even comfortably European. Deconstruction maintains a still operative allegiance to something outside the West.

If it is nonetheless unclear whether or not to call this solidarity, then this is because Derrida, in Louisiana in 1992, called himself "the only Franco-Maghrebian here" and, indeed, teasingly pulled rank on the people who otherwise fit that description: North African Arabs with strong ties to France and French culture. To one such person he said: *My friend, I am more Franco-Maghrebian than you.* And what he seems to have meant is: *More than you, I am neither one nor the other (because you are really Moroccan, whereas I am not really Algerian).* [Close off the reading in which his rival is French-raised.] At that moment, something unusual about Derrida's formulation slides into view, which is that he wants the two-term ethnicities that have become common in immigrant societies to be able to indicate neither-nor instead of both-and, which is how they are usually glossed. In fact, he seems determined to reserve the hyphenate construction for the negative case, requiring us silently to revise any number of common usages. To anyone speaking Derridean, "Mexican-American" would henceforth mean "not Mexican, but not American either." *I am Mexican-American … I am an un-Mexican-*

un-American. The hyphen furnishes not the fullness of a dual identity, of belonging more than one place, but the liberating severity of non-identity, of belonging nowhere, of feeling beholden to no formation.

Not really Algerian…. Second, then, Derrida makes a point of letting his audience know that his family was Jewish. He talks about being stripped of his citizenship during World War II and of being expelled from his French-colonial school as a pre-teen. He even links that near-calamity to his philosophical preoccupation with non-identity. [62] This matter is especially complicated, however, since it would have been easy for Derrida at this point to claim the status of the Jew. Plenty of scholars do this on his behalf.[63] He was neither French nor Algerian *because a Jew*; one writes that sentence and Judaism takes up its accustomed place (or non-place) as the non-national and stateless term, the stranger, the third, the ethnicity-that-is-not-one. It is all the more conspicuous, then, that Derrida refuses to make this claim on his own behalf. Plainly, the term "Franco-Maghrebi" is already in the way, occupying the spots in all the formulations where one might have expected to find the word "Jewish"; it, and not its Abrahamic rival, is doing the work of non-identity. "To be a Franco-Maghrebian, one 'like myself,' is not … a surfeit or richness of identities, attributes, or names. In the first place, it would rather betray a disorder of identity." [64] From this perspective, a man calls himself "Franco-Maghrebi" in order *not* to call himself "Jewish," presumably because this latter would too readily be perceived as a preformed category.

Not really Algerian, then, but not really Jewish, eitherThird, and in order to explain this last, Derrida offers that it was his

absorption into French settler society that kept him from being in any emphatic way Jewish: No-one he knew spoke Hebrew or Ladino; the Algerian Jews trimmed the penises of infant boys, but called this "baptism"; he grew up in "a disintegrated 'community' … cut off … from Jewish memory."[65] Derrida, in sum, was socially and culturally a *pied noir*. This, at least, is an identification he reaches for without fuss: "I have never ceased learning, especially when teaching, to speak softly, a difficult task for a 'pied noir'…."[66] Judaism moves in to block his identification with Algerians, and French settler society moves in to block his identification with Jews, but nothing arises in turn to block that *last* identification. The role of *pied noir* is the limbic of non-identity within which the other two are suspended, since it was under the umbrella of French colonial institutions that Algerian Jews and assimilated Arabs and the mutant French all met. The term "Franco-Maghrebi" thus ends up suggesting not "North African Arab in France" but "displaced *pied noir*," the homeless Acadian or expropriated Rhodesian. A term that you might have thought was functioning like "Haitian-American" or "Asian-American" turns out to sport the old imperial hyphen after all, in the manner of "Anglo-Indian" or "Anglo-Irish," while the qualities that a radical ethics has sometimes associated with Judaism get assigned to white colonials instead.

What we'll want to see at this point is that Derrida goes out of his way to narrow the distance between the Algerian Jews and the *pied noirs* or, indeed, between the *pied noirs* and favored Arabs. He refuses, in other words, to distinguish between varied and unequal social positions in colonial Algeria, or is interested in those situations where these really were least distinct. Crucial here is a longish passage where Derrida describes his early

education: "For all the pupils of the French school in Algeria, whether they were of Algerian origin, 'French Nationals,' 'French citizens of Algeria,' or born in that environment of the Jewish people of Algeria who were at once or successively the one and the other... for all these groups, French was a language supposed to be maternal, but one whose source, norms, rules, and law were situated elsewhere."[67] Two points need to be made about this passage:

First, it is Derrida's habit to fuse the positions of the colonizer and the colonized, and to associate both indifferently with the alterity for which Judaism has long served as shorthand. "For all the pupils … For all these groups…" This bit of improvised sociology is, in effect, just a historically concrete version of that argument he has already made in the abstract, via the philosophy of language: that none of us are the masters of language, not even of our native tongues, that we are all colonized by language. A person reading *Monolingualism of the Other* for the first time might think that the historical situation of the young Derrida was simply too peculiar to furnish any generalizable insight. Perhaps all Derrida can do, when thinking back to his childhood in the colony, is testify, to draft what at times reads like anti-fascist testimonio. But writing as a philosopher, Derrida says he has no interest in mere witnessing of this kind. Quite the contrary: He wants to consider the ways in which the seemingly anomalous settler-Jew, the not-quite-pied-noir, discloses something "structural, universal, transcendental, or ontological." Here's the single most Kantian sentence in the entire oeuvre: "What holds for me, irreplaceably, also applies to all. … Everyone can say the same thing for themselves and of themselves."[68] So everyone is a not-quite-pied-noir, and deconstruction asks us now

to conclude that *no-one* is native. *No-one is native*   you can't be a good Derridean and flinch from the realization that this line of reasoning simply shuts out indigenous people, by declaring them non-existent. You might, of course, think that Derrida is right about this   that the people who call themselves indigenous are dismally self-deluding   though hopefully you'll concede even so that this is going to come as news to the Quechua and *kanaka maoli*. The Algerian Jews, at any rate, "could not properly identify themselves," but then neither could the French-speaking Arabs or the white-settler kids; they were all equally "deprived of easily accessible models of identification."[69] Non-identity thrives in the colony, which is to that extent to be preferred to non-colonial formations   either to decolonized institutions or to the putatively uncolonized metropolis.

And yet   second point   the metropolis retains its position of priority even here, just when it seems to have been sidelined. The colony, as the scene of generalized liminality, is where deconstruction is best actualized, and yet it can only achieve its truth in relation to Paris. Without colonialism, no liminality; and without the metropolis, no colony. A few sentences bear the claim out. French literature, Derrida says…

> …was the only thing … that I enjoyed receiving. The discovery of French literature, the access to this so unique mode of writing that is called 'French-literature' was the experience of a world without any tangible continuity with the one in which we lived, with almost nothing in common with our natural or social landscape.[70]

"The French language was situated elsewhere." "French literature had nothing in common with ordinary experience." It's not hard

to see that Derrida has maneuvered the high bourgeois culture of the imperial center into what deconstruction takes to be the redemptive position, the position of *Autrui*. Racine and Voltaire are this short book's one specified instance of "language … coming from the other," language as "the coming of the other."[71] The idiom of alterity has always been wholly formal anyway and to that extent self-defeating, unable to distinguish among the world's many different candidates for the title of other, consigning them all in one go to the heap labeled "anything-that-isn't-me" and thereby abolishing the very distinctions that the concept was commissioned to keep safe. More to the point, the concept of "the other" is reversible; I possess a boundless obligation to the other, but then so does the other, who to that extent ceases to be altogether unlike me. Radical ethics thus establishes the identity of *moi* and *Autrui* in the very act of making our dissimilarity morally relevant. As concepts, non-identity and alterity are wholly vacant, incapable of caring about which historical content you summon to fill them out. Politically, otherness becomes a non-starter as soon as you realize that one can easily plug the imperial metropolis into the alterity slot   and not only that one *can*, but that Derrida *does*. For our purposes, the important point to carry forward is that when Derrida speaks of language in these (messianic) terms as "the coming of the other" he is making a universal point about the colonial status of all language while *also* talking in historically specified ways about the projection outside of Europe of Parisian French: "an available monolanguage for example, French." [72] In this deconstruction, the other is a Gaul. "I finally know how not to have to distinguish any longer between promise and terror." Or almost two decades before that, in *Of Grammatology*: "What is

going to be called *enslavement* can equally legitimately be called *liberation*."[73]

•**4.2**

If the term "post-structuralism" has ever referred to any titles in particular   if post-structuralism, that is, has had not just canonical texts, but name-generating ones   then surely it refers to the attacks that Derrida launched against Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1966 and 1967. "Structure, Sign, and Play" goes after "structural or structuralist thought" in its very first sentence; its opening claim is that "structure" is as old as the West, an encumbrance, therefore, an unthinking conceptual reflex, one more bad habit picked up in childhood, the philosophical equivalent of chewing your nails. This "would be easy enough to show," we read in the lecture, which formulation is Derrida's preferred way of not showing something.[74] It's not clear, anyway, that Derrida is right about this. An etymological dictionary will tell you that the word "structure" is Latin, from *struere* "to build," and so not, in fact, ur-Western   old, sure, but not Aegean-old. It will also tell you that "structure" goes back to the Indo-European root *stere-*, meaning "to spread or stretch out," which also gives us Greek *stronymi* or "strew," in which case we would have to conclude that the word "structure" has "strewing" as one of its closer cousins. Structure and dissemination are thus not the antitheses that deconstruction takes them to be, but in fact variants of one another, two different ways of naming a collection of scattered points. Anyone wanting to toss out the one on the grounds of its metaphysical antiquity would, to be consistent, have to discard the other, as well.

The attack on Lévi-Strauss then continues in *Of Grammatology*, where the anthropologist serves as Derrida's one great example of a living, breathing gramophobe—all the evidence he has, really, for the claim that a writer could still in the late twentieth century rise to prominence by systematically dishonoring his own medium, that someone trained as a philosopher could take to print in ink-loathing praise of *peuples sans écriture*. Lévi-Strauss had reported seeing an indigenous man in Brazil, living far from white settlement, wielding fake writing as a weapon against his fellows, trying to bolster his authority over them by pretending to read wordless scratchings on a page. Reflecting on that scene some days later, he had concluded that this incident revealed something important about all writing: namely, that some of its political effects depended not at all on *what* it said, but merely on the performance of the saying; that writing communicated the power of the writer before it communicated anything else. You can tell that the power of the writing is independent of its words because it seems to operate even when there aren't any words.[75] Such is the argument that Derrida was out to defeat. And to the extent that Lévi-Strauss was uniformly regarded as structuralism's standard-bearer, that defeat would do more than any other event in recent French philosophy to bring into view the possibility of what we might call thought after Lévi-Strauss and what we have called post-structuralism, which is the name we give to sundry radical French philosophers when assimilating them to Derrida.

But then if you're going to call deconstruction and the rest "post-structuralist," you also have to let "structuralism" suffice as a descriptor for Lévi-Strauss's work. This means, in turn, that if you emphasize *other* features of Lévi-Strauss's system—or if you

simply recognize other keys to Lévi-Strauss's renown in the mid-1960s; other features, I mean, of his public profile then our conception of deconstruction will shift accordingly, and maybe our conception of post-structuralism, as well, should it be shown to have been surpassing other things, too, in the process of outstripping *la structure*.

Anyone with enough time can confirm through a course of reading the broad outlines of Lévi-Strauss's philosophical project. The trick to reading Lévi-Strauss is to realize that he was, despite himself, a big-historical thinker. Structuralism, officially anti-historical, houses within itself a whopping-great story about What Has Happened to the World Over Time, and it is these disavowed historical claims that underwrite its rejection of history in favor of myth. Those claims are by now pretty familiar. Lévi-Strauss begins with the anti-humanist theory of (European) man that we associate above all with Heidegger and the Frankfurt School: of Promethean man, in other words, an Ahabian humanity driven to master the world, all-conquering, determined to murder the very ocean, self-subordinating, too, constructing the technologies and institutions that "destroy innumerable living forms," and then capturing itself in its own disastrous machinery.[76] Many have come to the conclusion that there is a basic ambiguity in Lévi-Strauss's arguments or that he wants to have it both ways. No French writer of his generation wrote as ardently against ethnocentrism or against the late Victorian habit of ranking the world's peoples, and if we take Lévi-Strauss at his word, then we shouldn't be able to rank the West any more than we can rank the Bantu or the Inuit. Or rather, we shouldn't be able to *demote* the West. European civilization should settle in as just one more culture among others, with conventions of its own, cognitive

customs (called "science"), narrative customs (called "history"), and so on. But there is, of course, a second sense in which Lévi-Strauss's structuralism takes European culture to be unique, after all   uniquely diseased, uniquely alienated, estranged from the fundamental ways of relating to others and to the non-human world that are preserved by tribal thought. Structuralism was thus energized by a remarkable combination of features: a Frankfurt-style critique of instrumental reason   or a Heideggerian critique of productivism   grafted upon an anthropologist's regard for indigenous ethics, though it's not hard, of course, to see how these would go together: the comprehensive rejection of European thought sponsors a rigorous survey of the non-European kind.

The subtle point about structuralism, then, is that it meant not only to report on the thinking of pre-literate societies, but also to replicate that very thought for the people of Europe and North America   to teach someone who would otherwise be reading Salinger and Nabokov to think again like an indigenous person. It's not just that Lévi-Strauss was an eco-thinker in the ordinary sense, though he could usefully be revisited under that rubric, given that he was trying to spell out a conservationist approach to thinking itself, an approach to thought modeled on the conduct of people who live amidst scarcity, on the recycler's approach to objects, therefore, in which thought can be reconditioned and repurposed and so does not require endless innovation or concept-production, where you sift through the intellect, take what you need, combining one fistful of concepts and images with scraps of other such, cinching together out of the leavings of former reflections a not-exactly-new thought-object better suited to the task at hand. The idea, at least, is that such tinkering is what

thought actually does, only we don't know this because we chronically overestimate the mind's novelty and independence. But then equally it is what thought *should* do — adapt, sort through its already existing riches rather than engineer a single intellectual innovation determined to drive all others from the field. Structuralism, which is another name for *pensée sauvage*, offers itself as the very model of extensive and non-hierarchical cognition, the thinking of concrete possibilities, permutations within generous limits, social and cultural variety, solutions other than the one we opted for.

All I mean to say is that it is important to recall just what Derrida, in 1967, was attacking by attacking Lévi-Strauss. A person, of course, would have to have read deeply in Lévi-Strauss to put a résumé together.[77] But it is enough to thumb through his UNESCO writings — among the most widely read anti-racist tracts to come out of Europe after the war — to find sentences like this: "There is no justification for asserting that any one race is intellectually superior or inferior to another." Or this: "The original sin of anthropology … consists in its confusion of the idea of race, in the purely biological sense, … with the sociological and psychological productions of human civilizations." Or this: "In actual fact, there are no peoples still in their childhood; all are adult, even those who have not kept a diary of their childhood and adolescence." Or again this: "We may note that acceptance of the Western way of life, or certain aspects of it, [by non-Westerners], is by no means as spontaneous as Westerners would like to believe."[78] Alternately, a person reading *Tristes Tropiques* in the 1950s might have remarked that in its opening chapters Lévi-Strauss violates his own chronology in order to let the reader know that he was friends with André Breton, with whom he was

in exile in New York, the two men having met unexpectedly on the anti-fascist refugee ship that carried them both from Marseilles to Martinique.[79] This early French reader, moreover, would likely have known something that a belated Anglo reader could easily miss that the Surrealists were themselves ardent anti-colonialists; that anti-colonialism, more than a rather generic united-front communism, was the distinguishing drift of Surrealist politics which means, in turn, that when Lévi-Strauss drew attention to the Breton circle as one of *Tristes Tropiques*'s more relevant contexts, he was requesting that his readers see that book as an extension of the French avant-garde's repudiation of high Europe. Structuralism asks to be seen as a restaging of a Surrealist action from 1925, in which Breton and his friends disrupted a Parisian literary banquet by sneaking into the hall and tucking into each place-setting a flyer that began: "We profoundly hope that ... colonial insurrections will annihilate this Western civilization whose vermin you defend. ... We take this opportunity to dissociate ourselves publicly from all that is French." Read in this context, Lévi-Strauss's output looks like a multi-volume companion piece to the exhibition that the Surrealists mounted in 1931, called "The Truth about the Colonies" totally direct that exhibition was, no poetry needed, not Surrealist, but realist. One could go on. A '60s-era reader of *Tristes Tropiques* Derrida, say, when preparing the *Grammatology* might have recalled the much discussed Manifesto of the 121, co-written by a young Surrealist and revised by Breton himself, calling for organized resistance to the French government in Algeria and aid for the independence movement there.[80] One detail in particular stands out: It was on that journey across the Atlantic, alongside Lévi-Strauss, that André Breton first made the acquaintance of Aimé Césaire, who

became Surrealism's most important exponent outside of Europe and who was already publishing a journal called *Tropiques*, which then furnished Lévi-Strauss with half his title: *Tristes Tropiques, Troubled Tropics, Tropics of Woe, Despairing Equator*.

Deconstruction, we can now say, came into the world as an attack on anti-colonial anthropology. Not that Derrida was the first person to disagree with Lévi-Strauss hardly. His method had already faced a strong challenge from the Left, where it was said that structuralism was a device for downplaying conflict, for minimizing the fractures and struggles that agitate and occasionally transform even non-literate and stateless societies. Many readers on the Left have always felt that structuralism was guilty of overstating the ability of culture, art, or myth to produce stability in a society by imaginatively reconciling its real antagonisms.[81] But then Lévi-Strauss had also faced a challenge from the Right, which accused him of being a self-loathing Westerner driven by anti-civilizational prejudice, a temperamental and aestheticized primitivism that would say anything, opportunistically and unaccountably, in order to make tribal people look better than the Belgians or the Lyonnais.[82]

It is this second line of argument that Derrida took up in 1967. What we'll want to note first is that indigenous peoples are never *not* at issue in *Of Grammatology*, from beginning to end, albeit in ways that can be a little hard to spot. Indians don't appear by name until the chapter on Lévi-Strauss, but they hang silently over the entire book, since they can't help but be Derrida's test case, over and over again, for his signature claim that there have never existed societies without writing. Take the following sentence: "Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing,

or the letter…, the concept of the *graphie* [the unit of a possible graphic system] implies the framework of the *instituted trace*, as the possibility common to all systems of signification."[83] The word to pay attention to is *before*: Even before the letter, before writing in the ordinary sense. Derrida has to grant that there have existed oral societies even in the process of negating that claim. The same holds true for the the prefix *arche-* in the term *arche-writing*; it, too, points to *indios* and islanders. In some contexts, of course, *arche-* just means "very ancient" or the "first," and if that were true here, *arche-writing* would refer to "the rudiments of writing" or "ur-script," hence maybe to Babylonian accounting methods, except Derrida exploits a permanent ambiguity in perceptions of the primal, which ambiguity follows on from the simple observation that the prototype of a given thing is often unlike that thing's common form, sometimes to the point of unrecognizability. The earliest version of x both is and isn't x. What Derrida also calls "originary writing" thus carries its own negation inside itself: writing-before-writing, which is also writing-that-is-not-writing, which is also indigenous writing or the writing-of-people-who-don't-read. If you were to substitute "Indian" for "arche-" every time you saw it, it would become rather easier to reconstruct Derrida's historical claims: arche-writing, Indian writing, un-writing.

The first of Derrida's complaints is thus easy to guess: Lévi-Strauss is to be rebuked for stupidly believing that the Nambikwara didn't know about writing until he showed up with his notepad. If you've read any Derrida at all you will have seen this thesis coming, though even in that case, the "Violence of the Letter" will give you a chance to confirm your hunch that Derrida can make his signature argument only by proclaiming all marks to

be writing: vegetable-dye tattoos, zigzags on squashes, wolves urinating on rocks. The idea is that the precolonial Nambikwara could have gained insight into writing by watching a jaguar claw significance into tree bark.[84]

It is, however, Derrida's second argument, the one about violence, that you might not have seen coming. Lévi-Strauss, after all, had wanted to specify the forms of oppression that Europeans have inflicted on the non-European world, and to point out that this oppression was not just material, but cultural and cognitive, as well. And to this Derrida replies that the violence at issue was *not* Europe's fault, that colonized people were already oppressed before their conquerors arrived, overcome from the start by "the originary violence of language which consists in … classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute" the direct address and so using words to subsume the world in generalities.[85] Here, at the very latest, we are forced to conclude that Derrida has fundamentally reversed tack on radical philosophy's usual wildcat genealogies of "metaphysics" or "Western thought." For if deconstruction is right, the problem with "Western thought" is not its addiction to theoretical, philosophical, or scientific knowledge (which has its home in writing &c); nor are we meant to contemplate the ways in which writing everywhere produces new forms of hierarchy: scribal elites, ranked degrees of literacy, preferred positions for the hyper-literate, &. The most serious problem with "Western thought" is that it encourages one to believe that there is also something other than "Western thought." The polemical thrust of early deconstruction in its struggle with anthropology boils down to the idea that there is no position outside of the violence perpetrated by meaning-making people

from which one might in good conscience struggle against London or Paris.

This is not an argument that will withstand even basic modes of scrutiny. One can, of course, indict Lévi-Strauss on charges of a generic Rousseauvianism. If you've already decided that Rousseau was a chump and Alp-climbing hippie, or if you think that anyone who prefers indigenous people on any grounds is indulging in so much noble savagery, or if you think that smart and convivial Indians are *only* ever stock characters, then nothing Lévi-Strauss says is going to change your mind. But the details of Derrida's objections won't hold up. Nor is this a subtle point. It's enough to go and read *Tristes Tropiqes* to see that Derrida is wrong about Lévi-Strauss. The big point should be apparent, in fact, to anyone who knows anything about structuralism, even second-hand. Lévi-Strauss, after all, is not dreaming of a paradisical spoken language in which words were still full, directly attached to the world's furniture, capable of presence. Quite the contrary: He accepted Saussure's position, which Derrida also misrepresents on this point. The most basic move of structuralist anthropology was simply to extend the Saussurean account of language to tribal societies, precisely in order to *defeat* the idea that language worked differently for indigenous people   to show that tribal people, too, existed in culture and not nature, that they were semiotic peoples, all peoples being semiotic, intensely and intricately coding the world in language via differences that were not positivities. When Derrida attributes to Lévi-Strauss the opposite position, he is simply inventing things that his rival does not say.

It's even worse on the matter of violence, because the evidence could not be clearer. Derrida says repeatedly that Lévi-Strauss is pushing some stupid myth in which native Americans are fundamentally peaceful, which then allows the anti-colonial anthropologist to claim that white people introduced violence to the Americas. And again, this simply isn't what Lévi-Strauss is claiming. In the chapters immediately surrounding "The Writing Lesson," Lévi-Strauss describes an orphan trampled at a dance; "children often hitting out at their mothers"; a little girl who says: "When I'm big I shall kill all the wild pigs and all the monkeys"; hunters who think they will be reincarnated as predatory cats; and those same hunters' belief that any woman who pries into the secret rites of men "should be struck down at once." He also notes "the speed with which [the Indians] pass from cordiality to hostility." He recounts the making of poison. He even describes how the Nambikwara, by their own admission, "murdered" some Protestant American missionaries. It's just that Lévi-Strauss asks us not to judge them for this, construing that killing as a spontaneously anti-colonial act, and so shrugging good riddance to this Presbyterianism-on-the-march, even though he is pretty sure at one point that his hosts are about to kill him, too.[86] That last episode, where Lévi-Strauss anticipates his death at Indian hands, appears in "The Writing Lesson" itself. Nor does Lévi-Strauss then turn around and incongruously describe his hosts as pacifists. He doesn't say much more than that he liked them   that they were "charming," that they goofed around a lot, that they seemed to enjoy each other's company.[87] Post-structuralism's founding arguments rest on errors of the most elementary kind.

•4.3

Then there are the failures of conceptualization and the argumentative inconsistencies. Here's one:

-Derrida's theory of writing is incompatible with an ethics of alterity. Anyone going back to re-read Lévi-Strauss should stay on the lookout for his most characteristic move. Examples of this argumentative pattern abound, but one especially telling instance arrives early in *Tristes Tropiques*, when Lévi-Strauss launches his celebrated attack on travelers and travel writing. The ethnographer begins his travelogue by arguing that we require an anthropology of Western exoticism itself. Or perhaps we don't require *new* knowledge; maybe it would be enough to adapt what we already know back to Germany and Britain and the US. This is to suggest that anthropology in its current form can already help us understand why some white people and especially young white men are drawn to the jungle and the desert. The backwoods adventure, the study-abroad program, the New Zealander's OE these are all tribal initiation rites, in which the European male passes into adulthood via some pointless act of disorientation, self-abuse, and pseudo-heroism. The temporary journey away from one's society is how some people achieve status in that society, by returning home from their gap-year walkabout bearing diaries full of fabricated wisdom: "Lofty and lucrative are the 'revelations' which these young men draw from those enemies of Society savages, snowbound peaks, bottomless caves, and impenetrable forests which Society conspires to ennoble at the very moment at which it has robbed them of their power to harm."[88] One is struck by how much Lévi-Strauss's observations anticipate postcolonial theory in its vintage, Saidian form. Travel

writing is an industry for producing transformative encounters with the non-West, routinized journeys into the Third World, manufactured sublimity that, despite promising fresh experience, nonetheless only ever discovers the same few human types and hyperborean pigeonholes. That argument about well-trodden paths is itself by now a well-trodden path, but the distinctive Lévi-Straussian touch is the idea that commercial and urban societies have never really given up on rites of passage, that expeditions in search of ceremony are themselves ceremonial; that the adventure tourist and bush-league neo-conquistador is, indeed, close to the indigenous people that he seeks out, just not in the way he *thinks* he's close; that Westerners are most like tribal peoples when acting out their Orientalism.

Lévi-Strauss's arguments, in other words, often work by identifying the survival of non-civilizational social forms within putatively civilizational ones. A properly structuralist account of writing, then, would have to reason in this manner, arguing perhaps that indigenous people are *quicker* than others to comprehend the politics of literacy, because even before they have so much as seen a book, they understand the capacity of marks to confer power, whereas scholarly people who live in and around written language are more likely to be duped by its content   all that information! Indigenous people are obviously well positioned to share Lévi-Strauss insight into how indigenous modes persist, and what they might therefore say about literacy is that when young Westerners document their travels in Bolivia or the Thai hill country, they are trying to absorb indigenous life by representing it   that's an argument that Lévi-Strauss himself really does make. Western travel writing is a species of "black magic," and this will be easier to spot if you already know a lot

about magic   if you're an anthropologist, I mean, but also if you're Azande.

This is all to say that Lévi-Strauss, no less than Derrida, posits a continuity between the practices of non-literate and literate peoples. "These customs are very much closer to our own than they appear."[89] In the aggregate, structuralism's continual rediscovery of indigenous ways among Europeans amounts to a Big Argument, which is that we never really break away from *pensée sauvage*, that wild thinking is a permanent part of cognition. If I say again that all peoples are semiotic peoples, then I am saying that the content of any particular system of classifications is less important than the simple fact of system itself, that it is the mind's ability to generate conceptual distinctions   to code the world in language   that makes society possible at all. Semiosis is the ability to organize human groups around basically fictional or at least contingent distinctions. But then to the extent that all societies do this, they are all *sauvage*   all premised on myth and taxonomy and the classifications that analogy makes possible.

Here, then, are some key points that Derrida and Lévi-Strauss agree upon: First, that indigenous people make marks, and that some of those marks resemble script.[90] Second, that even the people we call native live at a permanent and unbridgeable remove from nature. On the terrain of this concurrence, one question remains at issue: whether we are going to assimilate so-called civilized societies to their stateless counterparts, by arguing that even Westerners &c. have indigenous minds, or whether we are going to assimilate indigenous people to the West by arguing that even uncolonized Indians have writing. The choice between Lévi-Strauss and Derrida is thus a choice between a universalism-

of-the-other and a universalism of the self. You might have taken Derrida to be arguing that "Western thought" has always been locked into a certain structure; that it is "poisoned by metaphysics"; that it might nonetheless be possible to think outside of the West if we could patiently wean ourselves off those metaphysics; that until we do so, we will tend recklessly to project Western categories upon everything we see and fatefully upon the non-West.[91] It is precisely if you are convinced that Derrida is right about this last that you would have to reject the Derridean category of "writing," which is more egregiously Occidentalist than "presence" or "spirit" or any other philosopheme that deconstruction raises its crowbar against. There are in the end good reasons for thinking that writing engenders non-identity, and yet the indiscriminate argument-to-écriture is the most identitarian device in all of deconstruction. Alterity is nullified when the well-read ego can envision its others only with texts in their hands.

•4.4

That was one inconsistency. Here's another:

-*Derrida's theory of violence is an instance of the violence it theorizes*. Derrida thinks that we can call all indigenous societies "violent," and that we can do this on philosophical grounds, without having to check, on the simple grounds that they all possess language. He thinks, further, that we can call all language "violent" because sounds and marks begin functioning as words only when they refuse to discriminate among the multiple objects they designate. Language simply will not permit us to fix our regard on some particular thing; it is a hard-wired invitation to

inattention, the inevitable thoughtlessness of thought, an inability to cherish, the ongoing obliteration of specificity. It would be enough at this point to restate Derrida's claim that all culture is colonial: "Every culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some 'politics' of language. Mastery begins, as we know, through the power of naming, of imposing and legitimating appellations."[92] Colonized people are as violent as the people who have colonized them because they give things names. If you want to stay close to Derrida's reasoning, you have to be able to amplify these points with a certain ferocity, declaiming your view that every word is a red-hot cattle-brand, every noun a cauterant; that we speakers of language are the victims of an irreparable ontological wrenching, an abduction, after which we will never again be where we each most wanted to be, never simply and placidly *there*, as language yanks our head, over and over again, away from whatever we looked at last and towards that thing's many substitutes and remote doubles. Of course, it is enough to paraphrase Derrida in this het up fashion to realize that his rhetoric of violence is, in fact, wholly optional. All language is general, sure enough, but one is hardly obliged to make that point in a manner that recalls angry severity or physical force, which last Derrida is stuck referring to as "empirical violence."[93] Other words would also serve: Maybe language is "alienating" or "etiolating" or "schematic." Language compels inattention, so maybe it's just "rude." To use the word "violence" to name all neglect of specificity is to discount the possibility that there is something specific about violence. Equally, it is to block the judgments that we are otherwise called upon to make about types and degrees of violence   judgments, in other words, about which kinds of violence we might wish to oppose in the first instance,

today, before going home. Not that Derrida doesn't himself sometimes distinguish between forms of violence, instructing us, indeed, which types to prefer. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida says that people attached to their localities are "archaic" and "primitive" and then greets the possibility that modern, quintessentially American media   radio, film, telephones, television, what he calls "tele-technics"   will roust and scatter such people, subjecting to "the process of dislocation" anyone who still thinks he possesses a "native soil."[94]

•4.5

So much for the second incoherence. Here's a third:

-Derrida's universalism is not really universal. So a Derridean might want to reply at this point that aboriginal people are never aboriginal, which is to say that they are always already displaced and dispossessed. The colonizers don't have any ontological privilege or historical mandate. If everyone is already *dispossessed*, then metaphysically speaking, there's nothing for a land-hungry settler to do. This is where Derrida is, in fact, closest to Lacan (or to Lacan/Žižek), offering his own theory of the barred subject, universal alienation, and our fundamental inability to reunite with the world, which in Lacan is simply Oedipus or the lost mother, hence the course of individuation or, worse, of failed individuation. But there are nonetheless questions of an Aristotelian/Hegelian kind about the relation between the particular and the universal about, in other words, the realization of the universal in this or that particular. And here Derrida is perfectly willing to distinguish between people (and practices and institutions) who actualize this universal

dispossession to greater and lesser degrees. It will be important at this moment to consult the passage in *Of Grammatology* where he concedes that the invention of "writing in the narrow sense" was an event of epochal significance because it involved "a prodigious expansion of the power of differance." [95] Speech is already mediation, already the active and productive coding of the world, but writing makes this truth overt and unignorable and potent. This means, in turn, that people with "writing in the narrow sense" are imbued with "the power of differance" in ways that non-literate peoples are not. What had been writing *in nuce* becomes writing in elaborated fact. More: Derrida thinks that some people can convince themselves that they are rooted or non-alienated and that it would be better if they were rendered fugitive. "Dislocation" is primal in Derrida, coeval with the fantasy of a settled community, and yet techno-media are granted the special power to effect that dislocation in some actualized and real-world form. And the word "dislocation," of course, introduces as relevant context a rather striking set of historical referents. To insinuate that people would be better off having their land taken from them because it would correct their metaphysics is to offer philosophical apology for dispossession.

I began with some questions: How can we tell the difference between deconstruction and the other philosophies of non-identity, notably negative dialectics? Who are deconstruction's real enemies? Can just anyone be a Derridean? Answers should now be forthcoming: Derrida is unlike Adorno because he universalizes the civilizational technology of writing; because his inflated concept of violence refuses to distinguish between a Native American clearing a path through a forest and a European clearing a path through Native Americans; because his entire

program is pitched against the non-literate, which could mean the badly educated, but mostly means the indigenous, who are not the philosopher's Levinasian others, but rather his chosen adversaries, the unwelcome. If there is a politics to deconstruction, Derrida says, it is a "politics of exodus, of the émigré. As such, it can of course serve as a political ferment or anxiety, a subversion of fixed assumptions and a privileging of disorder."[96] Underlying this subversion   this bringing of disorder to the natives   we find a fixed assumption in turn, which arrives in the form of an analogy or even a sort of allegory: that emigrants are people in the condition of writing, no longer tied to a single place, spread out, propagated, published, a kind of human *écriture*. Human societies are just only when they approximate the condition of literature. Linguists, of course, have felt free all along to ignore deconstruction, preferring to stand pat on the idea that writing-in-the-narrow-sense is secondary to language-in-general. Linguists will tell you that the minds of children are set up to develop language, to absorb it from the vibrating air, whereas writing has to be in a different sense learned, which is to say taught, broken down into steps and lessons and drillable techniques. They will also tell you that most languages have never been written down, including the great majority of historically vanished ones.[97] From that perspective, there is nothing more telling in Derrida than his dismissal of oral societies. His entire argument is designed to dislodge people without writing from historical and global primacy, or even to deny their existence. A linguist will hear this and think it all a bit dotty, since the numerical preeminence of oral societies is as well established a fact as any in the human sciences. But all of early deconstruction is an effort to set the terms such that these propositions become

in some special sense plausible, and if we know that, we will be in a position, at last, to spot the biggest misunderstanding in all of critical theory. Deconstruction is not a critique of Western metaphysics; it is a defense of Western metaphysics from critique. When Derrida first published *Of Grammatology*, he mailed a copy to Roland Barthes, who was then serving out a stint at Johns Hopkins, and Barthes wrote back to thank him. In Baltimore, Barthes said, Derrida's writing was "like a book by Galileo in the land of the Inquisition, or more simply a civilized book in Barbary." [98] And what we learn from the civilized book of deconstruction is that it is a mistake to think that one could ever be non-Western, that in Maryland no less than in North Africa, there is nothing outside the West. *Il n'y a pas de hors-ouest*.

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[1] *Monolingualism of the Other* (1992; 1996), translated by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 16. For variations on the phrases "Deconstruction is America" and "America is deconstruction," see Derrida's *Memoires: For Paul de Man*, rev. ed., multiple translators, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and "Deconstruction is America?" in Malabou and Derrida's *Counterpath*, translated by David Wills (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 219-229.

[2] Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2000), translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 14-15.

[3] Literacy statistics come in various forms. One recent set is available from the National Center for Education Statistics, *A First Look at the Literacy of America's Adults in the 21ˢᵗ Century* (NCES Publication No. 2006-470).

[4] Derrida, Jacques. "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination* (1972), translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 61   171, quotations at pp. 144-5, 143.

[5] ibid., p. 143.

[6] ibid., p. 143.

7 ibid., p. 145, 143.

8 For the commonplaces, see:

http://history-world.org/writing.htm

https:// en.wikibooks.org/wiki/World_History/Ancient_Civilizations

http://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/writing-and-civilization-from-ancient-worlds-to-modernity.html

http://www.mrdowling.com/603-writing.html

http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=23519

All sites retrieved December 17, 2015.

9 All quoted phrases are from Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966), translated by E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), pp. 6   8.

10 All quoted phrases are from Adorno's "Heliotrope," in *Minima Moralia* (1951), translated by Edmund Jephcott, (London: New Left Books, 1974), pp. 177-178.

11 The standard biographies are Stefan Müller-Doohm's *Adorno: A Biography* (2003), translated by Rodney Livingston (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); and Benoit Peeters, *Derrida* (2010), (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013).

12 For Adorno's use of *demontieren*, see *Negative Dialectics*, p. 6. On the policy of *Demontage*, see Lutz Budraß and Stefan Prott's "Demontage und Konversion. Zur Einbindung rüstungsindustrieller Kapazitäten in technologiepolitische Strategien im Deutschland der Nachkriegszeit," in *Innovationsverhalten und Entscheidungsstrukturen. Vergleichende Studien zur wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung im geteilten Deutschland 1945–1999*, edited by Johannes Bähr and Dietmar Petzina (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996).

13 Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," p. 93, p. 70; *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 106, p. 65.

14 Derrida's "Heliotrope" is a section heading in "White Mythology" (1971), in *Margins of Difference* (1972), translated by Alan Bass (Brighton, UK: Harvester Press, 1982).

[15] The bit about *logos* comes from a question that Richard Kearney put to Derrida in the interview published as "Deconstruction and the other" (1981), in *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 156-176, quotation at p. 167. Kearney is paraphrasing Derrida back to him, and the latter accepts the gloss: "Just so."

[16] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. ???; Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (1994), translated by George Collins (London: Verson, 1997), p. 279. For Derrida, see also *Points*, p. 101: "Phallocentrism and homosexuality can go, so to speak, hand in hand."

[17] See Hegel in the *Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), p. 59 : "A person is a specific existence; not man in general (a term to which no real existence corresponds)." Or in the early essay on the "Positivity of Christianity," in the *Early Theological Writings*, translated by TM Knox (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961), p. 169: "The general concept of human nature admits of infinite modifications, and there is no need of the makeshift of calling experience to witness that modifications are necessary and that human nature has never been present in its purity. A strict proof of this is possible; all that is necessary is to settle the question: 'What is human nature in its purity?' This expression, 'human nature in its purity,' should imply no more than accordance with the general concept. But the living nature of humanity is always other than the concept of the same, and hence for the concept is a bare modification, a pure accident, a superfluity, becomes a necessity, something living, perhaps the only thing which is natural and beautiful."

[18] Hegel's anti-reductionism is clearest in his account of the syllogism in either of his two Logics, see, e.g., *The Science of Logic*, translated by George di Giovanni (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 588 - 624. The book I'm describing is not hypothetical. See Robert Brenner's *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (1993) (London: Verso, 2003).

[19] This is the goal of the *demontieren* I was describing earlier. See *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 3   28.

[20] For Derrida on Kafka, see "Before the Law" (1982), in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 181-220. On Joyce, see "Ulysses Gramophone" (1984) in the same volume, pp. 253   309, quotation at p. 74.

[21] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Acts of Literature*, pp. 221 252, quotation at p. 231.

[22] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 7, 43, 108.

[23] See the lecture on "Differance" (1968), in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), pp. 1-28. For "generalized writing," see *Of Grammatology*, p. 55.

[24] Sartre, Existentialism: "Nor can I be sure that comrades-in-arms will take up my work after my death and carry it to the maximum perfection, seeing that those men are free agents and will freely decide, tomorrow, what humanity is then to be."

[25] *Points*, p. 135.

[26] Derrida, *Negotiations*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 374-5; "Deconstruction and the Other," p. 158. See also the end of "The Force of Law," p. 56, where Derrida says that his thinking is neither Jewish nor Greek, but "Judaeo-Greek."
Derrida is explaining again why he prefers the term *mondialisation* to *globalization*, or really why he prefers *world* to *globe*. And what he says is that *globe* is pagan or "pre-Christian" -- and that "world" is to be preferred *because it is Christian*, because "Saint Paul" gave us the "world as fraternal community of human beings, of fellow creatures, brothers, sons of God and neighbors to one another." He wants us to stick with this "Pauline language," coming out of "an Abraham tradition (Judeo-Christian-Islamic but predominantly Christian)." (Globalization, Peace, and Cosmopolitanism p. 374 - 5) He says that the conception that most matters to him is "Christian predominantly" -- that he knows, further, that this conception has been guilty of a certain hegemony, but that we must hew to it all the same, embracing its universalism -- the commitment it inspires to one's fellow "creatures and sons of God" -- and we must embrace this Christianity-beyond-Christianity without giving in to "a facile critique of Eurocentrism."

[27] John Caputo and Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press), p. 22.

[28] *Nutshell*, p. 22; Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 59, p. 28.

[29] *Specters*, pp. 78-9.

[30] "Deconstruction and the other," p. 167; *Points*, p. 83.

[31] ibid., p. 173.

[32] A question in that spirit: "Why should philosophy be the preserve of professional philosophers?" See *Points*, p. 125.

[33] Caputo in *Nutshell*, p. 163.

[34] Derrida in *Nutshell*, p. 24.

[35] *Points*, p. 86.

[36] For the Weberian account of writing, see, among others, Jack Goody's *Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). The classic essay on bookland is Frederic William Maitland's "Book-land" and Folk-land," in *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), pp. 244-258.

[37] *Points*, p. 130.

[38] ibid., p. 125.

[39] Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* (1991), translated by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

[40] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, translated by Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 29-31; *Monolingualism of the Other*, p. 17.

[41] *Given Time*, p. 100.

[42] ibid., p. 159.

[43] ibid., p. 158.

[44] "Plato's Pharmacy," p. 78.

[45] "Specters," p. 6.

[46] Marx, *Capital, Volume 1* (1867), translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 128.

[47] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), translated by James Bell and John con Sturmer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 312.

[48] "White Mythology," p. 209.

[49] ibid, p. 210.
[50] Anatole France, *The Garden of Epicurus*, translated by Alfred Allinson (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1923), p. 214. Derrida quotes   or misquotes   France at p. 213.

[51] *Monolingualism*, p. 23, p. 26, p. 39.

[52] See "Choreographies" in *Points*, pp. 91-2: "To credit [the ordinary left-wing conception] of progress and entrust everything to it would be to surrender to a sinister mystification: everything would collapse, flow, founder in this same homogenized, sterilized river of the history of mankind…. This history carries with it the age-old dream of reappropriation, 'liberation,' autonomy, in short the *cortège* of metaphysics and the *techné*."

[53] *Monolingualism*, p. 40.

[54] ibid., p. 47.

[55] Ibid., p. 62.

[56] See also *Monolingualism*, p. 40: "we cannot and must no lose sight of this obscure common power, this colonial impulse which will have begun by insinuating itself into … 'the relationship to the other' or 'openness to the other.'"

[57] For more on that letter, see Edward Baring's "Liberalism and the Algerian War: The Case of Jacques Derrida," in *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Winter 2010), pp. 239-261.

[58] *Monolingualism*, p. 12.

[59] "Maghrebi-French" is also common in the English-language scholarship, often as a more formal synonym for *beur*. For a general discussion, see Paul Silverstein's *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, Nation* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004).

[60] In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida lays into "the phoneticization of writing" as early as p. 4.

[61] He aligns *écriture* with China on pp. 25-26 and again on p. 76.

[62] *Monolingualism*, p. 15-17.

[63] See especially Sarah Hammerschlag's *Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar France Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[64] ibid., p. 14.

[65] ibid., p. 55.

[66] ibid., p. 47.

[67] ibid. p. 41.

[68] ibid. p. 20.

[69] ibid., p. 52.

[70] ibid. p. 45.

[71] ibid., p. 68.

[72] ibid., p. 67.

[73] *Monolingualism*, p. 73; *Of Grammatology*, p. 131.

[74] See "Structure, Sign, and Play" (1967), in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (1978), (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 351-370, quotations at p. 351.

[75] See "The Writing Lesson" in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), translated by John Russell (New York: Criterion, 1961), pp. 286-297.

[76] Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques, III, L'Origine des Manières de Table* (Paris: Plon, 1968), p. 22.

[77] In addition to *Tristes Tropiques*, a person would need to have read *The Savage Mind* (1962), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) and the late talks on *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Book, 1979). It would also help to read David Pace's *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Bearer of Ashes* (London: Routledge, 1983) and the biography by Patrick Wilcken (New York: Penguin, 2010).

[78] Levi-Strauss, *Race and History* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952), p. 5 (quotations #1 and #2), p. 19, p. 31.

[79] Lévi-Strauss describes his meeting André Breton in *Tristes Tropiques*, p. 26.

[80] On the politics of Surrealism, see Mark Polizzotti's *Revolution of the Mind* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1995), pp. 235-240 and p. 601; also Jody Blake's "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: *Art indigène* in Service of the Revolution" in *Oxford Art Journal* 25:1 (2002), pp. 35-58.

[81] See for instance Maurice Godelier's "Myth in History" in *New Left Review* 1.69 (1971), pp. 93-112.

[82] See esp. Roger Caillois's two-part essay "Illusions à rebours," in *La nouvelle nouvelle revue française*, December 1954, pp. 1010-1024 and January 1955, pp. 58-70.

[83] *Of Grammatology*, p. 46.

[84] See also *Points*, p. 84.

[85] *Of Grammatology*, pp. 111-2.

[86] *Tristes Tropiques*, p. 274; p. 276; p. 281; p. 282-3; p. 284-5; p. 290.

[87] ibid., p. 285.

[88] Ibid., p. 42

[89] *Savage Mind*, p. 209.

[90] I should note: There's simply no way that Lévi-Strass thinks that native Americans were altogether without writing. At one point in *Tristes Tropiques*, p. 246, he mentions three pre-Colombian societies, the Hopewell, the Chavin, the Olmec, and then makes the following remark: "In all three cases, we are faced with an art that is cursive, free, supple, and marked by an intellectual delight in double meanings (in Hopewell, as in Chavin, certain motifs bear one meaning when read normally, and quite another when read upside-down)."

[91] Derrida qtd in Peeters biography, p. 180.

[92] *Monolingualism*, p. 39.

[93] *Of Grammatology*, p. 112.

[94] *Specters*, p. 82.

[95] *Of Grammatology*, p. 131.

[96] "Deconstruction and the other," p. 170.

[97] The point is that these are the commonplaces of linguistics and especially of ethno-linguistics, but see, for instance, David Harrison's *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). I'm grateful to Nathan Sanders for helping me clarify these points.

[98] Barthes qtd in Peeters's Derrida bio, p. 181.