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Derrida and Postmodernity: At the End(s) of History

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Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

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This thesis has been completed as a requirement for a higher degree of the University of Southampton.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis has been completed as a requirement for a higher degree of the
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This thesis erects and defends the proposition that Jacques Derrida's readings of 'metaphysics in deconstruction' and his raising to theoretical consciousness of the 'differential matrix', have the capacity to inaugurate a 'brave new world' in this postmodern 'age of the *aporia*'. Beginning with an examination of Derrida's readings of Husserl and Saussure, it is argued that the radical historicity uncovered here *qua* an originary synthesis of language, time and the other, opens the possibility for greatly more democratising and emancipating self-creations and human solidarities to be thought. In terms of 'self-creations', and borrowing from the work of Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Chapter Two follows Derrida as modernity's sovereign subject and its 'History' are dis-placed by an absolutely affirmative postmodern subjectivity whose axiom might be 'I inherit, therefore, I am...yes, yes...' Construed through his deconstructive reading of Kant, Derrida shows the way in which this postmodern subjectivity *without alibi*, makes of us all (like it or not, know it or not) *resistance fighters*, so many singularities existing in constant tension with all normalising/totalising tendencies (social, economic, techno-scientific, political, legal etc...) which profess to *know* the *secret*. Turning to co-extensive 'human solidarities', Chapter Three subsequently demonstrates the way in which Derrida's call for a 'New International', orientated through a 'new figure of Europe', enables us to imagine new polysemic communities (local, national, international) founded on the '*aporia* of the demos', a 'foundation' that construes its hyper-relativity as a positive (ethico-political) condition of *decision* in terms of a radical responsibility (on an individual and communal level) for the moral/aesthetic decisions we make. It is thus that I will argue that Derrida's vision for a 'new world order' is born out of an aporetic condition which is both a risk and a chance of both the best – and the worst – happening; as someone who shares Derrida's desire for a fairer, freer, more peaceful world, one respectful of difference and otherness, I believe this to be a 'poker like gamble' well worth taking. Chapter Four offers a comparative analysis between the work of Jacques

Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, two theorists counter-signing differently many of the 'same' discourses/ traditions/cultures/languages, etc...to which they are both heirs. The chapter examines their respective 'quasi-philosophies of the limit', together with their differing conceptions of the issues surrounding globalisation and universalisation, as well as Baudrillard's elevation of America (as opposed to Europe) as the exemplary site of resistance against the dangers of totalisation in 'postmodern' societies. The central argument here, in line with my previous remarks, is that Derrida's thought arguably remains 'the best' way to navigate the postmodern condition and the challenges it produces.

The originality of this thesis lies in two main areas, the first having to do with my presentation and conception of Derrida's oeuvre and the second having to do with the comparisons made in this study between Derrida and Ermarth and Derrida and Baudrillard. In terms of the former, I offer what I consider to be a unique, sustained, in-depth analysis of the 'development' (on a theoretical and practical level) of the thematics of 'radical historicity' and of 'post-historical man' – effectively the development of Derrida's *quasi-philosophy of history* – from his earliest works so that they can be seen to inform his later intervention(s) in what are conventionally understood as ethical and political matters; transforming this understanding in the process and, after the end of history's *ends* (upper case, lower case and the totalising 'history of meaning' *per se*), quite literally and radically changing the way we see what we call 'the world'. For while in the conventional literature Derrida's politics come late, I argue here that his indeed later political work is but an emphasis of constant political thematics acting as a leitmotif from beginning to end. Turning to the latter, in terms of the comparisons I make – first between Derrida and Ermarth in Chapter Two and more especially between Derrida and Baudrillard in Chapter Four – the claim to originality lies in the fact that there is no comparison of any note or depth in the literature between these thinkers; nothing that compares Derrida's 'affirmative postmodern subjectivity' and its 'inheritance' with Ermarth's 'rhythmic time' and 'multi-level consciousness', and nothing comparing Derrida's corpus – specifically his optimistic emancipating and democratizing hopes for the future – with Baudrillard's more pessimistic conceptualization of 'simulation society' and the loss of our European universal values under the hegemonic, globalising movement of the 'American model'. The aim of these two comparisons is to support my claim that Derrida's historico-political position is the 'best' way of essaying the quasi-ground of an in(different) politics in such a way that it keeps the future open to what he calls a 'better world' to come, a world without *ends*.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Sally Hart

declare that the thesis entitled

'Derrida and Postmodernity: At the end(s) of History'

and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.

- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

- none of this work has been published before submission

Signed:

Date: 8th January 2007.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

> Philosophy came into existence to answer the question: First of all, how to handle one's life and live well together – which is also politics. This is what was addressed in Greek philosophy and from the beginning philosophy and politics were deeply intertwined. We are living beings who believe we have the capacity to change life, and we place ourselves above other animals...we have the ability to make decisions and organise our lives. Philosophy poses the question: what should we do to have the best possible lives? I'm afraid we haven't made much progress in arriving at an answer to this question.
>
> Jacques Derrida[1]

To some, writing a thesis on Derrida and 'postmodernity' might seem to be like

trying to hit a square peg into a round hole, given his inherent dislike of terms such

as the 'post' with its linear connotations of the 'new', and even greater disquiet

about terms such as postmodern*ism*, poststructural*ism*, and the like. However, and

despite the huge 'Derrida industry' which admittedly made me feel uncertain as to

whether I could say anything 'new' or 'original' about either the man or his work,

I felt that Derrida's corpus remains largely unappreciated and misunderstood –

especially outside of a relatively limited radical theoretical community – in terms

of the kind of grand-epochal change I believed it to give voice to and the kind of

'post' modern subjectivity I believed him to espouse; albeit one heavily qualified

so far as the 'postist' phenomenon goes. This belief was increased when, half way

through the writing of the thesis, Derrida succumbed to pancreatic cancer, giving

rise to a flurry of hastily written obituaries in the Autumn of 2004 and various

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[1] Quote taken from an interview conducted by Kristine McKenna for LA Weekly (November 2002), subsequently re-published in the book *Screenplay and Essays on the Film: Derrida*. Directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman. Manchester University Press, Manchester: 2005, p.119

contemplations thereafter on the Derridean legacy. For I was shocked and disappointed (for Derrida himself in the first place) that his deconstructive thought remained so poorly comprehended and so little engaged with at anything more than a cursory level by so many (supposedly) eminent academics who repeated the stereotypical drivel of journalists such as Jonathan Kandell whose libellous article in the *New York Times* drew much derision from Derrida's friends and admirers (even those who did not share his precise intellectual or moral ethos).[2]

I also felt, despite the excellent work in attempting to come to terms with Derrida's work on Philosophy, Literature, Religion, Science, Ethics and so on – which often took the familiar form of 'Derrida and X' – that what was lacking was a really wide-scale understanding of Derrida's thinking which addressed how what often seemed his more abstract theoretical investigations translated into a textual praxis which could enable us, on an individual and collective level, to come to terms with, and go beyond, our 'postmodern condition' politically. For while I by no means regard post-modernity as an absolute break with either modernity or metaphysics *per se*, Derrida's reading of 'metaphysics in deconstruction' does give

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[2] Of Kandell's article Yve-Alain Bois, Professor of Modern Art at Harvard University wrote to *The New York Times* 'Topping the usually philistine relationship of the Times to just about everything academic, and its habit of entrusting the composition of obituaries to overt opponents of the deceased supposed to be memorialised, the article by Jonathan Kandell on Jacques Derrida...reaches a peak of populist anti-intellectualism – not to speak of the countless distortions it contains – that I thought only possible in a Murdoch publication'. (*The New York Times*, October 10th, 2004). This view was endorsed by a range of hostile polemics to Kandell's article by the likes of Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Samuel Weber. A summary of the various arguments can be found in my (soon to be published) article 'On Jacques Derrida: The Politics of Mourning'. This article is due for publication in the June 2007 issue of *Re-Thinking History* (Routledge, London).

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voice to a grand-epochal change wherein we have the 'risky' chance to transform

our self-creations and human solidarities in more democratising and emancipating

ways which have real relevance for the way we live our lives and the economic,

political, social, cultural, technological and religious structures which (help) form

them. While, of course, this involves a degree of historical generalisation through

an ironical historical consciousness working things out in postist ways beyond

history's ends (upper and lower case and the history of meaning *per se*[3]), it is

argued here that this is necessary *today* in order to keep in mind the scale of the

reformation in consciousness involved and the ethico-political terrain upon which

we are now left to make our moral and aesthetic choices *without foundations*. If

we do not keep this in mind, there is a danger that the long, hard, but rewarding

task of the Derridean postmodern 'resistance fighter' will too easily give way to

political apathy.

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[3] I use these three terms as follows: *'Upper case history'* is taken to be meta-narrative history, the genus of those 'modern' speculative quasi-philosophies of history prevalent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which, as Jean-Francois Lyotard argues, seek to organise the whole mass of events into various narratives whose end(s) tend to be universal freedom or the fulfilment of humanity; these 'grand-narratives' being founded on *the* meta-narrative of history *qua* the rationalisation and homogenisation of time and consciousness definitive of 'modernity' as such. *'Lower case history'* is here taken to be the kind of 'common sense', 'own sakist' history which populates most schools, colleges and universities, and which takes what is only a species of history (a bourgeois, conservative species) to *be* history itself (and this 'history' too often taken to be identical with the past itself, as if 'the past' and 'history' were the same phenomenon). This kind of 'academic' history is just as foundational(ist), just as 'endist', as its upper case system variant, and, crucially, just as vulnerable to the kind of postist theorising Derrida *et al* will espouse. Finally, by the *'history of meaning per se'*, I mean to refer to *all* attempts in the Western metaphysical tradition (viewed with an ironical historical consciousness) to constrain the meaning of being to presence up to (and including) our own historical *episteme* which, as I argue, *gives itself* to think not only the fallacy of its own *ends* (hence the irony), but *ends as such*. The argument being (one which will be developed in the course of Chapter Two in particular) that we cannot (and indeed need not) *simply* give up this 'history' in order to challenge it, but must think *through* it.

Undoubtedly my own interest in Derrida's raising to consciousness of what I term, in Chapter One, '*The Differential Matrix*'[4] is motivated by my own moral/aesthetic sensibilities. Being of the political 'left' certainly makes me pre-disposed to Derrida's theorisations and his own political position (he was, he insisted, 'always a man of the left') in that they seem to offer a more plural, flexible, tolerant approach to a range of (contemporary and perennial) ethical and political issues than practically anyone else. To give just a few examples at this point: my concerns regarding the legal and moral status of the current war on terror, my worries regarding our media (hype) driven societies and the models they promote, and all of those inequalities and injustices (economic, social, gender, racial) which go all too often un-remarked or are ignored (or simply paid lip service to), are all theorized and (in my eyes) addressed practically, sympathetically and (morally) responsibly throughout the *entire* course of Derrida's *oeuvre*. But of course at this early stage it is also vital to point out that 'deconstruction' – if there is such a thing – can go with anyone, and that outside the raising to consciousness of this matrix in postmodernity (as that within which consciousness itself is inscribed) I have to take my chance and make out my case based on my own beliefs as to what are 'good', 'just' and 'right' in each new situation/context.[5] As I don't believe that

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[4] *Qua* what will come to be identified as the non-originary origin of language, time and the other, constitutive of our made meaningful world.

[5] A 'fact' of course, that detractors such as Richard Wolin and the late Professor Allan Bloom (to name just two at this juncture) can only abhor in a profound mis-reading of Derrida's 'politics'. While Wolin will speak of the 'corrosive nihilism' of deconstructive thinking, Bloom spoke in a lengthy polemic contained in his book *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon and Schuster Inc. 1987) of deconstruction's propensity for attack moral fibre and lending itself all too easily to 'proto-fascist currents'.

anyone – anyone else – can seriously make their own cases rest on foundationalist premises any more, the sentiments of others are, *in principle*, just as valid as my own. Consequently I have to hope that, *after* Derrida[6], my own more searching, critical, liberal, inclusive 'friendship-based' approach is (Rorty-like) just more 'attractive' to readers than many other readings and that intolerant arguments will fail to appeal to those educated to the shifting, foundationless nature of our 'meaningful' world – hence Derrida's advocation of departments, colleges and the like devoted to philosophy (and hence all disciplines) rendered other-*wise*.[7]

Before I go on to explain how this thesis is structured and developed, there are two points that must be made in this introduction which follow from my just 'footnoted' approach and which I re-iterate in the opening remarks of Chapter One

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[6] When this term '*after* Derrida' is used, and frequently flagged up, I mean (in a sense coined by Nicholas Royle) both 'after Derrida' chronologically and 'after Derrida' in spirit (see Royle's *After Derrida*. Manchester University Press, Manchester: 1995).

[7] In the first chapter of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Richard Rorty explains that, because knock-down, logical arguments that definitely establish a position that is held to be *the* truth are unavailable (indeed impossible), then all we can do is to try and make one's position look appealing; attractive. He writes that this sort of philosophy does not work piece by piece, analysing concept after concept, or testing thesis after thesis. Rather it works holistically and pragmatically. It says things like 'try thinking of it this way' – or more specifically, 'try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and potentially interesting questions'. Consequently, Rorty goes on: 'Conforming to my own precepts, I am not going to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace. Instead, I am going to try and make the vocabulary I favour look attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics'. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1989, p.9).
In this thesis I will, on occasion, argue logically; I shall on occasion try to demonstrate things – as Derrida did himself. But I think he knew, like Rorty knows, that 'in the end', one can only hope – in these 'postist' days after foundationalism(s) – to make one's own thesis (position, reading, 'axiomatically based' gaze) look attractive, and thus to be taken as having (whilst being neither 'true or false') 'at least a certain appearance in its favour'. For Derrida's own comments see 'Deconstructions: The Impossible', in, S. Lotringer and S. Cohen (eds) *French Theory in America*, Routledge, London and New York: 2001, pp.13-32. p.22, from whence the phrase 'at least a certain appearance in its favour' is taken, and where Derrida is painting a position of his own involvement in 'deconstruction in America' tentatively, attractively.

– for they are crucial to this thesis. First, and perhaps most importantly, my

reading of Derrida's theorisations is, of course, precisely that, it is *a* reading: it is

my reading – the same being true for my construal of Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth and

Jean Baudrillard – and thus is both positioned with regard to my own

interpretation(s) of Derrida's work and in respect to the relevant literature.

Second, while I have attempted to simplify some difficult language in this thesis

and to keep postmodernist jargon at a minimum so as to present the arguments as

coherently and transparently as possible, it must be recognised that this attempt is

ultimately imperfect (radically im-possible) and that the use of sometime specialist

and 'technical' terminology[8] comes with the territory and for which I make no

more apologies.

With these comments in mind, the thesis as presented is organised as follows.

In Chapter One I follow Derrida's reading of 'metaphysics in deconstruction' as he

demonstrates the way in which all phono-logo-centric gestures are necessarily and

radically undercut by an 'originary' structure of language and existence which

makes *all* attempts to fix meaning in a determinate figure impossible. In other

words, I follow Derrida's path as he demonstrates that foundationalist acts of

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[8] I would like to underline the fact that 'specialist' and 'technical' is not to confused with 'obscure' and other such adjectives used by (amongst others) Noam Chomsky who argues that the simplicity of Derrida's ideas are 'obscured' with 'pretentious rhetoric'. Not only is much of Derrida's terminology a re-invention and re-elaboration of *existing* terms/terminology. but it seems odd that if scientists, mathematicians and the like are permitted to make use of specialist and (yes) sometimes difficult terminology. that a philosopher-theorist such as Derrida is not.

closure of *whatever type* are always and necessarily imperfect due to a certain, irreducible, absent other(ness) unable to be incorporated into even the most rigorously circumscribed of contexts – everything always remains 'to be thought'. For Derrida will show, through his deconstruction of the 'sign' (a deconstruction not least enabled by his 'double reading' of Edmund Husserl and Ferdinand de Saussure) that the origin of language, reason and history is not located in an originary presence as he argues the mainstream of Western philosophy predominantly asserts, but is instead the product of a greatly more radical historicity or plurivocality referred to in this study by way of the neologism: the *'Differential Matrix'*[9], a phenomenon which makes the metaphysical (foundationalist) gesture simultaneously both necessary and impossible, and which re-inscribes the empirico-transcendental difference in accord with a new quasi[10]-philosophy of the limit. Without an understanding of this *abyssal* quasi-logic (as non-originary origin) which forms the ethico-political space of the decision – of all decisions of whatever kind – it is impossible to grasp either the full impact of Derrida's work for transforming our self-creations and human solidarities in our

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[9] I use this neologism the *'Differential Matrix'* to refer to the non-originary origin of language, time and the other because, in a quite exemplary fashion given its etymological roots (coming from the Latin: *womb*), it re-marks the way in which the matrix or matrices of Western metaphysics – matrices cast variously in terms of origins, forms, (en)closures – are themselves the product of a *monstrous conception* which undercuts *all* first causes, *all* determinate forms, *all* closures of whatever type.

[10] The term 'quasi' is used here, as elsewhere in this study, to mark the paradox of a philosophical account which seeks to demonstrate why we cannot have a final account of how things are or will be. I am indebted to Mark Mason for reminding me of the need to explicate the quasi in this way, and for his useful summary contained in his essay 'Exploring '*the* impossible': Jacques Derrida, John Caputo and the Philosophy of History'. *Re-Thinking History*, op.cit, Volume 10, No.4, December 2006, pp.501-522.

current postmodern condition, or his co-extensive (and possibly) pathological fear

of closure. For if it just is the case that everything (logically) can be described and

re-described *in infinitum*, if meanings remain always and forever *structurally* 'to

come', to be made and re-made in accord with our own moral and aesthetic

sensibilities alone, then everything changes, everything is *different*. A new world

can be imagined, an arguably 'better' world, for those who still believe that the

twin discourses of democracy and emancipation have some 'mileage' left in them

– even if this means rendering them (to repeat) other-wise: *Derrida's politics begin*

here.

In Chapter Two I argue that, with this quasi-philosophy of language/'the limit' in

mind and recognizing ourselves to be in the 'post'- modern 'age of the *aporia*'

(*aporia* being the im-possible passage of meaning and decision making), Jacques

Derrida gives voice, with increasing urgency, to an absolutely *affirmative*

postmodern subjectivity whose axiom might be: 'I *inherit*, therefore, I am...yes,

yes...'; re-figuring our modern metaphysical inheritance beyond the 'ends of

history'[11] by way of a new 'politics of memory' which makes of us all postmodern

resistance fighters against the attempt(s) – 'modern' or 'postmodern' – to execute

what Baudrillard calls 'the perfect crime'. In this chapter I use the work of

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth not only to contextualise postmodernity in relation to

modernity (and metaphysics *per se*) by way of an ironical historical consciousness

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[11] To repeat: upper and lower case history and the 'history of meaning *per se*', as these terms are
defined on page 3, footnote 3 of this thesis.

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which is working itself through in 'postist' ways, but also to juxtapose Ermarth's

rhythmic time and multi-level consciousness against the messianic time and

affirmative postmodern subjectivity I consider Derrida espouses. I argue that

while Ermarth's experimental anthematics and parapraxis provide us with some

interesting imaginaries to work with, Derrida operates in terms of a more effective

textual praxis which, working within and through existing structures and working

in and through our metaphysical inheritance, has a heightened understanding of the

need to work in torsion between metaphysics and the differential matrix (within

which it is inscribed) in a less outright 'Joycean' style, while conversely aiming at

a more radical reading of the 'politics of morality'. No such comparison of

Derrida and Ermarth – which casts them both into productive relief – has

previously been made.

In Chapter Three, I seek to show that Derrida's later thought, characterised as it is

by a more overt intervention – a more vigorous stress – in ethical and political

matters, is entirely consistent with and indeed a working out of and through his

very earliest work on Husserl and Saussure which inaugurates his thinking of the

beginning of historicity and of post-historical man: this continuity is, I think, in the

detail of its 'tracing' in this thesis, a major contribution to 'Derrida studies' and an

answer to critics such as Allan Bloom, Jean Luc Ferry, Alan Renaut and Richard

Wolin (among others) who argue variously that Derrida's deconstructive thinking

leads to 'political irresponsibility' and/or 'moral bankruptcy'.[12] For having

brought to theoretical consciousness the construction of meaning in and through

the *differential matrix*, whereby *all* meaning remains always and forever

structurally 'to come', Derrida uncovers the ethical relation to the other (always

more than one) which opens the ethico-political space of the decision constitutive

of our made-meaningful world. Thus it is that the concept of the political is

simultaneously broadened to cover all conceptual/discursive meanings and is

transformed in its conventional sense insofar as political theory has generally

relied on the notion of a certain 'sovereignty' – variously located in the

body/politic – practiced in the security of the *logos*. With this in mind, I argue in

this chapter that Derrida's thinking has the potential to have a profound,

deconstructive impact on our Western liberal democratic societies which, after the

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[12] In *The Closing of the American Mind* (op.cit, 1987) Allan Bloom argues deconstruction is the
last, predictable stage in the 'suppressing of reason and the denial of truth in philosophy'. Linking
Derrida's work, mistakenly, to a suppression of Marx to the benefit of Nietzsche and Heidegger,
Bloom argues that the 'proto-fascist currents' in deconstructive thinking encourage the nihilism and
relativism which have come to 'infect' the humanities, social sciences and popular culture, thereby
threatening American culture and its 'moral fibre'.
Also concerned with Derrida's specific use of Heidegger Alan Renaut and Jean Luc Ferry
collaborated to produce the book *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*
(University of Massachusetts, Cambridge: 1990) where they argued Derrida's was paradigmatic of
'68 thought which was characterized by a concern with style over substance and a denial of
meaning at all costs.
In a similar tone to Bloom, Richard Wolin has argued that Derrida's work represents a 'corrosive
nihilism' (a view re-iterated in the recent edition of *The Seduction of Unreason*, Princeton: 2004) –
a description to which Derrida has taken great exception. The antagonistic relationship between
Derrida and Wolin was exacerbated when Derrida took issue with what he regarded to be a wilfully
malicious mistranslation of an interview of his on Heidegger which appeared in Wolin's book *The
Heidegger Controversy* (ed. R. Wolin. University of Massachusetts, Cambridge: 1993); a book
Derrida judged to be 'weak, simplistic and compulsively aggressive'. In the light of what he
regarded to be the intentional mis-reading of his work Derrida subsequently refused permission for
the interview to be republished in later editions/reprints of Wolin's book, and the debate which
followed between the two men was played out in the American media, only intensifying the
animosity between them.

end of modernity's history, are faced with the rampant omnibus of modern-style

globalisation much shorn of its sometime 'older' emancipatory and democratic

content. For Derrida insists that, *after* Marx, we must work *today* to intervene in

concrete and urgent situations and to ask questions about the future of our liberal

capitalist democracies in a juridico-political space increasingly shaped by the

powers of the tele-techno-media and dominated by the rhetoric of the world's

strongest nations (the United States exemplarily) which auto-immunise themselves

against the very democracy they are meant to uphold in the name of an

international justice they cannot help but betray. In particular I will follow

Derrida's arguments as he calls for the creation of new forms of struggle to counter

the inequalities and manifest injustices of a paradoxical globalisation orientated

through his suggestions for a 'New International'; for a movement of intellectuals

and activists who might develop new concepts of state, sovereignty, citizen,

international institutions and international law which stretch old political

vocabularies to breaking point. As we will see, for Derrida 'Europe' is to have a

central role in this scenario given that its common experiences, traditions and

achievements have endowed (us Europeans) with what he takes to be a unique

political consciousness and sense of duty to think 'reason'; to think new ways of

'being' other-wise. Derrida argues that the birth of a European public/identity –

which constitutes itself out of respect for difference and otherness – is vital in

fostering a more democratising and emancipating civic solidarity mindful of the

need for continual revision and improvement of all laws, institutions, organisations

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(political, economic, social, religious) in the face of infinite justice; a Europe with the military force and diplomatic powers necessary in the service of such new international institutions and international law to regulate the manifest injustices and paradoxes of globalisation in the international order. Following on from the analysis in Chapter Two, the final point being made in this chapter is that we can all take a more active role in terms of the decisions we make and the pressure we bring to bear on our governing codes/rule systems. It will not be easy, unfortunately for the more 'fundamentalist mind' like Alan Bloom's *et al* there are no guarantees for tactics and strategies are emergent for this 'political ethics': it is a *task* forged in *aporia* (the very condition of the *demos*). But we all have the power to counter-sign differently, and we can try to literally change the world for what *I will argue*, in line with Derrida, is something much the better.

In the Fourth and final chapter I offer a comparison of Derrida's work with that of fellow French philosopher-theorist Jean Baudrillard – arguably one of (or perhaps the) other most radical thinker of our time(s). After a relatively brief but enabling examination of the central themes/arguments that can be read as running through(out) Baudrillard's work – simulation, reversibility, the 'hell of the Same', the aestheticisation of culture to mention here just a few – I proceed to argue that while both men begin from an understanding of the phenomenon of *differance* (the *'differential matrix'* as it is presented here) they arrive at very different conclusions in terms of their respective hopes, their political desires. For while in

some senses it is a slightly reductionist and thus over-simplistic statement to make, it just does seem to be the case that Derrida generally remains much more optimistic in tone, and Baudrillard much more pessimistic in tone, so far as their hopes for a more radically democratising and emancipating future for our self-creations and human solidarities are concerned. And I will argue that nowhere is this more in evidence than in their respective views on Europe and America as potential sites of resistance (or not) to present day, foundationalist enterprises. For while Derrida holds out the hope for a Europe led/inspired new world order opened in the political aporia of the *demos*, to a large extent Baudrillard concedes victory to a banal, technicized, upholstered way of life – what he calls the 'American model' – which has been drip fed to the rest of the world and against which he sees only momentary, largely singular bouts of resistance; resistance all too easily folded back into more of 'the same old thing' (or what Baudrillard refers to as the 'hell of the Same'). Thus I argue (in a similar vein to my conclusions *vis a vis* Derrida's comparison with Ermarth in Chapter Two), that while Baudrillard's strategies of resistance and his writing style, can *appear* more flamboyantly radical than Derrida's, ultimately it is Derrida who allows us to intervene most productively in concrete situations to change the world *more* radically – that is 'for the better' from a post-modern/post-structuralist, left wing, generally more optimistic point of view: Derrida's viewpoint.

The conclusion to be drawn in this chapter is that if 'the best' is here defined as the most empowering radically democratising and emancipating way(s) of reading this 'age of the aporia', such as it (always potentially) keeps the future open to new and unforeseen possibilities for our self-creations and human solidarities – then Derrida's left-wing, optimistic, deconstructive approach, as it is deployed at a theoretical and practical level and which runs as the leitmotif of his work from 'end to end', just *is* 'the best' way to navigate our current postmodern condition with a view to what he hopes will be a new, more free and equal world without beginnings and without ends: an open quasi-conclusion endlessly awaiting much more to be said. And it is this 'conclusion' that is re-turned to (in *my* final pages, in *my own* inconclusive conclusion) in ways rendered slightly otherwise. For this 'tentative conclusion' is that to which I have been working from the beginning of this thesis, the tentative conclusion that has indeed informed and thus constituted it. There is, let me be clear, no teleology at work here, but rather a 'movement' of the *differential matrix* traced throughout in ways which, to re-iterate, might have, as a reading, at least 'a certain appearance in its favour'.

Chapter One:
The Differential Matrix.

[We] begin with the problem of signs and writing – since we are already in the midst of it.
                              Jacques Derrida[13]

In this first chapter I intend to trace the early development of Derrida's reading of

'metaphysics in deconstruction' which, co-extensive as it is with his quasi-

philosophy of language, undercuts the onto-theological[14] tradition's founding

gesture in the form of the Platonic ethico-theoretical decision to oppose the

sensible and the intelligible through the 'Law' of the bar (/); de-stabilising *all*

foundationalist pretensions across the Western discursive formation. Derrida will

show, through a deconstruction of the very 'sign' which endows the world with

meaning for 'us', that the origin of language, Reason and history is not located in

an originary presence – as he considers the mainstream of Western philosophy

would have us believe – but is instead a product of a greatly more radical

historicity or plurivocality referred to in this study as the political and politicising

'differential matrix', a phenomenon which makes the metaphysical gesture both

necessary and impossible.

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[13] Derrida, Jacques, *Speech and Phenomena and Other essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston: 1967, 1973, p.138.
[14] In *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh: 1992, 1998) Sean Burke traces the genealogy of the term 'onto-theology' through Nietzsche and Heidegger respectively, as he argues: 'Following upon Nietzsche's identification of all metaphysical systems with the theological question, Heidegger came to conceive of metaphysics as onto-theology, the determination of being as presence. From Parmenides and Plato onward, says Heidegger, being has been conceived as a simple unity, a full self-present origin and ground'. (p.117).

15

In two of Derrida's earliest publications – namely his translation and 'Introduction' to the philosopher Edmund Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*[15] (1962) and *Speech and Phenomena*[16] (1967) (where he begins with the 'sign' or 'sign-language' and its peculiar aporetic logic), Derrida seeks to demonstrate that the whole historico-metaphysical 'epoch' has always been menaced by what he calls the 'problem of language'; a problem which he argues – in his contemporaneous publication (in English) of *Of Grammatology*[17] (1967) – can no longer be ignored. For while Derrida understands that the 'history of meaning' has been predicated on a presence which (understandably) originated from hearing oneself speak through the phonic substances – and which underlay the Platonic separation of the empirical and transcendental in binary opposition – he nevertheless argues that, particularly in the light of the phenomenological and structuralist 'moments' in the twentieth century (considered as the 'twin poles' of twentieth century thought), this difference and the speech/writing binary upon which it is predicated can no longer be maintained. Indeed, it is in these early texts that the Derridean notions of *'differance'* and *'arche-writing'* can be traced, irrespective of whether they are explicitly 'present' in lexical form. For these neologisms and their thematic and syntactic precursors point to a re-inscription of the empirico-transcendental difference (in terms of an interminable movement of delimitation and excess)

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[15] Derrida, Jacques, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction By Jacques Derrida.* Translated and with a preface and afterword by John P.Leavey Jnr. University of Nebraska Press, London and Lincoln: 1962, 1989.
[16] Derrida, Jacques, *Speech and Phenomena*, op.cit, 1973.
[17] Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology.* Translated and with a preface by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London: 1967, 1998.

which Derrida draws out through the point at which both Husserlian

phenomenology and Saussurean linguistics *fail*.

It is important to emphasise at this point that I am not claiming here to add

anything to Husserlian or Saussurean scholarship – the readings I proffer are

'Derrida's' in so far as I understand them – nor am I essentially adding anything

'new' to existing Derridean scholarship surrounding these deconstructive readings

– Christopher Norris, David B. Allison or Christina Howells, for example, all offer

compact summaries.[18] Rather, in coming to terms with *my* Derridean 'inheritance'

I have made the (ethico-theoretical) decision to 'begin' with Derrida's reading of

Husserl and Saussure in some detail because I think that the originary synthesis of

language, time and the other which he uncovers here (and the ethico-political space

of the 'decision' opened therein) forms the political framework within which

Derrida's later more overtly edifying work can best be understood. For I will

subsequently seek to demonstrate that what may seem to be simply abstract,

theoretical arguments, actually and decisively inaugurate a new kind of (textual)

praxis which enables us, in our current postmodern condition and our

understandings of it, to conceive of greatly more radical 'democratising' and

'emancipating' self-creations and human solidarities than have henceforth been the

case in the totalising 'history of meaning'. Indeed, through his readings of Husserl

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[18] See particularly Christopher Norris's *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, London and New York: 1982, 1999), David Allison's Introduction to *Speech and Phenomena* (op.cit, 1993) and Christina Howells *Derrida: From Phenomenology to Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge: 1999).

17

and Saussure, Derrida is taking us beyond the end of (a certain) history (of ends) whereupon we must seek to forge our own path – a never uncomplicated, differentiating one: setting things straight is not the name of Derrida's game.

Part One:
Derrida and Husserl: At the Limits of Phenomenology.

As I have already suggested in my opening remarks, the importance of understanding Derrida's reading of the 'phenomenological vision' of Edmund Husserl cannot be under-estimated in any attempt to understand the political development of his thought and, most importantly, its impact on our epistemo-ontological and ethico-political economies of knowledge. Indeed it is arguably through his encounter with Husserl that his conception of 'deconstruction' initially developed its rigour and subtlety beyond the reach of any immanent criticism[19], and enveloped for the first time the entire edifice of Western foundationalist thinking. In an interview with Richard Kearney, 'Deconstruction and the other' (1984), Derrida says retrospectively:

> I have never shared Husserl's pathos for and commitment to, a
> phenomenology of presence. In fact, it was Husserl's method that helped me
> to suspect the very notion of presence and the fundamental role it played in
> all philosophies.[20]

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[19] As defined by Theodore Adorno, 'immanent criticism' of intellectual and artistic phenomena seeks to grasp, through the analysis of their form and meaning, the contradiction between their objective idea and their presentation.

[20] Kearney, Richard (Ed), 'Deconstruction and the other'. In *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind.* Manchester University Press, Manchester: 1995, p.160; this paper is the publication of a dialogue which originally took place in Paris in 1981.

For Derrida, Husserlian phenomenology is essentially a 'phenomenology of signification'[21], the most rigorous attempt to separate the sign and presence in order both to secure the primacy of the latter over the former in ways subordinating meaning to Truth (*Logos*) as the *telos* of language, *and* in ways rescuing philosophy from the sceptical doubt he saw pervading Western thought while denouncing the adoption of an unreflective positivism or mere subjective pensivity (aiming to sail a path between empiricism and idealism). As Husserl argues in *The Cartesian Meditations*[22]:

> We must place ourselves above this whole life and all this cultural tradition and, by radical sense-investigations, seek for ourselves singly and in common the ultimate possibilities and necessities, on the basis of which we can take our position toward actualities in judging, valuing and acting.[23]

Husserl's hyper-metaphysical intention, then, is nothing less than a repetition, restoration and completion of the *Greek* origin (Greek metaphysics), a re-calling to be achieved through the excavation, from beneath 'degenerate' metaphysics, of what Husserl will term the 'authentic mode of ideality' which he believes will

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[21] Paul Ricoeur notes in the introduction to his own *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston: 1967) that 'the first question of phenomenology is: What does signifying signify? Whatever the importance subsequently taken on by the description of perception, phenomenology begins not from what is most silent in the operation of consciousness but from its relationship to things mediated by signs as these are elaborated in a *spoken* [my italics] culture. The first act of consciousness is designating or meaning (*Meinen*). To distinguish signification from signs, to separate it from the word, from the image, and to elucidate the diverse ways in which an empty signification comes to be fulfilled by an intuitive presence, whatever it may be, is to describe signification phenomenologically'. (p.26).
[22] Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations, I-IV* were first presented in Paris as a lecture series in German in 1929 and were translated into French by Gabrielle Pfeiffer and Emmanuel Levinas as *Meditations Cartesiennes*, Paris 1931,47. English translation by Doris Cairns as *Cartesian Meditations*, The Hague, 1968.
[23] Ibid, p.26/7 (Cairns).

serve to establish a (primordial) unity of objective and subjective presence[24], of

form and matter, mediated through the medium of the *voice* in the most classical of

onto-theological gestures (that instituting the separation of the intelligible and the

sensible) which might serve as an ultimate foundation for knowledge. Thus

Husserl draws his founding concepts from, and is faithfully inscribed within, what

Derrida will come to call the 'history of metaphysics' of which he says:

> Its matrix…is the determination of Being as *presence* in all the sense of this
> word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to
> principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence –
> *eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance) *aletheia*,
> transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.[25]

It is thus that Rudolphe Gasche perceptively argues in *Inventions of Difference*

(1994), that the contradictions Derrida will draw out through his deconstructive

reading of the key axioms of the Husserlian corpus come to be determined 'as

contradictions constitutive of philosophical discourse in general, and of Husserl's

philosophy in particular'.[26]

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[24] In the Introduction to *Speech and Phenomena* (op.cit, 1973), its translator into English, David B. Allison, states: 'For Husserl and the tradition, the sense of being has always been interpreted as *presence*, and this interpretation assumes two forms: something *is* insofar as it presents itself or is capable of presenting itself to a subject – as the present object (*ob-jectum*) of a sensible intuition or as an objectivity present to thought. Second, we may say that a subject (*sub-jectum*) or self in general *is* only insofar as it is self-present, present to itself in the immediacy of a conscious act. The former marks the interpretation of being as objectivity (*ousia, physis*, etc…), the latter as subjectivity (*parousia, nous* etc…). The interpretation of being as presence and self-presence entails a series of philosophical consequences and conceptual oppositions that persists to the present day, and nowhere are these consequences more strikingly evident than in the thought of Husserl'. (p.xxxii).

[25] Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*. Translated and with an Introduction and Additional Notes by Alan Bass. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, London and New York: 1978, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997 (Routledge),p.279.

[26] Gasche, Rudolphe. *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: 1995 (second printing), p.36.

Of course it is important to grasp from the very outset that it is not Derrida's

intention to *contest* this presence, either as it is delineated within Husserlian

phenomenology or as it is articulated in Western Metaphysics *per se*; a fact which

is frequently overlooked by many commentators on Derrida's work who argue

variously (and often conflictingly) that his deconstructive reading leads to nihilism,

anarchism, scepticism, historicism and all the other 'isms' which Derrida himself

so dislikes (and which is why he so pointedly avoids talking of

decosntruction*ism*).[27] Rather, it is Derrida's intention to show that the decision(s)

taken in both Husserl's project in particular and in the 'history of meaning' *per se*

to determine the meaning of being as presence (subjective, objective, or as in

Husserl, their unity) effaces, in their respective elidings of the 'problem of

genesis'[28] that archi-synthesis of language, time and the other, whose movement of

difference and deferral allows being as presence to be thought *as such* in its

simultaneous possibility and impossibility. It is this that Derrida will refer to as

that 'unheard of thought' in 'Violence and Metaphysics'[29] as the '*non-Greek non-*

foundation'.

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[27] The most famous example of such a (collective) mis-reading being the infamous 'Derrida' or 'Cambridge affair' which saw a group of co-signatories – including Wilfred Van Orman Quine – contesting Derrida's awarding of an honorary degree at Cambridge University citing his 'semi-intelligible attacks upon the values of reason, truth, and scholarship'. Their letter was published in the London *Times* on May 9th, 1992.

[28] Which is ultimately the 'problem of the sign' – what I call, *after* Derrida, the 'differential matrix'.

[29] The essay 'Violence and Metaphysics' is contained in Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, op.cit, 1997, pp.79-153.

Consequently, in order to show the above and its 'politico'/historico significance

here, I shall first proceed to examine the arguments surrounding Derrida's reading

of Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* (henceforth in the main to be referred to

simply as *The Origin*), not merely because of its chronological priority (for as

Derrida himself says, *The Origin* and *Speech and Phenomena* can be considered

two sides of the same coin) but because, as Derrida himself puts it in his 1980

thesis defence:

> Naturally, all the problems worked on in the Introduction to the Origin of
> Geometry have continued to organize the work I have subsequently
> attempted in connection with philosophical, literary and even non-discursive
> corpora, most notably that of pictorial works: I am thinking for example, of
> the historicity of ideal objects, of tradition, of inheritance, of filiation or of
> wills and testaments, of archives, libraries, books, of writing and living
> speech, of the relationships between semiotics and linguistics, of the
> question of truth and of undecidability, of the irreducible otherness that
> divides the self-identity of the living present, of the necessity for new
> analysis concerning the non-mathematical idealities.[30]

Accordingly (as Marian Hobson has exactingly pointed out) the articulating

patterns in his writing (syntax), the circuits of argument and words like

'*differance*' and '*deconstruction*' – words (or as they are termed *lexemes*) which

represent for readers 'points of accumulation of an argument' –   find their

awakening in Derrida's lengthy *Introduction* to *The Origin*. In particular,

Derrida's very conception of the 'history of meaning' as a Western metaphysical

tradition of presence, and the centrality of the speech/writing binary and the

philosophy of language common to it – developed more thematically in *Speech*

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[30] Quoted by John P.Leavey in Derrida, Jacques, op.cit, 1989, p.186 (pp.39-40 in the thesis defence itself).

and Phenomena and more extensively in *Of Grammatology* – have their

'grounding' in this *proto-deconstructive reading* of Husserl's 1962 text. Despite

the sometime difficult vocabulary which I shall attempt to render more transparent

(though never totally: that particular miracle being unachievable), it is always the

movement of delimitation and excess engendered through the (originary) synthesis

in the production of meaning *without foundation* which Derrida seeks to raise to

theoretical consciousness through what Critchley calls his 'double reading'. This

will, I hope, soon become clear.

Differance at the Origin: Derrida's *Introduction to The Origin of Geometry.*

Although Jacques Derrida had not yet coined the neologism 'deconstruction' – a

neologism whose etymological roots are usually traced back to Heideggarian

thought (his project of the 'destruction of metaphysics') – it is evident from his

introductory remarks on *The Origin* that what Geoffrey Bennington calls Derrida's

'deconstructive reading' is already operating in this text. Indeed, as John P.Leavey

remarks – though not without some qualification as regards the openness of

translation and the disruption of the rhythm of anything like 'a' Derridean corpus –

> From 1963 to 1968, after the Introduction to *The Origin of Geometry*, after
> the first thesis on 'The ideality of the literary object' (Jean Hyppolite
> directed), and after the *Memoire* on 'the problem of genesis in the
> phenomenology of Husserl'...there is the working out of 'a sort of strategic
> device...an unclosed, unenclosable, not wholly formalisable ensemble of
> rules for reading, interpretation and writing'.[31]

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[31] John P.Leavey in Derrida, Jacques, Ibid, p.186 and including a quote from Derrida's thesis
'defense': 'The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations' (in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan
Montefiore, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1983).

We can see this 'working out' when, after speaking of Husserl's attempt in his

1962 appendix to *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental*

Phenomenology to reconcile empirical development (history) with those

(transcendental) structures which seem to be built into the way we think the world

– here geometry (but also philosophy) – Derrida states:

> *The Origin of Geometry* has both a programmatic and exemplary value.
> Consequently, our reading of it must be marked by the exemplary
> consciousness proper to all eidetic attention and be guided by this infinite
> task, from which phenomenology alone can make its way. In this
> introduction we now attempt, our sole ambition will be to recognise and
> situate one stage of Husserl's thought, with its specific presuppositions and
> its particular unfinished state. Though this moment of Husserl's radicalness
> is ultimate according to the facts, it is perhaps not so *de jure*. Husserl
> repeatedly appears to agree with this. Therefore, we will always try to be
> guided by his *own intentions* [my italics], even when we get caught up in
> certain difficulties.[32]

This 'statement of intent', whereby Derrida will follow Husserl's eidetic (essential)

descriptions – and the way the principles guiding Husserl in his quest point beyond

the factual accomplishment in *The Origin* – is a clear 'methodological' pre-cursor

for what will become known, on reflection, as 'deconstruction'.[33] The so-called

'difficulties' which Derrida will identify – and which will later be called (among

other things) *aporias* and which Husserl himself sets up in his delimiting historical

reflections – reveals a certain *tout autre* which transgresses these same limits from

within: the outside is inside. Thus we might say that Derrida's *Introduction*

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[32] Ibid, p.27.
[33] As Christina Howells concurs 'Derrida studies phenomenology in Paris with Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur. He considers Husserl to have been one of the major influences on his philosophical formation... Indeed, Derrida's whole philosophical programme seems to spring from his tussle with phenomenology'. This quote is taken from her excellent book *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics*, op.cit, 1998, 1999.

'supplements' *The Origin*, grafting on to the name of phenomenology something

'new' which nevertheless seems to write itself – has been 'waiting to be written' –

within the Husserlian text. Consequently I argue that if Derrida can in any sense

be called 'postmodern' then this can only make sense in terms of his position as a

quasi-philosopher of the limit, a *liminal* thinker who reveals an irreducible

contamination which bifurcates (divides) presence from within whilst at the same

time allowing presence to be thought. This is what Derrida shows us *through*

Husserl, not simply despite him and, in so doing, points to a certain *experience of*

the impossible; that is, an experience of the impossibility of establishing a

foundational ground for meaning.

More specifically, the 'stage of Husserl's thought' which Derrida is dealing with

here is his *historical turn* which, not unfortuitously, appeared at a time when the

question of history had taken on added significance for German philosophy. As

Paul Ricoeur states in his excellent chapter 'Husserl and the Sense of History':

> The political situation in Germany at that time is visibly in the background of
> this whole course of thought, and in this sense one can surely say that it was
> the very tragedy of history which inclined Husserl to think historically.
> Suspected by the Nazis as a non-Aryan, as a scientific thinker, and more
> fundamentally as a man of Socratic and questioning spirit, the ageing
> Husserl, retired and condemned to silence, could not fail to discover that the
> spirit has a history which is of importance to all history, that the spirit can
> become ill, that history is even a place of danger for the spirit and a place of
> possible failure. This discovery was inevitable, since the sick themselves –
> the Nazis – were the ones who were to impose new biological criteria for
> political and spiritual health. In any event, it was through awareness of the
> crisis in the time of National Socialism that Husserl actually entered into

history. Out of respect for rationalism, someone had to say who was ill and hence to point to the sense and senselessness of man.[34]

Against this background, Husserl perceived in Galileo's inauguration of modern science the root of what he termed the general 'crisis' of European sciences and more particularly the crisis of philosophy as the universal science (the science of science). In Galileo's 'mathematisation of nature', reality is conceived as a rational universe accessible to a totally rational – that is mathematical – science. In response, modern philosophy had developed along two antithetical lines – namely *objectivism*[35] and *transcendental idealism*[36] – neither of which Husserl regarded as capable of providing an absolute foundation for knowledge since he thought they remained within an 'inauthentic' dualistic attitude. In this way Husserl takes Galilean geometry as symptomatic of the manner in which 'Western man' has lost sight of the *'idea'* which makes him what he is; uncoupling science from the philosophical aspirations out of which it was born. It is in this connexion that Husserl asks:

> Who can still maintain that science has the function of enabling Western man to renew himself under the idea of his rationality, to lead an authentic existence as a rational being, to order freely and reasonably his relations to his environment, his fellow-men, and himself.[37]

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[34] Ricoeur, Paul, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, op.cit, 1967, p.144.

[35] *Objectivism* is the philosophical doctrine that reality is objectively there and that sense data corresponds with it.

[36] *Transcendental idealism* is a term formulated by Kant, and is a position which argues that the objects of the world have their ordinary properties (their causal powers and their spatial and temporal position) only because our minds are so structured that these are the categories we impose upon the manifold of experience.

[37] Gurwitsch A., 'The Last Work of Edmund Husserl'. In *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston: 1966, pp.399-447.

Through the specialisation and technicisation of instrumentalist positivistic

sciences, human reason – which Husserl reminds us is but a name for 'eternal' or

atemporal ideas and norms (true knowledge, authentic value, good action, etc...) –

is excluded from the sciences, whether natural or human. Consequently, it is as a

result of this exclusion (whereby the status of such ideal objects as geometrical

objects are severed from their *origin* in the Life-world as products and creations of

the human mind) that science threatens to lose its significance for human

existence, spawning umpteen sceptical relativisms or historicisms which deny the

existence of any and every absolute truth. It is thus Husserl's concern to avoid

both objectivist and historicist fallacies which, Derrida argues, combine in *The*

Origin to form a new schema; revealing on the one hand a new type/profundity of

historicity in connection with ideal objects and, on the other, the new tools and

original direction of historical reflection. This is the schema that Derrida seeks to

follow, moving beyond Husserl's expressed intentions to their logical, *aporetic*

'ends', ends leading ultimately (via what might be termed the '*linguistic turn*' in

Derrida's own work) to the re-inscription of the Husserlian 'transcendental' *back*

within the differential matrix as the *radically historical* non-originary origin of

Western philosophical discourse *per se*. The Husserlian 'transcendental' is

helpfully clarified by Marian Hobson as follows:

> For Husserl...Things transcend our perceptions of them, in that they are over
> against our perception, not in it; that is what makes it always possible for us
> to perceive more, to try to fix our perceptions and make them clearer. So
> that the different ways we see things, the different perspectives in our
> perceptions, are an essential part of the clarifying process not an accidental
> weakness of human constitution (Husserl 1931:SS149). The mind stands

beyond – not in the world, but as a subject for which this world has meaning and being. Here, 'transcendental' applies not, as with Kant, to conditions of possibility, but implies that the 'I' is the concrete source and place of every *a priori* or essential piece of knowledge.[38]

The significance and implications of what Hobson is saying that Husserl is saying must be understood; namely, that if Husserl cannot establish a transcendental history purified of all matters of (constituted) fact, chance and ambiguity; if the transcendental 'I' is not the simple concrete source and place of every *a priori* or essential piece of knowledge but rather both subject and object are constituted through the interface of an originary synthesis of language, time and the other where meaning is always differing from itself and endlessly deferred, then the entire 'history of meaning' – in as far as it has determined the meaning of being as presence, as pre-sent – must be called into question. This is why I argue that through a double reading of Husserl's 'phenomenology of history' Derrida is thinking something *other* than history which nevertheless has given the concept of 'history' (indeed concepts as such, essence(s) as such) the chance to be thought. Thus Derrida bespeaks a *certain* 'end of history' – or better, he speaks of the coming to the end of history's *ends* (of history not having 'ends') – which announces itself in that critical epoch which is ours and has been defined by the (perennial) problem of language (sign-language).[39] That is, the end of the 'history

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[38] Hobson, Marian, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines*. Routledge, London and New York: 1998, p.39.
[39] I say the end of a *certain* history because while Derrida will speak of the end of a certain *metaphysical concept* of history, the end of history's *ends*, as he often does he still retains the word 'history' in order to inscribe its force, but this time cast in terms of 'a new logic of *repetition* and the *trace*' – this being his radical quasi-philosophy of history which he here develops through his deconstructive reading of Husserl. As I will go in to argue in Chapter Two, this quasi-philosophy

of meaning' 'developing itself, producing itself, fulfilling itself'...linearly...in a

straight or circular line'.[40]

Geometry and the Problem of History

As Derrida argues, then, Husserl's choice of the mathematical/geometrical object

as the privileged example and most permanent thread guiding his reflections is

predicated upon it being 'totally transparent' and therefore 'exhausted' by its

phenomenality:

> Absolutely objective, i.e. totally rid of empirical subjectivity, it nevertheless
> is only what it appears to be. Therefore, it is always already *reduced* to its
> phenomenal sense, and its being is, from the outset, to be an object [etre-
> object] for a pure consciousness.[41]

It is not therefore difficult to understand why, as Leonard Lawlor notes in *Derrida*

and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology, that 'Husserl's privilege of

the mathematical object is the source of Derrida's concept of presence'.[42] It is also

clear, I think, that the (putative) ideality of the mathematical object appears to –

and indeed does – bring it into immediate conflict with the (f)actuality of a history

that is, by definition, unique, irreversible and non-iterable. And indeed in *The*

Origin, Husserl, starting from the reduction of the factual history of geometry

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of history is perhaps best articulated by Geoff Bennington as a 'politics of memory' which opens, as all thinking does, in *aporia*. (See page 94).

[40] Derrida, Jacques, *Positions*. The Athlone Press, London: 1987, p.56. To put what I have said here slightly differently (and ironically given the subject-matter), Derrida in effect argues that realist-representational(ist) discourse *ends here*, in an epoch wherein language can no longer be regarded as delivering up self-pre-sent meaning to (be) thought. To repeat once again, meaning *remains* to made and re-made *without limits, without ends*.

[41] Derrida, Jacques, *Introduction*, op.cit, 1989, p.27.

[42] Lawlor, Leonard, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 2002, p.62.

(who said what to whom, where, when, etc...) argues that the normative value of

geometrical truth should be radically independent of its history in order to respect

and show the 'unique historicity' of the ideal object itself. At the same time,

however, Derrida will argue that Husserl also has to respect the singularity of

history since he himself argues, *contra* Kant, that geometry happened for a 'first

time': geometry is instantly historicised. Again Lawlor is very clear on this point

too:

> Even though, as Derrida stresses, this 'first time' act must include a strata of
> receptive intuition, it is still a production (*Leistung*)... Even though, for
> Husserl, geometrical ideal objectivities such as triangularity must arise out of
> non-geometrical objectivities, they did not exist as such before this
> 'experience'. As non-revelatory, geometry's original experience cannot *not*
> be a 'total fact'. It must bear the characteristics of uniqueness ('*unicite*', as
> Derrida says), irreversibility, and irreplaceability...; a creation happens only
> once. Although this 'only once' would seem to preclude access for
> phenomenology to history, it does not, according to Derrida.[43]

And the reason 'not' is that Husserl will argue that the non-repeatable fact brings

into history what can be wilfully and indefinitely repeated as an '*essence* of the

first time' which excludes empirical individuality but includes the individuality in

general of a thing, the *sense* of the fact which is the repeatability of the non-

repeatable. So for example, when a triangle was experienced for the first time, it

was not simply 'this triangle' but the 'essence' of triangularity which was

experienced and allowed it to be identified as such. When someone draws a

triangle on the blackboard or makes it out of stones, or traces it in the air, it is not

the marks on the blackboard, or the stones on the ground, or the movement of their

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[43] Ibid, p.62.

finger which makes of the triangle what it is; in all three cases it is the 'essence' of the triangle, its triangle-ness, general and essential, which makes it understandable as such, which gives it its 'sense'. Thus Husserl will argue that the 'ideal object' has historicity – the always inter-subjective consciousness of history – as one of its components. The same object can be experienced and identified in its (es)sense over time; the conditions of objectivity are the conditions of historicity itself. The paradox that therefore confronts Husserl's phenomenological inquiry (and leads to its undoing) – whereby reason is historical only on the condition that it escapes the empirical ground of history – is thus above all (*and this must be stressed*) what interests Derrida in his *Introduction*, seeing the dialectic between phenomena and Idea necessitated by an originary lack of self-present Truth which undercuts phenomenology's 'principle of principles' and bifurcates the 'history of meaning'. It is here that the priority of presence over the sign – as it is articulated in an exemplary way in Husserl's phenomenology – is called into question (calling into question *the* question). For having dismissed both the concept of a Platonic realm of ideas and the fallacy of historicism/empiricism, Husserl turns to language.

Language and Truth: 'The Most Interesting Difficulty'

The 'problem of language' is raised for Derrida (it is, he thinks, the 'most interesting difficulty' of *The Origin of Geometry*) when, suspending the actual description of the origin of geometry as such, Husserl answers the question as to how the subjective, intra-mental evidence of sense – i.e. the geometrical structure I

have in my head for the first time, the sense-structure of the geometrical object –

becomes objective and inter-subjective by arguing: '*the broadest concept of*

literature'.[44] As Derrida points out, language is used by Husserl to initially

consider the very nature of ideality within a three-tier structure of ideal objectivity;

namely, that of the word, of the intentional content, and, crucially for Husserl, of

the *object itself*. The ideal objectivity of geometry is absolute and without any

kind of limit. Thus as Derrida states:

> ...For Husserl... 'The broadest concept of literature' comprises all ideal
> formations, since, in order to be such, they must always be capable of being
> expressible in discourse and translatable, directly or not, from one language
> into another. In other words, ideal formations are rooted only in language in
> general, not in the factuality of languages and their particular linguistic
> incarnations.[45]

Husserl is thus bracketing out empirical language and culture – French or German,

Russian or Anglo-American – in order to let the originality of 'transcendental

language' come to light, an in-formation of such ideal objectivity within a 'pure

language in general'. Geometrical truth relies on this pure and essential linguistic

possibility if it is not to remain 'ineffable and solitary'. As Derrida argues, speech

is thus no longer a supplement to an already constituted presence, to an ob-ject

already given in completion to and for the subject. Instead, speech is the concrete,

juridical condition of truth, and its paradoxical re-internment of absolute ideal

objectivity back into language and history – which simultaneously *frees* this sense

at the same time as it contaminates its ideal purity – is precisely the 'difficulty' or

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[44] Husserl is quoted in Derrida, Jacques, *Introduction*, op.cit, 1989, p.66.
[45] Ibid, p.66.

(what Derrida will come to call) the *aporia*. As he will argue, the 'transcendental'

must thus be rethought in terms of an essential contamination of the empirico-

transcendental difference.[46]

At which point what is of most interest to Derrida is that the very possibility of

transcendental language is co-extensive with intersubjectivity (with the relation

with the other). Pure language (that is the possibility of language in general I

pointed to a moment ago) requires consciousness of being-in-community, and

being-in-community requires pure language. At the same time, *both* require, or

pre-suppose, the horizon and unity of one and the same world – as the one,

infinitely open totality of possible experiences. Without the knowledge that we are

before one and the same world individuals separated across vast expanses of time

and space could not be sure that they were before the same 'thing' and something

like *a* geometrical tradition or tradition of truth in general could not be assured.

However, as Derrida will argue at this point, it is precisely this which produces a

number of problems which remain un-thought in *The Origin* and which threaten

Husserl's whole teleological philosophy of history with ruination.

The first problem for Husserl, then, is what he terms 'adult normality' as the

horizon of civilisation; this is the 'privileged example', as opposed to the young,

the mad or the infirm. Thus one group becomes exemplary, essential, as one

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[46] Once again and in other words, the ground or 'foundation' of meaning must be re-thought in ways which re-cognise the always im-possible condition of meaning and being, whereby the world always remains to be thought, always resists every attempt at closure.

'empirical and factual modification…is pretending to be a universal norm'.[47]

Without a yardstick to measure 'normality' it is simply assumed by Husserl to be

that of two 'grown' *men* of sound mind and body (whatever that may mean), thus

foregrounding the added complication that Husserl has already pointed out in other

parts of his work, that one can *never* have knowledge of the other's lived

experience (one can never get inside of the others head and confirm s/he has the

same experience as 'I' do). The second problem is that two essential limits are

posed by Husserl. First, Derrida notes Husserl's inability to solve the problem of

the possibility of a 'pure grammar' and '*a priori* norms' of language, quickly

proceeding to the problem of Husserl's postulation of a pure natural existent – the

same (life-) world, the earth itself – as that which guarantees translatability and

grounds the consciousness of the pure 'we'. For as Derrida argues (and as the

necessity of the reduction and return inquiry (backward glance) implies) pre-

cultural pure nature is, very precisely, *always already* buried. There are *no*

absolute or purely objective objects as such – least of all natural ones – the

consequence being that we can *never* overcome singular, cultural differences and

be before 'one and the same world'. This does not (incidentally) preclude

translation between readings of this one world, or mean that the attempt at

univocity should be abandoned (for in that case there would be no history in the

absence of some kind of universal communication and understanding), rather, the

upshot is that non-communication and misunderstanding are the very horizon of

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[47] Derrida, Jacques, *Introduction*, op.cit, 1989, p.80.

culture and language – the possibility and impossibility of communication and of understanding themselves. As the postal metaphor(s) Derrida often invokes suggests, the possibility that a letter may be lost, damaged, cast adrift in circulation or indeed mis-read or read by someone else, are part of its very *readability in infinitum*. Neither the finitude of the sender nor the receiver can be overcome as meaning is cast adrift in circulation as a 'wild singularity' which ultimately resists the teleological imperative as a certain irreducible excess. When I receive a letter I may understand it, but I can never know what it *really* means even if the sender is still alive and I can broach the question with them – for the sender is always already the receiver of things 'before' them, even in the act of writing. The significance of this for both subjective and objective presence is already becoming clear: everything always escapes closure – both 'front' and 'back', 'before' and 'after'. No beginnings – no ends.

At the Beginning: Language, Time and the Other

That language and intersubjectivity (relation with the other) – both of which are spatial – are revealed by Husserl to be co-dependent on a temporalisation which, in the first place, is operative at the level of *intra*-subjectivity and productive of an ideality across different moments of the same subject means, for Derrida, the possibility of a greatly more radical historicity (in terms of self-creations and human solidarities) than Husserl's phenomenology of history envisages, coming as he does to recognise not the historicity *of* sense but that historicity *is* sense, *is*

passage (this passage being the always imperfect, ambiguous path of meaning).

Anticipating much of his work in *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida reads in

Husserl's description of the inner historicity of (an ideal) sense – where the same

sense is recalled and anticipated in the Living present of a Transcendental Subject

– a radical alterity which bifurcates the Living Present while giving it to be

thought; the Living Present, for Husserl, being the ultimate form which seeks to

tame a (wild) genesis (becoming). For Husserl's phenomenology draws attention

not just to the consciousness *of* delay – the originary experience of the essence of

the geometrical object, say, lapsing into the just past and then becoming further

and further past and only existing through the present recollection of its 'identity'

and the anticipation of more of the same – but consciousness *as* delay. Here we

find an extended articulation of the irreducible structural genesis of meaning, as

subject and object are constituted in a trace-structure without beginning (all

reflection – by definition – on an 'originary' experience or evidence admitting an

irreducible absence of the ob-ject and the subjects own self-presence) and without

end (it being an infinite ideal – more on this later), which takes on an added

significance after Husserl's discussion of the necessity of the written as well as the

spoken sign in the constitution of truth. Hence here, at the 'beginning', we can no

longer speak of identity *and* difference but only and 'forever' of identity *in*

difference; always differing from and deferring 'itself' *ad infinitum*.

From Speech to Writing: 'The Most Difficult Problem'

And so concerned (as he is all along) to show the way in which foundational

thinking of whatever kind is always contaminated by a certain irreducible excess (a

certain looseness – a certain 'play') which prevents any fixity, which prevents any

closure, and turning from 'the most interesting difficulty' of *The Origin* to its

'most difficult problem' – the 'move' from speech to writing – Derrida examines

the paradox whereby an absolutely ideal objectivity free from every factual subject

and community in general is *bound* to be written. For spoken language only frees

ideal objectivity from individual subjectivity to leave it dependent on the

instituting community, that of the first geometers, meaning that it would remain

relative to this community and inevitably die with it. Freed from *actual*

subjectivity in general, freed from *actual* evidence for a real subject, and freed

from *actual* circulation within a determinate community, only writing can assure

absolute objectivity in its relation to a universal transcendental subjectivity. That

Husserl suggests here that writing makes up for a 'lack' of persisting truth at the

origin is critical and must be noted. Writing is the *necessary supplement* to truth,

it produces presence by delivering it from the place of its utterance in a specific

individual or a specific community. In other words, writing (permanence) takes

the place of the Platonic realm of ideas without (in Husserl's view) falling into

speculative metaphysics. For Husserl the 'body of writing' is a spiritual body,

alive with the animating intentions of the author (with the necessary presumption

that when I write I know what I mean and mean what I say). Not that truth's

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ontological sense is now seen to derive solely from its factual linguistic

incarnations by way of some sort of pernicious relativism, rather 'graphic

possibility' frees ideality in the first place. It is the nature of this paradox – namely

that truth is *bound* to be free – that once more interests Derrida here, as the sign

itself appears to move on to centre stage and, at that very moment, be

simultaneously thrown into crisis.

Death and the Transcendental

That the necessity of 'consignment' – ultimately in terms of the written sign –

unites death to the transcendental by ensuring the possibility of the repetition to

infinity of the same sense after my death, marks for Derrida the moment when

what had been at times considered a factual event is made into a transcendental

condition of possibility for both absolute objectivity and transcendental

subjectivity to appear; my intentions must survive me and be re-cognised and

fulfilled by other (transcendental) subjects, any time, any where. But this is not

without its 'dangers'. As Rudolf Bernet perceptively writes in 'On Derrida's

Introduction to Husserl's Origin of Geometry':

> ...writing generates an anonymous and 'autonomous transcendental field'
> which is comparable to the ego-less 'field of consciousness' described by A.
> Gurwitsch on the basis of his phenomenology of perception. Writing
> promotes intellectual flexibility in the cultural world which always already
> embraces us and upon which we can only impress a personal stamp by
> exerting considerable creative force. But the anonymity and the
> independence of writing also makes possible a radical loss of sense, the
> burying of the intentions and the cultural world of the author, or the

indecipherability of a stone inscription. Because of this possibility of radical loss writing confronts us with 'the transcendental sense of death' as no other phenomenon does. Perhaps we must even say that transmission and the loss of sense do not simply hold the balance of writing but rather that the very possibility of loss contributes to the significance of the text in a quite essential way.[48]

And as Derrida himself argues:

> The silence of prehistoric arcane and buried civilisations, the entombment of lost intentions and guarded secrets, and the intelligibility of the lapidary inscription disclose the transcendental sense of death as what unites things to the absolute privilege of intentionality in the very instance of its essential juridical failure.[49]

It may appear that Husserl's phenomenology – essentially a philosophy of *Life* – is thus threatened by the course of his own description which, in the constitution of truth through writing, admits a danger to meaning from what is outside of the sign – hence the current 'crisis'. As Derrida states: 'In the moment of writing, the sign can always "empty" itself, take flight from awakening, from "re-activation", and may remain forever closed and mute'.[50] And as Peter Fenves argues, for Husserl:

> An indefinite 'taking flight' *would be* the fate of reason's 'higher products', including the ideal objects of geometry, if reason were not from its inception teleological; if, therefore, its end and purpose were not the rediscovery and recovery of its origin. But history can then have no other subject than meaning, and meaning must be recovered *after all* – after, that is, the dangerous epoch of writing. An inquiry into the history of geometry, for example, could never begin if it did not take the telos of history – 'the sense [of geometry] as we now know it' (O,50) – for its starting point; otherwise it could never be sure that the *same* things were experienced under the same *names* over an indefinite extent of time and across an indefinite expanse of space. And if the history of geometry is exemplary, this is true of the history of reason in particular and history as such: whatever happens, the danger to

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[48] Bernet, Rudolf, 'On Husserl's Introduction to The Origin of Geometry'. In Hugh Silvermann (Ed) *Derrida and Deconstruction*. Routledge, London and New York:1989, p.145.

[49] Derrida, Jacques, *Introduction*, op.cit, 1989, p.88.

[50] Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, op.cit, 1997, p.166.

meaning will have been arrested after all.[51]

For Derrida, however, writing's 'ambiguous value' and the transcendental sense of death which has a constituting value for all language, cannot be effaced by such a teleology which seeks to reduce writings equivocation. The necessary readability (that is to say iterability (repetition)) of marks in different contexts, constitutes both the chance for the transmission of meaning and the necessary possibility of its failure: I can never control or anticipate the future context(s) within which such marks will be read. In fact, I can never be sure that I have the same sense of geometry as the other (however minimal the difference in time and distance in space may be). That forgetfulness and/or loss of sense – or at least ambiguity – seems to be part of the necessary constitution of sense or meaning, is to be affirmed in the course of Husserl's own argument. In the first place, although Husserl rules out the hypothesis of a death of sense in general within the *individual* consciousness (which itself remains contentious) he makes clear that the permanence and virtual presence of sense only *announces* ideal objectivity which 'there' requires speech and writing. As Derrida says at this point, 'Profound forgetfulness therefore extends into the spaces of intersubjectivity and the distance between communities'.[52] In other words, from the very beginning 'crisis' is both a risk and a chance for making meaning which cannot be overcome. Of course for Derrida this is a good thing, an *affirmative* condition: meanings must always be

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[51] Fenves, Peter, 'Derrida and History'. In *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. Edited by Tom Cohen. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2001, p.284.
[52] Derrida, Jacques, *Introduction*, op.cit, 1989, p.93.

capable of being re-made: closure permanently recedes. But for Husserl it is not; such equivocality must be overcome otherwise knowledge wobbles. Thus, in the second place, while for Husserl the burning of the 'world-wide library' would not effect the ontological sense (truth) of an ideal object like triangularity, the fact that Husserl argues 'truth' must be consigned in order to 'be' (being an ob-ject rather than an in-itself or a 'pure spiritual interiority') implies, for Derrida, that such a catastrophe *would* effect *all* the senses – bound or free. For although, as Derrida argues, the materiality of the sign may not constitute what the sign 'is', as 'Husserl clearly [says] (c)orporeality is indispensable to it'.[53] That Husserl makes writing not just a sensible phenomenon but *at the same time* a *living* flesh, therefore makes it hard to understand how writing could save its (spiritual) meaning from worldly disaster. Accordingly it is only by subsequently evacuating the material body from the 'essence' of the sign that Husserl can claim that the danger to sense is in the intellectuality of the flesh; the intentional act itself. Forgetfulness of truth is thus not radical for Husserl but an abdication of responsibility which his phenomenology seeks to overcome. This responsibility is a co-responsibility on the part of the reader and writer whose imperative should be univocity. Ideally a word or term should have one unambiguous, unmistakable meaning. Ironically, it 'never' does...that's 'for sure'...

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[53] Ibid, p.94.

The History of Meaning: Between Husserl and Joyce

The notion of univocal expression as it has just been considered is critical for

Husserl in that the *unity* of history is only given in so far as ideal objects break the

surface. In other words – and to put this as plainly as I can – *only* if univocal

expressions remain the same and carry an identical meaning across the whole

becoming of culture(s), can communication across generations and the exactitude

of translation be assured. Univocity, for Husserl, retains 'pure sense' within the

flux of historical change as intellectual intuition; as the *logos* itself. Consequently,

it is important to emphasise here (to re-emphasise) that Derrida does not, as some

have argued, deny the importance of univocity.[54] Rather, and in a move which

opens the ethico-political space of deconstruction, the impossibility of languages'

univocity necessitates the infinite task of a reduction to the *making* of sense which

must be begun over and over again – interminably; neither pure univocity or pure

equivocity make a history. John D. Caputo helpfully summarises much of this in

his excellent *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* where he writes:

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[54] This 'fact' contradicting accusations by the likes of Cambridge Professor of Philosophy Simon Blackburn, who, in an ill-informed and ill-judged summary of Derridean thinking, contrasted pro-Derridean 'hey nonny pomo tendencies' with that 'objectivity' and 'truth' guarded by old stalwarts such as the historian Geoffrey Elton. Blackburn went on to argue that the kind of textual analysis promoted by Derrida saw objects like a speed bump being read in terms of the 'charged subset of letters it contains' – namely B-U-M. This clearly misses what Simon Critchley has termed the 'patient, rigorous and scholarly' reconstruction of a text which comprises an important part of any deconstructive reading (the other part, of course, opening this same text to the so-called 'blind-spots' it contains. Surely the very model of critical thinking?) Blackburn and Critchley's articles both appeared in the November 12th 2004 issue of the *The Times Higher* as part of a series of articles on the Derridean legacy.

Trying to trace the historical genesis or constitution of ideal meaning, Husserl insisted upon 'the imperative of univocity'...that the same words bear the same meaning across time, that later generations be able to repeat and reactivate exactly the same sense, in order thereby to allow communication and, hence, progress among generations of investigators. The opposite conception is Joyce's, which locates history in releasing every buried association in language, in loading every vocable, word, and sentence with the highest possible amount of associative potential, which cultivates rather than avoids plurivocity, so that history lurches forward in a labyrinth, a 'nightmare' of equivocation.[55]

Thus where for Caputo (and in fact Derrida), James Joyce in *Ulysses*[56] attempts to recollect all empirical cultural meanings in one book (focusing on the 'passive associative resonances' and 'ignoring the translatable cores'), Husserl seeks to precisely *reduce* factual or empirical language to its translatable cores in order to render the pure structure of history visible; the invariables among the variables.

Derrida – *and this is a key point to retain* – clearly sees the limitations in *both* ideas: untamed equivocality would mean that the very 'text of repetition' would be unintelligible while, on the other, perfect univocity could only lead to paralysis and sterility in the 'indefinite repetition of the same'. Consequently, only a relationship, only a differential tension between the two, can guarantee a 'history' as such. As Caputo puts this, again very sharply:

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[55] Caputo, John D., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Fordham University Press, New York: 1997, p.183.

[56] Of this book Derrida states '...in 1956-57, I spent a year at Harvard, and what I did there was to read Joyce in the Widener Library, which provided my encounter with *Ulysses*. Since then, Joyce has represented for me the most gigantic attempt to gather in a single work, that is, in the singularity of a work which is irreplaceable, in a singular event...the presumed totality, not only of one culture but of a number of cultures, a number of languages, literatures, and religions'. Derrida in Caputo, John, Ibid, p.25. (James Joyce's *Ulysses*, as referred to by Caputo and Derrida, is published by Random House, New York: 1961).

Deconstruction – as usual – situates itself in the distance between these two [between univocity and equivocation.]. It does not renounce the constitution of meaning and the transmission of scientific ideas, even while it inscribes ideality in the flux of writing, for the sphere of ideal meaning is always already forged from below, as an effect of the play of traces. Deconstruction is a certain Husserlianism, a theory of the constitution of meaning and ideality, but one that is always already exposed to a certain Joyceanism, to the irrepressible anarchy of signifiers, the unmasterable, anarchic event of archi-*ecriture*. For textuality or *ecriture* sees to it that we are at best able to put together certain unstable and contingent unities of 'meaning', certain effects of the differential play of traces that, with a lick and a promise, may get us through the day, that are only as good as the work they do and only for the while that they do it, before they give way to more felicitous effects and more successful convergences, before they are taken up into 'higher' but into different and more felicitous configurations.[57]

That the only two 'limit' cases in which univocity could be imagined prove self-defeating merely serves, for Derrida, to confirm the auto-deconstruction of Husserl's attempt to establish a transcendental history. In the first 'limit case', absolute univocity would be assured by the *proper name* in its designation of a singular, natural 'object'. But, as Derrida argues, for that to happen, such a 'word' would have to be a 'pure' ideal or universal. But, because any such 'univocity' necessitates translation (that is, the ability of the same sense to be communicated from emitter to receiver) the word must be uttered 'in the world' which immediately places it 'in a culture, in a network of linguistic relations and oppositions which would load the word with intentions or virtual reminiscences'[58]: univocality is therefore ruined. As noted above, Derrida has already argued that pure nature is 'always already' buried. In the second such 'limit case', the possibility of univocity would be tied to the possibility of a trans-cultural

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[57] Ibid, p.183.
[58] Derrida, Jacques, *Introduction*, op.cit, 1989, p.103.

objectivity like that of the geometrical object. Again, Derrida sees this

'possibility' to be simultaneously an 'impossibility', since the ideal object is

'always already' inscribed within an ever changing system of relations. This

interminable 'iterability', this incessant repetition of the ideal object in

innumerable and unforeseen contexts, therefore makes the object both 'irreducibly

relational' *and* tied to the context within which it is (each time) realised. As

Derrida thus argues, that every univocal attempt always falls into 'some singular

placings in perspective, some multiple interconnections of sense, and therefore

some mediate and potential aims'[59], precludes absolute univocity while giving it its

very chance. Since all objects must be 'consigned', and since words and language

per se can never be absolute and unambiguous, then there can never 'be' pure

translatability and pure community. The phenomenological 'absolute' is caught up

in interminable mediation which contaminates its ideal purity – the *'differential*

matrix' is thus 'confirmed'. 'Absolutely'!

The Limitations of Husserl's *Idea*

That Husserl thinks it is possible to 'idealize away' this relativity of univocity and

plurivocity by instituting absolute univocity as an infinite task in line with an *Idea*

in the Kantian sense thus marks, for Derrida, the very specific tension which opens

up phenomenology as a dialectic between its 'principle of principles' – the

'definite thing' present in person – and its final institution, the infinite Idea as an

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[59] Ibid, p.104.

always deferred *Telos*. As John P. Leavey pertinently remarks in his preface to

Derrida's *Introduction*:

> The dialectic of these two, phenomenon and Idea, is what Derrida seems to
> feel implicitly guided Husserl in his reflections on historicity, and a study of
> Derrida's commentary reveals what happens when these implications are
> made explicit.[60]

Moreover, Husserl evokes the Idea and the type of idealisation which produces it –

which he calls *Reason* – not only to help deal with the problems of equivocity and

finitude in the actualisation of sense, but also to describe the origin and infinite

progress of geometry itself. For Derrida this recourse to the *Idea in the Kantian*

sense at certain difficult moments of Husserl's description creates a difficulty in

that the origin of idealisation cannot be determined by an intuition. As Geoffrey

Bennington pertinently argues:

> ...the Idea... allows Husserl to think the transcendental as in some sense
> essentially historical ('transcendental historicity'), and yet itself escapes
> phenomenological analysis – for the watch-word of phenomenology, 'to the
> things themselves', is inoperative in the case of the Idea in the Kantian sense,
> which works just where the 'thing itself' is by definition inaccessible to full
> intuition. The Idea-in-the-Kantian sense, then, has a paradoxical status in
> these late Husserl texts, providing phenomenology with a vital resource for
> thinking the relation between the transcendental and the empirical, and yet
> itself perpetually escaping phenomenological grasp.[61]

That the infinity of interconnections between ideas/things cannot be intuited,

introduces an irreducible absence into the plenitude or 'full-ness' of experience as

the promise of unity can only be experienced as its *impossibility* through a certain

experience of language as the 'un-safe house of truth'. Because the interminable

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[60] Ibid, p.10.
[61] Bennington, Geoffrey, *Interrupting Derrida*. Routledge, London and New York: 2000, p.185.

iterability of any sense-structure necessarily implies the possibility of alterity, then

the possibility of 'presence' is contaminated by an essential finitude which heralds

a 'radical other' who/which escapes positive determination. This radical other is

(first of all) an 'other in me', an absolute past which opens on to an absolute future

which always calls upon me to decide, to *make* sense, but to do so each time in a

new way, in order to do justice to all that falls silent in the process – those unheard

of possibilities both past and still to come. Consequently (and this is crucial for

my 'thesis' to note), it is here that Derrida's early work plentifully foreshadows

what he will come to call a 'democracy to come' and the 'messianic call' which

calls forth the decision itself. The inability to determine meaning absolutely; the

inability to 'gather' the history of meaning in the unity of the (transcendental)

subject who *makes sense* of the world (*for* which the world 'is'); the fact that

meaning is generated across an interminable process of signification (such that all

meaning is structured *like* a language) in terms of an originary synthesis of

language, time and the other – without beginning and without (ends) – all this is

the opening of an 'infinite' Justice as a *radical responsibility* to the other.

Speech and Phenomena: Touching the Void, the Voice of 'Truth'

Having discovered through his reading of *The Origin of Geometry* that Husserl

fails to make the sign derivative to presence since Truth requires writing in order

to achieve absolute ideal objectivity and all the problems that brings, Derrida now

equates 'the problem of the sign' in Husserl's philosophy to that of the *voice*; a

move which can be seen to motivate his subsequent analysis in *Of Grammatology* of the speech/writing binary as the founding opposition of what he comes to term (in *Speech and Phenomena*) the Western 'metaphysics of presence'. Indeed by way of a 'summary', in 'Implications: Interview with Henri Ronse' (published in *Positions*), Derrida says of *Speech and Phenomena*:

> ...in it is posed, at a decisive point which appears juridicially decisive for reasons that I cannot explain here, the question of the privilege of the voice and of phonetic writing in their relationship to the entire history of the metaphysics, and metaphysics in its most modern, critical, and vigilant form: Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. What is 'meaning', what are its historical relationships to what is purportedly identified under the rubric 'voice' as a value of presence, presence of the object, presence of meaning to consciousness, self-presence in the so-called living speech and self-consciousness? The essay which asks these questions can also be read as the other side (recto or verso, as you wish) of another essay, published in 1962, as the introduction to Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*. In this essay the problematic of writing was already in place as such, bound to the irreducible structure of 'deferral' in its relationships to consciousness, presence, science, history and the history of science, the disappearance or delay of origin etc...[62]

It is this privileging of speech over writing that is central to Derrida's deconstructive reading of Husserl. For we can now see, moving on to a brief – though important – analysis of Derrrida's subsequent reading of Husserl's 'philosophy of language', the way in which the drive to efface the originary synthesis (*sans origin*) of language, time and the other in Husserl's phenomenology, is orientated by the absolute privilege granted to the most intimate, ordinary, everyday experience – namely hearing oneself speak; the way this seemingly 'natural' commonplace has orientated an entire history of meaning

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[62] Derrida, Jacques, *Positions*. Translated and Annnotated by Alan Bass. The Athlone Press, London: 1987, p.5.

of which Husserlian phenomenology is the *raison d'etre*, and which is now,

arguably, coming to an 'end'. Accordingly, it is to this crucial aspect in Derrida

that I now turn.

Derrida, the Living Present and the 'Privileged Concept of the Sign'

It is in his Introduction to *Speech and Phenomena*, then, that Derrida announces

his intention to return to Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (one of Derrida's

earliest works) in order to show, as David B. Allison accurately states in his

'Translators Introduction', how the whole of phenomenology is implied in a

reflection upon language; how a discussion of meaning, expression, grammar and

logic – the themes of the *Investigations* – will anticipate and later decide the

forthcoming 'transcendental problems'. Proceeding to engage in a deconstruction

of the essence of phenomenology Derrida will use – as we will see shortly – the

'difference' *within the sign* between 'expression' and 'indication' as the lever for

his reading of the entire framework of Husserl's thought in terms of what Derrida

will identify as the constitutive and unquestioned metaphysical pre-supposition;

presence or the *living present*. For what is at issue for Derrida in the 'privileged

example of the sign' is

> ...to see the phenomenological critique of metaphysics betray itself as a
> moment within the history of metaphysical assurance. Better still, our
> intention is to begin to confirm that the recourse to phenomenological
> critique is metaphysics itself, restored to its original purity in its historical
> achievement.[63]

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[63] Derrida, Jacques, *Speech and Phenomena*, op.cit, 1973. p.5.

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Despite Husserl's claim to have avoided *speculative* metaphysics, it is clear to

Derrida that he does not (can not) actually renounce metaphysics *per se*, but only

the 'degenerative' schemas which have remained blind to what he terms the

'authentic mode of ideality'. In repeating the Platonic gesture which inaugurates

Western onto-theology, Husserl tries to bring us to an experience of presence –

both subjective and objective – in the form of the living present. And yet,

typically, Derrida is concerned not merely to show how Husserl is 'taken' by the

'metaphysics of presence' – led there precisely by the inescapable necessity that all

experience occur within the form of the living present – but how he is concerned to

bring out an irreducible necessity that amounts to a 'discontinuous and irruptive

change of terrain from Western metaphysics'.[64] In a move which reveals the same

aporias which beset Husserl's later 'historical phenomenology' as present at the

very outset of his *Investigations* (indeed they open up phenomenological space)

Derrida argues:

> ...phenomenology seems...tormented, if not contested from within, by its
> own descriptions of the movement of temporalisation and of the constitution
> of inter-subjectivity. At the heart of what ties together these two decisive
> moments of description we recognise an irreducible non-presence, a non-self
> belonging to the living present, an ineradicable non-primordiality.[65]

This is the 'other of philosophy' which is no longer 'its' other but the condition of

possibility and impossibility for presence, the Living present, to be thought. This

'non-site' can no longer be constrained by a determinate arch-telos, but rather is

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[64] Derrida, Jacques, 'The Ends of Man'. In *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. Harvester Wheatsheaf, Herts: 1982, p.135.
[65] Derrida, Jacques, *Speech and Phenomena*, op.cit, 1973, p.6-7.

the place (without it ever 'taking place') where the closure of metaphysics can be solicited and opened to the future, to what is to come. Thus it is that the re-inscription of the empirico-transcendental difference traced in Derrida's *Introduction to The Origin* in syntactic and thematic form (that is in terms of the pattern of ideas and Derrida's meditation on the difference and deferral of a truth constituted (ultimately) through writing) finds lexematic form in *Speech and Phenomena* in terms of *differ-a-nce* and the *trace*; words which give 'names' to the impossibility of fixing any meaning(s) outside of the play of differences (pre-figuring the expansion of the very concept of writing in terms of Derrida's *ecriture*). It is this movement of the originary synthesis of language, time and the other, which I have already called in this study the '*differential matrix*', the axiom underwriting Derrida's position.

The distinction Husserl wishes to draw, within language, between indication and expression is thus critical for Derrida here, as the absolute privileging of 'expression over indication' Husserl creates ensures his (definitive) concepts of sense, objectivity, truth, intuition and perception. For as Derrida will show, if this distinction can *not* (and it cannot) be maintained; if expression is always trapped in an indicative web (which it is) then, from the very start, the whole of Husserl's Phenomenology will be delimited by its own 'internal' logic. It is thus that Derrida wishes to make the tension between gesture and statement appear in terms of a certain 'experience of the impossible' which undercuts or 'deconstructs' not

only the Husserlian project but the Western tradition of presence *per se*; an

experience which Derrida comes to define as the 'least bad definition of

deconstruction itself'.[66]

Sense, Expression and the Reduction of Indication: The Nerve of Husserl's Demonstration

When opening his analysis of language, Husserl had stated that 'every sign is a

sign for something, but not every sign has 'meaning', a 'sense' that the sign

expresses'.[67] So it is by virtue of this stipulation that *expressions* – which carry a

meaning which is present as the *signified* content – are distinguished from

indications – movements of empirical association. For while not being without

signification, indicative signs (indications) have no inherent sense, rather they

point away from themselves to another object or state of affairs, for example,

smoke indicates the presence of a fire. Not only that, for Husserl *all* relations

share the 'common circumstance' that a belief in the existence of one thing

motivates a belief in another – a psychological association. As Derrida expresses

this point:

> ...it will then be quickly seen that, for Husserl, the expressiveness of
> expression – which always supposes the ideality of a *Bedeutung* – has an
> irreducible tie to the possibility of spoken language (*Rede*). An expression is
> a purely linguistic sign, and it is precisely this that in the first analysis
> distinguishes it from an indicative sign. Although spoken language is a
> highly complex structure, always containing *in fact* an indicative stratum,

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[66] This is a sentiment he expresses in 'Afterw.rds, at least, less than a letter about a letter less'. In *Afterwords*. Edited by Nicholas Royle and translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Outside Books, Tampere, Finland: 1992, pp.197-203.

[67] Derrida, Jacques, *Speech and Phenomena*, op.cit, 1973, p.23.

which, as we will see, is difficult to confine within its limits, Husserl has nonetheless reserved for it the power of expression exclusively – and thereby pure logicality...a speaking subject expressing himself...about something, means or wants to say something. One would thus be assured that the meaning (*Bedeutung*) is always *what* a discourse or somebody *wants to say*. What is conveyed then, is always a linguistic sense, a discursive content.[68]

It is thus that John Sallis in his 'Doublings' (in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*[69]) argues that whatever falls outside of intention Husserl will exclude from the sphere of expression, this coming to include facial expressions, gestures, the whole of the body and of mundane inscription – in other words the whole of the visible and spatial order as such. Husserl is therefore not just drawing a boundary *between* language and non-language but a boundary *within* language, 'between the voluntary, transparent, self-present' – the *meaning* that I intend here and now – and the involuntary, external, non-self-present – i.e. the look on my face, the movement of my hand, the marks on a page. The essence of language is revealed and enclosed in the 'citadel of *Geist*', which is to say, in pure spiritual intention. Despite the fact that Husserl is forced to recognise that the difference he draws at this first stage is more functional than substantial – not least because in communicative speech expression is always interwoven with an indicative relation – he still tries to rigorously distinguish an *essence* from his 'investigations'. The stakes for him are high. The separation between existence and essence, fact and intention define phenomenology, a definition that depends entirely on the validity of a radical distinction between indication and expression. The thrust of Husserl's

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[68] Ibid, p.18.
[69] Wood, David (Ed), *Derrida: A Critical Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford: 1992.

demonstration is thus to prove, while recognising every expression to be caught in an indicative process, that the reverse is not true. Crucially, as Derrida remarks:

> One might be tempted…to make the expressive sign a species of the genus 'indication'. In this case, we would have to say in the end that the spoken word, whatever dignity or originality we still accorded it, is but a form of gesture. In its essential core, then, and not only by what Husserl considers its accidents, it would belong to the general system of signification and would not surpass it. The general system of signification then would be co-extensive with the system of indication.[70]

Husserl, however, wants to find a phenomenological situation in which expression is *not* caught up in this entanglement – that is, with indication – and he thinks he has found this in the 'unshaken purity of expression in a language without communication, in speech as interior monologue, in the completely muted voice of the "solitary mental life"'.[71] Accordingly, at this point the nerve of *Derrida's* demonstration, *contra* Husserl, will thus be to uncover the way in which the indicative relation inevitably pervades interior monologues. The privilege granted to what Derrida calls the 'living present' – in which I say what I mean and mean what I say – uniting objective and subjective presence in the voice, indicates Husserl's *dogmatism* in terms of the question of the sign. It is this dogmatism, argues Derrida, which neuters what may have been an exemplary *critical vigilance* had Husserl taken his own descriptions to their conclusions and which would have then revealed *the living present (of the voice) to be never present*; to be always other than itself, an effect within the movement of traces where anything like subjective and objective unity are revealed as an 'effect'. Had Husserl undertaken

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[70] Derrida, Jacques, *Speech and Phenomena*, op.cit, 1973, p.21.
[71] Ibid, p.22.

this task – a move which Derrida will henceforth undertake *via* Saussure – not only would the hierarchy between the sign and logic have been reversed but the sign itself deconstructed as an inherently metaphysical concept. Let us follow Derrida following Husserl here (both in the sense of following Husserl's argument, and following it up)...

In interior monologues, then, Husserl will argue that the sensible sign is ultimately reduced so that, in effect, one speaks to oneself in silence. This does not mean that words entirely disappear from this 'fictional communication' with oneself, but that the word is merely 'imagined' and thus assimilated to the self-present intention; as 'sounded', it can only be indicative (i.e. indicating the thoughts of a speaker to another). Having argued that only expression is a 'purely' linguistic sign, in fact all 'real' signs have been exiled from the realm of pure self-presence which is taken to stand before the operation of signification as such. This move is further assured by Husserl's next reduction of pure expression to sense experience; that which the expression serves to double in the order of ideality. Here, as John Sallis argues, '[i]t is the voice that preserves presence and thus lets the ideal meaning be immediately present'.[72] As Derrida states at this point:

> This immediate presence results from the fact that the phenomenological
> 'body' of the signifier seems to fade away at the very moment it is produced.
> It seems already to belong to the element of ideality. It phenomenologically
> reduces itself, transforming the worldly opacity of its body into pure
> diaphaneity. This effacement of the sensible body and its exteriority is *for*

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[72] John Sallis in David Wood (Ed) *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, op.cit, 1992, p.129.

consciousness the very form of the immediate presence of the signified.[73]

Hearing myself speak at the same moment that I speak, I am given back to myself in this moment of self-coincidence; the object and subject are united in the purity of the living present of Transcendental Life.

Time and the Presence of the Present: Touching the Void.

This is the '*point*', announced already in his *Introduction to The Origin of Geometry*, at which Derrida will determine the way in which Husserl's own analysis of temporalisation bifurcates the 'unity' of the living present, and the extent to which the voice, in hearing oneself speak *and hearing an-other* at the same time, introduces the movement of inter-subjectivity into the allegedly 'self-present' subject, ultimately serving to make subjectivity derivative to a movement no longer 'nameable'. For while Husserl admits that 'the now' cannot be isolated as a pure 'now point', he thinks that this does not prevent it being granted a constitutive privilege in the flow of time. (The living present of the actual now, enshrined in the privilege of the phenomenological voice, is precisely what guarantees the immediacy or presence of the signified content, as (pure) expression merely doubles – without 'adding' anything – the pre-expressive stratum of sense). Without questioning the privilege of this experience as that which determines ourselves as conscious beings as such, Derrida wishes to introduce, *at the same time*, an irreducible *non-presence* into this sphere of originary presence which, as I

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[73] Derrida, Jacques, *Speech and Phenomena*, op.cit, 1973, p.77.

have said, *writes* itself within Husserl's own discourse here. As Derrida remarks

'...the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only insofar as it is

continuously compounded with a non-presence and non-perception, with primary

memory and expectation (retention and protention)'.[74] As John Sallis admirably

summarises all of this:

> ...the self-identity of the present would no longer function as a simple origin
> (as present origin or originary present) but would rather be *produced* through
> a certain compounding of presence and non-presence, of impression and
> retention, of impression and protention. Hence the very constitution of the
> now, the moment, takes place as a doubling of the previous nows (or the
> nows to come) in the present now, that is, as retention (or protention); and as
> a doubling, an unlimited repetition, of the now as such, in its ideality, as the
> ideal form of presence. This double doubling in which time is constituted,
> produced – Derrida will call it *differance* – is thus more originary than the
> present... more 'originary' than the phenomenological originary itself.

In other words, and this glossing is crucial because it gets straight to the point, at

the heart of the alleged 'phenomenological originary' *après* Husserl, in hearing

oneself speak in 'my' living present, something of me, some 'meaningful' thought

or content, has always already passed away and can only be brought back in the

form of the *trace* in the composition of a 'new now' which itself only appears in

the compounding of the 'no longer' and the 'not yet'; a-presentation always

'taking' presentation, giving it to be thought in the structure of originary difference

and delay or deferral. I am 'always already' *late* for my own self-presence, not in

the sense of a loss, but as an unavoidable, originary lack which therefore always

requires indefinite supplementation which is productive of self-presence and

objective presence as such. As Rudolphe Gasche pertinently observes at this

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[74] Ibid, p.64.

juncture:

> Without an originary trace, that is, 'a bending-back of a return', and without 'the movement of repetition' constitutive of the possibility and impossibility of self-reflection, how could there even be (and not be) something like self-reflection.[75]

It is therefore this originary trace which is (and has to be) repressed by Husserl in a gesture which repeats the gesture that inaugurated the Western (philosophical) tradition and its metaphysics of presence. Uncovering its effacement, Derrida thus uncovers the Husserlian transcendental in an exemplary manner and from the 'beginning' (if we can still use this term here!) to be complicated by the empirical as *its* transcendental. Accordingly, all of Husserl's subsequent 'problems' of separating the purity of the phenomenological Absolute stem from the impossibility of rigorously separating indication, expression and sense. There is only difference at the 'origin' of all 'things': bringing this to theoretical consciousness we are touching the *void*.

So much for Husserl's attempt to replace a single 'origin' that is, actually, always multiple, always more than one, always constituted in its sense of now by the 'before now' and the 'after'; always constituted indifferently in difference (differ*a*nce). For so much of what Derrida will be(come) is thus expressed by him in this very early critique of Husserl. But, Derrida's position not only originates differently in/from Husserl but, positively, *also* owes much to Ferdinand de Saussure's 'structural linguistics'. Indeed Saussure, widely recognised as the

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[75] Gasche, Rudolphe, *Inventions of Difference*, op.cit, 1995, p.40.

father of a 'structuralism,' is regarded by Derrida himself as the twin pole (to Husserl's phenomenology) of twentieth century thought, a pole which he himself gravitates/oscillates around. Consequently, in order to 'trace' this 'other influence' on Derrida I now follow his deconstruction of the sign to its 'logical conclusions' formative of his (quasi)-philosophy of language (as trace-structure) which I argue underpins all of his subsequent thinking; a thinking which raises to (theoretical) consciousness the new 'post'modern 'age of the aporia' and a co-extensive affirmative postmodern subjectivity able to re-conceive our self-creations and human solidarities in new more democratising and emancipating ways. My treatment of Saussure is briefer than my treatment of Husserl given the 'foundation' Husserl has provided for us (me).

Part Two:
Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure: A Sign of the Times

The Sign in 'Crisis': Derrida Post - Structuralism

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida states that the 'historico-metaphysical epoch must finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon. "Language" ceases to be assured, contained, guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it'.[76] It is here, in a deconstructive reading of Ferdinand de Saussure's project to found a structural linguistics, that Derrida arguably *best* articulates his quasi-philosophy of language which he never renounced and which undoubtedly developed, *via* Husserl, from the cardinal insight of a primordial difference at the origin whereby the privilege of presence over the sign cannot be assured. What Marian Hobson calls the 'originary synthesis of language, time and the other' (which she terms, against Geoffrey Bennington, as 'intentions of the infinite'[77]) – that is the movement of difference and deferral constitutive of meaning – is, in this context, referred to under the quasi-transcendental concept of *'arche-writing'*, a structure which Saussure reveals (against his express intentions) to envelop both speech and writing in its innermost 'meaning'. It is this insight that calls further attention to the sign as that 'ill-named thing' which, now having become 'critical', undercuts the 'history of truth' *per se* which has, for Derrida, always relied on a

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[76] Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*, op.cit, 1997, p.6.
[77] Hobson, Marian, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines*, op.cit. 1998, p.50.

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conscious or unconscious suppression of that element of the written sign which

Husserl calls that 'dangerous supplement'.

In his essay 'Differance', then, Derrida states:

> Most of the semiological or linguistic research currently dominating the field
> of thought (whether due to the results of its own investigations or due to its
> role as a generally recognised regulative model) traces its genealogy, rightly
> or wrongly, to Saussure as its common founder.[78]

Thus it is that structuralism (the other twin pole of twentieth century thought – the

other, of course, being phenomenology) traces its genesis back to Ferdinand de

Saussure and his posthumously published *Course in General Linguistics*[79], Derrida

acknowledging that his own quasi-philosophy (of the limit) – frequently referred to

in contemporary theory as 'post-structuralist' co-extensive as it is with his quasi-

philosophy of language – finds most of its impetus in his deconstructive reading of

Saussure's attempt to found a science of language.

Saussure's 'Essential Distinctions' and the Exclusion of Writing

As in Husserl's Phenomenology, Saussure's reading of linguistics as a human

science turns on a number of what Derrida has called 'essential distinctions'. The

first few chapters of *The Course in General Linguistics* separates out the abstract

system of *langue* – a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas,

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[78] The essay 'Differance' was originally published in the *Bulletin de la Societie francaise de philosophie* (LXII, No.3 July September, 1968, 73-101), but republished in both the David B. Allison edition of *Speech and Phenomena* (op.cit, 1973) and *Margins of Philosophy* (op.cit, 1996).
[79] de Saussure, Ferdinand, *Course in General Linguistics*. McGraw-Hill Book Co, New York: 1966.

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axiomatically 'true' of language *per se* by definition – from the 'empirical

multiplicity of languages' with their linguistic, physical and physiological

variations. Within the limits of the social conventions which underpin the system

of *langue*, Saussure argues that the *essence* of this system is to be found in the

'union of meanings and sound-images'. Yet despite having spoken of the

'artificialness' of the 'institution' of *langue*, he will argue that the sign itself is

made up of a *natural* unity between a psychic sound (signifier) and the meaning

(signified), and that (crucially for Derrida) whilst the psychic sound (the being-

heard of the sound) must be differentiated from its physiological manifestation (the

sound heard), the *phonetic* pronunciation of the word is still considered by

Saussure as being more 'natural' than its written inscription. Indeed, for him, the

effective exclusion of 'writing' from the field of linguistics is what establishes

linguistics as a science. *Thus it is that the speech/writing binary determining*

Husserl's phenomenology comes to pre-eminence again. Indeed, it is Saussure's

arguable failure to pass with sufficient critical vigilance through the transcendental

(voice) which prevents him from reaching the logical conclusions of his *own*

descriptions, it subsequently being the *tension* between gesture and statement that

provides the 'space' within which Derrida will insert his by now 'typical',

deconstructive reading.

Consequently, Derrida will come to identify Saussure's *phono-logocentrism* as

both metaphysical and *violent* in its privileging of the by no means 'natural'

relation between phonic signifier and (signified) meaning. As Richard

Beardsworth says of Saussure's prioritisation of the *phone*:

> Despite noting at the very beginning of the *Course in General Linguistics*
> that the only access to the matter of linguistics is through writing, Saussure
> considers writing's unique *raison d'etre* to be the representation of speech.
> Indeed, whenever the question of writing turns up in Saussure's
> observations, it is immediately stigmatised and expelled as a 'monstrosity'
> which reverses the natural order between speech and writing... writing is
> considered a tyrant (1915:53/31) which usurps the natural phonic
> pronunciation of words, substituting for them their visual images.[80]

So it is that, as with Husserl's Phenomenology, Saussure's (structuralist)

linguistics – which claims to be general, universal, non-metaphysical and value-

free – is seen to be founded on what Derrida terms an *ethico-theoretical decision*

'disguised by the apparent naturality of the object under consideration, but

revealed by the obsessive insistence with which the founder of linguistics wishes

to expel writing from the essence of language'.[81] For this 'in essence'

phenomenological reduction of language reveals Saussure to be 'taken' once more

by the 'metaphysics of presence', repeating the founding Platonic gesture of

Western phono-logo-centrism by disavowing inscription. It is thus clear again, as

Beardsworth comments, that the relationship(s) between philosophy and a human

science such as linguistics is infinitely more complicated than one might have

assumed and, indeed, that what Geoffrey Bennington refers to as 'transcendental

contraband' is an abiding interest for a Derrida who regards this necessary

contamination as a (non-) site of ethical and political opening (though of course in

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[80] Beardsworth, Richard, *Derrida and the Political*. Routledge, London and New York: 1996, p.9.
[81] Ibid, p.9.

the non-traditional, non-dogmatic, 'messianic' sense of these two terms, to the extent that they too 'belong' (without belonging) to metaphysics as such).

Speech and Writing: The Violence of Thought

In following Saussure's 'essential distinctions' – between speech and writing, the intelligible and the sensible, *la langue* and *parole*, signified/signifier – and the exclusions upon which they are predicated, Derrida thereby re-negotiates the *law* (that is the determination and hierarchisation of these exclusions, with the former retaining pre-eminence over the latter) such that he effectively re-casts – or better re-inscribes – the empirico-transcendental difference (this very oppositionality *as such*) and the tertiary structure of violence which issues from this re-inscription. Indeed, in this early work – and against the arguments of philosophers/theorists such as Richard Rorty who have denied the edifying status of Derrida's deconstructive readings – Derrida here prefigures what he will later call the opening to a *democracy-to-come*. This he will do by demonstrating, after Saussure, that the very condition of possibility (and impossibility) of the *phone* is *arche-writing*, doubling, in effect, what he had already re-marked in the passage through the Husserlian transcendental (*arche-writing*, like *differance* and the *trace* being – as we have already seen – 'points of accumulation of an argument, places where it was possible to bring complexity together in a word and hence raise as a theme').

For having thus instituted linguistics on the exclusion of writing, Saussure's

discourse becomes irremediably complicated from the outset by an aporetic logic

which issues in a 'double reading' of *The Course*. Famously, in terminology

which will soon become synonymous with deconstruction (namely the conceptual

dyad signifier/signified) Saussure argues that the sign is made up of the signified

(concept) and the signifier (sound-image). For Saussure the sound-image is

phonic, securing the allegedly 'natural' dimension to the unity of sound-meaning

and determining the derivative, secondary nature of the written sign (as the sign of

a sign). However, the fact that Saussure postulates an 'arbitrary' relation between

signifier and signified questions the very nature of the phonic sign as such. For if

the sign is arbitrary; if it is instituted by its insertion in a structure of difference,

then there seems to be no reason for his vitriolic denigration of writing. Rather,

the fact of writing, as the unmotivated relation between concept and sound-image

par excellence, is now extended to cover the whole field of linguistic signs. This

elaboration of the trace already points towards a first account by Derrida of the

spatio-temporal field of *arche-writing* whose effects constitute precisely a 'tertiary

structure of violence' described thus:

> first, the originary violence of the system of differences which
> disappropriates the proper in constituting it'; second, the violence of what is
> commonly conceived as the attempt to put an end to violence – the
> institution of law – but which is revealed as a violence because of its
> apparent suppression of the originary difference; and third, the necessary (if
> empirical) possibility of phenomenal violence *as* the consequence of the
> inability of the law to suppress its 'illegality' in relation to originary

difference.[82]

Arguing as Saussure does, that language is constituted by 'differences without positive terms', the natural unit(y) of sign-meaning *now* appears only as a secondary effect of the differential system of language. Indeed, Saussure himself concedes that an ethico-theoretical decision – the taking of the 'word' as the minimum object of analysis – institutes linguistics as an objective science, this decision casting the very objectivity it claims into critical relief. That Saussure seeks to conceal/disavow this decision by naturalising his description(s) marks, for Derrida, the effacement of the originary violence referred to above and which can only lead to a 'worst violence' serving to repeat the suppression of difference as history already seen in relation to Husserlian phenomenology. Indeed the very space between philosophy and linguistics is transformed as both are revealed as founded on the generalised space of arche-writing which they disavow in order to appear as such.

For in designating language as a system of differences without positive terms, Derrida argues that Saussure must acknowledge that the signifier is actually not phonic (i.e. not in any way *essentially* related to, or a property of, the voice) and that nor does it belong to *langue*, but rather that it is *generated* by the differences which separate one signifier from every other signifier, such that meaning is both constituted in this 'web of differences' *and* endlessly deferred: in-definite. It is

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[82] Ibid, p.23.

here that Saussure introduces the analogy with writing, an analogy allowing

Derrida to see the movement of arche-writing as the difference between the

materialisation of each phoneme or letter and the acoustic-sound they must

presuppose in order to be recognised as such – whatever the form this

materialisation may take. This is the very difference of consciousness, of the

possibility of re-cognising things 'as such'. This difference, transformed by the

inaugural Platonic gesture into the opposition between the sensible and the

intelligible, the ideal and the material, the finite and the infinite, is precisely what

is described in the course of the *Introduction to The Origin of Geometry* and

Speech and Phenomena in relation to Husserl's passage through the transcendental

(voice) which both conceals and reveals, in the course of its own description, the

'differential matrix' as that which is 'upstream' from metaphysic's oppositional

structure. Saussure's recourse to the metaphor of writing at the same moment as

he brackets the materiality of the sound-image thus confirms, for Derrida, that

arche-writing constitutes the structure of the instituted trace and constituted the

foundation, exclusions and contradictions of (the history) of linguistics.

Concluding Remarks

In this first chapter I have attempted to trace, through Derrida's engagement with the works of Edmund Husserl and Ferdinand de Saussure, the bifurcation of the onto-theological 'history of meaning' by way of what I have called here the *differential matrix* as Derrida seeks to affirm that metaphysics is 'in' deconstruction ('meaning' always being constituted and incessantly able to be reconstituted in the web of difference and deferral without beginning and without end(s)). It is thus that Derrida will repeatedly and quite properly argue that deconstruction is *not* a method or theory applied 'from the outside' but is always already at work in texts variously under consideration. Tracing the deconstruction of the dyad separating the sign and presence which allows language to be revealed as the problematic horizon of an entire (metaphysical epoch) – as the sign 'language', indeed 'sign-language' (as sign *of*), moves into crisis – I have argued that Derrida allows us to see subjective and objective presence as the effect of a greatly more radical *historicity* in which they are produced as always unstable, infinitely deferred effects produced within the quasi-economy of difference whose originary violence must be recognised and minimised in the responsibility of the *decision*. For, as I continue to argue in Chapter Two, the raising to theoretical consciousness of the originary synthesis of language, time and the other in 'postmodernity' – such as we will have to justify the use of this term – enables us to conceive of a quasi-philosophy of the limit which has the potential to transform our self-creations (i.e. how we decide within our (con)textual milieu who or 'what'

we are on an individual basis) and – further explored in Chapter Three – our human solidarities (how we come to understand, negotiate and take responsibility for the other on a communal, national and Inter-National scale) from the totalising limits within which they have been constrained in and by and 'around' the metaphysical tradition. With Derrida we therefore do indeed come to a certain 'end of history' (the end of history as the end of a definitive meaning *per se*), as something 'other than' history emerges from, and 'grows out of', our modern historical consciousness in its specificity and its general signification as an attempt to efface originary difference. And this really is *excellent news* for those – like Derrida, and like myself – who will *never* give up the hope, the *demand*, for a fairer, freer and more peaceful world to come, *now*.

Chapter Two:
Re-Figuring the Postmodern Subject Beyond the End(s) of History: A Comparative Study of Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth.

> Who is it that is addressing you? Since it is not an author, a narrator, or a *dues ex machina* it is an 'I' that is both part of the spectacle and part of the audience. An 'I' that, a bit like 'you', undergoes its own incessant violent reinscription within the arithmetical machinery. An 'I' that functioning as a pure passageway for operations of substitution is not some singular and irreplaceable existence, some subject or life. But only rather moves between life and death, between reality and fiction. An 'I' that is a mere function or phantom
>
> Jacques Derrida[83]

In this second chapter I want to argue (recalling my remarks in the Introduction) that, recognising ourselves to be in the '"post"'-modern'[84]; in the 'era of the aporia', Jacques Derrida gives voice, with increasing *urgency*, to an absolutely *affirmative* 'postmodern' subjectivity whose axiom might be 'I *inherit*, therefore, I am...yes, yes...'. In this way Derrida arguably refigures our modern-

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[83] Quote taken originally from Derrida's *Dissemination* (The Athlone Press Ltd, London, 1993) but reproduced in *Screenplay and Essays on the Film Derrida*, op.cit, 2005, p.68.

[84] It must be emphasised that Derrida doesn't much like the pre-fix 'post', with its historical connotations of the 'new' or the linear; but – and in a more radical historical sense which is better defined in terms of historicity – I keep the term in relation to our current condition and the kind of subjectivity I see co-extensive with it for three reasons. First, because of its power to shock – especially linked to Derrida and, second, (and conversely), because some have already proclaimed the death (or immanent death) of the postmodern which is not only premature but plain wishful thinking, and third, because I utilise the word 'post' *après* Geoffrey Bennington to signal a way of working through the complex textual resources of the modern-metaphysical tradition and the metaphysical tradition more widely. See Bennington, Geoffrey, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction*. Verso, London and New York: 1994, p.180.

metaphysical inheritance beyond the 'ends of history' by way of a new 'politics of

memory' which makes of us all (whether we know it or like it or not) postmodern

resistance fighters against the attempt(s) – 'modern' or 'postmodern' – to execute

what Jean Baudrillard calls 'the perfect crime'.[85] For *apropos* Chapter One, faced

with an inherent un-decidability which results from the re-inscription of the

empirico-transcendental difference separated in Plato's inaugural decision to

oppose the sensible and the intelligible through the law of the bar $(/)^{86}$, Derrida

argues that we must take 'a risk and a chance' and make decisions concerning our

own self-creations and human solidarities based on our own moral and aesthetical

sensibilities alone, with one ear open to the other (the other and the other in me);

an interminable openness to the future, to what is always 'to come'. And in this

openness the relationship of Derrida to Husserl and Saussure is crucial. For in the

position he develops and consolidates in works subsequent to those wherein

Husserl and Saussure are at the centre of his attention – works wherein he

exemplarily effects the above re-inscription *qua* his raising to consciousness of

(what I call here) the *differential matrix* – he deepens, extends and goes beyond the

Husserl/Saussure inheritance, thus forming, despite local 'variations', the *theme* of

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[85] This term, the 'perfect crime,' is one introduced by Jean Baudrillard to describe the attempt by a society to reproduce itself in as stable condition as possible so that all potentially de-stabilising and thus dangerous excesses are either rigorously excluded from, or incorporated into, 'the Same'. This is a condition which, were it achieved, would be so perfect that no-one would ever know that it was taking place as it quickly folds all unwanted phenomena such as difference, otherness and excess – all that cannot be digested by current social and political formations – into the old and familiar without remainder; without any 'loose ends'. Another 'ending'.

[86] In summary this bar (/) separating the intelligible and the sensible, perception and conception, signifier and signified, institutes the epoch of the metaphysics of presence (whether subjective and/or objective): the idea that there exists some knowable essence/foundation underlying what we *think* and what we *do*.

the impossibility of fixing meaning any*where*, in any*thing*, by any*one*; Derrida's

radical quasi-philosophy of history (*qua*) inheritance and its attendant postmodern

subjectivity as it gives itself to be thought in our arti-factual[87] and actu-virtual[88]

'postist' condition being nothing but the theoretical and practical registering of this

simple 'fact'. Critically for my purposes here in Chapter Two then, and

anticipating the thematics of Chapter Three, it is *this* re-cognition which

subsequently opens the ethico-political horizon to new and un-thought, greatly

more democratising and emancipating possibilities for both our self-creations and

human solidarities.

To support this thesis – to make this line of thinking persuasive, attractive – I here

juxtapose Derrida's thinking 'against' another version of 'radical openness' as

outlined by literary theorist/historian Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth. As my

introduction to this thesis states, my reasons for using Ermarth at this juncture are

three-fold. First, I think that Ermarth's systematic re-thinking of our 'modern'

conceptions of 'historical' time, consciousness, representational language,

narrative conventions and so on – most cogently and extensively essayed in her

1992 publication, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of*

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[87] As we will see in more detail (pp. 100-106) the term '*arti-factuality*' refers to the fact that
actuality is made (not found) by a range of 'hierarchising' and 'selective' procedures wherein the
'reality' of 'actuality' only reaches us through fictional devices.
[88] As we will see in more detail (p. 106) the term '*actu-virtuality*' refers the always positioned,
never (value) neutral virtual images, spaces and events which help construct our 'actuality' today.

Representational Time[89] – helpfully contextualise (in a different register) Derrida's

own thematics of radical historicity and post-historical man. Indeed having come

to Derrida 'after Ermarth' I found that her tracing of what she terms in *Sequel to*

History and elsewhere the 'Postmodern Reformation', really enabled me to get a

better grasp of Derrida's more philosophically difficult, challenging and

comprehensive 'end of history' argument (*qua* the entire history of meaning which

the modern 'concept' of history, working itself out in 'postist' ways – i.e. through

an ironical historical consciousness – arguably gives to be thought); as my earlier

remarks suggest, this argument already being delineated in some detail through his

deconstructive readings (in this study) of Husserl and Saussure and the quasi-

philosophy of history developed therein (with all the implications for the modern

idea of the subject this quasi-thematic implies).

Somewhat ironically , however, and despite throwing Derrida's oeuvre into relief,

my second reason for using Ermarth at this point is due to her arguable

misreading[90] of Derrida's theorisations with regards to whether they can be

considered 'postmodern' and/or 'post-structural' in their orientation. For for

Ermarth the 'postmodern' involves a reformation in consciousness going back to

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[89] Princeton University Press, Princeton. In developing Ermarth's thematics it is to this publication that I will chiefly refer given that while since 1992 Ermarth has returned to the issues and the theses first outlined in this work – most recently in her 2004 article 'Ethics and Method' (*History and Theory*, Theme Issue 43, December 2004, pp.61-83) – apart from a brief engagement with some of the operative codes (social, economic etc...) at work in our postmodern landscape I consider that her position/focus on the more formal aspects of her thinking – in particular what (as we will see) she terms 'rhythmic time' and multi-level (anthematic) consciousness – remains broadly the same.
[90] In the sense of failing to read Derrida with sufficient critical vigilance to support her own argument(s).

the Renaissance more specifically and whose singularity she argues Derrida

ignores (to his detriment) in favour of a more pervasive post-structural approach

which takes the horizon of this reformation back to Plato. In what I subsequently

argue to be a misunderstanding of his work, Ermarth's (mis-)reading thus allows

me to situate Derrida's corpus in relation to both 'postmodernity' and 'post-

structuralism' such as they are traditionally conceived, conflated and sometimes

opposed. In the same critical vein, my third and final reason for using Ermarth is

that despite her best efforts and the undeniable utility of her 'working out' of the

postmodern condition, I find her subsequent development of a radical postmodern

aesthetic to reveal her, in the detail of its tracing, not to be as open as she thinks;

her acts of (relative) closure only serving to draw attention to the 'openness' of

Derrida's postist thought.

With these brief 'contextualising' remarks in mind, my approach in this second

chapter is as follows:

First, I concentrate on that part of Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's work in which she

thematises the peculiarity of modern 'historical time'. This then enables me to

situate, with *an ironical historical consciousness*, 'modernity' as it developed from

its supporting spatio-temporal framework to become figured in grand-narrative

form(s) as the 'project of modernity'. *Ironical*, not only in the sense of being

'wise' to the fallacy of modernity's attempt to execute the 'perfect crime' but also

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because 'history' in its all pervasive modern-metaphysical form(s) gets to conduct its own *wake*, reflecting on its own radical im-possibility. As Ermarth herself says in the course of *Sequel to History* 'this text "about" postmodernism is written in the language of representation; it produces meaning, assumes a consensus community, engages in historical generalisation and footnotes...I assume that one need not give up history to challenge it'. That modernity is both slayer and slain is no bad thing however, and, as I will argue in relation to Derrida's thought, is in a certain and important manner entirely continuous with the self-reflexive spirit of modern philosophical thought.

Second, I turn to what I regard as Ermarth's mis-reading of the 'horizon' and the subtly of Derrida's work and which I argue is instructive for delimiting the kind of affirmative postmodern subjectivity I believe he gives voice to, and whose axiom is described as 'I inherit therefore, I am, yes...yes....'. At which point I leave Ermarth to follow the way in which (what is generally taken to be) the more abstract, theoretical pronunciations of Derrida's early work on 'metaphysics in deconstruction' – in this thesis exemplified by his deconstructive readings of Husserl and Saussure – is actually enormously *concrete* and salient for the entirety of the (inter) textual milieu (in the expanded sense) we confront in our postmodern condition today with all its social, economic, cultural, political and religious discourses 'beyond the (ends) of history'. In particular, I propose that it enables us to become Derridean-type postmodern *resistance fighters* against those

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modern/postmodern attempts to institute foundationalist maxims under a naturalist/realist pretext which serve to close off the future to the unpredictable and the unforeseeable *(l'avenir)*.[91] For this is a kind of 'radical openness', I argue, which enables us to re-think our economies of knowledge in greatly more democratising and emancipating ways than has hitherto been possible within the theoretical constraints of the Western onto-theological tradition which has sought, very precisely, to constrain the meaning of being to presence.

Third, and finally, I return to Ermarth in order to underline what I perceive to be Derrida's more radical openness by comparing her conception of rhythmic time and multi-level/anthematic consciousness with the kind of affirmative postmodern subjectivity I believe Derrida to espouse and which is, as I shall by then have argued in the previous section, at the same time a kind of textual praxis operative in the 'here and now' in our postmodern condition. This is not, I hasten to add, to say that I disagree with most of what Ermarth says *at the level at which she says it* – Ermarth's feminist, radical theorising is so much better than most of her colleagues – rather I feel that there is a *gap* between the critical consciousness she

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[91] In this context it is worth noting here that Derrida will distinguish between what he calls the 'future' and the '*l'avenir*', the former having to do with the programmable, foreseeable – and the latter (which often confusingly he still refers to as the future) refers to someone whose arrival is totally unexpected. However this (almost) necessary confusion has undoubtedly to do with the 'fact' that for Derrida it is not a case of either/or but both/and. That is, it is always a *tension* between the future and the *l'avenir*, economy and the *gift*, same and *other* which de-limits all attempts at definitive closure. For Derrida (as ever) it is a case of keeping the future *as open as possible* to the other, but this is always an other which comes to interrupt some existing horizon of sense – wherever we are in a text already. It is a question of *vigilance* and, as we will see, respect for the *secret*.

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advocates when she speaks about understanding what kinds of codes and tacit

knowledges or implicit understandings govern the operation of powerful

systematic influences in our society such as the corporation, media, etc..., and the

kind of experimental thematic she advances in terms of an-thematic (which is to

say multi-level) narrative processes.[92] For I will argue that we need to take up

Derridean-like positions of resistance as postmodern subjects with the (admittedly

hard) task of exhausting the conceptual resources of terms such as 'history' so

radioactive, still, with old meanings (which is perhaps where Ermarth, concerned

to emphasise the idiomatic nature of the modern sense of history, underplays the

vast metaphysical tradition within which the term is inscribed). In fact I shall

argue that we need to work within structures in ways which loosen them and which

eventually disregard or change beyond recognition those terms/concepts/systems

which fail to call for, elicit and provoke responses due to their totalitarian nature –

taking texts in new and unforeseen directions while taking the time and care to

read texts in their original language, context and history of reception. It is, also,

critically important to draw attention to what I, following Derrida, have already

referred to as the arti-factual and actu-virtual nature of actuality in these

'postmodern times' so as to open this 'actuality' to difference and alterity. And all

of this, I think – and as Ermarth's own remarks suggest – involves a certain

ironical historical consciousness which is 'post' in the sense of still working

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[92] Processes where readers (as multi-level thinkers) actively engage in the text (in the expanded
sense), attending to a multitude of thematic voices and constructing from the paratactic elements
'sequential figures that differ with each reader and reading'. Deeds Ermarth, Elizabeth. *Sequel to
History*, 1992, p.194.

through its modern-metaphysical (as well as metaphysics in general) inheritance

beyond the ends of history (upper and lower case history and the history of

meaning *per se*). For our contemporary consciousness is still being moulded by

hyper-modern forces (not least those of the economic and techno-scientific) which

have simply speeded up historical time to an absolute real time which itself now

needs to be addressed and de-constructed. Thus while the kind of experiments

Ermarth advocates – which involve experimenting with 'phenomenological time'

and making consciousness aware of the need to attend to multiple acts of attention

no longer rationalised into a single, homogenous 'meaningful' horizon – do have

their place in what is arguably a condition of *polemos* (certainly interrupting the

comfortable boundaries between history and literature), I am not sure, certainly

outside of a relatively small radical theoretical community, if they have the ability

to change the way we think and act outside of a more pervasive Derridean

approach to the postmodern condition. This is not to say that Derrida's approach

does not advocate a certain multi-level thinking, but that it does so in such a way

that it works within existing discursive boundaries so as to make them speak

differently, thus opening such texts to the aporias, fissures and paradoxes which

they themselves contain; this kind of textual praxis being that which reveals what

is *always already* at work but effaced, by the attempt to constrain the meaning of

being to presence. It is not (if I can enter another caveat) that I do not necessarily

consider that one day we might come to think in the way Ermarth suggests, but

rather that once we take it as inevitable – i.e. we think we just have to re-write our

narrative conventions – and more importantly once we treat it as closer to the way

reality 'really is' than historical time and its conventions as Ermarth arguably does,

then we risk gifting it back to the onto-theological tradition Derrida (and 'we')

seek to escape. Let us thus press forward – take a risk and a chance – and

welcome that which has not yet come (about)!

So, I now begin to give some substance to the above delineated 'approach' by

following Ermarth's examination of 'modernity' in such a way as to help us

comprehend the nature and scale of the reformation that leads, for her, to precisely

the 'postmodern condition' we currently live in and through.

Derrida and Ermarth: Re-Thinking 'Modernity' in the 'Post' Modern 'Age of the Aporia'

That we are in the postmodern condition now seems fairly obvious, if by this is

meant the condition engendered by the failure of the 'project of modernity' defined

by Keith Jenkins as

> ...the attempt, from the eighteenth century in Europe, to bring about through
> the application of reason, science and technology, a level of social and
> political well-being within social formations which, legislating for the
> increasingly generous emancipation of their subjects/citizens, we might
> characterise by saying that they were trying, at best, to become human rights
> communities.[93]

This failed attempt to execute the 'modernist project' absolutely – a project I think

might be considered the *'raison d'etre'* of Western metaphysics – is traced back by

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[93] Jenkins, Keith (Ed), *The Postmodern History Reader*. Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p.4.

Ermarth somewhat beyond the 'experiment of modernity' re: the Eighteenth

Century, to the much earlier Renaissance. And this is because, for Ermarth,

'modernity' signals neither the local event of modern*ism* she sees prevalent at the

turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, nor the era since the eighteenth

century Enlightenment, but rather marks the type of humanist rationality

constructed and disseminated in Renaissance and Reformation Europe without

which the later 'project of modernity' would have been 'unthinkable'. 'Older than

the Enlightenment and newer than the kind of rationalism traceable to the Greeks',

she writes, this modern 'Culture of Representation' is defined by

> ...its libraries and universities, its democratic politics and its human rights,
> its reliance on rationality and universal laws, its new kind of descriptive
> notation that made possible the development of empirical science and of
> technology, its emphasis on development and production, its reliance on a
> particular definition of individuality, its faith above all in neutrality and its
> constructed objectivity.[94]

For Ermarth, what underpins modern culture as its founding meta-narrative is

'historical time', a particular and peculiar time-bound 'timing of time' which she

traces back to the Renaissance when the rediscovery of classical learning led to

those shifts in technical achievement which changed the very 'bases' and methods

of our 'understanding'. Out of this shift emerged the modern idea of history, which

she describes in her seminal work, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the*

Crisis of Representational Time, as follows:

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[94] Deeds Ermarth, Elizabeth, *Rewriting Democracy: Cultural Politics in Postmodernity*, 2005. p.7
(unpublished typescript).

> The view of time as a neutral homogeneous medium like the space of pictorial realism in painting; a time where mutually informative measurements can be made between past, present and future, and where all relationships can be explained in terms of a common horizon... The temporal analogue that links past, present, and future involves a different faculty (consciousness) and a different medium (time) but the same formation inheres.[95]

To exemplify this view of linear history, Ermarth asks us to consider (the analogous) single point perspective of painting. Here, in single point perspective, the view from any point on a common horizon gives the spectator a view of the 'world' that remains the same regardless of his/her position and which extends to infinity, thus having the value of a 'universal truth'. It is through a similar use of single point 'time' that history has become a – indeed *the* – commanding meta-narrative in modernist discourse, the organisational *form* of 'modern' narrative in which language is constrained to a representational function, 'one in which a sign refers, without any unsettling influence, to a world where language functions chiefly as information'.[96] So it is that Ermarth argues that the literary conventions of modernity, far from being constrained to the pages of the novel or the pictorial or plastic arts, etc, support an entire 'representational discourse'.

Ermarth's own critique of single-point linear history and its temporality rests on two main premises. First, her rebuttal of the 'omniscient narrator' (or what she

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[95] Deeds Ermarth, Elizabeth, *Sequel to History*, op.cit, 1992, p.27.
[96] Ibid, p.157.

terms in *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel*[97] the 'Narrator as Nobody')

and, second, her conception of the limitations or weaknesses of what she calls

historical convention's most powerful effects: its production of transcendence in

'various appealing forms'. With respect to the former, Ermarth contends that in

modern narrative there is a general acceptance of 'the Narrator as Nobody', in

other words, the narrator is simply 'History speaking' to 'us'. This 'Nobody'

narrator rationalises consciousness by channelling time into a single horizon

(hence Ermarth's analogy to single point perspective). The continuums of time

and consciousness thus appear inseparable, serving as the medium in which events

are understood 'neutrally', it being the unquestioned assumption of neutrality

which is arguably used by those claiming objectivity and subjectivity in their study

of the 'past'. However, as Ermarth warns us

> ...the formal achievement which I call realistic 'consensus' has itself *created*
> the media of space and time in which we proceed to make our mutually
> informative measurements, arrive at hypothesis, formulate our laws, and
> produce our experiments, our capital, and our knowledge, that other form of
> capital. There is nothing 'natural' about it.[98]

It is this 'illusion of history' which Ermarth thinks gives rise to the production of

transcendentalism in a variety of forms – not least in those Capitalist and Marxist

eschatological grand-narratives helpfully define as the *project* of modernity –

motivated by the desire to deflect what Martin Heidegger identified as the desire to

transcend what she calls the 'decisive material limitation of death'. Ermarth, like

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[97] Deeds Ermarth, Elizabeth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh: 1998 (2nd Edition, orig.1983).
[98] Deeds Ermarth, Elizabeth, *Sequel to History*, op.cit, 1992, p.30.

Heidegger (to whom she regularly refers)[99], argues for the rejection of

transcendence (and dialectics) which 'requires' people to accept the condition of

today in anticipation of tomorrow (a tomorrow Baudrillard reminds us may never

arrive). As she argues: 'If I remain aware of my own inevitable finitude, questions

of value become urgent'.[100]

It is thus that Ermarth uses literary narratives – namely those multi-level narratives

of Vladimir Nabokov, Julio Cortazar and Alain Robbe-Grillet – to re-organise

sequence and meaning at the level of both written text(s) and the 'level' which she

also sees governing our understanding of the unwritten text(s) i.e. the 'world', the

'self', the 'other,' etc. For subverting the literary conventions of modernity

arguably helps change how 'we' perceive/order both 'ourselves' and 'others'. As

Ermarth argues: 'The revision of sequence at the level of language is where the

practical, embedded resolutions of postmodernism become available'.[101]

Ermarth: Mis-Reading Derrida.

Having thus situated 'postmodernity' in relation to 'modernity' and before coming

back to a critical examination of Ermarth's own postmodern 'revision of sequence'

in the last part of this chapter, I now want to briefly examine what I take to be

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[99] Ermarth states that for her, Heidegger's most important perception was that 'the idea of temporal infinity is what in practice deflects our attention from the ultimate human necessity of facing death'. Ibid. p.35. For for Heidegger *Dasein* (human *being*) opens up the arena of significance very precisely by anticipating its own death. He calls for *Dasein* to reclaim its own radical finitude and the finitude of (beings) disclosure and so become *authentically* itself.
[100] Ibid. p.36.
[101] Ibid, p.3.

Ermarth's mis-reading of what I have already called the 'horizon and subtlety' of

Derrida's work, which creates a kind of 'jetty'[102] for launching my own reading of

the kind of postmodern subjectivity I believe Derrida does actually give voice to.

For while I agree that there is a certain specificity to the modern tradition and to

modern historical time (which I don't think Derrida would deny) I cannot agree

with Ermarth's remark (in the 1998 Preface of the second edition of *Realism and*

Consensus), that Derrida 'mistakes the historical horizon'[103] indicated by the

mutation which gives rise to the differential consciousness (or rather the

consciousness of *differance*) which she also suggests arises from Derrida's work

on Husserl and Saussure. For here Ermarth argues that Derrida represents that

tendency of thought which she calls 'post-structuralism' and which she argues

traces the critique of Western metaphysics back to Plato, rather than her own brand

of 'postmodernism' which takes the critique of Western culture back only as far as

modernity; and, in my view, this rather skews the issue as far as Derrida is

concerned. For whilst the kind of 'post-structuralist' insights he gleans from his

engagement with Saussure and Barthes *et al*, do indeed impact on a certain

'structuralism' common from 'Plato' onwards in the 'metaphysical tradition', his

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[102] I like the word 'jetty', it appears in Derrida's essay 'Some Statements and Truisms' and refers to a kind of 'force of movement' which escapes determination. The implication is that while all jetty's start from somewhere, from a certain decision, a certain determinate gesture, each (theoretical) jetty enters originally into conflict and competition where all totalising gestures remain partial and open to re-interpretation *without ends*. The full title of Derrida's essay is 'Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms and Other Small Seisisms'. This essay appears in *The States of 'Theory': History, Art and Critical Discourse*, edited and introduced by John Carroll. Translated from the French by Anne Tomiche. Stanford University Press, Stanford: 1990, pp.63-94.
[103] Deeds Ermarth, Elizabeth, *Realism and Consensus*, op.cit, 1998, p.xxii.

position is both in-formed by (and in-forms) what might be called his

'postmodernism' as an engagement with modern (philosophical) thought. For

Derrida's is not a conventional critique but a reading of 'modernism' and its

'history' (in its various incarnations) rendered other-wise. This can best be

illustrated by the lengthy engagement with Emmanuel Kant in Derrida's essay 'On

a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy'[104], which raises the spectre of an

'apocalyptic postal system' informed by an affirmative perversion of Kant's

modern critical thought which refuses not only to give up the modern desire for

critique and truth (law and destiny), but also becomes resonant for the entire

metaphysical tradition beyond its modern formulation(s) alone in terms of the

foundationalist 'messages' we have been sent after Plato's inaugural decision to

oppose the sensible and the intelligible through the law of the bar(/). This is not to

deny, of course, the importance or the specificity of modernity in relation to

postmodernity – not least because Derrida's thought would have been impossible

and unthinkable outside of a Marxist space which itself has relied on the

development of modern historical time – but to recognise that 'modernity' (its

upper and lower case discourse(s)) has sought to justify itself through the attempt

to throw a *totalising* explanatory grid over the *differential matrix* (in which it is

inscribed), common to an entire metaphysical tradition... the dislocating effects or

'excess' of which the tradition as a whole has always tried to suppress. This is

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[104] Derrida, Jacques, 'On A Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy'. In *Raising the Tone Of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida.* Edited by Peter Fenves. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London: 1993.

why the 'age of the aporia', which recognises an irreducible heterogeneity, makes Derrida state: 'I had the feeling that – despite the enormous tradition going back thousands of years – something singular is happening today, of which there are a great many signs in the world. Something completely new, to which we have to respond and with respect to which we have to situate ourselves'.[105] For here he is giving voice to something which is *at the same time* both very new and very ancient and which is thus 'signified' repetitively throughout our historical tradition, in 'Greece and in Rome... [in]... Plato and Descartes and Kant'.[106] Accordingly, what Ermarth arguably mis-reads is the extent to which Derrida's 'postmodern' engagement with modernity/modernism has both informed and been informed by his post-structuralism which uncovers the '*differential matrix*' whose rupturing effects are felt, and generally effaced, by Western metaphysics *per se* and which, raised to theoretical consciousness (without being itself a 'theory' as such), enables a kind of textual praxis interminably open to the future; open to the irreducible excess of a certain structural genesis which cannot ever be closed. Ermarth claims that Derrida mistakes the historical horizon of post-modernity. He does not.

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[105] Derrida, Jacques and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret.* Polity Press and Blackwell Publishers, Oxford: 2001, p.79.
[106] Derrida, Jacques in Richard Kearney (Ed), *States of Mind,* op.cit, 1995, p.163.

The Postmodern Apocalypse (*Sans* Apocalypse): Beyond the Ends(s) of History

As Geoffrey Bennington argues in his excellent, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction*, 'I suspect that the prefix "post"- in terms such as "postmodernism" and "poststructuralism" can be worked with interestingly – non-journalistically – only if linked to Derrida's exploration of the postal system'.[107] And it is this point – that I regard as absolutely critical – which can be seen in the above mentioned essay 'On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy', which is characterised by one of Derrida's most incisive commentators, John D. Caputo, as an

> ...essay on what could have been called 'postmodernism', that is, of how to work ones way *through* modernity (not around it), how to work with it (not jettison it), had not this word suffered the ill-fortune of being ground into senselessness by overuse, by a wild circulation that is postmodern in the very worst sense.[108]

In the essay itself Derrida thus explores, following Kant's own essay 'On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy' [109], the question of what he calls the 'apocalyptic tone' (then) recently adopted in French Philosophy – his own included – and what he terms his notion of the apocalypse without (*sans*) apocalypse which, he will argue, is the transcendental (read *quasi-* foundational) condition of all discourse, of all experience, of every 'mark' or 'trace', and whose movement he will liken to an apocalyptic postal system which, while keeping

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[107] Bennington, Geoffrey, *Legislations*, op.cit, 1994, p.180.
[108] Caputo, John D., *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion.* Indiana University Press, Bloomington:1997, p.89.
[109] Kant, Immanuel, 'On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy', in Peter Fenves (Ed) *Raising the Tone*, op.cit, 1993.

'Reason' alive, *dreams of the impossible*, the unprogrammable, the unforeseeable. Against those such as Searle and Gutmann[110] who read deconstruction as an anti-modernist, anti-enlightenment *Schwarmerei* (passion), in fact what Derrida reads through Kant's 'modern' tract is Reason rendered other-wise through what Caputo calls a 'little postmodern prayer'. Let us now follow Derrida following Kant as this prayer is made audible and where, in my view, a new kind of postmodern, post-historical consciousness/subjectivity is heralded or 'called forth'.

In 'On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy', Kant seeks to defend the idea of a pure, passionless reason from those dangerous 'mystagogues' (*viz*: religious and mystical enthusiasts) who for him threatened the very survival of philosophy by opining feelings and private communications with the super-sensible world. For Kant saw in the mystagogues secretive 'crypto-poetics' a profoundly un-democratic tone which replaced reasoned argument with debased metaphor and threatened to confuse philosophy with 'mere' literature. Accordingly, Kant's response was to extol the superior virtues of the 'moral law'

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[110] John Searle and Amy Gutmann view deconstruction as providing a license for 'irresponsible scholarship', arguing this manner of reading advocates the free play of meaning and is politically conservative, only serving to obfuscate the grounds on which a normative communicative reason could be established (clear overtones of Habermas here). The Searle-Derrida debate dates back to Derrida's 1971 essay 'Signature, Event, Context' and Searle's reply 'Re-iterating the Differences' (see Derrida's *Limited Inc*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston: 1988). For a more recent summary of Searle's polemics against deconstruction see his essay 'Postmodernism and the Western Rationalist Tradition' which appears in the collection *Campus Wars: Multi-Culturalism and the Politics of Difference*. Edited by John Arthur and Amy Shapiro. Westview Press, Boulder: 1995, pp.28-48. For an extended example of Amy Gutmann's views on how deconstruction (used as a synonym for Derrida) destroys both academic standards and reason itself, see her essay 'Relativism, Deconstruction, and the Curriculum' which appears in the same volume (pp.57-69).

(as categorical imperative) without ever positively identifying it as such whilst calling on the mystics to no longer attempt to 'lift the goddesses skirt' to reveal her secrets.

Of course, Derrida reminds us that it is not simply the mystagogues who espoused (and still espouse) such an apocalyptic eschatology. Hegelian, Marxist and Nietzschean eschatologies all 'happened' after Kant, and at the time of writing the 'Apocalyptic Tone' essay (1980), the 'ends of man' was a then current topic for much intellectual debate. Indeed as Caputo reminds us (and as Derrida concurs), nowadays a whole variety of discourses zoom in on the 'end' of this or that: the end of philosophy, the end of history, the end of metaphysics, the end of epistemology, the ends of progress, the end of ideology, etc. And part of Derrida (and Caputo's) concern is to be alert to the very 'ends' such 'endist' philosophers seek to lead us toward (which is not of course to simply reject in a blind cynicism such legacies, as Derrida's work on Marx demonstrates). This is why Derrida thinks that we cannot (for all that his passage through Husserl and Saussure has taught him and us about the differential function of language, about (inter) textuality, about the fallacy of the transcendental signified and such like), forego the desire for critique and truth (law and destiny). Indeed, Derrida doesn't find the two positions mutually exclusive: we must continue to seek to demystify speculative discourse(s) on vision, theophany and *parousia* wherever they are

found. This is why Derrida, *contra* Habermas'[111] arguments, is *not* anti-

Enlightenment and why, as Niall Lucy reminds us in his succinct *A Derrida*

Dictionary:

> If Derrida has sometimes taken Kant's ideas to task (see especially *Truth in Painting*), it has not been in order to pave the way for 'relativism' or to sound the death of 'reason' but to question his 'faith in the purity of transcendental questions, which ask after the conditions, the preconditions or the presuppositions of knowledge'.[112]

What Derrida argues, then, is that we must be suspicious of those Enlightenment

philosophers who claim to have seen the light at the end of various tunnels; to

know the secret of the thing 'in itself', to know what is to come. We must be

sceptical of hidden secrets, of all apocalypticisms, just as we are also of the

religious fanatics or mystics or fundamentalists who claim to know 'the secret'.

Indeed, it is precisely when Kant recognises that the Enlightenment has not yet

happened in his time (is still happening, is still 'to come', has not yet 'found' the

secret) that Derrida becomes 'a happy post-Kantian'. For he is not so happy when

Kant seeks to overcome this condition by way of a 'peace treaty' with the

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[111] As Christopher Norris states in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, London and New York: 1999). of the prejudice which sees Derrida's work as a practice of an artful, allusive, 'literary' style incompatible with the interests of truth seeking thought: 'This prejudice assumes its most elaborate and systematic form in a work like Jurgen Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (trans.1987), where Derrida is cast – along with various other "postmodern" enemies of reason – as just another latter-day sophist, a skillful rhetorician whose literary gifts are placed in the service of a wholesale Nietzschean-irrationalist creed, a betrayal of that 'unfinished project of modernity' which Habermas regards as our last, best hope in an age of distorted mass-media values and inert consensus politics...Habermas is virtually predestined to misread Derrida in so far as he makes it a requirement for enlightened thought that criticism should respect the *de jure* separation of discursive regimes, and not allow itself to become mixed up with the poetic (or world-disclosive) function properly served by metaphorical or literary language'. (P.139-140). The relationship between Habermas and Derrida has grown more conciliatory over the years as my remarks in the next Chapter will show, their sharing a concern in the years before Derrida's death with issues surrounding the future of Europe, the UN, international law and Kant.

[112] Lucy, Niall, *A Derrida Dictionary*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford: 2004. p.66.

mystagogues whereby all are to stand before *the* moral Law.[113] For Derrida sees it

as our postmodern fate to live in the (ethico-political) space between the

Aufklarers and the mystics in the structurality of an opening which says, 'Come,

will you ever be up to it…' and to which we must be end-less-ly affirmative and

inventive, tirelessly vigilant and' just 'that little bit blind'.

For what Derrida seeks to emphasise, in part through the 'catastrophic reversal' of

the scene of the Apocalypse of John is that as soon as one no longer knows who

speaks or who writes, then the text becomes apocalyptic; here Derrida is making, I

think, a 'postmodern scene'.[114] For whereas traditionally, and without simply

reducing all apocalypticism to a *mono*-tone, apocalyptic writings (of a mystical or

an Enlightenment disposition) positioned themselves above the 'chaos' of

contingency from whence they could locate and explain everything 'clearly',

deconstruction exposes the quasi-structure of a 'system of relays in which we do

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[113] The problem with *the* moral law, as Derrida amongst others has pointed out, is that there is more to morality than always adhering to a set of compulsory moral values, regardless of individual circumstances. For not only does this ignore singularity, it implies a co-extensive lack of responsibility for one's decisions. Despite Kant's invocation of free will, what 'free choice' is made or exercised when one simply *follows* or *obeys* a rule/law etc…

[114] In 'The Revelation of St. John The Divine' (*The Holy Bible*, Collins, London and New York: 1957) is written 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty' (1:8) As John D Caputo writes in *Religion without Religion* (Indianna University Press, Bloomington: 1997) 'If we imagine, by a kind of provisional fiction, that there were but one apocalyptic tone, instead of a generalized derangement (Verstimmung) and unmasterable polytonality of apocalypticisms (which is what Derrida really thinks), it would sound something like this: I have come to unveil the truth for you about the end of the world. The end is near and I can see it; we are going to die, the faithful and the goyim alike. I alone can reveal the truth, the destination. We must form a closed community of those who stay awake while the others sleep. The Apocalypse of John embodies this scene.' (p.90). By way of a 'reversal' Derrida seeks to make us aware of that 'experience of the impossible', of 'un-decidability', whereby there is no unitary authoritarian voice to assure a self-present and/or objective meaning. The text is duplicitous, and we just have to take responsibility and decide, each time, affirmatively.

not know who is saying what to whom, thereby stirring up *passion du non-savoir*[115] (a passion for the un-knowable). In what has become (in Derrida's sense) an apocalyptic postal system, it is no longer clear or certain from whence we have come or where we are headed (besides, things are always getting 'lost in the post'). This is the scene, then, amongst other scenes, of that 'strange institution called literature'; of what Nicholas Royle calls a 'certain experience of displacement, a question of any and every sense of "place"'. As Royle remarks:

> Literature has no definitive meaning or resting place, even if it allows one to explore notions of 'definitive meaning' and 'resting place' in especially critical and productive ways. The literary work never rests. It does not belong. Literature does not come home: it is strangely home-less, strangely free.[116]

This kind of fairly 'modern' experience of literature Derrida finds salient for all discourse, for all text(s) which, as bearers of 'meaning' constructed in and through the movement of the *'differential matrix'*, remain interminably open. Consequently, this experience of the 'impossibility' of arresting or consolidating meaning 'once and for all', can be linked back to the above discussion of Husserl whose recourse to writing – to 'literature in the broadest sense' in order to guarantee the ideal objectivity of meaning (in the case of geometry) – seemed to interrupt his very ideal of translatability and univocity as sender and receiver became irreducibly complicated and meaning, if not irrevocably 'lost in translation', was cast adrift into an interminable relay of difference(s) and deferral(s) without beginning and without end(s).

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[115] Royle, Nicholas, *Jacques Derrida*. Routledge, London and New York: 2003, p.45.
[116] Ibid, p.45.

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A Question of Inheritance: The 'Politics of Memory'

Ours is thus, argues Derrida, a messianic time without messian*ism*, a time beyond calculable plurality, a moment beyond the linear time of history and/or the controlling vision of modernity's sovereign subject. Developed not least through his readings of Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'[117] and various texts by Marx[118], this messianic (quasi-) structure is linked by him to the notion of *inheritance* which takes on so much importance for the postmodern subject.[119] Which is to say, as Derrida puts it in *Spectres of Marx* :

> That we are heirs [inheritors] does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or not. [120]

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[117] Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn. Schoken, New York: 1969. In this work Benjamin will speak of a 'weak messianic power' admirably summarised by Niall Lucy in his *Derrida Dictionary* (op.cit, 2004) as follows: '[I]t relates each of us today to those who came and suffered before us. We are the chosen ones, as it were, whose present time was once the promised future of the past, and it is our responsibility to remember and redress the injustices that were suffered by those who made it possible for us to live. For Derrida, this is to rethink the present in terms of a never-ending future to come, based on our 'inheritance' from the past.' (p.74). In other words, and as I suggest here, this is Derrida's quasi-philosophy of history.

[118] For example *The German Ideology* (written with Engels), *Capital* and the *1844 Manuscripts*. Through his deconstructive reading of these texts and others what Derrida will argue we have inherited from Marx is not a *programme* for change but a *messianic promise* of change; Derrida's reading(s) of Marx forming the basis for my next chapter 'Derrida: Changing the World (Before Two O'Clock)'.

[119] It is also important to mention Kierkegaard at this juncture. Kierkegaard will speak in *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard* of the uncertainty of history, the lack of pre-existent proofs of determinate knowledge, and instead advocates the primacy of life, a life where one must take a risk and a chance (already a familiar Derridean axiom to us) and make a subjective choice via a 'leap of faith', a commitment to the absurd. As my discussion progresses it will be clear to what extent the Kierkegaardian inheritance in-forms deconstruction. *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard* were selected, edited and translated by Alexander Dru, Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1955.

[120] Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf and with an Introduction by Brend Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg. Routledge, London and New York: 1994.

For the postmodern subject, recognising itself to be 'thrown' (to borrow a Heideggarian term) into an inherently foundationless, inter-textual discursive landscape which preceded its 'birth' and which will survive its 'death', the 'history of meaning' – up to and including the 'modern historical tradition' which gives us the (now ironical) conceptual tools in order to conceive of the metaphysical tradition as such – is transformed into what Geoffrey Bennington has called a 'politics of memory' – a situation which has no omniscient narrator or super-sensible deity to guide or take responsibility for the idiomatic (without of course being totally idiomatic) paths to be forged. As Derrida explains:

> Let us consider first of all, the radical and necessary *heterogeneity* of an inheritance, the difference without opposition that has to mark it, a 'disparate' and a quasi-juxtaposition without dialectic (the very plural of what we will later call Marx's spirits). An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction to reaffirm by choosing*. 'One must' means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not simultaneously call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause – natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret – which says 'read me, will you ever be able to do so'.[121]

The 'politics of memory' thus involves taking up critical positions toward the archive(s) – modern and postmodern – an increasingly important 'position' in our information age where data is brought and sold on the open market. Thus, just as we must 'filter, select, [and] criticise' modernity's archive and its legacy which is still maintained today by those who seek to consolidate a more conventional

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[121] Ibid, p.16.

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historical memory, so we must be aware of new archiving techniques (micro-chips,

the internet, virtual reality, mobile phone, ipod technology, television archives

etc...) which , whilst they may seem diverse, free and accessible, remain no less

over-determined by economical, political and cultural influences/constraints than

more 'traditional' archival remains – books, newspapers, paintings, handwritten

diaries, and so on.

This notion of inheritance and the various archival/communicative structures we

both help (re-)form and are formed by, serves to re-mark the fact that the kind of

liminal postmodern subjectivity Derrida advocates is thus above all a *responsible*

one, not least in the sense that 'I' am responsible for the *decision* taken by me (by

us all) 'before the other'. As Derrida says in 'Intellectual Courage: An Interview',

this is an *ethico-political* (space of the) decision which

> ...to be just, cannot content itself with applying existing norms or rules but
> must take the absolute risk, in every singular instant, of justifying itself
> again, alone, as if for the first time, eve if it is inscribed in a tradition... A
> decision, though mine, active and free in its phenomenon, cannot be the
> simple deployment of my potentialities or aptitudes, of what is 'possible for
> me'. In order to be a decision, it must interrupt that 'possible', tear off my
> history and thus above all, in a certain strange way, the decision of the other
> in me: come from the other in view of the other in me.[122]

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[122] Taken from an interview with Jacques Derrida whose english translation reads 'Intellectual
Courage: An Interview'. This interview was originally conducted by Thomas Assheuer of German
weekly *Die Zeit*. At Jacques Derrida's request the full text was published in French on the Derrida
website in March 1998. Assheuer's questions were translated into French by Andreas
Niederberger; after a long correspondence, and an abbreviated form of the interview was printed in
German as '*Ein Gesprach mit dem Philosophen Jacques Derrida uber die Intellektuellen, den
Kapitalismus und die Gesetze der Gastfreundschaft*' [a conversation with the philosopher Jacques
Derrida about intellectuals, capitalism and the laws of hospitality] in *Die Zeit* on March 5, 1998
(*Die Zeit* 11, 1998.) The English translation was completed by Peter Krapp. See:
http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk/Cmach/Backissues/j002/Articles/art_derr.htm. 2003.

What Derrida is outlining here, as we will see, is a new way of construing ethics

which en-courages us all to take responsibility – as far as is possible – for our own

life as, precisely, responsible for 'more than one'. For, possibly, every-one.

Affirmez La Survie: in the Spirit of the 'Incorruptibles'

For what Derrida is cultivating here is an 'ethos of writing and thinking' which he

has 'inherited' (without of course espousing vain repetition or unquestioning

faithfulness) from both a by-gone generation – stretching from 'Lacan to Althusser

by way of Levinas, Foucault, Barthes, Deleuze, Blanchot, Lyotard, Sarah Kofman,

etc...'[123] – and those writer-thinkers, poets, philosophers, or psycho-analysts still

living, all of whom he regards as being characterised by a metonymic, intransient,

incorruptible approach which involves, as he argues:

> ...not letting public opinion, the media, or the phantasm of an intimidating
> readership frighten or force us into simplifying or repressing. Hence the
> strict taste for refinement, paradox and aporia.[124]

It is not that Derrida wants to teach us a 'postmodern lesson' in the sense of

teaching us 'how to live...finally', for as Derrida remarks, 'to learn how to live is

to learn how to die'[125] – and Derrida professes to have remained uneducable as

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[123] From Derrida's last interview with the French newspaper *Le Monde* entitled: 'I am at War with Myself' and published on Wednesday the 18 August 2004. English translation by Pascale Fusshoeller, Leslie Thatcher and Steve Weissmen for 'truthout.org' on-line at http://www.truthout.org. With many thanks to Dr David Clark for his help in locating this English Translation.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

regards even (or particularly) his own death.[126] Rather, in drawing attention to the

primary, structural dimension of 'survival' – which 'does not add up to living or

dying'[127] – Derrida is raising to the level of consciousness a form of 'yes' saying

which remains indifferent to evidence by way of being an unconditional

affirmation of life. As Judith Butler says correctly in her obituary-cum-homage to

Jacques Derrida, 'Affirm the survival':

> Derrida makes clear that there is, regardless of the impoverished state of
> wisdom in this life, an imperative to affirm this life, a life for which there is
> no redemption, a life that is not justified through reference to another, more
> perfect life.[128]

For Derrida does not wish to renounce anything which has formed him – things

which he loves (those *forces* which are 'infinitely greater and more powerful than

oneself... [but]... nonetheless form part of this little "me"'[129], from the Bible to

Kant, Marx to Freud, Heidegger to Levinas, Husserl and Saussure). At the same

time, however, he also explores the problems of formulation; of the folds, the

paradoxes and the supplementary contradictions he finds in this 'inheritance' and

which appear to evade understanding, not in order to debunk this or that text (used

in both its conventional and expanded sense), but in order to mark the singularity

of every situation, of every 'event' of writing or reading. Derrida wants to make

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[126] Asked in a 2002 interview whether or not he had made peace with the inevitability of death Derrida replied 'So far I haven't and I doubt I ever will, and this awareness permeates everything I think. It's terrible what's going on in the world and all these things are on my mind, but they exist alongside the terror of my own death'. The interview is contained in *Screenplay and Essays on the Film: Derrida*. Directed by Amy Ziering Kofman and Kirby Dick, op.cit, 2005.
[127] Ibid.
[128] 'Affirm the survival' by Judith Butler contained in the journal *Radical Philosophy*. Jan/Feb 2005, p.23.
[129] Derrida, Jacques, 'I am at War with Myself', op.cit, 2004.

salient the endless readability which appears as the structurality of an opening

common to both language and existence; an irreducible excess which calls for the

incessant drawing and redrawing of boundaries as we try to make sense of the

world – the rules of which we have to invent (even if it is to re-affirm an already

existing rule) along the way. This is the chance for that which is irreducible to the

same; for that 'bit of newness' which (possibly) grows out of the inherent

instability of a past inheritance (always more than one), that always runs wild

without the assurance of an identifiable sender or addressee able to fix/determine

meaning in the form of univocal and immovable foundations, axioms, ideas and

concepts and the like (we are back to the apocalyptic postal system).

And, undoubtedly, Derrida's own life experiences heightened his sensitivity to the

inter-textual differential networks within which we all operate; the border lines we

both respect and transgress. In autobiographical mode he says:

> Contingencies have made me a French Jew from Algeria from the generation
> born before the 'War of Independence': so many singularities, even among
> the Jews and even among the Jews from Algeria. I participate in an extra-
> ordinary transformation of Algerian French Judaism; my great grandparents
> were still very close to the Arabs in language, customs etc…[130]

Derrida's language (his 'essential' as he describes it in *Le Monde*) is, of course, the

'French' language, which he describes as 'the only one I was taught to cultivate,

the only one for which I may call myself more or less responsible'.[131] And yet,

Derrida always had the feeling of being, in varying degrees, a 'foreigner' to this

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

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language, as did many Algerian French people – albeit he is now 'welcomed in'.

Indeed, Derrida feels that his 'singular story' has exacerbated his consciousness of what he calls the 'universal law in me'; namely, that 'language is not owned. Not naturally by its very essence. Hence the fantasies of property, appropriation and colonial imposition'.[132] Of his relationship to his mother tongue – which he describes as neither nationalistic nor conservative – as of language in general, he says:

> One may not do whatever one wants with the language; it was there before we were; it will survive us. If one affects the language of anything, it must be done in a refined way, by respecting its secret law through disrespect. That is, unfaithful fidelity: when I do violence to the French language, I do it with a refined respect for what I believe to be an injunction of this language, in its life, its evolution.[133]

It is Derrida's hope that he will leave his own 'traces' in the French language – indeed in all the discourses/texts (in the conventional and the expanded sense) in which he operates – and so engender that passion for the impossible in others; with one ear open to the other, to the future, to what is to come. Interminably.

It is this call which Derrida will sound with increasing urgency in our postmodern condition which is, in a sense, 'hyper-modern'. That is to say, that shorn of historical teleology, postmodern societies (re-)produce their socio-economic, cultural and political hegemonies in as stable a condition as possible, in a significant part through an increasingly complex techno-scientific media which

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[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

continues to (re-) produce the 'neutral' space-time fostered by historical discourse by speeding it up to an absolute 'real time'. Despite the increased recognition of difference – different people/cultures/religions/customs/politics/morality – the world appears smaller and more homogenous *via* a kind of calculable plurality that attempts to manage and, to a significant extent, 'stereo-type' different 'identities' both at the point of production and consumption. For such images are immediately disseminated and made accessible through radio, television and the internet, whereby everything appears both more diverse yet somehow simultaneously pre-programmed or saturated with an immanent meaning where nothing is left to chance and where nothing is allowed to 'become' anything *other* than it is said to be by those who (chiefly economic and political hegemonic groups in charge of the mechanics of discourse) dominate discursive practices. Derrida therefore thinks that (in the West at least) we have come to pretty much un-critically accept our liberal, capitalist democracies as somehow the best we can hope for, however imperfect, and however far from their emancipating and democratising ideals they appear to have strayed. Whether through ignorance or apathy we have become paralysed in relation to how to act or resist in ways which seek to foster new democratising and emancipating ways of thinking and acting.

Critical Resistance: The Arti-Factuality and Actu-Virtuality of the Postmodern Times.

For the above reasons it is therefore essential for Derrida to make us aware of the *artifactuality* and *actu-virtuality* of 'our' postmodern times. Here the task is one of

making us aware of the artificial nature of the 'present' (Western) world; a

'present' which – as he says in the interview 'The Deconstruction of Actuality'– is

'constantly changing in form and content as a result of the tele-technology of what

is confusingly called news, information or communication'.[134] It is crucial that the

postmodern subject – as the 'resistance fighter' Derrida explicitly wants us to be –

comprehends the means by which postmodern societies have come to reproduce

themselves beyond the 'ends of history' and have helped form the horizon of their

own self-creations and human solidarities. As we might expect from Derrida, this

is not simply a negation or a straightforward critique of such production, but a

means of de-naturalising its 'systems' in order to expose their constructed and

selective nature so to open up such systems to difference and otherness in more

democratising and emancipating ways – a process which might be aided by just the

tele-technological advances which overwhelmingly conspire to close off such

possibilities. Again, it is about taking up political *positions* in this 'age of the

aporia' against those who seek to control and appropriate the (in principle if not in

fact) uncontrollable and the un-appropriable.

Accordingly, it is in this 'context' that Derrida explains what the 'portmanteau'

term – *'artifactuality'* means; it means

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[134] 'The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview with Jacques Derrida'. Conducted by Brigitte Sohm, Cristina de Peretti, Stephane Douailler, Patrice Vermeren and Emile Malet (English translation by Jonathan Ree). In *Radical Philosophy* 68, Autumn 1994, p.28.

> ...that actuality is indeed made: it is important to know what it is made of, but it is even more necessary to recognise that it is made. It is not given, but actively produced: it is sorted, invested and performatively interpreted by a range of hierarchising and selective procedures – *factitious* or *artificial* procedures – which are always subservient to various powers and interests of which their 'subjects' and agents (producers and consumers of actuality, always interpreters, and in some cases 'philosophers' too) are never sufficiently aware. The 'reality' of 'actuality' – however individual, irreducible, stubborn, painful or tragic it may be – only reaches us through fictional devices.[135]

The only way to analyse such artifactuality is thus, for Derrida, through a 'work of resistance', through vigilant counter-interpretation and such like. Just as Hegel was correct to advise philosophers of his time to read the newspapers, then

> Today, the same duty requires us to find out how the news is *made*, and by whom: the daily papers, the weeklies, and the TV news as well. We need to insist on looking at them from the other end: that of the press agencies as well as that of the tele-prompter. And we should never forget what this entails: whenever a journalist or a politician appears to be speaking to us directly, in our homes, and looking us straight in the eye, he or she is actually reading, from a screen, at the dictation of a 'prompter', and reading a text which was produced elsewhere, on a different occasion, possibly by other people, or by a whole network of nameless writers and editors.[136]

One is never sure exactly who is speaking, from where, why, to whom: there are so many voices, so many echoes, so many crossed lines...

Consequently out of 'duty' to develop a systematic critique of artifactuality as 'citizens' or 'philosophers' Derrida makes some 'crucial qualifications' which he argues must be kept in mind if this artifactuality, however 'artificial and manipulative' it may be, is to 'bend itself or lend itself to the coming of what is on

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[135] Ibid, p.28.
[136] Ibid, p.28.

its way, to the outcome which carries it along and towards which it is moving. And to which it is going to have to bear witness, whether it wants to or not.'[137] They are three-fold, and they run as follows.

The *first* qualification concerns 'the question of *nationality*'; that is to say, the way in which the apparently international processes of homogenisation may provoke national resistance. In other words, the way in which creating a global solidarity might be undermined by nationalist (in terms of either an individual or a group of nations) concerns. Derrida argues here that among the 'filters' which inform what he calls 'the moment' – nations, regions and provinces, indeed 'the West' – there is still a dominance which over-determines every other hierarchy: sport in the first place, then the 'politician', and finally the cultural (where-in the nations identity, *its* concerns and interests are given predominance to the exclusion of 'others'). What this leads to, argues Derrida, is a discounting of a whole mass of events which are regarded as being irrelevant to the national interest, the national language or the national code/style. Thus on the news, 'actuality' in Europe is automatically *Eurocentric*. Even if not with an openly nationalistic fervour, 'foreigners' – even those resident in the same country – are effectively excluded or silenced. He goes on: 'Some journalists make honourable attempts to escape from this pressure, but by definition they can never do enough, and in the end it does not

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[137] Ibid, p.29.

depend on professional journalists anyway'.[138] And for Derrida this situation has

particular resonance at a time when the old nationalisms are taking on new forms,

and utilising the most up-to-date media techniques/equipment (quoting the official

radio and television of the former Yugoslavia to be a particularly striking

example). Speaking of those whom he argues have now seen it necessary to cast

doubt on the critique of ethno- and Euro-centrism Derrida states:

> ...it is as if they were completely blind to the deadly threats currently being
> issued, in the name of ethnicities, right at the centre of Europe, within a
> Europe whose only reality today – whose only 'actuality' – is economic and
> national, and whose only law, in alliances as in conflicts, is still that of the
> market.[139]

As always for Derrida, the tragedy lies in a contradiction, a double-demand: 'the

apparent internationalisation of sources of news and information is often based on

the appropriation and monopolisation of channels of information, publication and

distribution'.[140] Thus it is that he argues: 'this apparently international process of

homogenisation may provoke national resistance'.[141]

Turning to the *second* qualification, Derrida says:

> ...this international artifactuality – the monopolisation of this 'actuality
> effect', and the centralisation of the artificial power to 'create events' – may
> be accompanied by advances in 'live' communication, taking place in so-
> called 'real' time, in the present.[142]

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[138] Ibid, p.29.
[139] Ibid, p.29.
[140] Ibid, p.29.
[141] Ibid, p.29.
[142] Ibid, p.29.

As Derrida argues – appropriately enough given the medium he is communicating through here – the interview itself is exemplary of the kind of genres (including telephone and (video) taped recordings, on-line chat rooms etc...) which give the (fictive) impression of 'immediate' presence and 'live' communication. Crucially, if we want to continue making use of such methods of communication – and how else, he rhetorically queries, can we seek an effective dialogue with the other on a local, national and inter-national basis – we *must* recognise that they 'are never pure: they do not furnish us with intuitions or transparencies, or with perceptions unmarked by technical interpretation'. Indeed this is a lesson we have already learnt on the most intimate level through Derrida's deconstructive reading of Husserl and the fallacy of a totally self-present communication (in interior dialogue). The (quasi) structure of the mark/trace, of mechanical repetition, has always already intervened.

Third, and in response to those who conflate all postmodern thinking with nihilism and/or anarchism; with the fictionalisation of 'the real', Derrida writes:

> ...the necessary deconstruction of artifactuality should never be allowed to turn into an alibi or an excuse. It must not create an inflation of the image, or be used to neutralise every danger by means of what might be called the trap of the trap, the delusion of delusion: a denial of events, by which everything – even violence and suffering, war and death – is said to be constructed and fictive, and constituted by and for the media, so that nothing really ever happens, only images, simulacra and delusions. The deconstruction of artifactuality should be carried out as far as possible, but we must also take every precaution against this kind of critical neo-idealism.[143]

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[143] Ibid, p.29.

For what deconstruction is 'about'; what drives Derrida's democratic and emancipatory hopes and desires, is *singularity*, are singular *events* and all which remain irreducible in them. His concern is to demonstrate the way in which (in our postmodern societies as in all social formations) 'news' or 'information' is a contradictory and heterogeneous process. '[I]t can transform and strengthen knowledge, truth and the cause of the future democracy, with all the problems associated with them, and it must do so, just as it often has done in the past'.[144] But we have to be aware of what is left out, of the way our 'reality' is a shifting construction which must be constantly revised in the *face of the other* to whom we must always seek to do *justice* (again, in principle if not in fact).[145] To draw attention to what Derrida calls (via his second 'portmanteau' term) the *actu-virtuality* of the (postmodern) times (that is to the always positioned, never 'neutral' virtual images, virtual spaces and virtual events which help to construct[146] what we regard as our 'actuality' today) is to open up the closure of 'events' (of all kinds) to re-reading(s), to new meanings/significance(s) outside those sanctioned or designated by those in control of the means of production and the consumers who devour such 'information'.

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[144] Ibid, p.29.
[145] For to remind ourselves, it is the other who will judge whether or not my actions, my decisions, (will) have been just.
[146] For our actuality is, of course, not only produced by the 'media'.

Counter-Signatures: a Matter of Life and Death

It, therefore, appears to be a question of the various inter-weaving discursive levels

and their media constitutive of our 'everyday reality'; of what Derrida calls in

'Choreographies':

> ...an incessant, daily negotiation – individual or not – sometimes
> microscopic, sometimes punctuated by a poker-like gamble; always deprived
> of insurance, whether it be in private life or within institutions. Each man
> and each woman must commit his or her own singularity, the un-translatable
> factor of his or her life and death.[147]

Only 'I' can live my life and die my death. However over-determined I may be by

the systems/structures (economic, social, cultural etc...) which have formed 'me'

and continue to do so, there is a certain irreducible, idiosyncratic quality about my

life which is suitably complex; a certain 'excess' over all and every generalisation

(not least the 'I' itself) which allows one to re-member, choose, to make decisions,

to 'change' – however (seemingly) minor or private this incessant structural

genesis may be. So, just as I never stop re-reading myself, so others should never

stop (re) reading this 'little me' and I should never stop reading others (people,

groups, academic discourse, nations etc...). In my singularity I remain a 'secret'

to the other and they to me, and I remain above all a secret (perhaps) to myself.

This is not to say that I do not have an identity or, better still, 'identities', identities

largely formed by the discursive world I have been born into (that is predominantly

a white, western, capitalist, liberal, male dominated, technocratic, social-

democracy). Instead it is to say that such identities are only constructed in and

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[147] Derrida, Jacques, 'Choreographies'. In *Points...Interviews with Jacques Derrida 1974-1994*, op.cit, 1995, p.95.

through difference and deferral that whatever 'I am', 'I am' ('is') an ongoing

project without beginning and without (ends).[148] I will never know 'who I really

am' and after my death, no one will *ever* 'get me right.' Doubtless this is what

prompted Derrida himself to remark, in the face of his own impending death:

> I feel that people have not even begun to read me, that if there are many very
> good readers (a few dozen in the world, perhaps) they will do so only later.
> On the other hand, I feel that two weeks after my death, nothing at all of my
> work will be left except what remains in the copyright registration library.[149]

This can be read, in a certain highly suggestive way, as a meditation on *copyright*,

on the signature, and on what Derrida calls here the 'counter-signature': of who

'owns' what? who signs?, who counter-signs?, and what does this mean for

traditional, metaphysical notions of property, propriety and authority in terms of

the politics of interpretation involved in the negotiation of our (inherently) textual

world; the kind of questions/issues raised here having occupied Derrida

incessantly throughout his career (most thematically in works such as *Limited

Inc*[150], 'Counter-signatures' (*Points*)[151], *Writing and Difference*[152] , 'No Apocalypse,

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[148] As always here it is a matter of remaining on guard against *the One*. For as Derrida will argue: 'As soon as there is One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. The One guards against the Other, it protects itself from the Other. But in the movement of this jealous violence it compromises in itself its self-otherness or self-difference. The difference from within one's self, which makes it One. The One as the Other. At one and the same time, but in a same time that is out of joint, the One forgets to remember itself. It keeps and erases the archive of this injustice that it is, of this violence that it does. The One makes itself violence, it violates what it is, the very violence that it does to itself. The determination of the self as One is violence'. This quote originally taken from *Archive Fever* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1996) is re-produced as it appears here in *Screenplay and Essays on the Film: Derrida*, op.cit, p.88.
[149] Derrida, Jacques, 'I am at war with myself', op.cit, 2004.
[150] Derrida, Jacques, *Limited Inc*, op.cit,1988.
[151] Derrida, Jacques, *Points*, op.cit, 1995.
[152] Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, op.cit, 1997.

Not Now' (*Psyche: Inventions de L'autre*.[153] Of singularity and the (counter-)

signature Derrida says, typically,

> ...there is singularity but it does not collect itself, it 'consists' in not collecting itself...the idiom[atic], if there is any, that by which one recognises a signature, does not reappropriate itself, as paradoxical as that may seem. It can only be apprehended by the other, given over to the other. Of course, I may think I recognise myself, identify my signature or my sentence, but only on the basis of experience and of an exercise which I will have undertaken and in which I will have been trained *as other*, the possibility of repetition and thus of imitation, simulacrum, being inscribed at the very origin of his singularity.[154]

In other words, as Caputo states cogently:

> A 'text' for Derrida has a 'signature' which is not reducible to the name of an 'author' or to the signing of a proper name. A signature is a matter of the idiomaticity of a text...of the idiosyncratic string of traces that constitute it, not of the psychology of an author. As a *structure of writing* [my italics] it invites or solicits repetition, a counter-signing. Texts, if there is anything to them, elicit, call for, and provoke other texts – responses, commentaries, interpretations, controversies, imitations, forgeries, plagiarisms, echoes, effluences, influences, confluences, translations, transformations, bald misinterpretations, creative misunderstandings, etc... (Otherwise they are ignored and forgotten, and serve only the purpose of tenure and promotion).[155]

Caputo further remarks (on the text and the signature in general) that it belongs to

the very structure of the signature to solicit and elicit counter-signatures: 'ways of

signing on to, ways of repeating the text'. The question, as ever – in the light of

what Derrida has taught us about the fallacy of the transcendental signified, about

the irreducible excess of meaning produced by the inscription of presence in the

[153] Derrida, Jacques, *Psyche: Inventions L'autre*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1989.
[154] Derrida, Jacques, 'A 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking', in *Positions*, op.cit, 1995, pp.354-355.
[155] Caputo, John.D, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, op.cit, 1997, p.189.

differential matrix and of the complexity of the (inter) textual milieu and about our certain (non) place within it (always on border lines) – is whether we have the intellectual courage to counter-sign affirmatively, faithfully (in our unfaithfulness), creatively, and responsibly by trying to make decisions which respect the singularity of the context and the other who will always judge if I have been just (even when I affirm an existing rule) and counter-sign.

Derrida and Ermarth: A Tale of Two Axioms

I turn now, as outlined in my introductory remarks to this second chapter, to juxtapose Jacques Derrida's affirmative postmodern subjectivity whose axiom is arguably 'I inherit, therefore, I am…yes, yes…' against the kind of postmodern consciousness espoused by Ermarth in her *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* whose axiom is therein described as 'I swing, therefore, I am'. I do so, as already indicated, to support my contention that while Ermarth's experimental 'anthematics' provide us with radical imaginaries to work with, Derrida operates in terms of a much more effective textual praxis which, working within existing structures and working through our modern-metaphysical inheritance, has a better understanding of the need to work in the 'torsion' between metaphysics and the *'differential matrix'* (in which it is inscribed) whilst conversely arriving at a greatly more open and radical reading of the 'politics of morality'.

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Of the new kind of rhythmic consciousness which Ermarth finds at work

exemplarily in postmodern narrative sequences, she says:

> This new *cogito* is like breathing or like a heart-beat, not like thinking,
> *pneuma* not *logos*, a most intimate rhythm. In this way, every moment is a
> 'terribly sweet instant' where conscious life first is conjugated and then goes
> 'paff, the end', to be succeeded by another, and another again. This delicate
> shift of equipoise initiates a profound reformation: a new definition of
> consciousness, and a new world of practice without transcendence, or depth,
> or history, or dialectics, or the 'subject' and the 'object'. Pneumatic, not
> logocentric, like Robbe-Grillet's successive experiments, like the heartbeat
> of *Ada*, the redefinition of consciousness and subjectivity empowers that
> 'swing' that puts discourse on the march.[156]

For Ermarth what distinguishes postmodern narrative sequences from their

historical counterparts is the active engagement of readers who, 'as they attend to

varying thematic voices, construct from the paratactic elements *sequential figures*

that differ with each reader and reading'.[157] Of this process she goes on:

> This constructive activity takes place at a level of complexity impossible to
> summarize. Reading *Jealousy* or *Hopscotch* or *Ada* engages readers in
> sustained feats of multilevel thinking, a complex discipline of consciousness
> resembling the power of good chess players. Not only must the player
> remember accumulated patterns and frequencies, with each new variation he
> or she must also keep in view the possible developments of which these
> themes might be capable. The more themes of details one becomes aware of,
> the more multi-thematic power one has.[158]

Linear time and its constitutive alibi in modernity's 'sovereign subject' become

rhythmic time and multi-level consciousness: 'The collapse in postmodern writing

(and living) of dualisms that sustain representational distance and enables it

mediations, opens an unfamiliar and surprising situation where both time and

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[156] Deeds Ermarth, Elizabeth, *Sequel to History*, op.cit, 1992, p.137.
[157] Ibid, p.194.
[158] Ibid, p.194.

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consciousness belong to the linguistic figure'. [159] Following Julia Kristeva's work

on the semiotic[160] and Derrida's notion of the endlessly ludic character of language

(and thus life – for to have residence in a language is to have residence in *a* reality)

Ermarth seeks to promote the limitless play which ruins any structures attempt to

effect closure. Like Derrida, Ermarth seeks to affirm life, the future, the

unknowable and unforeseeable.

It is thus that Ermarth argues that postmodernism has changed our 'reality' in ways

which she likens 'in general' to the 'postmodern' re-description of physical reality

by those such as Illya Priogine and Isabelle Stenger. Priogine himself received the

Nobel Prize for his work on the thermo-dynamics of irreversible systems and most

importantly showed in this context that in dissipative structures (i.e. systems far

from thermodynamic equilibrium) ordered states may sometimes arise

spontaneously out of disordered states. Our chaotic universe is inherently creative.

This presents a new conception of order which is independent of the 'closures and

finalities' of classical dynamics and allows us to see how nonequilibrium brings

'order out of chaos'. Here the element of chance in probabilistic processes opens

up 'new sources of life, new rhythms of continuance in ever new states and modes:

The more determinist laws appear limited, the more open the universe is to

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[159] Ibid, p. 18.

[160] As the *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states: 'Kristeva fuses linguistic insights with psychoanalytic inquiry as she presents two distinct yet interrelated aspects of the signifying process, the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic aspect of language is vocal, pre-verbal, rhythmic, kinetic and bodily. The symbolic aspect of language is social, cultural and rule governed'. Routledge, London and New York: 2000, pp.444-445.

fluctuation and innovation'.[161]

However, as I have already alluded to in my opening remarks, there are some

fundamental problems with Ermarth's conception of rhythmic time and multi-level

consciousness which arguably make it less useful for re-thinking or re-

conceptualisng our self-creations (and human solidarities issuing there-from) in

post-modernity than Derrida's reading(s) of metaphysics in deconstruction.

First, the kind of multi-level consciousness Ermarth find salient in postmodern

rhythmic narratives (such as *Ada* or *Hopscotch*) sounds terribly reminiscent of the

kind of 'nightmare of equivocality' Derrida describes in relation to, for example,

the work(s) of James Joyce. For while it is the case that in our own lives there are

various phenomenological rhythms (some fast, some slow, some regular, some

interrupted) and various levels of discursive operation, to keep them all 'in mind'

with their co-extensive potentialities for development seems difficult if not

impossible to imagine in daily life – and certainly no guarantee of a less totalising

way of thinking: there seems nothing that would, in principle, preclude the

decisions we make being fascist or racist, for example. And indeed, there is no

such restraint on the ethico-political/moral decisions we make. Once, *après*

Derrida, the space of the ethico-political decision is uncovered, even if one accepts

the '*differential matrix*' and the foundationless nature of discourse – which by no

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[161] Jenkins, Keith, *Why History?*. Routledge, London and New York:1999, p.180.

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means everybody does of course – *nothing* – and this is crucial to register –

follows from this. Derrida opens up the chance, the possibility for less

foundational, less totalising decisions to be made by drawing attention to

'metaphysics in deconstruction'. But, after this, nothing *necessarily* follows, no-

thing is entailed. Instead, we have to make what are *always* undecidable decisions

– on an individual and communal basis – over and over again, and hope that, being

increasingly educated to difference and alterity (in the radical sense) we make

more emancipating and democratising choices. Not that we (we resistance

fighters) will ever get anything 'right' of course. For to reach such a point would

be to close things off; to deny the un-programmable and unforeseeable future; the

radical other then is, always, yet 'to come'.

Thus I think that what Derrida hopes for is that we will *develop* a *taste* (moral and

aesthetic) *for the secret*; that is, that we will cultivate a critical consciousness here

and now in our current socio-intellectual landscape wherein we will work to

exhaust metaphysics conceptual resources – modern and postmodern – in the face

of the other (always more than one) who will always decide if I have been

successful. It is a daunting task and we may not succeed. Nothing is *now*

guaranteed. And, to some degree, Ermarth herself draws *less* radical conclusions

than this from a possibly *more* radical notion of the postmodern consciousness.

For Ermarth still holds out for the hope of a 'consensus' based on what she sees as

the acceptance of the finite nature of postmodern time and space as described

through the chaos theory and 'dissipative structures' depicted by Priogine and

Stenger. Apart from the fact that this sounds very much like a proposition

concerning how the world 'really is' (i.e. terribly metaphysical in the most

conventional sense), as Keith Jenkins argues:

> Let us suppose that the actual world is like Ermarth's rhythmic description of
> it après Priogine and Stenger. And let's say everyone accepts this – liberals,
> Marxists, feminists, Fascists – everyone. What difference would it make?
> Do we seriously think that a political/moral 'constrained' consensus between
> Ermarth and Fascists is going to be arrived at because of the way an
> (indifferent) world is under the description of physics?...I don't think so;
> their moral differences remain incommensurable because they're moral all
> the way down.[162]

Subsequently, and with such qualifications as this in mind, I would argue that

Derrida's more 'measured' (and what can indeed be described as a more

conservative) approach to 'metaphysics in deconstruction', is more likely to effect

a change in our postmodern consciousness which becomes increasingly aware of

our meaning-making capacities; indeed the meaning-making process *per se*. This

is not, of course, hostile to Ermarth's thinking, not least in terms of the fact that,

constructed out of strings of traces containing various voices (even if barely

audible) and inter-textual processes, Derrida shows the way that thought has

always been 'multi-level', even if channelled in foundationalist ways closed off to

difference. Indeed, it is such processes which Derrida seeks to explore and exploit

both as they have been metaphysically construed in various contexts and as they

are open to more violent re-interpretations without ends. For after Derrida (and

Ermarth), even if, as I have argued, we always remain over-determined by various

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[162] Ibid, p.180.

structures (economic, cultural, political), so long as we accept the consequences of this we all (in principle, if not always in fact) have a certain freedom to change 'our world' on an individual and communal basis. Structures are *never* closed. And this I would want to insist, is a good thing. But we have to accept – a 'we' that includes Ermarth – that there is an irreducible danger co-existing with this chance, whilst further recognising that 'hegemonic thinking' is not exclusively a Nazi or Stalinist phenomenon but a propensity (albeit at a lower level of violence) of all thought which tries to make sense of the world (historical or rhythmic or whatever) which can be minimised but not eradicated (which is not simply a negative phenomena but the condition of meaningful discourse and the opening of a new kind of morality). That is to say, we cannot think (individually or communally) outside of a certain presence which cannot but help reduce difference. However, wherever we are in the text already, taking the singularity of events into account (that is, re-thinking the very concept of the event), we can think presence other-wise – that is, in ways un-conducive to totalitarian*ism* and more conducive to an endless dialogue with the other, with those who appear unfamiliar and different to 'us'. As Jenkins reminds us, nothing is *intrinsically* repressive or *intrinsically* liberating (for postmodern thinking empties out all notions of intrinsicality) only contingently so. Some ways of thinking (Derrida's exemplarily I think) are more open to this than others and lead one to act (in the ethico-political space of the decision) accordingly. Thus, while I do not necessarily disagree with much of what Ermarth says, I think that the ontological

and ethico-political conclusions she draws remain particularly suspect, conflictive, and out of kilter with the textual praxis needed to negotiate the post-modern condition ... not least because she fails to adequately address in anything like the same detail as her investigations into historical time, the postmodern phenomenon of virtual time/space which I argue has filled the uncritical certaintist void left by conventional historical temporality and its conventions.

Concluding Remarks

In this Chapter, I have attempted to argue that Jacques Derrida gives voice, with increasing *urgency*, to an absolutely affirmative postmodern *subjectivity* whose axiom might be 'I inherit, therefore, I am...yes, yes...' Following the way in which this subjectivity has emerged from the ruins of modernity's 'sovereign subject' and its 'History', I have followed Derrida as he arguably re-figures our modern-metaphysical inheritance by way of a new 'politics of memory' which makes of us *all* (like it or know it or not) postmodern *resistance fighters* against the attempt(s) – 'modern' or 'postmodern' – to execute what Baudrillard calls the 'perfect crime' – that is – the attempt by social formations to reproduce themselves in as stable a condition as possible so that all de-stabilising problems/excesses are either excluded or reduced to the 'old and the familiar' without remainders. For as Derrida argues following his deconstructive readings of Kant, what such societies attempt to efface *is the secret that there is no secret.* And of course, this changes every'thing', no'thing' is *given* (in advance) but is

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always a *task* to do, to come. To remind ourselves of Derrida's crucial point once more, as subjects we are thrown into an inherently foundationless, inter-textual discursive landscape which precedes our birth and will survive our death, and we can each sign or, better, *counter*-sign differently (wherever we are in a text already) according to our own ethical/aesthetic sensibilities. There are no *alibis* here (no historical necessities for example), no norms or rules or authorities or institutions we have to appeal to. In the final instance of the *decision* the decision is 'mine' (without ever being *quite* mine), re-marking the singularity of a life, a singular 'I', which is always, always, 'more than one'.

The result of Derrida's bringing to theoretical consciousness of this 'subjectivity-in-processes' (Ermarth, 1992), born into a 'zone of arrivals without arrivals' (Bennington[163]), is thus a *hyper-politicising* of our textual world which, as I will argue in Chapter Three, profoundly transforms the 'ethical' and the 'political', opening up Western liberal capitalist democracies to a potentially more radical, emancipating and democratising, future. As I will suggest, Derrida hereby offers a

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[163] This 'zone of arrivals without arrivals' is designated by Geoff Bennington in the essay 'Is it Time' (*Interrupting Derrida*, op.cit) as that quasi-messianic structure wherein the 'here and now which allows for the thought of singularity as alterity in its arrival requires a thought of the moment that is not only simply present to itself in the presence of the present, but which is not recoverable as the *telos* of any natural or institutional process whatsoever, an *eskhaton* without salvation or redemption'. (p.137). Critiquing the tendency of some post-structuralists (including the early Derrida) to conflate the eschatological and the teleological, this 'zone of arrivals without arrivals' is thus the 'maintenance of the strictly messianic *moment* not only short of any predicative *when* ... but any content and axiological determination'. (p.137). It is, in other words, the condition of a never satiated *justice*, it is the radical *l'avenir*, which respects the alterity of the 'other' which always remains, structurally, 'to come'. This takes on even greater significance in the coming chapter.

very real, and very practical opportunity, orientated through what he calls a new 'global solidarity', to re-invent a fairer, freer and more peaceful world. There are no guarantees, *contra* Ermarth there is *no* foundation(s) for a political/moral constrained consensus. This is a task always and forever forged in *aporias*, in risks and chances. But, as I hope to show in the next chapter, this is a chance well worth taking for those with similar dreams.

Chapter Three:
Derrida: Changing the World Before
Two O'Clock.

We won't change the world before two o'clock, but what I'm saying is that we have to.

Jacques Derrida[164]

In this chapter I argue that the kind of post-historical, post-modern subjectivity to

which Derrida gives voice, working, as it does, beyond the ends of endist history,

offers the *best* chance (a risk and a chance) for 'us' to be able to refigure our

Western liberal capitalist democracies in more democratising and emancipating

ways no longer paralysed by what he calls old radioactive 'habits of the past'.

With particular reference here to Francis Fukuyama's now infamous proclamation

of 'our' having reached the 'end of history' as he saw it embodied in the hegemony

of free market liberalism, Derrida not only brings to the fore those crises/issues

which appear to contradict this utopian eschatology – for example famine, disease,

poverty – but he offers a sustained meditation, proffered in certain 'spirits of

Marx'(ism), on how we might re-think the logic of those (Eurocentric) social,

economic, cultural, political, ethical and legal frameworks (such as they can be

dissociated) which attempt to regulate our lives on an individual and communal

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[164] Quote taken from an interview with Jacques Derrida conducted by Geoffrey Bennington at the Centre for Modern French Thought at the University of Sussex on the 1st of December 1997. This interview centres on a discussion of Jacques Derrida's 1997 work *Politics of Friendship* (Verso, London and New York: 1997). Translation by Benjamin Noys and published on-line at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/frenchthought/derrida.htm.

basis and dictate our patterns of thought in ways over-determined by various

ideological/political interests grounded in various metaphysics of presence. In so

doing I believe Derrida offers a *practical* opportunity, orientated through his vision

for a new 'global solidarity', of fostering a fairer, freer and more peaceful world

which comes out of these axioms – and informed by those axioms he first

articulated 'against' Husserl.

Consequently in advancing this thesis I shall begin by framing my discussion with

reference to the path taken from Derrida's earliest works – in this study his

deconstructive readings of Husserl and Saussure exemplarily – in order to support

his claim that 'everything I have written has been directly or indirectly political'.[165]

Unlike some commentators, I take this remark as literally as a remark can be taken.

For it is in what are generally regarded as his more abstract theoretical works that a

hitherto effaced ethico-political space (of the decision) – which is first a relation to

the other – is revealed to rupture those metaphysics of presence upon which

traditional political and ethical thinking has been based. It is thus that from the

beginning, and passing (in this study) through a deconstructive reading of

Emmanuel Kant's anti-apocalyptic treatise, that Derrida serves to undercut

modernity's sovereign subject and its 'history' and in the process demand a

revision of the 'new world order' and its modern-metaphysical conceptual

genealogy. This 'continuity' between Derrida's earlier more 'elliptical' political

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[165] Derrida, Jacques and Geoffrey Bennington. *Politics of Friendship* interview. op.cit. 1997.

(and ethical) enunciations and his later more overt examination of the 'political

question'[166] as such, is demonstrated, I argue, in his first work to openly address

these ethico-political matters, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of*

Mourning & the New International.[167] Here, Derrida develops what he terms the

(quasi-) 'logic of spectrality', a 'hauntological logic', which he follows into a

sustained meditation on various sprits of Marx(ism) in order to set forth a

deconstructive reading not only of capitalism in all its forms, its superstructures,

media and self-justifying ideology, but also its means of self-consolidation through

that 'techno-mediatic power' which, touched on in Chapter Two, can both open

and severely restrict the democratic space. Indeed I argue here that *Specters of*

Marx serves as a microcosm of the entire Derridean 'corpus' (such as it can be

constrained in a unity) in terms of its epoch changing significance *vis a vis* the

opportunity for the radical post-historical transformations of our self-creations and

human solidarities.

I then proceed to examine the way in which what Derrida develops *after Marx* in

terms of a new global or International solidarity (of intellectuals and activists)

allied against the 'ten plagues of the new world order' figures a new role for

'Europe' 'as a proud descendent of the Enlightenment past and a harbinger of the

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[166] As Leonard Lawlor argues in his book *Derrida and Husserl* (op.cit, 2002) 'the concepts forged during this first period (from 1954-1967) ...*Differance and Supplementarity* ... remain in place in the later writings. In fact, the most remarkable thing about Derrida's vast corpus is its continuity; Derrida's thought does not, as one might think, shift *all of a sudden* from metaphysical issues to ethico-political issues...the ethico-political issues make an appearance [in the early writings]...the "we", for example in the *Introduction*'. (p211).

[167] Derrida Jacques, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit, 1994.

new Enlightenment to come'.[168] This would be a Europe Derrida describes as

being less market-dominated; a Europe neither content to compete with other

superpowers, nor prepared to let them do as they please. A Europe

> [w]hose constitution and political stance would make it the cradle of counter-globalisation, its driving force, the way alternative ideas reach the world stage, for example in Iraq or Israel-Palestine...This Europe...would show the world what it means to base politics on something more sophisticated than simplistic binary oppositions. In this Europe it would possible to criticise Israeli policy, especially that pursued by Ariel Sharon and backed by George Bush, without being accused of anti-semitism. In this Europe, supporting the Palestinians in their legitimate struggle for rights, land and a state would not mean supporting suicide bombing or agreeing with the anti-semitic propaganda that is rehabilitating (with sad success) the outrageous lie that is the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In this Europe it would be usual to worry both about rising anti-semitism and rising Islamophobia...it would be possible to criticise the policies of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz without being accused of sympathy for Saddam Hussein and his regime...*That is my dream...shared by billions of men and women all over the world. Some day, though the work may be long and painful, a new world will be born.*

Let us now begin to examine the path taken by Derrida (and in this study) from his

early work on Husserl (and Saussure) through (Kant) to his deconstructive reading

of a certain Marx(ism) and thus insist, *contra* oppositional voices, that politics that

has always informed his readings – and my reading of those readings.

The 'Political Question': From Husserl to Marx

Apropos Chapter One, Derrida's early exemplary works – his deconstructive

readings of Husserl's phenomenology and Saussure's attempt to found a structural

linguistics – serves to undercut the entire Western metaphysical (philosophical)

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[168] Derrida, Jacques, 'Enlightenment Past and Still to come', in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, English edition, published on-line at mondediplo.com, November 2004.

tradition which has sought to constrain the meaning of being to presence, to some foundation or essence. Derrida shows through his elaboration of the counter-logic of Husserl's phenomenological project that Plato's inaugural gesture of separating the sensible and the intelligible through the law of the bar (/) which primarily rested on the experience of hearing oneself speak through the phonic substances, was fatally flawed in its absolute privilege of the present/presence; a flaw Husserl, critical of Plato's speculative metaphysics, failed to overcome despite the logic of his own arguments *vis a vis* temporalisation and the constitution of inter-subjectivity. It is thus that Derrida will put into question the possibility of a pure self-identical 'presence' and the concept of (a pure) communication co-extensive with it, whereby one means what one says and says what one means in an (ideally) transparent relay to the other (both an other person/persons and the other in me). For as we have already seen, Derrida argues that time, 'the now', has *no* self-identical points but exists only as an 'effect' between the no longer and the not yet, between memory and desire, in an interminable relay of difference and deferral. And language, used supposedly to represent (self) present thoughts based on pure (transcendental) experience, is shown by Derrida to itself generate meaning through the '*differential matrix*'. As Derrida's work on Saussure demonstrates, words or *signifiers* and (most importantly) their *signifieds*, assume their meanings through difference, through the absent 'other'(s) whereby meaning is never 'present' as such but is always deferred, always capable of being re-formed in new chain of signifiers whereby concepts appear unstable, un-grounded; forever on the

move.

Accordingly, the early development of a 'conceptual politics' feeds into a

generalised 'politics of memory' whereby modernity's sovereign subject and its

history are displaced by a new kind of affirmative postmodern subjectivity and its

inheritance. Though no less over-determined by socio-economic and ethico-

political codes and their media in postmodernity (which remain still too 'modern'

in spirit, however 'contemporary') the foundationless nature of these

codes/practices are brought to (theoretical) consciousness in this 'age of the aporia'

as we are called to take our place within a certain 'theatre of violence' as

performative 'resistance fighters' newly aware of the acts of exclusion

characteristic of institutional categorisation which on an individual and communal

basis make us what we are (and are 'not'). As Derrida argues (and recalling my

argument in Chapter Two) we cannot escape this 'theatre', but we can 'act'

responsibly in *less* violent, more democratising and emancipating ways in accord

with our own moral and aesthetic sensibilities. As we have seen, what Derrida

inherits from his deconstructive reading of Kant is an Enlightenment spirit at once

self-critical, a messianic consciousness (without messianism), an apocalyptic tone

(*sans* apocalypse) which takes him and 'us' *beyond* the eschatological and

teleological *ends* of history as such – not least those 'ends' John. D. Caputo

reminds us are consistent with a certain 'European gesture' which (variously)

attempts to secure a cultural and economic hegemony working in the interests of

certain dominant ideological/political powers.

It is in this context that in his *Specters of Marx* (1993) Derrida seeks to clarify

deconstruction's relationship with Marx(ism) at a certain moment of what he calls

'a concrete and personal commitment'. It is here that Derrida, a self-proclaimed

'man of the Left'[169], will first openly address the 'political question' as such, in

order to show how his deconstruction of various 'metaphysics of presence' related

to ethical and political issues conceived in the more traditional sense. Until this

date, theorists such as Frederic Jameson[170], Frank Lentricchia[171] and Terry

Eagleton[172], had lambasted Derrida for his silence on Marx and Marxism. As

Geoffrey Bennington reminds us, there had long been a call for Derrida to 'come

clean' about (his) politics, and a 'lurking suspicion that his (at least apparent)

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[169] Of his (by no means 'easy') allegiance to the political Left, Derrida proposes this minimal axiom: 'on the left there is the desire to affirm what is to come, to change, and to do so in the sense of the greatest possible justice. I would not say that everyone on the right is insensitive to change and to justice (that would be unjust), but it never makes justice the first resort or axiom of its action. To take up distinctions that are not outdated, despite a fundamental transformation of the very concept of labour: the left will always privilege the profit from "labour" over that from "capital". The right always allege that the latter is the condition of the former. To be "on the right" consists in being conservative, but of what? Over and above certain interests, powers, riches, capitals, social norms and "ideologues" and so forth, over and above politics, the right always tends to preserve a certain traditional structure of the political itself, of the relations between civil society, nation and state. If one upholds the opposition of left and right, it is surely not easy to be on the left with some consequence, to be always on the left is a difficult strategy'. In 'Intellectual Courage: An Interview', op.cit, 2003.

[170] As Jameson argues in *The Prison House of Language*, forerunner to his later *The Political Unconscious* and *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) Derrida's deconstruction, having its source in Saussure's synchronic paradigm of language which abstracts language and knowledge from temporal change, fundamentally distorts thought's relation to social experience and catastrophically severed humanity's connection to its own past and future.

[171] Frank Lentricchia argues in *After the New Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago:1980) that the post-structuralist project – of which he takes Derrida to be a leading proponent – reinforces rather than subverts the reification to which it opposes itself; and it being an 'activity of textual privatization, it marks the critics doomed attempt to *retreat* from a social landscape of fragmentation and alienation' (p.186).

[172] Eagleton believed that Derrida has hitherto been caught up too much with words and their endless semantic possibilities and leant heavily on Nietzsche to the great detriment of Marx and socialism.

failure to do so was in principle a reason for dissatisfaction'.[173] As Bennington

says:

> According to a very common mechanism, Derrida's apparent reticence about
> some forms of political statement and argument led to charges (from the self-
> appointed guardians of the 'Left' tradition in academic politics) of liberalism
> or even conservatism written into his most general philosophical arguments,
> while his more obviously 'political' texts have given rise to objections on the
> grounds that they supposedly show no more than a decently liberal attitude,
> and not the sort of genuine recognisable radicality we might otherwise think
> it reasonable to expect.[174]

However, in the opening pages of *Specters of Marx* (and referring here to my

earlier remarks) it is obvious (*contra* Jameson, Lentricchia, Eagleton *et al*) to what

extent Derrida's readings of metaphysics in deconstruction have, from the very

'beginning', formed the basis for what would be a decisive and epoch-changing

intervention in ethical and political matters (broadly conceived under the rubric of

the 'political question' as such). As Derrida argues – aware of the anti-political

characterisation of him – it was a matter of waiting for 'a moment in the

development of my work when the level I wanted to reach in [the] re-elaboration

of the political question could be reached'.[175] This was a moment, I think, when

Derrida had sufficiently brought to theoretical consciousness the 'beginning of

historicity' and 'post-historical man', and, called by 'world events' (or more

precisely a reading of them) was ready to tackle the political question by showing

the extent to which what he develops *into* his work on Marx in terms of a 'logic of

hauntology' or 'spectrality' was 'central to an understanding of Marx and

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[173] Bennington, Geoffrey, *Interrupting Derrida*, 2000, op.cit, p.18.
[174] Ibid, p.18.
[175] Derrida, Jacques and Geoffrey Bennington, *Politics of Friendship* interview, op.cit, 1997.

therefore, let's say, to any politics that would want to be responsible to an ideal of social justice or a just society'.[176]

With these remarks in mind, all of which support my thesis of an 'unbreakable' thematics re: any notion of a younger and older (political) Derrida, let us now examine the precise way in which the rise of what is termed the 'new world order' after 1989 led Derrida to a deconstruction of Marx(ism). For as I argue it is this deconstructive reading, *continuous* (as it is) with his earliest readings of metaphysics in deconstruction (and subsumed here under the generalised heading of a quasi-philosophy of the limit)', which *best* enables us to begin to re-think the logic of those (Eurocentric) economic, social, cultural, political, ethical and legal frameworks/ institutions which attempt to regulate our lives on an individual and communal basis and dictate our patterns of thought in ways over-determined by various ideological/political interests. Derrida herein offers the chance for a

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[176] Lucy, Niall, *Derrida Dictionary*, op.cit, 2004, p.114. To emphasize the degree to which this logic of spectrality was *already* figured in his very earliest works – specifically here those of Husserl – one need only take this passage from Derrida's *Specters of Marx* wherein he states: '...the radical possibility of all spectrality should be sought in the direction that Husserl identifies, in such a surprising but forceful way, as an intentional but *non-real [non-reelle]* component of the phenomenological lived experience, namely, the *noeme*. Unlike the three other terms of the two correlations (noese-noeme, *morphe*,hule), this non-reality *[non-reellite]*, this intentional but *non-real* inclusion of the noematic correlative is neither "in" the world nor "in" consciousness. But it is precisely the condition of any experience, any objectivity, any phenomenality, namely, of any noetico-noematic correlation, whether originary or modified. It is no longer regional. Without the non-real inclusion of this intentional component...the noeme is included without being a part...one could not speak of any manifestation, of any phenomenality in general (that being-for-a consciousness, that appearing appearance which is neither consciousness nor the being that appears to it). Is not such an "irreality" *[irreelite]*, its independence *both* in relation to the world *and* in relation to the *real* stuff of egological subjectivity the very place of apparition, the essential, general, non-regional possibility of the specter'. Is it not also what inscribes the possibility of the other and of mourning right onto the phenomenality of the phenomenon?' *Specters of Marx*. op.cit, 1994, p. 189.

transformation of the new world order.

Deconstruction, Marxism and the 'Logic of Hauntology'

In the editor's introduction to *Specters of Marx*, Bernd Magnus and Stephen

Cullenberg write:

> In the wake of the orgy of self-congratulations which followed the 1989
> crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet
> Union, and a series of confrontations perhaps forever to be captured best in
> Tiananmen Square in the image of a single individual blocking the path of an
> onrushing military tank, a wave of optimism engulfed the Western
> democratic States. This contagious optimism was best exemplified by the
> confidence and popularity of Francis Fukuyama's claim that the end of
> history was at hand, that the future – if that word could still be said to have
> the same meaning – was to become the global triumph of free market
> economies.[177]

This optimism however, clearly did not extend to all, and Magnus and Cullenberg

write of a 'vague' and 'haunted' sense of foreboding that these huge international

changes would for a long time to come result in transformations as 'malign as they

were benign'. In this vein, many felt the proclamation of the death of Marxism

associated with the fall of communism to be both too hasty and its reception too

'homogenous' given the fact that these terms rightly referred to different things in

different times and places (as well as to different thinkers). While a 'new world

order' was undoubtedly being forged, and new ideological and political alliances

fostered by various interested parties, the response to the changing social, political,

philosophical and economic dimension(s) of the global community amongst

scholars and intellectuals was by no means easily agreed upon. Certainly not all of

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[177] Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit, 1994, p.viii.

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the scholars and intellectuals variously re-thinking the meaning of 'past verities'

and developing new theoretical approaches agreed with Fukuyama's triumphalist

vision of a global free market liberalism. In this context, many were asking: 'What

remains of the socialist vision(s) after the [communist] collapse in 1989?' Is there

a future for Marx(ism)? Have we really reached the end of history? What about

the failures and inequalities prevalent in such democratic, free market economies?

Are we not in danger of fostering new 'nationalisms'/'ethnocentrisms'? What

disagreements will abound, and who will finally control the nature of theoretical

and political discourse in the twenty first century? In particular, as Magnus and

Cullenberg ask 'How will intellectuals in the Marxist tradition respond?...What is

living and what is dead in Marxism?'[178]

It was within this milieu that Derrida offered his first sustained meditation on the

relationship between deconstruction and Marx(ism) at a conference entitled

'Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective', his paper later

being published as the elongated essay/book *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt,*

the Work of Mourning & the New International. Elaborated in what might be

termed a 'hauntological framework', at numerous levels *Specters of Marx* is all

about spirits, ghosts, the dead living or the living dead; for example, the non-

contemporaneity of the present/presence with itself, semantic/conceptual

instability, the spectral effect(s) of communicative structures, inheritance and

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[178] Ibid, p.ix.

responsibility (to past and future generations) – all of which, as we have seen, have been constant themes in the Derridean corpus right from the start. What is once again uncovered here – this time conceived of in terms of a 'virtual space of spectrality' – is the dis-locating effects of the *'differential matrix'* deconstructive of all realist-representationalist (which is to say *totalising*) discourse. It is just this 'excessive space', this 'virtual space of spectrality', which Western metaphysics has sought to confine to the aesthetic/literary zone. For as Niall Lucy reminds us, it is 'literature' which is 'allowed to play games with reality, to speculate about things we know (for certain) could never exist or happen. Against this excessive space, the real world of real things and real events is all the better defined'.[179] But for Derrida we are destined to live with ghosts, with spirits, and (recalling my arguments from Chapters One and Two) the generalised space of literature is an affirmative political condition (in the non-dogmatic sense) for *all* meaningful discourse, whereby from within the heterogeneity of our inheritance we are each called upon to make aporetic decisions without limits based on our own moral and aesthetic sensibilities (alone) in the face of the other out of respect for *justice*. The fact that there are no fixed identities – no totalitarianisms, no self-present identities – but only on-going process(es) of *identification* is a good thing, the incessant promise of change. We *must*, if we are to keep open the hope of *infinite* justice (the only condition of justice), remain open to another identity, to let others 'be' – those past and still to come but not yet gathered together (as a self-nation,

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[179] Lucy, Niall, *Derrida Dictionary*, op.cit, 2004, p.113.

community or history, for example).

It is just this sensitivity to the 'logic of hauntology', to infinite justice 'before the

law', that Derrida sees affirmed in at least one of Marx(ism)'s self-critical sprits,

prompting him to argue that:

> Deconstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least,
> except as a radicalisation, which is also *in the tradition* of a certain
> Marxism...a radicalisation always indebted to the very thing it radicalises.[180]

For Derrida this incalculable debt to Marx(ism) appears all the more urgent to

explore 'at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelise in the name of

the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human

history', not least because never before

> ...have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic
> oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of
> humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy
> and of the capitalist market in the euphoric of the end of history, instead of
> celebrating the 'end of ideologies' and the end of the great emancipatory
> discourses, let us never neglect this obvious macroscopic fact, made up of
> innumerable singular sites of suffering: no degree of progress allows one to
> ignore that never before, in absolute figures, never before have so many men,
> women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the
> earth.[181]

Of such human (rights) catastrophes, Derrida says in a 1998 interview:

> I think of the millions of children who drown every year, of the nearly 50 per
> cent of women who are beaten or fall victim to sometimes murderous abuse
> (the 60 million disappeared women, the 30 million mutilated women), of the
> 23 million infected with AIDS (of which 90 per cent are in Africa and to
> who the budget of AIDS research dedicates only 5 per cent of its resources,
> while therapy remains unavailable outside small occidental milieus, I think

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[180] Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit, 1994, p.92.
[181] Ibid, p.92.

of the selective infanticide of girls in India and of the monstrous conditions of child labour in many countries, and of the fact that there are, I believe, a billion illiterate people and 140 million uneducated children, I think of the maintenance of the death penalty and of the circumstances of its administration in the United States (the only Western democracy to do so and a country that no longer recognises the convention concerning children's rights and continues to execute punishment against minors even after they have reached adult age).[182]

It is clear, then, that what is celebrated as the end point of human government – the universalisation of Western liberal (capitalist) democracy – is instituted in 'suspect and paradoxical conditions' and, rather than being 'dead and buried' as the dominant discourse of the 'new world order' would have it, the Marxist socio-economic-political critique – or at least some of its (im)possibilities – has never been so necessary. Derrida again:

> Upon reading the *Manifesto* and a few other great works of Marx, I said to myself that I knew of few texts in the philosophical tradition, perhaps none, whose lesson seemed more urgent *today*, provided that one take into account what Marx and Engels themselves say (for example, in Engel's 'Preface' to the 1888 re-edition) about their own 'aging' and their intrinsically irreducible historicity. What other thinker has ever issued a similar warning in such an explicit fashion? Who has ever called for the *transformation* to come of his own theses? Not only in view of some progressive enrichment of knowledge, which would change nothing in the order of a system, but so as to take into account there, another account, the effects of rupture and restructuration? And so as to incorporate in advance, beyond any possible programming, the unpredictability of new knowledge, new techniques, and new political givens? No text in the tradition seems as lucid concerning the way in which the political is becoming worldwide, concerning the irreducibility of the technical and the media in the current of the most thinking thought – and this goes beyond the railroad and the newspapers of the time whose powers were analysed in such a comparable way in the *Manifesto*. And few texts have shed so much light on law, international law, and nationalism.[183]

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[182] Derrida, Jacques, 'Intellectual Courage: An Interview', op.cit, 1998.
[183] Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit, 1994, p.13.

Although Derrida rejects 'official' 'dogmatic' Marxism (its 'systematic, metaphysical or ontological totality' with its fundamental concepts of labour, mode of production, social class and thus the whole history of its apparatuses)[184], he will argue that in our current (postmodern) condition there is a political vacuum (in terms of a critique of capitalism) which, following the fall of communism, needs to be filled. This appears particularly important to address at a time when a new political landscape is being forged by the (virtual reality of the) tele-techno-media which demands *new* modes of representation and *new* forms of struggle.

Crucially, however, this is a 'vacuum' not to be filled by another dogmatic 'opposition' or by another foundationalist party-political organisation, but is rather an opening *within* the situation today of our ruling 'parliamentary-democracies-of-the-Western-world' (wherever we are in a text already). Derrida is advocating neither a strategy of *'inversion'* (i.e. orthodox Marxism) or one of *'subversion'* (i.e. anarchism), both of which Saul Newman reminds us are two sides of the same logic of 'place'.[185] As Derrida repeatedly asserts, deconstruction is *not* a political theory but a move to expose the *limits* of our so-called 'political reality' in a way which opens up its conceptual/discursive framework to the (infinite) possibility of transformation in a meaningful(l) world shorn of metaphysical foundations. As

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[184] Derrida appends '...projected or real: the Internationals of the labor movement, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the single party, the State and finally the totalitarian monstrosity)'. Ibid, p.88.

[185] See: Newman, Saul, 'Derrida's De-construction of Authority'. Found at the Interactionist Information Exchange: Collaborative Authorship, Collective Intelligence, at http://info.interactivist. net/, p.3 (of 9).

Derrida argues:

> I think political theory is necessary, but I try to articulate this necessity of a political theory with something in politics or in friendship, in hospitality, which cannot for structural reasons, become the object of knowledge, of a theory, of a theoreme.[186]

What Derrida is (once again) trying to give voice to here is a *politics of the impossible*, one which dis-places (which is not, to re-iterate once again, destroying), the laws of what Caputo (following Derrida) describes as the 'two capitalisms', 'the one having to do with a cultural hegemony, the rule of European (style) "culture" emblematised by the European "capitals" (*la capitale*, the capital city), and the other the hegemony of economic capitalism (*le capitale*), the one criticised by Marx in *Das Kapital*'.[187] Working against (without simply being opposed to) the limits of the politico-ideological hegemony of the 'new world order' and its media, Derrida argues that we must form an ethical and moral coalition of all those who are 'done in or headed off by the dominant heading, every[one] who is left out, de-posed, "de-capitated" by their race, income, gender, nationality, language, religion, or even species (animal rights) – in a nutshell, by their difference'.[188] Here Derrida proposes (once again, in a certain spirit of Marx(ism)) what he calls an 'effective global solidarity' or a 'New International' of intellectuals and activists. This is not to be an organisation of International Socialists such as Marx envisaged, and it does not recognise itself in those states or international agencies dominated by certain stately powers. Similarly, but

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[186] Bennington and Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* interview, op.cit, 1997.
[187] Caputo, John D., op.cit, 1997. p.119.
[188] Ibid, p.121.

irreducible to certain humanitarian projects, this new kind of solidarity calls for a

profound change in international law and its implementation; in our concepts of

the state, the nation and citizenship, and has today what Derrida terms the 'figure

of suffering and compassion' for the ten plagues of the global (or 'new world')

order enumerated in *Specters of Marx* in the order which follows:

1. *Un-employment*: Derrida argues that the 'more or less well-calculated

deregulation of a new market, new technologies, new worldwide competitiveness,

would no doubt, like labor or production, deserve another name today. All the

more so in that tele-work inscribes there a new set of givens that perturbs both the

methods of traditional calculation and the conceptual opposition between work and

non-work, activity, employment, and their contrary'.[189] What is needed in the face

of the changing function of social inactivity, of non-work, of underemployment, is

a new politics and another concept of un-employment itself suitable to these new

forms of experience and calculation.

2. *Exclusion/expulsion*: Here, Derrida points to the massive exclusion of homeless

citizens from participation in the democratic life of States and the

expulsion/deportation of exiles, immigrants etc… from a 'national' territory. This

heralds a new experience of frontiers and identity – national or civil – as

inhospitable identitariansims flourish in a time of supposed freedom.

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[189] Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit, 1994, p.81.

3. *Economic wars*: both among the European community and between member states and Eastern European countries, between Europe and the United States, and between Europe, the US and Japan. Derrida argues here – with clear resonance for the political, legal and humanitarian wrangling surrounding the war in Iraq – that economic war controls everything, beginning with other wars, because it controls the practical interpretation and 'inconsistent and unequal application of international law'.[190]

4. *Contradictions in the concepts, norms and reality of the 'free market'*: here the example is of the barriers of protectionism and interventionist bidding wars of capitalist States seeking to protect their national interests from cheap labour, while, in turn, this cheap labour has no comparable social protection.

5. *The aggravation of the foreign debt*: a major thread in *Specters* – and still a contentious issue for Western governments who in 2005 seemed reluctant to cancel third world debt completely. As Derrida argues, foreign debt and other connected mechanisms are 'starving or driving to despair a large portion of humanity'[191] and seems in conflict with the discourse of democratization or human rights which are supposedly being extended across the globe in the name of liberal capitalist democracy.

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[190] Ibid, p.81.
[191] Ibid, p.82.

6. *The arms and industry trade*: Whether conventional 'arms', or those at the cutting edge of tele-technological sophistication, Derrida points out that the arms industry is inscribed in the normal regulation of the scientific research, economy, and socialisation of labour in Western democracies. As such they cannot be suspended or cut back without running major risks – including that of un-employment. Furthermore, and exceeding drug-trafficking to which it is often allied, arms-trafficking remains both prolific and difficult to distinguish from 'normal' commerce.

7. *The nuclear threat*: As Derrida states 'The spread ("dissemination") of nuclear weapons, maintained by the very countries that say they want to protect themselves from it, is no longer even controllable, as was the case for a very long time, by statist structures. It exceeds not only statist control but every declared market'.[192]

8. *Inter-ethnic wars*: Inter-ethic wars – Derrida queries whether there have ever been any other kind – are more frequent and are driven by what he calls an '*archaic* phantasm and concept', a '*primitive conceptual phantasm*' of community, the nation-State, sovereignty, borders, native soil and blood. Though not without its resources, Derrida sees this archaism as increasingly outdated by tele-technological dis-location; a dis-location which, in what is a critical point, is no less arche-originary than the archaism it has *always* dislodged: 'This process [of

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[192] Ibid, p.82.

dis-location] is, moreover, the positive condition of the stabilization that it constantly relaunches. All stability in a place being but a stabilisation or a sedimentation, it will have to have been necessary that the local differance, the spacing of a dis-placement gives the movement its start. And gives place and gives rise [*donne lieu*]. All national rootedness, for example, is rooted first of all in the memory or the anxiety of a displaced – or displaceable – population. It is not only time that is "out of joint," but space, space in time, spacing'.[193] Here Derrida's earlier more theoretical elaboration of the differential matrix and the generalised conceptual politics to which it gives rise (and upon which the geo-political order is constituted) is 'fully present'.

9. *Mafia and drug cartels*: Derrida points to the growing and undelimitable global power of the super-efficient and 'properly capitalist phantom-States that are the mafia and the drug cartels on every continent' including the former (so-called) socialist States of Eastern Europe. As he argues, these phantom states permeate the socio-economic fabric of society, the general circulation of capital and statist or inter-statist institutions.

10. (And as Derrida says 'above all') we come to *The present state of international law and of its institutions*: Despite what he calls a 'fortunate perfectability' and 'undeniable progress,' Derrida points to two limits which afflict international institutions. The first (and most radical) is that in their norms, charter

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[193] Ibid, pp.82-83.

and mission, these institutions depend on a certain historical culture. They cannot

be dissociated from certain European philosophical concepts – most notably those

of 'State' or 'national sovereignty' – which effect genealogical closure both

theoretically and practically. The second limit, indissociable from the first, is that

although supposedly universal, international law is effectively governed by

particular nation States, as '[a]lmost always their techno-economic and military

power prepares and applies, in other words, *carries* the decision'. For example –

> ...whether it is a question of deliberations and resolutions of the United
> Nations or of the putting into practice or the 'enforcement' of these
> decisions: the incoherence, discontinuity, inequality of States before the law,
> the hegemony of certain States over military power in the service of
> international law, this is what, year after year, day after day, we are forced to
> acknowledge.[194]

Despite these limits, however, Derrida will argue that it is not a matter of seeking

to disqualify international institutions but rather of affirming those who work

within them in the direction of perfectibility and emancipation. While we must

remain vigilant to the manipulations to which they are subject, such institutions

can prove invaluable when, on 'humanitarian' grounds, they intervene at certain

times in order to limit the sovereign powers of the State.

I think it is now clear that *Specters of Marx*, as well as other works including

Politics of Friendship[195], *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*[196], and *The Other*

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[194] Ibid, p.84.
[195] Derrida, Jacques, *Politics of Friendship*. Verso, London and New York: 1997.

Heading[197], testify to what Richard Kearney and Simon Critchley call

> ...Derrida's characteristic readiness – in spite of persistently and
> perplexingly misguided charges of apathy and indifference – to tackle topics
> of major moral and political consequence for our times...proof, if proof were
> needed, that deconstruction is not some obscure textual operation intimated
> in a mandarin prose style, but is a concrete intervention in contexts that is
> governed by an undeconstructable concern for justice.[198]

For Derrida is clearly not content, *pace* Fukuyama, to accept injustice as the price

to pay for an ideal (of liberal capitalist democracy) which is here – *almost*. He is

not content to accept the bloody (that is the *worst*) violence, suffering and human

rights abuses of the 'new world order' as merely 'empirical shortcomings,

contingent blights on the Ideas relentless progress' (that which, as John D. Caputo

argues 'admits of a gradual empirical approximation and constitutes the very

essence of essentialism or idealism, of an idea in the Kantian sense, or of a

Husserlian infinite task'[199]). Indeed, Derrida sees the task of intellectuals and

activists of the 'New International' to be one of re-thinking our economies of

knowledge in such a way that they are not orientated around identity, or

determinate states (of affairs), but around a *messianic promise* of the kind already

developed (in this study) with reference to Kant (in Chapter Two). In Derrida's

view it is the task of such 'postmodern resistance fighters' to produce 'new events,

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[196] Derrida, Jacques, *On Cosmopolitianism and Forgiveness*. Translated by Mark Dooley and
Michael Hughes and Edited by Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney. Routledge, London and New
York: 2001.
[197] Derrida, Jacques, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Translated by Pascale-
Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 1992.
[198] Critchley, Simon and Richard Kearney, Introduction to *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*,
op.cit. 2001, p.viii.
[199] Caputo, John D., 'Without Sovereignty, Without Being: The Coming God And Derrida's
Democracy to Come', *Journal for Culture and Religion Theory* 4.3, August 2003, published on-line
at www.jcrt.org/archives/04.3/caputo.

new effective forms of political action/practice, organisation, and so forth'[200], which simultaneously involves a profound re-thinking of those outdated philosophical/conceptual foundations upon which Western (parliamentary) liberal democracies have been instituted; a strategy of resistance orientated through a dream of Europe which would simultaneously serve to transform the world in more radically democratising and emancipating ways. With these remarks in mind I would thus like to follow Derrida as, with 'hope, fear and trembling', he seeks to re-politicize the Left in Europe and re-figure our European inheritance in accord with another heading (or the other of the heading) co-extensive with an *abyssal* (quasi-) logic which re-invigorates the twin discourse of democracy and emancipation in radically new (and yet paradoxically the oldest) ways in line with a new thinking of friendship, hospitality and justice (and by analogy the law). Derrida will here point to the *deconstructing effects of capitalism itself* which, he argues, serves to uncover an enabling aporetic (ethico-political) condition which moves beyond modernity's (and post-modernity's) totalising habits of thought, beyond the ends of history itself, towards a fairer, freer and more peaceful world (before two o'clock).

Democracy in Crisis: Globalisation, Counter-Globalisation

Some twelve years on from *Specters of Marx* wherein Derrida first enumerated the 'ten plagues of the new world order', in an interview with Giavanna Borradori in

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[200] Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit, 1994, p.89.

2003 entitled 'Auto-immunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides', it appears, in

Derrida's eyes at least, that little has changed in what he terms here the 'paradox of

globalisation'. On the one hand, Derrida acknowledges, for the better, that

globalisation *is taking place*: discourse, knowledge and models are transmitted

better and faster. Democracy thus has more of a chance. He goes on:

> Recent movements towards democratisation in Eastern Europe owe a great
> deal, almost everything perhaps, to tele-technology, to the communication of
> models, norms, images, information products, and so on. Non-governmental
> institutions are more numerous and better known or recognised. Look at the
> effort to institute the International Criminal Tribunal.[201]

But, on the other hand, in remarks that will be familiar to us by now, Derrida will

argue that globalisation is still *not taking place*, that is to say:

> ...in an age where it is in the interest of some to speak about globalisation
> and celebrate its benefits, the disparities between human societies, the social
> and economic inequalities, have probably never been greater and more
> spectacular...in the history of humanity. Though the discourse in favour of
> globalisation insists on the transparency made possible by tele-technologies,
> the opening of borders and of markets, the levelling of the playing fields and
> the equality of opportunity, there has never been in the history of humanity,
> in absolute numbers, so many inequalities, so many cases of malnutrition,
> ecological disaster, or rampant epidemics.[202]

For Derrida reminds us once more that there remain vast technological inequalities

(only 5% of the world population has access to the internet for example), and

unprecedented numbers of people are still being oppressed by working conditions

or unable to find the work they desire. It remains the case that only certain

countries and certain classes benefit fully from globalisation; namely, wealthy

[201] Borradori, Giovanna (Ed), *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 2004, p.123.
[202] Ibid, p.121.

northern countries who hold the capital and control the instruments of economic

decision making (the G8, IMF, World Bank etc...). Thus it is that Derrida will

describe globalisation as a *simulacrum*:

> ...a rhetorical artifice or weapon that dissimulates a growing imbalance, a
> new opacity, a garrulous and hypermediatized noncommunication, a
> tremendous accumulation of wealth, means of production, tele-technology,
> and sophisticated military weapons, and the appropriation of all these powers
> by a small number of states or international corporations.[203]

For Derrida, in this the twenty first century, globalisation continues to take place

for better and for worse and, in the light of the latter, he repeats with some urgency

(not least in the light of recent world events) the call to tackle the contradictions

and inequalities of western societies and their democratising and emancipating

rhetoric. At a time when the juridico-political space of democracy is changing and

operating at an unprecedented speed and rhythm, when democracy itself seems to

be suffering from an *auto-immune crisis* (not least) with the 'return of the

religious' on the world scene, it is imperative, as he argues, that intellectuals,

writers, scholars, professors, artists and journalists, stand together against the un-

necessary violence of totalising (and thus terroristic) discourse – that of Bush no

less than Bin Laden – and re-think the (metaphysical-philosophical) foundations

upon which traditional political and ethical thinking has been based. In this course

of action Derrida will argue that whatever will have been put under the title

'September 11' will have 'been at once a sign and a...[very high]...to pay, without

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[203] Ibid, p.123.

any possible redemption or salvation for its victims'.[204] For in Derrida's view 'September 11' and the so-called 'war on terror', far from confirming the moral and political legitimacy of an international alliance (new International in the non-Derridean sense) defending the values of liberal democracy, revealed once again that this liberal democracy was defined not by the United Nations of the world but by the US, a US which was prepared to suspend these same democratic values in order to serve its own national interests – all in the name of 'international justice'. Apart from being highly selective – Niall Lucy asks why no-one has felt the need to organise (to give but two of his examples) a 'coalition of the willing' into a war with Russia over its treatment of the Chechens, or why the USA or any other nation didn't feel it necessary to liberate 'the others' under the Pinochet regime – these actions seem to disavow the extent to which 'September 11' was both highly predictable, and was the result of the actions of the US (and its allies) who welcomed, armed, trained and provided the technology for the twin towers attack. Furthermore, the response of the US administration has failed to be attentive enough to the fact that its impoverishing, pillaging, disenfranchising movements across the globe have themselves allowed the terrorists to justify their actions and turn back upon the USA its own logic in terms of its definition of terrorism (the US itself open to accusations of economic, social, environmental terrorism, for example). It may benefit George Bush to unproblematically declare a 'war on terror', but this strange 'war without war', which has no identifiable enemy, which

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[204] Ibid, p.118.

is (in part) the product of the same 'liberal democratic' regime that now seeks to counter it, and which is fuelled by religious rhetoric on both sides, can only serve the worst violence and prevent any future global solidarity from being fostered. The question therefore becomes: from where can resistance be organised, what is the future for democracy when we can no longer be assured of the credentials of what goes under this name?

A New Europe: *Oui, Oui...*

In an article published in *Le Monde diplomatique* entitled 'Enlightenment Past and Still to Come'[205] Derrida will argue that *Europe today* has a unique responsibility to take up what is a critical role (in both sense of this term) in the counter-globalisation movement, situated, as it is, between what he calls the two dominant politico-theological hegemonies of our time. That is:

> On the one side, the only great European-style 'democratic' power in the world that still has the death penalty in its juridical system and, despite the separation in principle between the church and state, a fundamental biblical (and primarily Christian) reference in its official political discourse and the discourse of its political leaders. 'God Bless America', the reference to 'evil doers' or to the 'axis of evil', and the first rallying cry (which was later retracted) of 'infinite justice', would be a few signs among so many others. And facing them, on the other side, an 'enemy' that identifies itself as Islamic, Islamic extremist or fundamentalist, even if this does not necessarily represent authentic Islam and all Muslims are far from identifying with it. No more, in fact, than all Christians in the world identify with the United State's fundamentally Christian professions of faith.[206]

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[205] Derrida, Jacques, 'Enlightenment Past and Still to Come', op.cit, 2004.
[206] Derrida, Jacques in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, op.cit, 2003, p.117.

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For Derrida firmly believes that beyond the 'economism' and 'monetarism' which

he sees dominating the new European spirit, the Left in Europe can move beyond

the 'nuances of adjustment' and the 'rhetorical changes' of a pragmatic realism of

the kind favoured by British New Labour and French Socialism and mount a more

vigilant political and social resistance to the manifest dangers of globalisation

(encapsulated in the 'ten plagues'). For without what he says is the slightest sense

of European nationalism or much confidence in the European Union as we

currently know it, Derrida will nevertheless argue that our European heritage (our

inheritance) is 'irreplaceable and vital for the future of the world'. He goes on:

> ...everything that can be deconstructed from European tradition does not
> prevent Europe, precisely because of what has happened here, because of the
> contradictions of this little continent and the enormous guilt that once passed
> through its culture (totalitarianism, Nazism, genocides, the Shoah,
> colonisation et decolonisation, etc...) the geo-political situation that is ours,
> Europe, another Europe but with the same memory, from (and in any case
> this is my hope) gathering together against both the American policy of
> hegemony (the Wolfowitz, Cheney, Rumsfeld etc... connection) and against
> Arab Islamic theocracy without Enlightenment and without a political future
> (but lets not neglect the contradictions and heterogeneouses of the two
> ensembles and let us ally ourselves with those who resist from inside of both
> these blocks...) Its not about hoping for a Europe that would be another
> military superpower, protecting its market and acting as a counterweight to
> other blocs, but of a Europe that would sow the seeds of an alternative world
> politics, which for me is the only possible way out.[207]

Derrida will argue that as Europeans, we thus have a 'stack' of common

experiences, traditions and achievements which have helped foster a unique

political consciousness and sense of duty and which enables us, *exemplarily*, to re-

figure an idea of Europe as the protagonist of a new radically more democratising

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[207] Derrida, Jacques, 'I am at war with myself', op.cit, 2004, p.6.

and emancipating world politics, a new global solidarity without limits. In the first place, in terms of 'our' tradition, the 'project of the Enlightenment' which, in principle, promoted the separation between the religious and the political – though incomplete and in need of revision – identifies Europe (once again, at least in principle) as the only *secular* actor on the world stage. This Europe or European Enlightenment, *pace* Marx, contains within its promise the inherent possibility of a discourse and a politics different from current American rhetoric or Islamic fundamentalism, or indeed the rampant nationalisms of the Balkan states – a crucial proposition if we consider what Derrida has to say about the 'return of the religious' on the world scene. Moreover, Derrida will argue that 'we Europeans' (which he uses as a conjunction here), should take heart from the fact that Europe has already solved two important contemporary political problems (however unsatisfactory and in need of revision they remain): supranational political order (the European Union), and social justice (the European welfare state), opening the space for a new (qualified) cosmopolitanism to be imagined which could be defended on the basis of international law. For our experiences in the twentieth century in terms of both world war and decolonisation have already taught us some important lessons. World War Two (and not least the Holocaust) taught Europeans that national sovereignty must sometimes be restricted in order to restrain military power as well as consolidating the need for new forms of supra-national co-operation. We are reminded here also (and not least) of the moral (quasi-) foundation of politics and a certain 'heightened sensitivity for injuries to personal

and bodily integrity'[208] which finds expression, among other things, in the fact that the European council and the European Union require applicant states to renounce the death penalty. At the same time, in terms of decolonisation, the experience of large European nations of the rise and decline of colonisation has meant European powers have had to adopt a 'reflexive distance' both to themselves, and have had to take in the perspective of the colonised, accounting for the violence of a deracinating modernisation.

In this respect, then, Derrida is neither rejecting his Enlightenment heritage or the idea of Europe as the source and leading purveyor of Enlightenment ideals; rather, as he argues in *The Other Heading*, we need to go beyond that idea in the name of an other Europe, 'less Eurocentric and more open to its other than it has been in the past'. Derrida asks:

> What if Europe were this: the opening onto a history for which the changing of the heading, the relation to the other heading or the other of the heading, is experienced as always possible? An opening and a non-exclusion for which Europe would in some ways be responsible? For which Europe *would be* in a constitutive way, this very responsibility? As if the very concept of responsibility were responsible, right up to its emancipation, for a European birth certificate?[209]

What Derrida has in mind here is an 'alternative world politics' elaborated in what is called the 'aporia of the *demos*' which, *dis*-placing the theory and practice of

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[208] This quote is taken from a joint essay/letter written by Derrida and Habermas on the future of Europe in the light of events in Iraq and the deracinating movement of an 'imposing and uprooting' modernisation/globalisation process. Dated Friday June 6, 2003 this letter is translated into English and published on-line at AldiborontiphoscophomioAnunpronoucibleblog.htm, originally appearing in the newspaper *Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung* (FAZ).
[209] Derrida, Jacques, *The Other Heading*, op.cit, 1992, p.17.

'sovereignty', would mark the beginning (without foundationism) of a 'new' Enlightenment rationality elaborated in accord with a 'new' morality – namely attention to and affirmation of otherness, the new, the other (the Other and the other in me). In the best 'spirit' of the Enlightenment this would be a move towards a new 'secular faith' which would serve to demystify all totalising political theology and its 'sovereign subject', challenging the metaphysical presupposition(s) of our modern (liberal) democracies and the tradition to which they are heir. Of this tradition, Caputo will also argue:

> Imagine…a symbiosis…among the soul, the state and the universe. That is a venerable and prestigious promise that goes back as far as Plato's republic, one that has guided our thinking ever since antiquity. Just as there is but one God in Heaven, the Father (Sic) Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, governing the universe, so the analogy goes there is but one King governing the state (and one father governing the family) and so on, finally, each man (sic) is the lord of his own actions. We modern democrats congratulate ourselves on having revolutionised this schema, having turned it upside down, by ridding it of its top down power structure. We have shown the King the door (or even handed him his head) and replaced him with a constitutional democracy, according to which power rises from the bottom up. We have gradually gotten around to giving the vote to every adult citizen, regardless of race or gender, propertied or not. Let there be no mistake that was no little achievement for which we are grateful and which, even today, is far from finished. We have even gotten around to God and made God a lot more gender sensitive and egalitarian and much less patriarchal. So the revolution has seemed more or less complete, at least in principle. *But the truth is* [my italics], while we have inverted the old schema, turning it on its head, by giving power to the people, we have not slipped free of its most basic presupposition, that of sovereignty itself, which goes unchallenged. Modern democracies have considered the revolution complete – at least in principle, as one will never be finished making this actually work – if they repopulate the sovereign centre with the people, running the lines of power from bottom up…even though they separate church and state, modern democracies, spawned in the 'Enlightenment', are run by the light of what Kant called 'autonomy'. Autonomy means answering only to a law (nomos) that you give yourself (autos) which is the only way to be 'rational' for Kant, which means not allow your reason to be

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overwhelmed by an alien power. That model is the secularised cousin of a theological image of God Almighty, the brightest light, the most autonomous agent, and the most serene and sovereign freedom of all.[210]

I quote at length Caputo's succinct remarks not only for their clarity but because they are absolutely critical for understanding Derrida's vision of a new (world) Europe and a new world politics which has the potential to transform the state of the world today (in every sense). For as Caputo reminds us once more, 'while they have shifted the rule (*kratia*) from a sovereign one or few to the people (*demos*), no mean achievement, our modern democracies have left the space of sovereignty and autonomy undisturbed. So now mighty nation-states stride the earth where once mighty Kings inspired fear and trembling – and having the power to inspire fear and trembling, to terrorise, is built into the idea of sovereignty'.[211] Indeed this is one of the reasons why Derrida will suggest that George Bush's declared 'war on terror' is oxymoronic.

For the difficulty seems to be that the theory and practice of (the concept of) 'sovereignty', as it underpins our modern-style democracies *post*-modernity, appears incompatible with a true or radical democracy, indeed the European *promise* of democracy: freedom and equality for all. For Derrida will argue that if democracy is allegedly concerned to facilitate difference and exposure to multiple perspectives and outlooks, if democracy is the name for an open-ness to what is to come, then there is a paradoxical sense in which democracy itself *never* arrives; is

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[210] Caputo, John D., 'Without Sovereignty', op.cit, 2003.
[211] Ibid.

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not substantiated or made 'real' in the form of *any* historical format such as the

Westminster system. Democracy is not only im-possible, but it lives off its im-

possiblity (between life and death) in its infiniteness openness to the other. This

democracy-to-come is nothing more than a *faith* in the in-coming (of the other);

the 'I don't know what'. In other words, and continuous with Derrida's

deconstructive readings of Husserl and Saussure given in Chapter One, a

democracy-to-come is the very experience of the impossibility of closing a

structural genesis (i.e. all structures, all meanings, etc...remain radically unstable

and contingent constructions interminably open to revision). There is then, as

Derrida argues, something very un-democratic about the traditional concept of

sovereignty.

What Derrida is here describing under the quasi-concept[212] of a 'democracy-to-

come' is what he calls – in the book of the same name – a new 'politics of

friendship' or, rather, a new political experience *in* friendship which takes in the

originary synthesis of language, time and the other and helps deconstruct the

'massive bulk' of political theory, in particular those concepts – such as

sovereignty exemplarily here, but also power, representation – which are

fundamental to our (still too modern-metaphysical) idea of politics. For despite

their associate rhetoric of freedom and equality such concepts, and the old

(implicit) 'model of friendship' they invoke, are *in fact* ideological, hierarchical,

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[212] Quasi-concept because it is no *thing* and no-*one*.

and (un-necessarily) violently exclusive of difference and otherness. Given that

the geo-political (world) order is largely founded on this old (European) model of

politics and friendship, the significance of Derrida's deconstructive reading(s) here

for the 'social bond', for notions such as the state, territory, the nation-state (as

well as the concepts mentioned above) is huge. So, given this significance and in

order to underline the thesis that Derrida's political and politicising writings from

'beginning' to 'end' offer us the chance for a 'better' world to come (and come...)

– which is to say, according to his criteria and my own a more radically

democratising and emancipating one – let us now briefly follow the exact nature of

Derrida's thinking on these issues as he advocates a new politics of friendship in

line with a democracy-to-come which, in the case of Europe exemplarily here, is

an altogether more hospitable relation to the other. Indeed we shall then follow

Derrida's exergue on the concept of 'hospitality' such that his battery of terms –

politics, friendship, democracy and hospitality – bespeak of an aporetical

conditional unconditionality which demands a re-cognition and re-negotiation (in

the name of an infinite justice propounded in a certain European – and not least

Marxian – spirit); of the meanings of laws, rights, conventions, borders as they

function in those European liberal democracies of the 'new world order'.

In an interview with Geoffrey Bennington at the Centre for Modern French

Thought on the subject of politics, friendship, democracy and hospitality (the basis

for the book *Politics of Friendship*) Derrida argues as follows:

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Friendship has been an apparently marginal concept within the field of politics and of political philosophy for centuries...it is marginal in the usual taxonomies of concepts. You can't find the concept of friendship there: usually it is left to ethics or psychology or morals, but it is not considered a political concept as government, or sovereignty, or citizenship may be considered political. But as soon as you read the canonical texts in political theory starting with Plato or Aristotle you discover that friendship plays an organising role in the definition of justice, democracy even.[213]

Indeed, without seeking to homogenise or reify the concept of friendship, Derrida will argue that while it is not exactly the same in ancient Greece, in the Middle Ages, and today, there are some 'permanent features' that are analysable and formalisable from a political point of view; a certain 'model of friendship' which underwrites our 'traditional' definition of politics and its 'institutions'. Nominally, Derrida states that it is first of all a model based on the friendship between two young *men*, mortals, who have a contract according to which one will survive the other, one will be the heir of the other, and they will agree politically. As he argues, this excludes not only all friendship between a man and a woman, but between a woman and another woman. Thus it is that Derrida will argue that, as a consequence, *brotherhood* or *fraternity* is the figure of this canonical friendship and has a number of cultural and historical premises:

It comes from Greece, but it also comes from the Christian model in which brotherhood or fraternity is essential. Men are all brothers because they are sons of God, and you can find the ethics of this concept in even an apparently secular concept of friendship and politics. In the French Revolution this is the foundation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Fraternity was the object of a terrible debate in France at the time, and fraternity appears, between equality and liberty, as one of the foundations of the republic. So you have to deal here with what I would call a phallocentric

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[213] Derrida, Jacques and Geoffrey Bennington, *Politics of Friendship* interview, op.cit, 1997.

or phallogocentric concept of friendship.[214]

Of course this is not to say that a woman could not have the experience of friendship with a man or with another woman, but rather that within this culture/society by which this 'prevalent canon was considered legitimate, accredited, then there was no voice, no discourse, no possibility of acknowledging these excluded possibilities'.[215] All the concepts which are fundamental to the canonical definition of politics ('of the state, the relation to autochthony in Greece, to the territory, the nation-state, filiation, representation, sovereignty', even the idea of democracy itself)[216] had to agree with the privilege granted to friendship as brotherhood, which means 'of course the family, the familial schema, filiation, it means brother, no different, and it makes no difference...'.[217] Given this fact, and in line with my earlier remarks *vis a vis* the quasi-concept of a democracy-to-come Derrida asks:

> Now is it possible to think of a democracy which would be, if not adjusted, then at least articulated with another concept of friendship, another experience of friendship which wouldn't simply be dependent on or subordinate to, what I call the prevalent canonical concept of friendship (phallogocentric, male, and so forth)...A democracy which is so strange that it is no longer simply reducible to citizenship, to the organisation of a regime for a given society as nation-state...can we think of a democracy beyond the limits of the classical political model of the nation-state and its borders? Is it possible to think differently this double injunction of equality for everyone and respect for singularity beyond the limits of classical politics and classical friendship.[218]

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[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.

In the aporia of the *demos* Derrida gives voice to what he calls an *unconditional injunction*: I have to welcome the other whoever he or she is unconditionally, without asking for a document, a name, a context or a passport:

> That is the very first opening of my relation to the other: to open my space, my home – my house, my language, my culture, my nation, my state, and myself. I don't have to open it, because it is open, it is open before I make a decision about it: *then I have to try and keep it open or try to keep it open unconditionally* [my italics].[219]

Derrida does not deny that such unconditionality is 'rather frightening'; remaining open to the 'other' risks both the best and the worst happening. Remaining open I am risking displacement, even destruction of everything I hold dear, which is why we have to *condition* this unconditionality, to organise what is called here 'hospitality' – which means laws, rights, conventions, borders, immigration laws and so forth. The debates around these issues appear to condition the extent to which we should welcome the Other:

> That's the problem: hospitality should be neither assimilation, acculturation, nor simply the occupation of my space by the Other. That's why it has to be negotiated at every instant, and the decision for hospitality, the best rule for this negotiation, has to be invented at every second with all the risks involved, and it is risky. Hospitality…has to be re-invented at every second, it is something without a pre-given rule. This is what we have to invent – a new language for instance. When two people who don't share the same language meet, what should they do? They have to translate, but translation is an invention, to invent a new way of translating in which translation doesn't go one way but both ways, and how can we do that? That's the aporia, and this political, the new form – but it had always been the form – of politics, but today it has, because of the development of communication, of crossing borders, of tele-communications, it has new forms of urgency.[220]

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[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.

For on the one hand, because the powers of the media and tele-technologies –

which today shape our experience of the world more than ever – go beyond state

power, become international, Derrida will argue that this at once confirms the

traditional structure of politics and at the same time deconstructs it – this is what

he calls (one of) the 'deconstructing effects of capitalism itself'.[221] As he has

already shown, opening the channels of translation and communication on a global

scale means that the space for democracy in postmodernity is both globalised

(opened to the other like never before – which is a good thing), and is always

potentially monopolised by various governmental and non-governmental agencies

(in particular multi-national corporations) which can propagate the techno-

economic-political (and often military) interests of a 'hegemonic few'. While

Derrida will speak of the 'progress of cosmopolitanism' which can be celebrated,

as would be any access to citizenship – in this case 'world' citizenship – at the

same time Derrida will argue that citizenship is also a limit; that of the 'nation-

state'. Indeed, his reservations with regard to a so-called 'world state' are well

documented. In this regard he thus argues:

> I believe we should thus, beyond the old Greco-Christian cosmopolitical
> ideal (the Stoics, Saint Paul, Kant), see the coming of a universal alliance or
> solidarity that extends beyond the internationality of nation-states and thus
> beyond citizenship. This was one of the major themes of *Specters of Marx*
> and other texts. We are always led back to the same aporia: how to decide
> between, on the one hand, the positive and salutary role played by the 'state'
> form (the sovereignty of the nation-state) and, thus, by democratic
> citizenship in providing protection against certain kinds of international
> violence (the market, the concentration of world capital, as well as 'terrorist'
> violence and the proliferation of weapons) and, on the other hand, the

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[221] Ibid.

negative or limiting effects of a state whose sovereignty remains a theological legacy, a state that closes its borders to non-citizens, and so forth?[222]

The challenge for Europe, then, beyond the functional imperative of the creation of a common economic and currency area which has driven reforms forward but is now exhausted, is to continue to exercise 'our' political responsibility and establish a European public whose identity is born out of the recognition of differences – the mutual acknowledgement of the Other in its otherness – so as to limit the damaging effects of globalisation while remaining aware of the necessary but insufficient and endlessly revisable nature of 'our' governing codes. In this task Derrida, along with Jurgen Habermas to whose letter on the necessary counter-hegemonic role of Europe on the world stage he is co-signatory, finds two particular dates in recent 'history' to be particularly instructive:

> The day on which the newspapers informed their astonished readers of the oath of loyalty to Bush, to which the Spanish Prime Minister had invited European governments willing to go to war behind the backs of their other European colleagues: but no less 15 February 2003, when the protesting masses in London and Rome, Madrid and Barcelona, Berlin and Paris reacted to this surprising coup. The simultaneous nature of these overwhelming demonstrations – the largest since the end of the Second World War – might be regarded with hindsight as entering the history books as marking the birth of a European public.[223]

Such an intensified collaboration would no longer be founded on *tolerance* towards other member states/citizens and non-member states/citizens, but on the Levinasian inspired ethico-political space of the decision. For as Peter Corey

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[222] Derrida, Jacques in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, op.cit. 2003, p.124.
[223] Habermas and Derrida letter, op.cit, 2003.

reminds us in his excellent essay, 'Totality and Ambivalence'[224], Western tolerance

has been the foundation of ethics, of so called 'human rights'. Nevertheless, as

Derrida argues, this is (and was) a limited form of tolerant 'hospitality' which is

always on the side of the strongest and which all too easily becomes *intolerance*

once the 'tolerated' group is believed to have broken the conditions it was

supposed to live under. We must accept, of course, as Derrida does, that some

political, legal and religious forms of organisation must be inhospitable to some –

otherwise they would lose their very identity or singularity such as it 'is', if it 'is'.

However, if we are conscious of the kind of unconditional hospitality outlined

above we will be acutely aware of the extent to which these forms are limited and

exclusive. As Corey again reminds us, we must live in *constant tension* (the aporia

of the *demos*) *between* the conditional form of tolerance and practice found in the

law and so on, and the unconditional imperative of absolute hospitality. We must

be Socratically suspicious of all those who seek to instantiate 'a law' (economic,

social, juridical, religious) in the name of a particular group, party, nation,

corporation etc , which is to say in the name of '*the* law', at the expense of justice.

This is a Derridean 'new Europe' in which we must remain ever vigilant of all

attempts of one nation or a group of nations to set the course of Europe such that

the world would become a European super-state with Paris, London or Berlin at

the head of affairs, making decisions reflecting their own (one-sided) national

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[224] Corey, Peter, 'Totality and Ambivalence: Postmodern Response to Globalisation and the American Empire', http://www.cutsci.ysu.edu/voegelin/EVS/2004%20Papers/Corey2004.htm, 2004.

interests/beliefs/customs. As Caputo argues, effectively paraphrasing (in a slightly

more congenial way) Derrida's argument in *The Other Heading*:

> That is what Derrida would have Europe avoid, and this by way of biting the
> bullet of *the* impossible. That means, on the one hand, learning to cultivate
> difference while avoiding both 'dispersion' and 'monopoly'...either pure
> unity or pure multiplicity is a 'synonym of death'...either way a catastrophe.
> On the one hand, Europe needs to avoid dispersion because it is constant
> danger of deteriorating into a myriad of nationalist idioms and self-enclosed
> idiolects, into a European 'apartheid'. On the other hand, Europeans need to
> cultivate cooperation while avoiding 'monopoly', a translation of their
> differences into a single overarching standardisation which circulates across
> the lines of a trans-national tele-technology. That would wipe out national
> difference by establishing a uniform *grid of intelligibility*, a trans-national
> cultural capital, a central switchboard, a central power, a capital that is not a
> particular city or metropolis. Such a world would be generically Anglo-
> American or NATO-ese; it would speak American/English, the new *lingua
> franca*, and it would be driven by a European science that stretches from
> Copernicus, Galileo, and Isaac Newton to M.I.T, and Silicon Valley. For
> this world 'politics' is perhaps no longer an adequate term; it would be rather
> a 'quasi-politics of the tele-techno-scientific world, the virtual world'.[225]

Furthermore, and despite being irreducible to a new military super-power,

Derrida's 'responsible Europe' would maintain a unified military force and a

specific strategic culture sufficient for autonomous European interventions that

would be motivated and deliberated in Europe. The US led war in Iraq has, once

again, only consolidated the long foreseen awareness of the failure of the common

European foreign policy. Only such a force would be able to mount a *credible*

challenge to American 'hard power' in the service of international institutions and

new international law no longer immunising themselves against the very

democracy they are meant to promote. Derrida dreams of a new United Nations

based in Europe (as the name for that 'alliance' responsible for the heading of the

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[225] Caputo, John D., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, op.cit, 1997, p.119-120.

other and the other of the heading) which would orient itself around the *promise* of a democracy-to-come; a United Nations free of the hegemonic influence of its most powerful members and with a 'wholly other' Security Council. As Caputo so precisely argues in this respect, the existing United Nation's Security Council's principle function has been to insure the security of the 'most powerful few against the democratic many in the General Assembly...[serving]...to secure the sovereignty of the five permanent members. Why just these five? Because they were winners of the last world war. Might makes right. The *strongest* reason, *la raison du plus fort*, prevails, not the strongest *reason*'.[226]

Of course (and without wishing to privilege the juridical sphere, international law and its institutions, even if he believes in them more than ever), Derrida reminds us that among the international institutions that matter most today there is more than the United Nations. Apart from political bodies such as the G8, Derrida and Habermas together argue that at world economic summits and within the institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Europe must bring to bear its influence in the design of a future world domestic policy. They ask why Europe, if it has managed to deal with those contemporary problems of supra-national order and the European welfare state, should not also take on the challenge of 'taming capitalism, posing itself the challenge of defining and furthering a cosmopolitan order on the basis of international law against

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[226] Caputo, John D., 'Without Sovereignty', op.cit, 2003.

competitive designs [Entwuerfe], to'.[227] A contemporary situation in which such

an alliance might intervene and bring to bear international pressure being the

disenfranchisement of peasant farmers in the Chinese provinces currently facing a

'land grab' policy instituted by the Chinese government bent on the expansion of

trade, industry and housing. Beaten and stripped of their assets, these people are

left homeless, jobless and poverty stricken, to suffer the fate of being barely

noticed by either their own countrymen, the legal system there, or the international

order who seem happy to accept the fruits of such an inhumane process of

usurpation. In effect, it us up to a core Europe – which must not consolidate itself

into a miniature Europe of course – to act as what Derrida and Habermas call a

'locomotive' in order to hasten the authorisation of the European entity (without

beginning and without end) to act in external affairs and prove that in a global

society it is not only complex [military] divisions which count, but the gentle

power of negotiation agendas, [international] relations and economic advantages.

In a statement echoing Derrida's commentary on Carl Schmitt the two signatories

state 'In this world the sharpening division of politics into the alternative, as stupid

as it is costly, between war and peace does not pay'.[228]

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[227] Derrida and Habermas letter, op.cit, 2003.
[228] Ibid.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have sought to argue that Derrida's later work, characterised as it is by a more overt intervention in ethical and political matters, is entirely consistent with and indeed, to put it stronger, is *governed* by his very earliest work on Husserl and Saussure and which inaugurated his thinking of the 'beginning of historicity' and 'post-historical man'. For having brought to theoretical consciousness the 'fact' that *all* meaning is constructed through the originary synthesis of language, time and the other, remaining always and forever (structurally) 'to come', Derrida uncovered, right at and from the start, the ethical relation to the other (always more than *an* other) which opens the ethico-political space of the decision constitutive of our 'meaningful' world. Thus it is that the concept of the political is both broadened to cover all conceptual/discursive meaning, and is transformed from its more conventional sense given that political theory has generally relied on the theory and practice of a certain 'sovereignty' practised in the security of the *logos*.

Derrida's work promises – hopefully/perhaps – to have a profound impact upon our Western liberal democratic societies which, after the end of modernity's history (principally the collapse of the Capitalist and Marxist grand-narratives) are faced with the rampant omnibus of modern-style globalisation shorn of its emancipatory and democratic content. Derrida shows that, *after Marx*, 'we' must work *today* to intervene in concrete and urgent situations and ask questions about

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the future of liberal capitalist democracies in a juridico-political space increasingly shaped by the powers of the tele-techno-media and dominated by the rhetoric of the world's strongest nations – not least the political theology of the United States – which auto-immunises itself against the very democracy it is meant to uphold in the name of an international justice it cannot help but betray. Derrida argues that we must urgently invent new forms of action and struggle to counter the inequalities and manifest injustices of a paradoxical globalisation as articulated in his call for a new international of intellectuals and activists who might help to develop new 'imaginative' concepts of sovereignty, the state, the citizen, new international institutions and new international laws. Critically, Europe has a central (without being central*ising*) role in this process given that its common experiences, traditions and achievements have endowed ('we Europeans') with a unique political consciousness and sense of duty to think 'reason'; to think new ways of 'being' together, *other*-wise. As Derrida points out, the birth of a European public, a European 'identity' which constitutes its sense of 'self' out of respect for difference and otherness, is vital in fostering a more democratising and emancipating civic solidarity mindful of the need for the continual revision and improvement of all laws, institutions, organisations (political, economic, social, religious) in the face of infinite justice; a Europe with the military force and diplomatic powers in the service of such new international institutions and international law to regulate the manifest injustices and paradoxes of globalisation in the international order. The space is opened up here for a different public

discussion of world issues without it collapsing into either binaries or dialectics

between good and evil, war and peace, democracy and non-democracy; here we

are *all* encouraged to take a more active role in terms of the decisions we make,

and the pressure we bring to bear on the legitimacy of our governing codes. It is

not easy, there is no mandate which says this is the path we *must* take, it is a task

always forged in *aporia* (the very condition of the *demos*). But, recalling my

arguments in Chapter Two, 'we' (who else?) have the power to counter-sign

differently; to literally change the world for what appears to be, in Derrida's view

as well as my own, the better. To repeat:

> We will not change the world before two o'clock, but what I am saying is
> that we have to.
> Jacques Derrida. [229]

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[229] Derrida, Jacques and Geoffrey Bennington, *Politics of Friendship* interview, op.cit. 1997.

Chapter Four:
Baudrillard and Derrida: At the Limits of Thought.

Facing a world that is unintelligible and problematic, our task is clear: we must make that world even more unintelligible, even more enigmatic.

Jean Baudrillard[230]

In this fourth and final chapter my intention is to offer a comparative analysis of

Jacques Derrida's work with that of his fellow postmodern 'quasi-philosopher of

the limit', Jean Baudrillard. For despite assertions by such theorists as, for

example, Christopher Norris, that the corpus of both theorists is irreconcilable

and/or impossible to compare in such a way, I follow Rex Butler and Philip

Jenkins in suggesting that an interesting, genuine and illuminating comparison

between Derrida's conception of 'metaphysics in deconstruction' and Baudrillard's

'radical thought' can be made within the remit of this thesis.[231] My contention will

be that while being necessarily understood 'on their own terms' (in accordance

with their own idiosyncratic elaborations of a deconstructive logic) both

substantial similarities and differences are identifiable which I here appropriate for

the purposes outlined below – though ultimately to justify my assertion that

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[230] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion*. Columbia Press, New York: 2000, p.83.
[231] Of Derrida's deconstructive thought Norris will argue in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (op.cit, 1999) 'Nothing could be further from Baudrillard's *tout court* dismissal of philosophy and Marxism alike as mere episodes in a self-deluding history of thought whose final chapter is the dawning recognition that all concepts, truth-claims, categories of value, etc. come down to so many optional variants on an age-old (ultimately Platonist) delusion of epistemological grandeur'. (p.157).

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Derrida's just *is* the best way to navigate the postmodern condition and with which conclusion I will, in 'the end', conclude.

In the order in which it is presented here, after a general overview of what I wish to establish as Baudrillard's position, I continue by arguing that both Derrida and Baudrillard uncover a similar deconstructive logic/movement of 'delimitation and excess' which proves to be the paradoxical (aporetic) condition of possibility and impossibility of all metaphysical/foundationalist thought (modern, postmodern, or whatever). After all, it is for this reason that Derrida and Baudrillard are amongst that group of thinkers called 'post-structuralist' or 'quasi-philosophers of the limit', thinkers who, as Rex Butler argues, were the 'first to think *this*, who first saw the advance of knowledge not simply as a matter of empirical argument and refutation, but bound up with the closure of thought, not so much the end of thought as what is excluded to allow it to reach this end and thus why it is always open to a certain future'.[232] Butler goes on, underlining his point::

> If there is anything in common to the various thinkers called post-structuralist, we would say that it is this notion of thought as *doubling*, as continuing even in the absence of any external standards of judgment outside of the world and its systems... In each it is not a matter simply of proposing an alternative to the system under investigation, but rather of pushing it to its limit. It is at this point, they speculate, that the system will turn against itself, that a certain outside to the system will open up or will show itself to have made the system possible ...and [thus]...finally impossible...from the very beginning.[233]

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[232] Butler, Rex, *Jean Baudrillard: The Illusion of the Real*. Sage Publication Ltd, London and California: 1999.
[233] Ibid, p.65.

Accordingly, it is from this 'post-structuralist' underpinning as proposed by Butler that both Derrida and Baudrillard's 'postmodern' theorisations must indeed be understood in terms of their respective attempts to push against the limits of contemporary discourse/systematic closure.

However, that said, I intend to go on to argue that despite these 'similarities' and commonalities with respect to Derrida and Baudrillard's deconstructive thinking, their respective analyses of our current postmodern condition and, in particular, their capacity for envisaging a radically more democratising and emancipating future for our self-creations and human solidarities can and does, at times, *differ markedly*. For while Derrida (*apropos* Chapters Two and Three) continues to hold out the (messianic) hope for such a future without beginnings and ends, Baudrillard increasingly adopts a position of (at best) radical irony and (at worst) open hostility towards even the very idea of a lost (quasi-) universal which he considers to have become absorbed in the 'black hole' of an all encompassing global techno-structure wherein the universal and its 'expressions' (human rights, freedom, international law, etc.) have become little more than *spectacles* wherein 'All liberties fade before the mere liberation of exchange'.[234] As Paul Corey remarks, supplementing Butler, while Baudrillard and Derrida do indeed 'share similar understandings of the general phenomenon of globalisation...

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[234] Corey, Paul, 'Totality and Ambivalence', op.cit, 2004.

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[they]…arrive at remarkably different conclusions'.[235] Here, going beyond Corey and indeed those few others who have made a Derrida/Baudrillard comparison, I will argue that it is precisely the attitude of Derrida and Baudrillard towards Europe and America – generally un-remarked – which proves so instructive for the comparative analysis of their visions for the future of the new world order, and for our individual and collective hopes and dreams.

The Chapter has two parts. In the first I begin, as noted already, by way of a general overview of Baudrillard's 'deconstructive thought' in order to provide a (quasi) foundation for a comparison with Derrida's *oeuvre* which allows the merits of their respective projects to be laid bare. Here, I follow Baudrillard's arguments in his book *The Vital Illusion* as the quasi-logic articulated there arguably repeats (this is my 'thesis') the same deconstructive movement that informs Baudrillard's *entire* oeuvre, and in particular his ethical and political position. In Part Two I follow Derrida and Baudrillard's respective – and I argue very similar – articulation of the logic of *differance* and their subsequent engagement with the 'law' and the secret, before moving on to examine the ways in which their respective attitudes to our tele-techno-media age indicates a *divergence* in their ethico-political strategies and in particular their hopes (or lack thereof) for our future self-creations and human solidarities to develop in more democratising and emancipating ways past the end of history's ends. As already noted, no such comparison of Derrida and Baudrillard yet exists.

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[235] Ibid.

Part One: Jean Baudrillard: Strategies of Resistance

<u>Baudrillard's *Evolution*: Life, Death and the (Moral) Universe</u>

In Chapter One of *The Vital Illusion* entitled 'The Final Solution', Baudrillard

charts, 'hypothetically' as he puts it, the movement of our species from the earliest

life of our cells towards what he anticipates to be an absolute death. So far, so

apocalyptic it would seem. However, absolute death is understood by Baudrillard

in a particular and peculiar way, as not the end of the individual human being but

rather as 'a regression toward a state of minimal differentiation among living

beings, of a pure repetition of identical beings'.[236] The meaning of this is by no

means obvious but its unpacking is absolutely crucial because it provides both an

accessible 'way in' to some difficult Baudrillardian arguments concerning

simulation, reversibility, reproductive technology, reality, virtuality, illusion, and

so on (thus providing the opportunity to grasp the significance of Baudrillard's

position for economies of knowledge and about how we understand our

contemporary world and how he compares to Derrida), *and* it is an 'opening'

approach that, so far as I am aware, has hitherto not been undertaken in the

literature: a new Baudrillard!

Speaking of the beginning of the 'human evolutionary process,' then, Baudrillard
states:

> Contrary to everything that seems obvious and 'natural', nature's first
> creatures were immortal. It was only by obtaining the power to die, by dint
> of constant struggle, that we became the living beings we are today. Blindly

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[236] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion*, op.cit, 2000, p.6.

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we dream of overcoming death through immortality, when all the time immortality is the most horrific of possible fates.[237] [238]

Again, Baudrillard's somewhat peculiar argument needs heavy glossing/reading.

For his point is that the move to mortality in the evolution of the biosphere is

marked by the move of immortal beings from the absolute continuity found in the

subdivision of the same toward the possibility of birth and death. Let us follow

Baudrillard again here as all becomes clearer:

> [So] the egg becomes fertilised by a sperm and specialised sex cells make their appearance. The resulting entity is no longer a copy of either one of the pair that engendered it; rather, it is a new and singular combination. There is a shift from pure and simple reproduction to procreation: the first two will die for the first time, and the *third* for the first time will be born. We reach the stage of beings that are sexed, differentiated, and mortal. The earlier order of the virus – of immortal beings – is perpetuated, but henceforth this world of deathless beings is contained inside the world of mortals. In evolutionary terms, the victory goes to beings that are mortal and distinct from one another: the victory goes to us.[239]

The victory, however, turns out to be short lived. The game isn't over. *Reversion*

is always possible. Encoded in the earliest life of our cells, immortality reappears

on the horizon, driving what he calls the 'enormous enterprise' we as living beings

appear to be undertaking today; namely,

> ...a project to reconstruct a homogeneous and uniformly consistent universe – an artificial continuum this time – that unfolds within a technological and mechanical medium, extending over our vast information network, where we are in the process of building a perfect clone, an identical copy of our world, a virtual artefact that opens up the prospect of endless reproduction...This is the revenge taken on mortal and sexed beings by immortal and

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[237] Ibid, p.6.
[238] As Baudrillard argues for Sigmund Freud the death drive is precisely 'this nostalgia for a state before the appearance of individuality and sexual differentiation, a state in which we lived before we became mortal and distinct from one another'. Ibid, p.6.
[239] Ibid, p.2.

undifferentiated life forms. This is what could be called the final solution.[240]

The result of this 'pathological *involution*' of the evolutionary process is thus the

'dis-information' of our species through the *cancelling* of differences; the result of

which leads him to question the scientific myth of progress as a *step forward*.

So: Baudrillard's hypothesis is that the human race, unable to face its own

diversity (its mortality), its own complexity, its own radical difference, its own

alterity, is involved in a kind of *revisionism*. But maybe, he muses, this

revisionism can be seen as an adventure or 'heroic test' in order to see what part of

so called 'human nature' survives the artificialisation of living beings taken to its

limits:

> If we discover that not everything can be cloned, simulated, programmed,
> genetically and neurologically managed, then whatever survives could truly
> be called 'human', some inalienable and indestructible human quality could
> finally be identified. Of course, there is always the risk, in this experimental
> adventure, that nothing will pass the test – that the human will be perfectly
> eradicated.[241]

The question for Baudrillard thus becomes that of whether by taking such an

artificial course our species is, in fact, hastening its own decline according to some

collective, suicidal impulse. For once humanity has rid itself of all its vicissitudes,

its negative traits – our desires, neuroses, dreams, handicaps, viruses, frenzies, our

unconscious (even sexuality is cited by Baudrillard) – then what makes us unique

as living beings is usurped in the perfection of the model:

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[240] Ibid, p.8.
[241] Ibid, pp.15-16.

Life becomes sheer survival when it is reduced to the lowest common denominator, to the genome, the genetic inheritance – where it is the perpetual movement of DNA codes that drives life, and where the distinctive marks of the human fade before the metonymic eternity of cells. The worst of it is that living beings engendered by their own genetic formulae doubtless will not survive this process of reduction. That which lives by the code and survives by the codes will die by them.[242]

Thus it is that Baudrillard wonders whether Nietzsche might have been right after all and that the human race, left to its own devices, is capable only of redoubling itself in its efforts to destroy itself.

And, Baudrillard continues musing, it would seem that perhaps nowhere does the threatened disappearance of 'the human' under the weight of its own simulation resonate more than in the discourse of 'human rights' – a discourse much employed on the contemporary world-scene. For the hegemony of the idea of the human – defined here as a modern, rational, Western being – is seen by Baudrillard as threatening both the specificity of the inhuman and that within the human which is said to be inhuman i.e. that which is resistant to 'interpretation' in its secrecy or seduction. For Baudrillard sees the impulse to *annex* nature, animals, other races and cultures whereby everything 'is assigned a place within an evolutionist and hegemonic anthropology',[243] as representing the victory of a 'monothought of the human...as defined by the West, under the sign of the universal and democracy'.[244] This situation leaves us, paradoxically enough

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[242] Ibid, p.20.
[243] Ibid, p.24.
[244] Ibid, p.24.

according to Baudrillard, in a position where we now witness the supposed

'improvement' of human rights *at the same time* as the irruption of their increased

violation.

For all of those who may still have faith in culture to preserve us from what is an

anathema to Baudrillard, and which informs his 'political' position – the thus

stated 'hell of the Same' – Baudrillard has some bad news:

> It is culture than clones us, mental cloning anticipates any biological cloning.
> It is the matrix of acquired traits that, today, clones us culturally under the
> sign of monothought – and it is all the innate differences that are annulled,
> inexorably by ideas, by ways of life, by the cultural context. Through school
> systems, media, culture, and mass information, singular beings become
> identical copies of one another. It is this kind of cloning – social cloning, the
> industrial reproduction of things and people – that makes possible the
> biological conception of the genome and of genetic cloning, which only
> further sanctions the cloning of human conduct and human cognition.[245]

Thus it is that Baudrillard will argue that mass destruction is endemic in Western

culture. For we must understand that before Europe and America perpetuated the

holocaust on cultures around the world *qua* globalisation, they achieved the same

effect on themselves. As Gerry Coulter puts this same point in a discussion on

Baudrillard and Agamben, 'How many regional dialects were sacrificed on the

altar of the French and German "national" languages? How many aboriginal cults

savagely destroyed by the European settler societies?'[246]

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[245] Ibid, p.25.
[246] Coulter, Gerry, Introduction to 'Form of Life' by Giorgio Agamben, published as 'Intersections and Divergences in Contemporary Theory: Baudrillard and Agamben on Politics and the Daunting Questions of Our Time'. Published on-line in the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* at http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_2/agamben.html. July, 2005.

Yet, it is not all doom and gloom for Baudrillard, for he goes on to argue that this phenomenon offers us the chance to call into question the basic elements of millenarian morality. And while he recognises that such self-analysis may take some time given our moralists and biologists are not yet at the point where they can recognise the fundamental role played by the death drive in both the human individual and in the human race as a whole, when it is completed Baudrillard expects that this fatal enterprise will reveal something that radical philosophers already know; namely, that

> ...there is no morality to oppose to this immoral desire, this technological desire for immortality. There are no laws of nature and no moral law that would be their manifestation. The notion of such a law springs from an idealised vision of the world, one that is perpetuated...by science itself. There are no natural rights of the individual, or of the species, from the point of view of an ideal definition. Thus there is no interdiction that could be founded on a division between good and evil.[247]

Although at first glance this may seem like rather less than good news, for Baudrillard this insight brings into relief a 'moral universe' dissimulated by the hegemony of the good *qua* the mono-thought of the human. In what he describes as 'this traditional universe', there was still a balance of Good and Evil according to a 'dialectical relation that more or less insured tension and equilibrium in the moral universe'.[248] On this telling there is no supremecy of Good over Evil or vice versa, and indeed it is when this symmetrical relationship is broken that the homogenising force of the Same is unleashed in its accumulative frenzy.

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[247] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion*, op.cit, 2000, pp.27-28.
[248] Baudrillard, Jean, 'The Spirit of Terrorism'. *Le Monde*, November 2001. Translated into English by Dr. Rachel Bloul. See http://slash.autonomedia.org/article.pl?sid=01/11/14/1753229&mode=7threshold=

Baudrillard again:

> This symmetry is broken as soon as there is a total extrapolation of the Good
> (an hegemony of the positive) over any form of negativity, an exclusion of
> death, of any potential adversarial force; the absolute triumph of the Good.
> From there, the equilibrium is broken, and it is as if Evil [of the same]
> regained an invisible autonomy, developing then in exponential fashion.[249]

As Baudrillard goes on to argue in a similar vein in his 2001 essay, 'The Spirit of

Terrorism', it is exactly this breakdown which has happened in the political order

with the failure/erasure of communism and the global triumph of liberal

capitalism, whereby 'a fantastical enemy appeared, diffused over the whole planet,

infiltrating everywhere as a virus, surging from every interstice of power.

Islam'.[250] It is in this context that Baudrillard argues that Islam can be read as the

ironic (reversible) embodiment of that greatly more powerful force that resides

everywhere and in each of us; that is, a fundamental impulse to deny any system if

such a system is (apparently) close to perfection or absolute supremacy. The more

the system is globally concentrated to constitute *one* network the more it becomes

vulnerable at a single point to a challenge to its generalised system of exchange by

an irreducible alterity that must always *resist*:

> When the situation is thus monopolised by global power, when one deals
> with this formidable condensation of all functions through technocratic
> machinery and absolute ideological hegemony (*pensee unique*) what other
> way is there, than a terrorist reversal of the situation...It is the system itself
> that has created the objective conditions for this brutal distortion. By taking
> all the cards to itself, it forces the Other to change the rules of the game.
> And the new rules are ferocious, because the stakes are ferocious.[251]

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[249] Ibid, p.7.
[250] Ibid, p.7.
[251] Ibid, p.4.

It is thus (hopefully) ironic that there now exists a situation where Western

hegemony of the Good and the positive accomplishments of Western economic

expansion and technological advancement have been met by equally negative

reactions as Evil develops exponentially: the West has engendered its own

destruction at the limits of its own perfection.

For Baudrillard, then, the result of the 'terrorist act' – exemplified *par excellence*

in the attack on the Twin towers on September Eleventh 2001 – is consequently to

introduce an *irreducible singularity* into the homogenising exchange circuit.

Terror against terror. It is as if, he muses, again – musing being very much a

favoured *tone* of Baudrillard's works – every 'domination seeking' phenomenon

was the creator of its own antibody, becoming the architect of their own

disappearance – impotent against the automatic (silent) reversal of its own power.

And for Baudrillard this situation is nothing less than a *World War*, a war

irreducible to the phenomenon of the opposition of America and Islam for

example, whose very oppositionality only serves to promote the illusion of a

visible conflict and an attainable solution (through force). For for Baudrillard this

'fundamental antagonism' is nothing less than a triumphant globalisation fighting

with itself. He explains:

> In this way it is indeed a World War, not the third one, but the fourth and
> only truly World War, as it has as stakes globalisation itself. The first two
> World Wars were classic wars. The first ended European supremacy and the
> colonial era. The second ended Nazism. The third, which did happen, as a
> dissuasive Cold War, ended communism. From one war to the other, one
> went further each time toward a unique world order. Today the latter,

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virtually accomplished, is confronted by antagonistic forces, diffused in the very heart of the global, in all its actual convulsions. Fractal war in which all cells, all singularities revolt as antibodies do. It is a conflict so unfathomable that, from time to time, one must preserve the idea of war through spectacular productions such as the Gulf (production) and today Afghanistan's. But the fourth World War is everywhere. It is that which haunts every global order, every hegemonic domination; - if Islam dominated the world, terrorism would fight against it. *For it is the world itself which resists domination.*[252]

This last remark must be underlined for it captures the very 'essence' of

Baudrillard's thinking which is always – and this needs to be stressed again given

its lack of visibility in many studies – thought *against* the dictatorship of the *same*,

of the identical, the cloned, the perfect *one*, the monolith(ic). And here the world

is on *his* side, breaking and resisting the domination of the *one and only*. The

world dies of sameness, it lives *through* different deaths. It is thus absolutely

critical for understanding the quasi-logic of Baudrillard's *radical thought* as he

seeks to uncover what he calls the 'greatly more radical illusion of the world'

beneath the illusion of the Real *qua* contemporary *hyper-reality* (the 'more real

than real') that we get this point. In his essay 'The Murder of the Real', Baudrillard

articulates his notion of 'radical thought' and of radical difference against closure

thus:

> I am well aware that all of this is metaphorical. But we are not interested in generating one more truth. We are trying to recover the traces of the illusion, that is to say, the vestiges of the original crime against negativity…Against the extermination of evil, of death, of illusion, against this Perfect Crime, we must fight for the criminal imperfection of the world. Against this artificial paradise of technicity and virtuality, against the attempt to build a world completely positive, rational, and true, we must save the traces of the illusory

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[252] Ibid, pp.5-6. My italics.

world's definitive *opacity and mystery.*[253]

We have arrived here at the 'key thought' of Baudrillard's position, a position he

puts forward in varying wefts and weaves, creating those radical figures of

'opposition to the same' that pattern his texts, not least in *The Perfect Crime*

(1996); namely, that the value of thought lies not in its *convergences* with 'truth'

but in the immeasurable *divergences* which *separate* it from 'truth'; indeed our

very *consciousness* (as consciousness *of*) results from a *challenging* of reality –

that is, from what he terms 'a bias towards the objective illusoriness of the world

rather than its reality'.[254] He explains:

> This challenging is more vital for our survival and the survival of the species
> than the belief in reality and existence, which is of the order of otherworldy
> spiritual consolation. Our world is as it is, and it is no more real for that.
> 'Man's most powerful instinct is to come into conflict with the truth and,
> therefore, with the real.'[255]

For Baudrillard, then, our everyday and thus commonplace 'belief in reality' (a

fundamentally religious belief he thinks) is thus a failing of both understanding

and of common sense; it is the last refuge of 'moral zealots' and 'apostles of

rationality' who, in reducing their own lives to an accumulation of facts and

evidence, causes and effects, vent contempt on both themselves and others. In this

'divine fallacy' the real and the rational do nothing less than seek to *close* the

opening of an originary communicative exchange that functions as a condition for

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[253] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion*, op.cit, 2000, p.74. My italics.
[254] Taken from an extract of Baudrillard's *The Perfect Crime* (Verso, London and New York:
1996), and reproduced in the Second Edition of *The Selected Writings of Jean Baudrillard*. Edited
and Introduced by Mark Poster. Polity Press and Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge and Oxford:
2001, p.266.
[255] Ibid, p.266.

thought and being: The aim of such discourses is the death of thought itself. Accordingly, Baudrillard desires an oppositional, heterogeneous life – a life of radical illusion/radical alterity, a radicality that is unalienable, interminable. And, ironically, 'natural': despite the thrust of our culture of and for the same, for closure against all differences, all excesses, life wants to be, and just is, *disobedience to conformity*. Life *is, Real* life *is*, excessive of all constraints.

So, from this argument, from this Baudrillardian premise, this quasi-foundation, this position, let us now follow him as he traces this effacement of originary difference (crucially analogous, as we will later see, with Derrida's notion of *differance*) by way of his analysis of what he calls 'communication'. For it is here that Baudrillard will juxtapose our 'human communication' as it has come to be ordinarily understood with those more 'interesting relations' issuing from the mode of challenge, seduction and play, the latter making livelier things come into existence, and the former producing more of the same by putting things that *already exist* in contact with each other. This will lead by extension to an examination of the space left open for effective political resistance (if any) in our discursive landscape, and the strategies one might employ to exacerbate the reversible logic inherent in every system in its drive towards closure.

In a Spin: Re-Thinking Communication in the 'Symbolic/Semiotic Spiral'

For Baudrillard the 'common sense' idea of communication that most of us work with is a massively misleading, paradoxical one. The tracing of the argument to this effect can begin by considering his assertion that in our techno-mediascape, where communication appears to have developed exponentially through the development and proliferation of our semiotic, our mass media and our cybernetic paradigms, *there is actually less and less communication taking place*. This is because, on Baudrillard's account, what such communicative paradigms efface is the violence of the initial communicative opening that is the condition of possibility (and impossibility) of all forms of communication. That is to say, that when communication is reduced to the production and circulation of meaning, something essential to communication is lost; is disavowed. Accordingly, for Baudrillard the very fact that linguistic communication can and does occur but that it always needs supplementing, clarifying, elaborating and repeating in its 'uncertainty', is proof of this violent, arbitrary communicative opening and its co-extensive symbolic exchange as (de-) constructive of all meaningful thought.

It is just this 'deconstructive movement' – cast in his work in terms of the *symbolic-semiotic spiral* – that Baudrillard therefore seeks to articulate with his idea of reversibility, a movement perhaps best illustrated with reference to his use of Marcel Mauss's elaboration of gift exchange in *The Gift* (Mauss, 1925). For what Baudrillard finds in Mauss's gift exchange theory is an exchange which operates *outside* of the code of rationality and its attendant transcendental subject,

and whose *challenge* results in an endless cyclical process of exchange/reversal.

For the reciprocal obligation identified by Mauss in symbolic cultures and

maintained by sacrifice and ritual (in certain American tribes for example) has

nothing whatsoever to do with the re-paying of a debt (the 'normal' economic

relation), but rather with assuring the continuation of exchange *per se*. For this

reason the object exchanged has no value independent of the ceaseless movement

of reversal, a movement which consequently operates not only without reference to

meaning but, more radically, without reference to fixed difference as such.[256] The

challenge of 'the gift and counter-gift' thus manifests itself in the way in which the

experience of the other gives rise to an interminable cycle of exchange irreducible

to the logic of identity (the 'hell of the same') yet without which identity and

concomitantly communication itself (as reply *to*) would never get under way.

Now, Baudrillard's point here – as throughout his work – is *not* (as certain

Baudrillard commentators and critics have wrongly assumed and agued) to

privilege primitive cultures as such, nor to advocate one type of communication

(the symbolic) at the expense of another (the semiotic) – as critics such as Jean

Francois Lyotard[257] and William Merrin[258] are prone to do – but rather, as his idea

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[256] To re-iterate, the symbolic being no-thing ontic (not belonging to the realm of Being) but standing as a form of exchange.

[257] As Philip Jenkins argues in *Jean Baudrillard: Deconstruction and Alterity* (unpublished PhD, University of Bristol, 2001), for Baudrillard, Lyotard is symptomatic of those critics who have been 'too ready to reduce symbolic exchange to the description of an exchange of gifts between pre-existing, separate and finite terms (subjects), that is, to a discontinuous paradigm…In reducing symbolic exchange to this literal reading Lyotard fails to grasp how the symbolic is operative as an analogy whose purpose is to articulate a circulation and opening that deconstructs precisely the discontinuity of the subject/object binary that structures his own comments'. (p.72).

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of the symbolic-semiotic *spiral* suggests, to give expression to the typically

obscured or unknown but, nevertheless, irreducible movement of 'delimitation and

excess' which is nothing less than the irreducibility of time and alterity to

figuration (i.e. the always failing to capture in any figure the totality: things always

escape our artificial exchange economies). And in Baudrillard's view the

attempted effacement of this irreducibility or radical singularity (by which nothing

is ever absolutely 'the same' and so cannot be exhaustively exchanged), is nothing

less than a 'perfect crime' against communication itself. In a key passage

Baudrillard clarifies all of this as follows:

> Our common language tries, by discursive means, to inscribe reality in a
> meaning, in a form of reciprocal exchange. But today language is confronted
> by the hegemonic fantasy of a global and perpetual communication – the
> New Order, the new cyberspace of language – where the ultrasimplification
> of digital languages prevails over the figural complexity of natural
> languages. *With binary coding and decoding the symbolic dimension of
> language is lost; the materiality, the multiplicity, and the magic of language
> are erased.* At the extreme limit of computation and the coding and cloning
> of human thought (artificial intelligence), language as a medium of symbolic
> exchange becomes a definitively useless function.[259]

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[258] I quote from Jenkins succinct remarks once more to gain clarity on this issue. He states of Merrin's arguable mis-reading of Baudrillard on this point: 'in his attempt to locate Baudrillard's theory of communication (and his work as a whole) within the Durkheimian tradition...Merrin tends to set up the very binary logic that the symbolic in fact deconstructs. Instead of operating as a general condition of im-possibility, the symbolic is presented simply as a "more personal, human and social" form of exchange that is *superseded* by the mass media, "a poor substitute for human contact." Despite his accurate exposition of Baudrillard's reading of symbolic exchange, Merrin fails to explain the correlation between the content of the symbolic as a form of communication and its *inalienability*. In this way, the irreducbility of symbolic exchange becomes equated with the inalienability of a *privileged* (and more genuine?) form of communication that is "lost" in modern society. Not only does this smack of primitive idealism (rejoining Lyotard's critique). but it also means that Merrin has difficulty in explaining what it is about the symbolic that makes it "fatal": what it is about the symbolic that cannot be obliterated?...[It] is only when the symbolic is understood as a general condition of im-possiblity (articulated *metaphorically* in terms of gift exchange) that these shortcomings can be resolved'. (Ibid, 2001, p.68.)
[259] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion*, op.cit, 2000, p.69. My italics.

The hope for radical critique, which 'relies', in a sense, on acknowledging the

protean possibility of symbolic exchange as forever uncapturable, thus comes, as

always for Baudrillard, from the imperfection of the (perfect) crime (here) against

language, whose evidence comes from unsettling language itself: there can be no

definitive (metaphysical) closure that exhausts in our communications (in the

semiotic) the always in excess symbolic exchange that, in the end, tirelessly and

inexhaustively unsettles everything, reopens every attempted closure: the symbolic

as the saviour of interminable openness. Accordingly, for Baudrillard the strongest

resistance – the 'counter destructive' moment – to the destructive virtualisation of

language comes from the 'singularity, the irreducibility, the vernacularity of all

languages'[260] which are still 'alive and kicking' and which remain, in all their

stubborn, radical singularity and un-cooptability, the best guarantee against the

global extermination of meaning, of meanings – of the guarantee against

monolithic closure – of differences.

The whole question of how such 'resistance' is played out socially, politically and

economically, however, is complicated in Baudrillard's theories by his argument

as to the disappearance of the space for, and hence the possibility of, collective

'political' action, thereby questioning, it would seem, the possibility of

overthrowing the 'new world order' as he construes it with all its manifest

injustices, its inequalities and its drive towards that *criminal* state of the monolithic

and homogenous same which negates alternatives, negates radical

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[260] Ibid, p.69.

otherness/alterity, and to which he is so utterly opposed. As Chris Rojek points out in this context in his essay 'Baudrillard and Politics'[261] (*Forget Baudrillard*, 1993), it is not now a question of the masses, for example, being prone to fascist manipulation or of communism somehow raising the consciousness of the masses into resistance. No, this is too old a story. For as constituted as terminals/multiple networks, the private sphere ceases to be the stage where the drama of the subject at odds with his/her objects and with his/her image is played out, and, where most of what passes for post-war politics has been concerned to show the gap between the personal and the political and to promote a realignment between the two for the purpose of moral advancement or social improvement, Baudrillard sees only the play of the signifier as the point of resistance: of potential 'reverse'. Citing as an example the events in Paris in May 1968, Rojek points to the poverty of the well-meaning politics of the Left which, dedicated to liberating the masses, found itself incapable of escaping the vortex of simulation in which the sign continuously promised more than it could deliver – May '68 perhaps – against its express intentions, thereby coming to signal (perhaps) the end of collectivism as such.

Yet it is not the case (as Baudrillard's commentators such as Christopher Norris all too often and all too wrongly assume) that in denying the old space of politics in today's world Baudrillard has no 'political interest' (just as it is not true that

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[261] Rojek, Chris, 'Baudrillard and Politics'. In *Forget Baudrillard?*. Routledge, London and New York: 1993.

Baudrillard has no 'ethical interest').[262] For the argument being put here – and

which I hope is already being made 'convincingly'/ 'attractively' – is that

Baudrillard is ethically and politically engaged throughout. So why the common

misunderstanding by otherwise sophisticated commentators and critics? Well,

such a denial of Baudrillard's political interest arises, I think, in misunderstanding

the nature of his self-declared nihilism which is taken to oversimply mean that he

denies all meaning whatsoever and therefore must lack any substantive

ethical/political position.[263] For this not only does not follow but is 'absolutely'

not the case: Baudrillard's work is one which seeks to come to grips with the

pathological *over-production* of meaning in 'Western' societies in which 'we' are

both literally and metaphorically killing ourselves, co-extensively seeking to

examine the way in which our traditional political concepts and categories have

emptied themselves out and thus pushed us beyond contemporary understandings

of the state and politics – and thus resistance as it is conventionally understood.

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[262] This tends to result from the view exemplified by Christopher Norris and supported by the likes of Alan Sokal that Baudrillard is a 'reality-denying irrationalist'. I refer you to Norris' remarks on Baudrillard's corpus quoted on page 166 of this thesis (see fn.231). Along these lines Alan Callincicos, drawing his own political implications of such views, will speak of Baudrillard's work as likely to 'license a kind of intellectual dandyism' which abandons the kind of critical inquiry needed to critique late capitalism in favour of a banal media theory. For Callincicos therefore, Baudrillard's work thus does little more than underwrite the intellectual and political dominance of the new western middle class(es) and add to the 'political disillusionment of societies most articulate members'. (Callum G. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians*. Pearson Education Ltd, Harlow: 2005, p.166).

[263] As Baudrillard says of the misunderstandings surrounding his nihilist labelling 'What I do is more of a thought experiment which tries to explore an unknown field by other rules. This doesn't mean it's nihilistic in the sense in which nihilism means there are no longer any values, no longer a reality, but only signs... But if you take nihilism in the strong sense of a nothing-based thinking, a thinking which might start out from the axiom "why is there nothing rather than something?" – overturning the fundamental philosophical question, the question of being: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" – then I don't mind being called a nihilist.' This quote was taken from Baudrillard's *Paroxysm: Interviews with Philippe Petit*. Verso, London and New York: 1998, p.34.

And this ever-present 'engagement' can be further seen if we examine the now

well worn but still useful example of the events surrounding '9/11' (indeed '9/11'

as Event). For here we can effectively grasp Baudrillard's current arguments (i.e.,

most recently rearticulated long-term position) surrounding what he terms the

trans-political and the possibility of resistance to the dominant system such that

we can open the way for a discussion of such issues as the 'hell of power', the

aestheticisation of culture, and Baudrillard's identification of America as the

privileged site of resistance to the homogenising forces of contemporary hyper-

reality. So far as I am aware no commentators have argued the Baudrillardian

'political' in this way, and certainly not as a prelude to a comparison with Derrida.

Baudrillard and the Politics of Terror

Baudrillard sees the value - not it must be emphasised the justification[264] - of the

September 11 attack, then, as being an 'irreducible, singular, and irrevocable

challenge',[265] a challenge all the more significant in that it affects 'the system'

from the *inside*, adapting to the logic of sign exchange and sign value. Using the

banality of American everyday life as a 'mask and double game', Baudrillard

argues that the terrorists used Western planes, computer networks and the media

(combined with their own demise) to produce a *spectacle* of terror designed to

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[264] As Baudrillard argues in *Der Spiegel* in 2002 'I do not praise murderous attacks - that would be idiotic. Terrorism is not a contemporary from of revolution against oppression and capitalism...I have glorified nothing, accused nobody, justified nothing. One should not confuse the messenger with the message. I have endeavoured to analyse the process through which the unbounded expansion of globalisation creates the condition for its own destruction'.
[265] This quote comes from Baudrillard's 2001 article 'The Spirit of Terrorism', op.cit, 2001.

push the system into overdrive and hence (potentially) bring about its own extermination: a hyperreal act confronts a hyperreal system. In other words, cast in terms of the symbolic-semiotic spiral repeated across Baudrillard's *oeuvre* (see my previous remarks on communication), the terrorist act operates *through* semiotic process(es), escalating them, creating reversive forces within the system; causing it to collapse at the point of perfection: the invulnerable American land mass. Ironically – and Baudrillard's irony is at the 'essence' of his thought – it is the semiotic (*qua* the productivist economy of meaning), striving as it does to produce a world of non-events, that itself produces a desire for precisely an event of maximum consequence, a fateful event symbolically rebalancing the scales of destiny as Evil reappears to haunt the conscience of the (self-declared) Good.

In terms of its 'event-ness', September 11 thus becomes *both* a non-event – it is quickly assimilated into and recuperated within the codes/models used to represent/control it (9/11 'now happened' in the same way as the Gulf War 'now happened', i.e. as an event enclosing a radical difference) – *and* what Baudrillard describes as an *absolute* event *qua* a reversive symbolic event after which the system can never quite function in exactly the same way again. That is to say – to unpack the argument here – that the problem for the West in responding to this event is that it cannot *directly exchange* anything with the terrorists, not only because it cannot reciprocate with its own death, but because acknowledging the challenge as such would admit an irrecoverable singularity into the homogenising

logic of the global capitalist machine. Refusing to accept the master's gift of life in exchange for their servitude (to put this in a Hegelian register), and in the face of the paralysis of the Western response, the terrorist threat to the global system subsequently becomes incalculable. The American led coalition is therefore forced into a *simulation* of war and security as a strategy of deterrence and as a 'face saving' exercise designed to reassert control and reinstate the illusion of power, winning back the public imagination which remains fascinated by the terrorist spectacle, replaying incessantly the humiliating moment(s) of the twin towers collapse when the seat of virtual (and actual) capitalism took a direct hit. The terrorists wager is that this strategy will prove *fatal*. As Baudrillard articulates all of this in 'The Spirit of Terrorism', the performative genius of the terrorist spectacle is to provide a condensed image of the West's social and political processes wherein the very derision of the situation (of the terrorist act), as well as the piled up violence of power, *flips over against it*, magnifying simultaneously both the system's violence and the symbolic violence it can never access or control.

And, in the light of the American led reaction to the 9/11 suicide attacks, argues Baudrillard, it would seem that the terrorist wager is working, events seem to have unfolded very much according to the terrorist script. As Douglas Kellner pertinently affirms in his 2005 article 'Baudrillard, Globalisation, and Terrorism':

For the majority of us, the Bush administration did what Baudrillard said the terrorists would want them to do, in terms of an overreaction to the 9/11 attack that would melt the initial sympathy for the US and that would win recruits for the terrorists reacting against the excess of violence and aggression of the US response.[266]

It has thus become obvious to all but the most interested parties, Baudrillard goes

on, that the most recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (like the first Gulf War) were

won in advance, and were therefore not 'wars' in any meaningful sense.[267] As

William Merrin says of the Afghan conflict in 'Total Screen: 9/11 and the Gulf

War Reloaded':

> Beginning on 7th October with a cruise missile and bombing assault on Kabul, the war would always suffer from being a TV repeat of the Gulf War, lacking the spectacle, footage and novelty, upon a country that, as the Captain of the USS Enterprise admitted was 'not a target-rich environment'. As one General commented, the military action involved 'turning big bits of rubble into small bits of rubble'. Bombed, ramshackle, training camps, already-razed Afghan cities, mountain warfare, and a ground offensive mostly conducted with Afghani, Northern Alliance fighters, televisually indistinguishable from the Taliban they opposed (and often once been), came a poor second to the real-time, hyper visible spectacle of the imploding Twin Towers. American attempts to stage-manage the media spectacle of war and manufacture more dramatic footage of the commando raids noticeably backfired.[268]

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[266] Kellner, Douglas, 'Baudrillard, Globalisation and Terrorism: Some Comments on Recent Adventures of the Image and Spectacle on the Occasion of Baudrillard's 75th Birthday'. Published on-line at the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol2, January 2005, p.3. Found at http:///www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_1/kellner.htm.

[267] That is, in the sense both of being a one-sided war with the outcome decided in advance, and – relatedly – being largely played out in the media theatre and through virtual representations.

[268] Merrin, William, 'Total Screen 9/11 and the Gulf war Reloaded'. Published in the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Ibid, Vol. 2, No.2, July 2005, pp.15-16. Published on-line at http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_2/merrin.htm.

In this perceptive article, Merrin argues it was this failure that led to the (re)turn to

Iraq in early 2003; a country it was thought would offer a more visible and

traditional target for Western military power and one capable of restoring

American pride. However, the allied (U.S. led) operation, 'shock and awe', failed

to do either. As with the Afghan conflict, the stage-managed fall of Saddam's

statue in the centre of Baghdad and the picture of a dishevelled, elderly dictator

paraded before the world's media, hardly rivalled the impact value of the World

Trade Centre collapse. Combined with the very public failure to find weapons of

mass destruction, the visible absence of a plan for post-war Iraq, and continuing

violence, looting and insurgency, what was very much designed to be a public

relations victory turned into a show of bad conscience for the West. And for

Baudrillard nowhere was and is this bad conscience more in evidence than in the

various prisoner abuse scandals. As he argues in the opening gambit of his essay,

'War Porn':

> World Trade Centre: shock treatment of power, humiliation inflicted on
> power, but from the outside. With the images of the Baghdad prisons, it is
> worse, it is the humiliation, symbolic and completely fatal, which the world
> power inflicts on itself – the Americans in this particular case – the shock
> treatment of shame and bad conscience. This is what binds together the two
> events…Before both a worldwide violent reaction: in the first case a feeling
> of wonder, in the second, a feeling of abjection.[269]

While Baudrillard sees September 11th as providing 'exhilarating images of a

major event', he sees the images coming out of Abu Ghraib and the like as the very

opposite, a 'non-event of obscene banality, the degradation, atrocious but banal,

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[269] Baudrillard, Jean, 'War Porn', published in *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol.2,
No.1, January 2005, p.1. See http://www/ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_2/merrin.htm.

not only of the victims, but of the amateur scriptwriters of this parody of violence'.[270] The American attempt to symbolically humiliate the other *qua* an irrecuperable excess which refuses domestication into an indifferent world order turns itself into what Baudrillard will describe as a 'grotesque infantile reality-show, in a desperate simulacrum of power...a power henceforth without aim, without purpose, without plausible enemy, in total impunity'.[271] In other words, rather than inflicting humiliation on the victims or others, America humiliates itself. He goes on:

> These images are as murderous for America as those of the World Trade Center flames. Nevertheless, America in itself is not on trial, and it is useless to charge the Americans: the infernal machine exploded in literally suicidal acts. In fact, the Americans have been overtaken by their own power. They do not have the means to control it. And now we are part of this power. The bad conscience of the entire West is crystallised in the burst of sadistic laughter of the American soldiers, as it is behind the construction of the Israeli wall. This is where the truth of these images lies; this is what they are full of: the excessiveness of a power designating itself as abject and pornographic.[272]

But while Baudrillard speaks of the 'truth of these images', he is keen to point out that 'truth' is *not* veracity. Whether these pictures of prisoner abuse are true or false remains somewhat uncertain. But the point he is making is that it is their *import* which counts; the manner in which they are definitively integrated into the war. Thus they don't *represent* the war anymore – they involve neither distance, perception nor judgment – rather, precisely because of this their specific violence adds to the specific violence of the war. And so the typical Baudrillardian trope of

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[270] Ibid, p.2.
[271] Ibid, p.2.
[272] Ibid, pp.2-3.

reversibility gets articulated again, here is that 'reversing irony'; the irony of our aestheticised culture: that the *same* techno-media apparatus that enabled the Western military to control, produce and direct coverage of the war, ultimately proves self-defeating. As Baudrillard tellingly states: 'There exists in all of this... an immanent justice of the image: those who live by the spectacle will die by the spectacle. Do you want to acquire power through the image? Then you will perish by the return of the image'.[273] And so it is that no matter how many soldiers are tried and convicted of the abuse of the Iraqi prisoners in their care, the damage has been done: America has electrocuted *itself*.

Now all of this is very, very clearly 'political'[274]: in fact, Baudrillard's work is politically saturated – just as Derrida's is. And so, to develop this (novel) reading of what I argue is his quite overt and unmistakable political position further, I now want to consider his *political theorisations* on the 'global and the universal'. For as he makes clear in the article, 'Our Society's Judgment and Punishment', all of what has just been examined is evidence of the ignominy of a lost universal whose light is extinguished under the hegemonic movement of globalisation in our trans-political universe. And it is to Baudrillard's distinction *between* the 'global and

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[273] Ibid, p.3. Such passages clearly demonstrate that Baudrillard was heavily influenced by Situationists such as Guy Debord, whose concept of the 'society of the spectacle' has such resonance here. However, as my outline of Baudrillard's position already suggests, unlike the Situationists, Baudrillard holds out no hope for a hermeneutics which might find a reality under appearances.

[274] Thus directly refuting arguments which either see Baudrillard's work as effectively apolitical (Norris and Sokal for example) or uncritically compliant with bourgeois ideology (Callincicos in particular here). See page 186 of this thesis (fn.262) for a reminder of their comments to this effect.

the universal' to which I would now like to turn in order to further elucidate the

possibility (if any) he leaves open for some kind of organised *resistance* to the

homogenising forces of Western integrism (the transpolitical being the condition

engendered by the global, logistical attempt to eliminate the time and space to

resist).

The Global and the Universal

As Baudrillard explains in his essay 'The Global and the Universal', globalisation

and universality are not equivalent terms – the former pertains to techniques, the

market, tourism and information, the latter to values: to human rights, freedoms

and democratisation. And whereas globalisation (led by the USA 'everywhere')

currently seems irreversible, the universal (universal 'human' aspirations) now

appear to be almost an endangered species. He puts it this way: 'The globalisation

of [relative] exchange puts and end to the universalisation of [absolute] values. It

is the triumph of monothought over universal thought'.[275]   In Baudrillard's view,

democracy and human rights now circulate like any other global product – oil or

capital – and their expansion corresponds to their weakest definition. As Paul

Corey perceptively remarks in this context, 'what actually expands is the *spectacle*

of universal democracy, human rights, and freedom, but not reality. Liberty is

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[275] Baudrillard, Jean, 'The Global and the Universal'. Published on-line at The European Graduate School Website, http://www_egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-the-global-and-the-universal.html, p.1, 2006.

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reduced to the free exchange of wealth and information'.[276]

For Baudrillard it is the American way of life – which 'we Europeans' think of as naïve and/ or culturally worthless – which provides us with a graphic representation of the end of our values – only prophesised in 'our' countries – on 'the grand scale that the geographical and mental dimensions of utopia can give to it'.[277] No charm, no seduction here – just the absolute fascination of the disappearance of all aesthetic and critical forms of life in the 'irradiation of an objectless neutrality... insane circulation without desire'.[278] As Baudrillard cogently puts it:

> It is not just the aesthetics of décor (of nature or architecture) that vanishes into thin air, but the aesthetics of bodies and languages, of everything that forms the Europeans – especially the Latin Europeans – mental and social *habitus*, the pathos and rhetoric of social relations, the dramatisation of speech, the subtle play of language, the aura of make-up and artificial gesture. The whole aesthetic and rhetorical system of seduction, of taste, of charm, of theatre, but also of contradictions, of violence always reappropriated by speech, by play, by distance, by artifice. Our universe is never desert-like, always theatrical. Always ambiguous. Always cultural and faintly ridiculous in its hereditary culutrality.[279]

Without a hint of European nostalgia – or nostalgia for Europe – Baudrillard's America is thus described as a 'stunning fusion of a radical lack of culture and natural beauty, of the wonder of nature and the absolute simulacrum'[280] (by-passing the in-between stage of universal mediating values). The monumentality

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[276] Corey, Paul, 'Totality and Ambivalence', op.cit, 2004.
[277] Baudrillard, Jean, *America*. Verso, London and New York: 1999 (this translation), p.98.
[278] Ibid, p. 124.
[279] Ibid, p.124.
[280] Ibid, p.126.

of the landscape reminds humanity that it is just one in a series of signifying

systems, while the apocalyptic state of speed, noise and over-consumption of

American cities attests to the empty experience of contemporary hyper-reality. As

Baudrillard states in his travelogue, *America*, 'In such a place one lets oneself drift

freely while still retaining – even at the most extreme limits – a sense of

simulation'.[281] America, here, is the name of that *strange destiny* wherein

everything is fated to appear as simulation. Baudrillard brilliantly and concisely

captures this:

> Landscapes as photography, women as sexual scenario, thoughts as writing,
> terrorism as fashion and the media, events as television...*You wonder*
> *whether the world itself isn't just here to serve as advertising copy in some*
> *other world.* When the only physical beauty is created by plastic surgery, the
> only urban beauty by landscape surgery, the only opinion by opinion poll
> surgery...and now, with genetic engineering, along comes plastic surgery for
> the whole human species.[282]

All this is evidence, for Baudrillard, of the tragedy of a utopian dream made

reality: 'In the heartland of wealth and liberation, you always hear the same

question: What are you doing after the orgy? What do you do when everything is

available – sex, flowers, the stereotypes of life and death? This is America's

problem, and, through America, it has become the whole world's problem'.[283]

When everything becomes art (art is liberated) then art disappears (think

Duchamp's urinal). When everything becomes sexual (sex is liberated) then

sexual potency loses its force (think pornography). Taking the social as a case in

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[281] Ibid, p.26.
[282] Ibid, p.32. My italics.
[283] Ibid, p.30.

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point, the problem is no longer cast in terms of representation, objective needs or

desires, truth, and so on. It is no longer a problem of alienation – which assumes a

now implausible human nature and eternal essence. The problem is simply the

excess of information; it is this which Baudrillard sees as leading 'us' to the

condition of 'saturation and entropy'. As we have already seen in relation to the

Gulf 'war(s) without war' (as virtual war(s) won in advance): 'when knowledge,

through its models, anticipates the event, in other words, when the event (or

opinion) is preceded by its degraded form (or its simulated form) its energy is

entirely absorbed into the void'.[284] As Baudrillard succinctly puts it in *Fatal*

Strategies:

> Such is our destiny as the polled, the informed, the measured, confronted
> with the anticipated verification of our behaviour, absorbed by this
> permanent refraction, we are never again confronted with our own will or
> with that of the other. We are no longer even alienated, for there is no more
> other; the scene of the other, like that of the social and political, has
> disappeared. Each individual is forced into the undivided coherence of
> statistics. Extraversion without appeal, like uncertainty.[285]

Baudrillard continues in this vein. The obscenity proper to polls and the like

derives not from the betrayal of some 'secret opinion', or the intimacy of a desire,

or the violation of some sacred right to privacy, but from *statistical exhibitionism*

(or what he describes as the continual voyeurism of the group spying on itself): 'at

every moment it must know what it wants, what it thinks, it must see itself in

numbers on a video screen, decipher its temperature curves, in a sort of

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[284] Baudrillard, Jean, *Fatal Strategies*. Translated by Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski.
Semiotext(e)/Pluto, New York: 1990(b), p.91.
[285] Ibid, p.90.

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hypochondrical mania...'[286] Thus over-informed, over-fed the social becomes

obese with *itself.*

And so to the irony. Again. For for Baudrillard this socialisation process, this

obsession with the manifest visibility of the social, actually works to disguise the

fact that government policy is *de*socialising, *dis*enfranchising and (de)ejecting; that

the social order is *contracting* at this level of obesity to include only economic

exchange, technology, the sophisticated and the innovative. Expanding on this

process of *ex*-communication Baudrillard writes:

> ...as it intensifies these sectors, entire zones are 'disintensified', sometimes
> not even that: dumping grounds, wastelands, new deserts for the new poor,
> like the deserts you see forming around nucleur power stations or
> motorways. Nothing will be done to save them and perhaps nothing can be
> done, since enfranchisement, emancipation, and expansion have already
> taken place. There are none of the elements here for a future revolution; what
> we see are merely the inescapable results of an orgy of power, and the
> irreversible concentration of the world that has followed upon its extension.
> The only remaining question is this: what situation will result from this
> progressive disenfranchisement...?[287]

Baudrillard's answer seems to include both a certain violence which (as seen in

Iraq and Afghanistan) proves ultimately self-defeating, and a kind of *menopause*

resulting from a lack of new frontiers. That is to say: 'a conservative image-

conscious management of things, steady, unambitious performativity with no

thought of the future, austerity and physical training, business and jogging, the end

of the mad whirl and...the restoration of a sort of naturalist utopia of the enterprise

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[286] Ibid, p.90.
[287] Baudrillard, Jean, *America*, op.cit, 1999, p.113.

and a bio-sociological conservation of the race'.[288] And the upshot is again clear: the American cult of individualism, exercised through the discourse of freedom and human rights, leads ultimately to banality, materialism, greed and the atomisation of social life. Here anomie, paranoia, social fragmentation, structural poverty, the decline of *civitas* and civility, corruption and corporatism, lie beneath the surface of the 'winning smile'.

Yet there is, however, in the Baudrillardian schema – as my earlier remarks on reversibility and so on attest – actually room for optimism, room for resistance, some joy to be found in all of this – albeit an optimism not of a conventional type. Irony again. For William Bogard has also commented, despite the obvious injustices of simulation society (that is, despite of the attempt, by all the various interested parties, to figure time and alterity absolutely) at the same time *anything* does still remain possible, *nothing* is foreclosed, the world 'can be enchanted even in its banal simulation'.[289] And, crucially for my purposes at this juncture, Baudrillard's *America* is where we are to find this *seduction* re-introduced (albeit a cool seduction) if we are going to find it anywhere. He argues:

> I think that each of us can *resist*. I don't get the impression there could be any organised political resistance as such. It would always be an exception, and whatever you do will always be 'exceptional' in that sense. A work of art is a singularity, and all these singularities can create holes, interstices, voids *et cetera*, in the metastatic fullness of culture. But I don't see them coalescing, combining into a kind of anti-power that could invest the

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[288] Ibid, p.117.
[289] Kellner, Douglas (Ed). *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford: 1995, p.326.

other.[290]

The injunction is this then: 'You have to look either to the achievement, by saturation and concentration – by the system's excess of positivity – of a critical mass , and then it's no longer the negative but the more positive-than-positive that produces the upheaval; or to singularities, perfectly anomalous objects or events, which are neither inside nor outside [the system]'.[291]

Taking some examples already touched upon and concerning, first, the 'reversing irony' of the obesity and transparency of the system, Baudrillard will speak about AIDS, cancer, computer viruses and so on as phenomena which he thinks may save us from the afore mentioned 'hell of the Same'. For to repeat, Baudrillard sees the attempt to constitute the system into one network, into one homogenous feed-back loop where all differences are accommodated and positioned in a 'technized, banalized, upholstered, zero degree culture', as inevitably leaving the system open to attack. Working (again ironically) *through* the system and turning its own logic back against it, such viruses and the like speak ultimately of the failure to institute a perfect, glitch-free system, and, forcing the system into hysteria, shows the frailty of all simulation models (shows them *as* precisely simulations). What else can account for the fury met by spotty American adolescents who manage to hack into the American militaries top secret files/programs, and who are threatened with the kind of jail terms normally

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[290] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Perfect Crime*, op.cit, 1992, p.2.
[291] Baudrillard, Jean, *Paroxysm*, op.cit. 1998, p.63.

reserved for mass murderers? And it is this same logic that is used by modern terrorism which exploits the interconnectedness of contemporary society, its over-determination and de-territorialisation – as well as its own 'media' – to induce incredibly frightening effects by even the smallest, most random of gestures (wherein the terrorist does not even have to *do* anything – a hapless individual leaving their lunch on the tube on the way to work can induce the same effects as an actual terrorist attack).

In this same context of the 'obesity of the system', Baudrillard also talks of the scandalous resistance of 'the masses' as a nameless, faceless no-thing-ness which increases exponentially at the same time as the social and information. As Victoria Grace admirably summarises, the problem for the consensual order is that these 'silent majorities'

> ...do not respond to the simulation of the social and of the meaningful with the seriousness and responsibility required to sustain the appearance of a credible politics...there is no longer 'any social signified to give force to the political signifier' (SSM: 19). Rather than playing the game and responding to this imperative to produce meaning, to produce rational communication, the masses...resist...and take the hyperlogic of the play of signs to its most banal. Surveys, polls, referenda, tests remain the only way in which the silent majority makes its appearance, but in terms of a simulated mode of apparition, not in terms of a sociality where meaning flows from one pole to another...The silent mass refuses to be spoken of as well as to speak. And yet the demand is that they speak, that they participate...Everywhere the masses are encouraged to speak, they are urged to live socially, electorally, organisationally, sexually, in participation, in festival, in free speech'...But the mass absorbs all efforts to engage in this fabricated sociality, dispersing the signs of politics, sexuality, festivity, talk in a

meaningless void; more information produces more masses.[292]

In other words, the production of meaning has increased at a rate that has not been matched by the *demand* for meaning, such that 'power' is revealed as nothing but an 'empty simulacrum' – existing only to conceal the fact that the real is no longer real – whilst the social only exists for those on the left and the right who can still point to those not 'assimilated into the smooth functionality of hyperreal life'[293] (Grace also points to the never-employed, to gangs, to drug and alcohol abusers, to pregnant mothers, single parents, etc). And, for Baudrillard, it is precisely these groups which provide evidence of the 'virulent disruption and tearing of simulated life'[294], and thus the impossibility of totally neutralising and excluding the Other through the logic of sign-value.

I think it is therefore clear that what Baudrillard is always searching for is that certain *seduction* which interfaces with simulation where alterity and incongruity, play and obscurity distort the floating circuit of pure, seemingly stable and reliable surface images which the masses (not least) are meant to 'buy in to' or, even better, demand. Baudrillard therefore seeks out, everywhere, opposition and opacity where consensus and transparency are 'the norm'. In terms of singularity, this may mean exalting, say, singular buildings which float as if in a vacuum, anticipating future developments, challenging their surrounding architecture or

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[292] Grace, Victoria, *Baudrillard's Challenge: a feminist reading*. Routledge, London and New York: 2000, p.103.
[293] Ibid, p.104.
[294] Ibid, p.104.

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environment. Or, perhaps reading familiar texts or narratives backwards or sideways/paratactically (for example interpreting one's life not from what star sign you were born under but what star sign you are somehow fated to die under, or reading anagrammatically – or however).[295] Using the feminine as an example at this juncture, the point is not to seek another fixed (feminist) identity which remains caught within the same productivist, assimilist logic of the system, but rather to *seduce and be seduced*, challenging the masculine (i.e. productivist ontology) to constantly reveal itself as the *illusion* it is so to ensure that in the drive to make things intelligible and true the greatly more radical illusion of the world shines through in the vertiginous play of the appearance and disappearance of meaning (either of which in isolation prove truly unbearable).

This, I think, I would argue, is Baudrillard's overtly radical, overtly political position that commentators such as Norris *et al* [296] have failed to adumbrate and/or disregard/deny/not see, from which basis I now move on to examine what I consider to be – quite justifiably I think – the manifest similarities and differences between Baudrillard's general position and that of Derrida's *as I see it* with a view – established at the outset and guiding this whole chapter – to arguing that despite

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[295] As Baudrillard will suggest in the closing pages of *The Illusion of the End* (Polity Press, Cambridge: 1994): 'Might we not transpose language games on to social and historical phenomena: anagrams, acrostics, spoonerisms, rhyme, strophe and catastrophe? Not just the major figures of metaphor and metonymy, but the instant, puerile, formalistic games, the heteroclite tropes which are the delight of a vulgar imagination? Are there spoonerisms, or an anagrammatic history (where meaning is dismembered and scattered to the winds, like the name of God in the anagram). rhyming forms of political action or events which can be read in either direction?' (p.177, translation by Chris Turner).

[296] Again see page 176, fn.262.

the merits of Baudrillard's strategy/position (arguably one of the most radical in contemporary 'postmodern' thought) Derrida's way of re-figuring our self-creations and human solidarities post-modernity in the hope of fostering a fairer, freer, and more peaceful world is more promising...that in this comparison between Baudrillard and Derrida Derrida 'wins' for the types of reasons I now 'argue' for.

Part Two: Derrida and Baudrillard: A Fatal Comparison?

When undertaking the detailed comparison of Derrida's radical thought with that of Baudrillard's in order to try and justify my argument that Derrida's just *is* the best way to navigate the postmodern condition, what was immediately striking to me were the similarities between their respective quasi-logics; similarities which I now use – against the above analyses of Baudrillard – as the basis to identify what remain as important differences between the two men not least, as my opening remarks in this chapter suggest, with respect to their hopes for a more democratising and emancipating future to come. And here I want to argue that Derrida and Baudrillard both undertake readings of metaphysics-in-deconstruction which reveal the aporetic condition of im-possibility of all foundationalist thinking (modern, postmodern or whatever) *qua* an originary experience of time and alterity which resists, absolutely, all attempts at a total/totalising figuration while at the same time allowing figuration to occur. What Baudrillard registers in terms of the

repeated inter-articulation of the symbolic and semiotic finds its analogy in Derrida's quasi-logic of *differance* which, to recapitulate, Derrida describes as follows:

> *Differance* points to a *relationship* - a relation to what is other, to what differs in the sense of alterity, to the singularity of the other - but 'at the same time' also relates to what is to come, to that which will occur in ways which are inappropriate, unforeseen…it is a thought which wishes to yield to the immanence of what is coming or about to come: to the event, and therefore to experience itself, insofar as it too has an inevitable tendency, 'at the same time' and in the light of 'the same time', to appropriate whatever is going to happen: the economy and the an economy of the other, saving and dispensing, both at once.[297]

What both Derrida and Baudrillard arguably demonstrate in their own ways therefore, is the failure of the transcendental gesture constitutive of Western metaphysics to attain *closure*; what they both show is that the world is never *present* (pre-sent) in even the finest grained analyses, but always *remains* to be thought - interminably. In this vein – and tellingly – both Derrida and Baudrillard have recourse to the aporia of the law[298] in order to identify that which exceeds all fixed determination, and a relatively brief summary of their arguments here proves a useful 'heuristic device' for the wider comparative analysis of their respective positions to then be attempted and with which I bring my argument to a non (de-finitive) closure…

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[297] Derrida, Jacques, *Margins of Philosophy.* Harvester Wheatsheaf, Herts: 1982, 1996, p.203.
[298] I am much indebted (once again) here to Philip Jenkins who, in his doctoral thesis on Baudrillard states: 'An analysis of Derrida and Baudrillard's deconstruction of the *law* offers an effective means of engaging with this logic of *differance*. For both writers conceive of the law in terms of the irreducibility of time and of singularity to its legislative gesture (/), that is, as the perpetual deferral of the law'. However, while some of the arguments presented here will repeat Jenkins' thematics my originality - I hope - lies here within the wider comparison between the two theorists to which the initial presentation of these arguments *vis a vis* the law give rise. I thus acknowledge the debt, as it were, but hope to take it up in a singular fashion.

Before the Law: The Secret Passage

As I hope my preceding chapters – wherein I read the form and content of Derrida's *oeuvre* – make clear, when Derrida speaks of the aporia of the law he is effectively casting in a juridical problematic the same irresolvable tension between the empirical and the transcendental as articulated in his earliest deconstructive readings of Husserl and Saussure. And, as I said when analysing this, this aporia in-forms everything which comes thereafter. Indeed, as Derrida argues in his roundtable discussion with John D. Caputo *et al*, this aporetic tension is evidenced in the equally valid but forever incommensurable demands made on us by both the law and justice whereby, to again recapitulate, the very im-possibility of justice drives the constitutions and institutions of the law – their eternal quest for improvement and transformation. For whereas positive law can (and must) be deconstructed, justice remains the un-deconstructable condition of possibility and impossibility of judgment and thus of 'law'. And of course, to speak of justice, says Derrida, is not a matter of legal knowledge. He goes on:

> A judge, if he wants to be just, cannot content himself with applying the law.
> He has to reinvent the law each time. If he wants to be responsible, to make a
> decision, he has not simply to apply the law, as a coded program, to a given
> case, but to reinvent in a singular situation a new relationship; that means
> that justice cannot be reduced to a calculation of sanctions, punishments, or
> rewards. That may be right or in agreement with the law, but that is not
> justice. Justice, if it has to do with the other, with the infinite distance of the
> other, is always unequal to the other, is always incalculable. You cannot
> calculate justice.[299]

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[299] Jacques Derrida in conversation at the Villanova Roundtable, in Caputo, John D.,
Deconstruction in a Nutshell, op.cit, 1997, p.17.

The 'aporia of the law' – its *promise* – thus reminds us that judgments are only ever tokens of the law and never the law itself (Justice) which unfailingly and interminably *exceeds* the sum of all and every'one' of its empirical instantiations. The very notion of 'Just law' remains forever undecidable, haunted by an excess it can neither figure nor control (the law here standing in for *all* positive determinations). And it is precisely this thinking on the irreducibility of the 'in excess' to definitive figuration – to fixity (and especially any infinite/absolute fix) – which also finds itself cast in terms of the Law and its excess in Baudrillard's work – though this time it is not articulated in terms of the logic of jurisprudence. For Baudrillard, too, the Law (/) serves to institute a discontinuous form of exchange which opens up the space of meaning, depth and truth by establishing a universal limit. Formalised as signifier/signified, exchange value/use value, this legislative gesture creates the illusion of an objective reality, of knower and known, rigorously and violently excluding its own constitutive excess. However, in the same way that for Derrida the law is perpetually deferred in the name of a never satiated Justice, so for Baudrillard the law is haunted by what it must disavow in order to appear as *the* law, a disavowed which returns (always potentially, all too infrequently in actuality!) to undermine its authority. It is thus that Baudrillard has recourse to the logic of the *rule* which he shows to be the laws founding im-possibility.

For whereas the law is shown by Baudrillard to be an instance based on an irreversible continuity, involving constraints and prohibitions, he sees the *rule* as concerning cycles, the recurrence of conventional procedures, and involving obligations. The rule is thus a circular, seductive gaming space which requires neither interpretation nor production but simply observance. Playing on an immanent sequence of arbitrary signs (as opposed to the law's transcendent sequence of necessary signs) the game is kept going by the challenge and the stakes involved with that challenge, and so is dominated by a relation of two or more reversible elements. And while the election of the rule does not put an end to the Law - as with Derrida it is not a case of disrespecting or leaving the law behind as such – the necessary co-implication of rule and law marks the perpetual *differance* of the legislative gesture.

For both Derrida and Baudrillard the aporia of the law consequently becomes a question of a healthy respect for 'the *secret*' - phrased in Derrida's work in terms of 'the unpresentable' and the 'sacred' and in Baudrillard's terms of the hypothesis of a secret pre-destination of the world. In the former (as I have shown in Chapter Two through Derrida's deconstructive reading of Kant), the nature of any secret is that it must remain unpresentable, absolutely singular - in other words be irreducible to positive determination (in the form of the law or whatever). Thus Derrida will speak of the necessity of keeping our economies of knowledge open and remaining aware of those discourses – religious or secular and 'both of a

metaphysical kind' – which claim to know *the* secret; *the* answer, *the* 'final solution'. It is in a vein similar to this that Baudrillard will speak of a fatal unfurling of necessity in excess of the rational and closed order of causality – including objective contingency. In Baudrillard's view, as Zygmunt Bauman tellingly puts it in 'The Sweet Smell of Decomposition', 'there is no law that links action to outcome, there is no clear prescription [of] what one should do in order to attain the result one wishes. This world offers no certainty – but no despair either; only the joy of a right move and the grief of a failed one'.[300] In both Derrida and Baudrillard it is therefore important to 'know' that while we cannot escape the law we inescapably pass through that secret passage which shakes up our received wisdom(s) and calls us toward a certain 'experience of the impossible' (which, as Derrida remarks, is probably *the* best definition of deconstruction).

As a consequence, attentive to the excessive natures of time and alterity that always exceed our timing (our taming) both Derrida and Baudrillard are naturally concerned with the manner in which our experience of time and otherness is ordered (or better still, 'domesticated') in our current postmodern condition. Thus I now turn – with these remarks on the 'law' still in mind – to examine their respective attitudes to what they call the actu-virtual and arti-factual nature of our experience of the world. And this is crucial to register. For the importance of this comparison (their singular views on the subject having already been examined in the course of this thesis) lies in the fact that in their respective discussions of the

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[300] Bauman, Zygmunt, 'The Sweet Smell of Decomposition', in *Forget Baudrillard?*, op.cit, 1993, p.38.

shaping powers of the tele-techno-media *crucial differences begin to 'emerge'* (in particular ethico-political differences) which *do* mark a sharp divergence in their respective democratic and emancipatory hopes and desires for the future, this divergence – their dis-similarity – finding expression in their contrasting views on what Baudrillard calls – to recall – the 'global' and the 'universal'. The upshot will be that two very different ways of being-in-the-world, two very different 'modes of resistance' to the homogenising logic of the Same will emerge. I will now essay these differences in order to then give, in summary form, the 'result' of my Derrida/Baudrillard comparison *vis a vis* the thesis I've been at pains to argue.

The Tele-Techno-Media Age: The Beginning Or the End of Freedom and Equality?

In the opening gambit of *Echographies of the Television*, co-produced with Bernard Stiegler, Derrida writes:

> ...Today, more than ever before, to think one's time, especially when one takes the risk or chance of speaking publicly about it, is to register, in order to bring it into play, the fact that the time of this very speaking is artificially produced. It is an *artefact*. In its very happening, the time of this public gesture is calculated, constrained, 'formatted', 'initialised' by a media apparatus...This would deserve almost infinite analysis. Who today would think his time and who, above all, would speak about it, I'd like to know, without first paying some attention to a public space and therefore to a political present which is constantly transformed, in its structure and its content, by the teletechnology of what is so confusingly called information or communication.[301]

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[301] Derrida, Jacques and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, Polity Press, Cambridge: 2005, p.3.

And indeed it is just this concern with the artificial (re-) production of our time(s) that leads Baudrillard to speak of our living in a universe of *integral reality*: our inter-active, virtual simulation-world. But whereas Derrida's *Echographies* is a book written with the aim of encouraging a positive, critical engagement with our tele-technologies, one cannot help but be left with a much bleaker picture of our arti-factual and actu-virtual condition in Baudrillard's work – as book titles such as *The Evil Demon of Images*[302] and *The Transparency of Evil*[303] tellingly suggest. Take this series of remarks on the tele-techno-media age from the 'Evil Demon' essay as a typical example:

> The immense majority of present day photographs, cinematic and television images are thought to bear witness to the world with a naïve resemblance and a touch stoning fidelity. We have spontaneous confidence in our realism. We are wrong. They only seem to resemble things, to resemble reality, events, faces. Or rather, they really do conform, but their conformity is diabolical...[304]
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> . . . . .
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> For some time now, in the diabolical relation between reality and images...the image has taken over and imposed its own immanent, ephemeral logic; an immoral logic without depth, beyond good and evil, beyond truth and falsity; a logic of the extermination of its own referent, a logic of the explosion of meaning in which the message disappears on the horizon of the medium. *In this regard, we all remain incredibly naïve: we always look for a good use of the image, that is to say a moral, meaningful, pedagogic or informational usage, without seeing that the image in a sense revolts against good usage, that it is the conductor neither of meaning nor good intentions...*[305]

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[302] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Evil Demon of Images*. Left Bank Books: 1987.
[303] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Transparency of Evil*. Translated by James Benedict. Verso, London and New York: 1999(d).
[304] Extract from Baudrillard's *The Evil Demon of Images*, op.cit, reproduced in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*. Edited by Clive Cazeaux. Routledge, London and New York: 2000, p.444.
[305] Ibid, p.448. My italics.

And this is why, as a radical European theorist 'abroad' – and for all the manifest injustice and inequalities he finds in *his* America – 'hyperreal America' remains for Baudrillard more 'true to the state of things today' than any nostalgic 'European mind-set'. For as Baudrillard argues in *Paroxysm*[306], in America, *from the outset*, you are in a transpolitical sphere of the medium and the screen which exempts you – for better or for worse – from any social realism. As he goes on, whatever you think of this 'hegemony of the medium over there', at least it is a social 'fact'. By way of contrast, in our 'traditional world' (i.e. our European world of history and linear temporality, high culture and intellectualism) 'we' retain the 'sentimental cult of the message' (whether this message be ideological, political, psychological or cultural) whose time has now passed. And so while America may serve as an alibi for the European mind as it seeks to comfort itself that this high culture shelters us from the banality, the superficiality and the brashness of a zero-sum signification society, in fact America is the 'truth' of a generalised loss of values in the West raised to the Nth power (i.e. where the real is more real than real, the fat fatter than fat). This is not to say that Baudrillard sees Europe turning into America but that (hyper) modern America, having been born out of a rupture with Europe, now appears on Europe's horizons to haunt its bluff, good conscience as, by media injection, it spreads to all latitudes and countries *qua* the disappearance of the referent and the triumph of globalisation over a now defunct universalisation.

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[306] Baudrillard, Jean, *Paroxysm*, op.cit, 1998.

Accordingly, though at this point it is hard to argue with *much* of what Baudrillard

has to say about Europe I cannot (will not!) accept that, *after* Derrida, we are

unable to re-think the European spirit of the universal in a re-worked ethico-

political space (albeit one transformed in our actu-virtual, arti-factual age) which

might enable us to utilize the potential benefits of globalisation while minimizing

its potentially harmful effects – thus leaving the way open for the rehabilitation of

a European project. For beginning at that point where I contend that (my) Derrida

converges with Baudrillard, it is difficult, taking two recent essays written by

Baudrillard on the subject of France/Europe – namely 'The Pyres of Autumn'[307]

and 'Holy Europe'[308] – to disagree with few of the sentiments found therein. In

the first article, written in the aftermath of the Paris riots over jobs and

immigration in the Autumn of 2005, Baudrillard talks of the collapse of the

'French model'[309] before our very eyes, 'not just under external assault – acts of

terrorism, Africans storming the barbed wire at Melilla – but also from within'.[310]

And no longer finding France an 'exception' within Europe, Baudrillard regards its

collapse as symptomatic of the decline of Europe as a whole – a decline which

forms the backdrop of the riots themselves. Of this downward spiral he states:

> The first conclusion to be drawn from the autumn riots annuls all the pious
> official homilies. A society which is itself disintegrating has no chance of
> integrating its immigrants, who are at once the products and savage analysts

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[307] Baudrillard, Jean, 'The Pyres of Autumn', in *New Left Review*. Issue 37, Jan-Feb 2006.
Published on-line at http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR27101.shtml.
[308] Baudrillard, Jean, 'Holy Europe', in *New Left Review*. Issue 33, May-June 2005. Published on-line at http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR26702.shtml.
[309] By which I take him to mean the 'French model' of social justice.
[310] Baudrillard, Jean, 'The Pyres of Autumn', op.cit, p.1.

of its decay. The harsh reality is that the rest of us, too, are faced with a crisis of identity and disinheritance; the fissures of the banalities are merely symptoms of the dissociation of a society at odds with itself. 'Integration' is the official line. But integration into what? The sorry spectacle of 'successful' integration – into a banalized, technized, upholstered way of life, carefully shielded from self-questioning – is that of we French ourselves. To talk of 'integration' in the name of some identifiable notion of France is merely to signal its lack.[311]

In this 'unequal bargain of democracy', faced with its own absence or loss of reality, Baudrillard prophesises that France (and other countries) will soon be defined *solely* by the foreign bodies which haunt its periphery but who are now – and this is vitally important for Baudrillard – *ejecting it from itself*. As he argues: 'It is their violent interpellation that reveals what has been coming apart, and so offers the possibility for awareness. If French – if European – society were to succeed in 'integrating' them, it would in *its own eyes* cease to exist'.[312] Invoking his previous arguments *vis a vis* the drip feeding of the 'American model' to the rest of the world and the resistance it provokes, Baudrillard continues in what should be a familiar language and a familiar vein by now:

Yet French or European discrimination is only the micro-model of a worldwide divide which, under the ironical sign of globalisation, is bringing two irreconcilable universes face to face. The same analysis…reprised at global level. International terrorism is but a symptom of the split personality of a world power at odds with itself. As to finding a solution, the same delusion applies at every level, from the *banlieues* to the House of Islam: The fantasy that raising the rest of the world to Western living standards will settle matters. The fracture is far deeper than that. Even if the assembled Western powers really wanted to close it – which there is every reason to doubt – they could not. The very mechanisms of their own survival and superiority would prevent them; mechanisms which, through all the pious talk of universal values, serve only to reinforce Western power and so to

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[311] Ibid, p.1.
[312] Ibid, p.1.

format the threat of a coalition of forces that dream of destroying it.[313]

And indeed Baudrillard finds this same episode – the resistance of Paris rioters to the homogenising, banalising movement of globalisation – to be connected to another recent episode in the European Union which forms the basis of the second essay I briefly examine here – 'Holy Europe' – in that the recent 'No vote' in the 2005 EU referendum represents for Baudrillard the move from feelings of disaffiliation to defiance among large swathes of the European populace. He argues:

> All the excluded, the disaffiliated, whether from the *banlieues*, immigrants or 'native born' at one point or another turn their disaffection into defiance and go on the offensive. It is their only way to stop being humiliated, discarded or taken in hand.[314]

Of the 'No vote' in the referendum, Baudrillard finds most intriguing the No that lies behind the *official* No: that is, beyond political reason. For Baudrillard this is a No that resists – and a very dangerous No at that – as the manic mobilisation of the authorities behind the Yes campaign testifies. As he states, 'Such defensive panic is a sure sign of a corpse in the wardrobe'.[315] In Baudrillard's view the 'No vote' is an instinctive reaction to what the referendum was about *from the start*: the ratification of an infallible, universal Holy Europe which did not dream it would provoke such a hostile challenge. Thus he argues that the No vote is less a No to Europe as such and more a resounding No to an unquestionable Yes to the *consensual order*. Indeed the real puzzle for Baudrillard is why there has not been

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[313] Ibid, p.2.
[314] Ibid, p.2.
[315] Baudrillard, Jean. 'Holy Europe', op.cit, 2005, p.1.

an even *bigger* and/or a more *violent* reaction against what he calls such 'mindless yes-ism'. He goes on:

> The No reflex does not require a political consciousness. It is an automatic return of fire against the coalition of all those who are on the side of Universal good, while the rest are relegated to the twilight of History. What the forces of Good failed to anticipate were the perverse effects of their superiority. Since Maastricht and the 2005 elections, political correctness – whether of the right or the left – has not wanted to know about this *silent dissidence*.[316]

In other words – and repeating briefly an argument which, again, we should be familiar with by now but expressed in a slightly different register – the No vote is not a work of a negative or critical thought, but simply a check to a hegemonic principle imposed from on high to which the will of the people is a matter of indifference and the population regarded as simply manipulable masses to be deployed as alibis for whatever political project is on the agenda. The authorities are therefore quite right to be wary of referenda and direct expressions of the political will, given that this chance of *genuine representation* might contradict the official party line. After all, Baudrillard says, 'Parliaments are normally charged with laundering the operation of ratifying Europe on the quiet'[317], this being nowhere better exemplified than in the decision to go to war with Iraq without widespread public support. Such incidents only confirm for Baudrillard the *breakdown of the democratic principle* of representation and democracy under the weight of a vast simulation model which works not from the people and citizens towards the authorities (as if it ever did!) but in reverse: from the authorities down

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[316] Ibid, p.1. My italics.
[317] Ibid, p.2.

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by 'booby trapped consultation and the circular game of question and answer, where the question only answers Yes to itself'[318] – the Yes being no longer an answer, but the content of the question itself; the constant injunction to vote *itself* appearing in this context to be merely an attempt to save the *appearance* of the representation system precisely because it is the *opposite* of real representation – the forced induction of decisions taken 'in the name of the people' even when, secretly, the people think the exact opposite. Crucially concludes Baudrillard (for the purposes of *this* thesis) this referendum is no more than an episode (as Europe itself is only one more episode amongst others) on the road to a greater loss of collective sovereignty: 'Behind the figure of the passive or manipulated voter stands that of the hostage-citizen, taken capture by the ruling powers; in other words a *democratic form of state terror*'.[319]

I think that it should now be clear that much of what Baudrillard has to say here also coincides with many of Derrida's concerns: the propensity of the state for terror, the danger of sovereignty, the exclusionist logic of a *certain concept* of democracy, the problems surrounding systems of representation, and so on. Yet it also seems to me that Baudrillard's dismissal of the universal *per se* fails to recognize the possibilities of a fairer, freer, more peaceful world (I can hear Baudrillard's guffaws now!), a chance Derrida just refuses to give up on and, I think, rightly so. For while Derrida recognizes that a certain Western capitalist,

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[318] Ibid, p.2.
[319] Ibid, p.2.

imperialist spirit has indeed been destructive – leading to (World) wars,

imperialism, colonisation, genocides and the like – he cannot foreclose on another

messianic (and most importantly) *European* spirit which promises not the

elimination of all otherness but a *new world order* infinitely *open* to otherness; a

world where universal human rights, international law, freedom and equality are

opened anew in the *aporia of the demos*. While for Baudrillard the impossibility

of accommodating all differences – or better, singularities – is symptomatic of the

fallacy of an impotent universal[320] in the face of an immoral globalisation process

(arguing that the other can only ever be a source of confrontation and non-

assimilation), for Derrida this very impossibility is the im-possible source of ethics

and responsibility; an ethico-political opening which has the opportunity to form

the axioms of new and more radical systems of law, politics, economics and values

(on a local, national and international level) whereby these 'institutions' remain

forever to be made and remade in the name of a never satiated *Justice*. And while,

for Baudrillard, globalisation leads only to the 'xeroxisation of values', to the

inevitable 'hell of the Same', for Derrida globalisation takes place for *better* as

well as for worse: democracy and human rights stand a better chance of being

realised where globalisation occurs (he claims that the movement toward

democratisation in Eastern Europe owes almost everything 'to television, to the

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[320] 'Impotent' because, to remind ourselves, Baudrillard thinks that the globalisation of exchange has put an end to absolute values, where human rights and the like are reduced to 'commodities', little more than empty rhetoric in the service of an indifferent globalisation process.

communication of models, norms, images, informational products, and so on').[321]

And whereas for Baudrillard all this amounts to little more than the victory of a 'banal', 'technicised', 'upholstered' way of life whose only relief is in momentary, largely singular bouts of resistance, for Derrida, as a man of the left, the 'export' of such models, images and informational products are only dangerous if they are not accompanied by an awareness of the *artifactuality* of all that is produced. By an awareness that actuality 'is not given but actively produced, sifted, invested, performatively interpreted by numerous apparatus which are *factitious* or *artificial*, hierarchizing and selective, always in the service of forces and interests to which "subjects" and agents…producers and consumers of actuality…are *never* sensitive enough'.[322]

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have attempted to give an overview of the always already political and politicising position of Jean Baudrillard – perhaps *the* other most radical postmodern/poststructuralist thinker of our times – in order to examine both the similarities and differences between his and Derrida's work(s) with a view to arguing that, despite Baudrillard's searing analysis and 'suggestions', Derrida's still is the best way to navigate our postmodern condition after the end of history's *ends*. For while I regard Baudrillard's texts as fantastically useful (not to mention incredibly interesting and provocative for those attempting to think our *times*) I

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[321] Corey, Paul, 'Totality and Ambivalence', op.cit, 2004.
[322] Derrida, Jacques and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies*, op.cit, 2005, p.3.

have sought to demonstrate that a number of his presuppositions remain rather weak and suspect. For whereas in my readings of Derrida I perceive a strong, critically minded post-historical, post-modern subjectivity capable of being developed in and for our postmodern age – that is to say for our contemporary world such that we experience it in our actu-virtual and arti-factual condition – I find Baudrillard's ruminations and musings on the relative paralysis of the subject in the virtual world (towards which, he argues, we are moving ever closer) pessimistic and too dismissive of radical possibilities by comparison. Some of this, it has to be said, is due to the strategy or the position Baudrillard adopts whereby he writes less about what is actually going on here and now (though of course, as we have seen, he does do this) and more in a prophetic, exaggerated, hyperbolic, and increasingly fragmented style of what may *possibly* happen if (what he sees as) the worse trends of our current condition are actualised. Yet it cannot be denied that in the face of liberal capitalist democracies such as they function imperfectly in our present world order, Baudrillard holds out little hope for significant emancipatory or democratic changes in terms either of our self-creations or human solidarities. Against the immense simulation models that he sees enveloping our lives, shaping our experiences and ultimately destroying meaning and critical thinking through the paradoxical overproduction of meaning, Baudrillard only anticipates certain internal malfunctions of the system, singular and fleeting bouts of resistance that are quickly forgotten or incorporated back within the logic of a system which can be shaken but, ultimately it would seem,

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not significantly changed – the apocalypse is behind us; the weightlessness of the system seemingly absorbs every challenge.

Thus I would wish to conclude that, while sharing many of the same fundamental insight into what this thesis refers to throughout as the *differential matrix* (i.e. empirical-transcendental *differ-a-nce*), Baudrillard fails to adequately seize the opportunity Derrida both helps provide and grasp for a re-thinking of our post-historical, post-industrial, post-modern self-creations and human solidarities in more exciting democratising and emancipating ways. While certain concepts of the state, sovereignty, friendship, subjectivity, democracy, emancipation, tolerance etc… are demonstrated by both Derrida and Baudrillard to be inadequate and in need of serious revision post-modernity, it is Derrida who most cogently and coherently develops the conceptual tools for imagining a 'brave new world' in which, having re-thought our inheritance on a theoretical and practical level, new and more radically free and fair, future orientated subjectivities and collective enterprises could be imagined in a new world order without beginnings and without *ends*.

Conclusion: A Certain Appearance in its Favour.

I began this thesis with the following reply given by Derrida in a 2002 interview to the question: 'What are the central questions philosophy came into existence to answer?' To remind ourselves, he replied:

> First of all, how to handle one's life and live well together – which is also politics. This is what was addressed in Greek philosophy, and from the beginning philosophy and politics were deeply intertwined. We are living beings who believe we have the capacity to change life, and we place ourselves above animals…we have the ability to make decisions and organize our lives. Philosophy poses the question: what should we do to have the best possible lives? I'm afraid we haven't made much progress in arriving at an answer to this question.[323]

I end this thesis 'without closure': that is, in a way which attempts to bring the threads of the argument(s) presented here (and laid bare in the abstract) together in order to support my abiding belief – as a postmodern/post-structural woman of the left – that by taking a gamble on embracing our (current) aporetic condition – as grasped through Derrida's theoretical and practical theorisations – we might look *forward* to a fairer, freer, more peaceful world after the end of history's ends and that this motive was clearly Derrida's from the very 'political' beginning. Thus it is that, in my opinion at least, questions on 'how to handle one's own life and live well together' and 'what we should do to have the best possible lives' are

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[323] Taken from a transcript of an interview with Kristine McKenna for LA Weekly. Nov 2002. The interview reproduced in full in *Screenplay and Essays on the Film: Derrida*, op.cit, 2005, p.119.

'answered' exemplarily – if de-finitively – in Derrida's texts in what amounts to an infinite negotiation with, and respect for, the other.

One of the chief aims of this thesis – and one undoubtedly conditioned by my predominantly historical 'training' rather than any predominantly philosophical background/training (though the two, of course, are irrevocably intertwined) – has been to grasp, with an ironical historical consciousness working itself out in 'postist' ways, the sheer *epoch-changing nature* of the Derridean inheritance as I see it. As my introductory remarks to this thesis suggested, I felt, early on, that there was an unfortunate gap in the literature in the sense of a really wide-ranging examination of the Derridean corpus which struck the right balance between establishing the 'quasi-' philosophical basis of Derrida's deconstructive thinking – read in this thesis (chiefly) through Kant, Marx, Saussure and Husserl – and investigating his co-extensive concrete interventions in what are traditionally regarded as more practical and overtly political concerns; i.e., immigration, human rights, terrorism and such like– though of course Derrida shows that the two strata (the theoretical and the practical) are fundamentally interfaced and that this distinction is itself simplistic and problematical.

Indeed part of what attracted me to an examination of Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's work – in conjunction and comparison with Derrida's – was the impression that the reading of her *Sequel to History* had on my sensibilities so far as fostering my

belief that we are in a new post-historical, post-modern age; an age/epoch opening us up to the possibility of potentially more democratising and emancipating ways of thinking and being-in-the-world. And while I concluded in Chapter Two that Ermarth's theorisations ultimately fell short (both ontologically and ethico-politically) of providing 'us' with the *best* conceptual tools for navigating our (still *too* metaphysical) arti-factual and actu-virtual postmodern condition, I felt that the *seismic shift* in consciousness she was describing was very much to the point in thinking *through* our times.

And indeed it was this concern with thinking (through) our *times* – in every sense of this word – that led me to compare (in Chapter Four) Derrida's *oeuvre* with that of fellow quasi-philosopher of the limit, Jean Baudrillard. For Baudrillard's work on simulation, reversibility, the symbolic-semiotic spiral, the 'hell of the Same' and so on, struck a chord with my own (and Derrida's) interest in the ways in which our experience of the postmodern world is structured and controlled in still too foundational ways and to which we remain *too insensitive as critical beings.* In particular I felt – despite sharing a discomfort with the whole 'postist' phenomenon generally – that in *conjunction* with Derrida's theorisations, Baudrillard's work really enables us to grasp that *excess of time and alterity* which escapes all attempts at closure (modern, postmodern or whatever) and which therefore leaves the future open in the name of a radical otherness that *always* resists incorporation – hence my classification of both men as *postmodern*

resistance fighters. And while I have eventually come to the conclusion that

Baudrillard's thematics remain just too pessimistic and thus in a way, slightly

irrelevant, so far as translating this irreducible excess into imagining strong

postmodern subjectivities and collective enterprises, I nevertheless regard the

readings of Baudrillard as presented in this thesis to be both new/original and

useful in helping us comprehend the *stakes* involved in taking a chance on

embracing our aporetic condition *vis a vis* re-formulating our self-creations and

human solidarities in (potentially) more democratising and emancipating ways.

But it is to Derrida that I always return and especially to his vision for a 'brave

new world' which may emerge out of this 'age of the aporia'; an age or condition I

have argued that Derrida sought to bring to consciousness from his very earliest

work (*Origins of Geometry, Of Grammatology, Margins of Philosophy, Writing

and Difference*). For as I showed in Chapter One, what Derrida therein developed

was a quasi-philosophy of language which de-naturalises what is conditioned by

history, institutions and society, and opens the (aporetic) ethico-political space for

new self-creations and human solidarities to be imagined *without foundation*; that

is, construed and defended on a *moral/aesthetic basis alone*. And while for

Derrida (and *contra* Ermarth) this never meant that such self-creations and human

solidarities *will necessarily* work themselves out in more democratising and

emancipating ways (as if by some analogous law of physics say) Derrida clearly

does believe that the deconstructive movement he helps uncover *best* lends itself to

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a more open, plural, friendship-based relation to the Other (which is to say *at the same time* the other in me). For while Derrida is not some hopelessly naïve utopian – he speaks in the *LA Weekly* in 2002 of the human animals capacity for cruelty and the pleasure that can result from making the other suffer – he nevertheless argues that such a seemingly negative drive, such a violent relation to the other, can be transformed (at a lower level of violence) into something *beautiful and sublime*; an aggressive energy which can be handled and negotiated in philosophy and thinking in more interesting, less despicable ways. This is the basis for the kind of critical thinking I believe Derrida to espouse – a *challenge* to both oneself and the other to argue, to fight, to negotiate, to be passionate about ones moral/aesthetic values/choices without resorting to killing or humiliating or closing the door to the other (that is, also, to the future) in the name of some inalienable rights or foundationalist/totalising beliefs.

Thus, as I argued in Chapter Two, Derrida opens the way for developing greatly more radical postmodern subjectivities which are substantially more sensitive to their surrounding technical conditions and open to re-thinking our various economies without blind recourse to old, radioactive habits of thought. That is to say, in the first place, *less* narcissistic (without being non-narcissistic) subjectivities that are more or less 'comprehensive, generous, open, extensive'. In contradistinction to modernity's sovereign subject and its history (for which it remains, as Ermarth argues, a constitutive alibi), the postmodern subject recognises

itself to be 'thrown' into an inherently foundationless, inter-textual discursive landscape which preceded its 'birth' and will survive its 'death', wherein the 'history of meaning' is transformed into a 'politics of memory' – 'a situation which has no omniscient narrator or supersensible deity to guide or take responsibility for the idiomatic (without of course being quite idiomatic) path to be forged'.[324] It is thus that I argue that this kind of *liminal* subjectivity is beyond the end of history's ends and is therefore the existential embodiment of the *affirmation of life*. To put this another way, such affirmative subjectivities rejoice in the heterogeneity of an inheritance (always more than one) which impels one to 'filter, select, criticise' in the face of the secret which says 'read me, will you ever be up to it'. These are subjectivities which just *are* happy to live with the endless drawing and re-drawing of boundaries, with the infinite injunction to read and re-read others infinitely and not de-finitively; to let a little newness enter the world; meeting the challenge of the other not with hostility or fantasies of 'property, appropriation and colonial imposition' but with respect, grace, humility and humour – even when critical or polemical. It is to this kind of self-creation that, after Derrida, I attribute the axiom: 'I inherit, therefore, I am...yes, yes...'

And, crucially for this thesis, it is this postmodern, post-historical subjectivity[325] to which I think Derrida, supremely, gives voice, a voice working itself out beyond the ends of *endist* history, which I conclude best enables us to re-figure our

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[324] See page 94 of this thesis.
[325] Once again, always more than one.

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understandings of Western liberal capitalist democracies and their modern-metaphysical conceptual genealogy in more democratising and emancipating ways. Derrida offers 'us' a real, *practical* opportunity *via* his conception of a new global solidarity; the risk and the chance of fostering a fairer, freer and more peaceful world. As I have argued in Chapter Three, the ethico-political space of the decision uncovered through his early writings surrounding the '*differential matrix*' subsequently translates, by way of Derrida's meditation on various spirits of Marxism, into a hauntological quasi-logic which sets forth a deconstructive reading of capitalism, its media and self-justifying ideology; in the process undercutting the theory and practice of a certain sovereignty practiced in the security of the *logos*. As shown, Derrida will argue, *after* Marx, that this hyper-relativist aporetic space of the decision – which he shows to be nothing less than the *aporia* of the *demos* – has the potential to inaugurate (in the best of all possible Derridean-type worlds) a new Enlightenment rationality elaborated in accord with a new *morality* (on an individual and communal level), namely attention to and affirmation of otherness, the new and the other leading, ideally, to the de-mystification of all totalising political theology and its sovereign subject and thereby challenging the very basis of our modern liberal capitalist democracies and the tradition to which we are heir.

In this elaboration of Derrida's ethical and political concerns, as demonstrated in this study present 'from the beginning', the above task is one which Derrida

regards 'we Europeans' as being particularly suited to given our common experiences, traditions and actions; these things, he argues, have endowed 'us' with a unique political consciousness and sense of duty to think 'reason' and new ways of being together other-wise. And, crucially for the moral/aesthetic positioning of this thesis regarding its own vision for a brave new post-metaphysical world, in pointing to all of the manifest injustices and inequalities still present in the world today (famine, war, human rights abuses to name but a few) Derrida is keen to argue that this is not a challenge we can afford to refuse or put off. To recap, in a (certain) Marxist spirit, Derrida argues that we must endeavour, *here and now*, in concrete and urgent situations, to question liberal capitalist democracies such as they operate in a juridico-political space increasingly shaped by the powers of the tele-techno-media and over-determined by the world's strongest nations for whom 'might means right'. Thus it is that Derrida (with Habermas) calls upon Europe as a whole to take a central role in fostering a more democratic and emancipating civic solidarity which might be translated onto the world stage in terms of global solidarity (in the form of a New International) ever sensitive to the need for the continual improvement of all laws, institutions and organisations in the name of an *infinite justice*. As I have argued it is *this* Europe, endowed with the military force and diplomatic powers set to work in the service of new international institutions and new international law which Derrida hopes may help regulate and remedy the manifest injustices and paradoxes of globalisation in the international order and thereby literally change the world for

the better (from a radical, pluralistic left wing point of view). Once again, all of this represents for Derrida both a risk and a chance of the best and the worst happening, but is a risk and a chance which with Derrida, I concur in thinking it to be one well worth taking.

But if all of this isn't to remain at an impossibly abstract level several times removed from most peoples everyday concerns, that is, if the 'real' benefits of Derrida's kind of textual praxis (on a theoretical and practical level) are to be felt (as I see them from my position stated at the outset) then I think that in both academia and the media *things have to change*. In the closing remarks of this thesis, I would like to sum up what, *after Derrida* and from my perspective, what needs to be done.

In the first place, as far as Derrida and academia (and the intelligentsia) is concerned, I think that what he has to say about the teaching of philosophy, about critical thinking and intellectual courage in particular, is more important/relevant today than it has ever been – albeit several decades after much of the sentiment found therein was first expressed. It was in 1975 that Derrida helped found the 'Research Group for the Teaching of Philosophy', which tried – and ultimately failed – to persuade (then) colleagues and French citizens of the need for philosophy – philosophy proper *and* philosophy *across borders* – to be taught in schools earlier than the last grade of high school (earlier than 16 or 17 years old).

It seems to me that the kind of quasi-philosophical deconstructive thinking Derrida advocates is, even when recognised, *still* too poorly developed in the education system as a whole and, at least from a British perspective, remains at best marginal even at university level. In the essay 'Once Again From the Top: Of the Right to Philosophy'[326], Derrida spoke of the need to give secondary teachers at junior and senior level, *whatever the disciplines they were preparing to teach*, an understanding of philosophy during their years of training – and I take him to mean not just the obligatory dose of 'pseudo-theory' so often packaged under the aegis of 'Study' and or 'Learning Skills'. For Derrida it remained a question of making philosophy popular (ironic, perhaps, given his infamous 'difficulty') while at the same time addressing the paradoxes surrounding this terms and the importance of isolating *both* the specificity of philosophy and the inter-disciplinary relations between philosophy and its other – these questions remaining for him in-dissociable from the *great question of democracy-to-come* (in Europe and elsewhere).

What Derrida advocates – and not just in philosophy but also in departments of literature, religion, law, history and the rest (though as the absolute source of legitimation philosophy remains exemplary) – are programs which are 'open-ended, porous, experimental, non-programmable, vigilant, self-questioning, self-

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[326] Derrida, Jacques, 'Once Again From the Top: Of the Right to Philosophy'. in *Points.* translated by Peggy Kamuf, op.cit, 1995.

revising, exposed to their other, inventive of the other'.[327] Thus, for example, it is

not difficult to see how Derrida's quasi-philosophical thought impacts on the way

law is conceived and taught (with his remarks on justice and the law); or history –

with his remarks on messianicity and 'the other heading' – or political theory –

with his deconstruction of traditional concepts of sovereignty and friendship, and

so on. But, of course, that these subjects all share a common, interchangeable

conceptual heritage is what makes cross disciplinary awareness, investigation and

co-operation particularly important, a factor motivating Derrida's dream of a

writing that would 'inhabit the distance between the departmental academic

specialities of philosophy or literature or law, or architecture, or religious

studies...something absolutely new, absolutely singular and unprecedented'.[328] I

believe that not enough progress in this area has yet been made at either secondary

school, college or university levels given what this thesis has shown, following

Derrida, to be the stakes involved in re-thinking old philosophical/metaphysical

habits of thought.

And in pressing for such changes this is where (after Derrida once again)

intellectuals must have *courage*, including the courage to redefine the figure of the

intellectual subject itself in a public space (as we have already seen and argued)

profoundly transformed by tele-technology and the media. As Derrida makes clear

in his very last interview with *Le Monde*, the intellectual he envisaged must resist

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[327] Caputo, John D., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, op.cit, 1997, p.70.
[328] Ibid, p.69.

populist pressures and concerns, resist the sensationalism of some media intellectuals and the demands from various politico-economic lobbies and continue to remain sensitive to the way the development and proliferation of technics conditions the arguments and in-particular our relation to the other. This is not to say, once again, that Derrida thinks we should avoid the media; rather, as I argue in Chapters Two and Three, Derrida thinks the media should be diversified: always, always, 'more than one'. After all, only if we open, and *keep open*, the (ethico-political) space for new kinds of discussion about contemporary issues of all kinds – racial, sexual, religious, humanitarian, economic, social, etc… – within which the media along with academia has a vital role to play – can we hope to raise to consciousness the radically more democratising and emancipating possibilities for our self-creations and human solidarities to which Derrida, *exemplary* in my opinion, gives voice. Indeed helping to keep such a discursive space open has been the main aim of this study: Derrida neither warrants nor knows of, nor ever wanted, a purely 'academic thesis'.

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