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Author(s): Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

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Responsibility

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Responsibility annuls the call to which it seeks to respond.

What is it, then, to be responsible to a changeful thought on the question of responsibility? “[W]hat could be the responsibility . . . [toward] a consistent discourse which claimed to show that no responsibility could ever be taken without equivocation and without contradiction?”¹ To open an essay with such a question is perhaps already to betray the ideal of academic responsibility in which one was trained. That ideal was to give an objective account of an argument with textual demonstrations, and subsequently to evaluate it, on its own terms as well as by the standards of an impartial judgment. By comparison with the imperatives of that austere responsibility, the first years of this writer’s teaching career, which began in 1965, seemed to be haunted by demands of an extreme irresponsibility toward the impersonality of history and augury: “Do we like it?” “Is that relevant to us?” and then, “to me?”

1. Jacques Derrida, “Passions: ‘An Oblique Offering,’” in David Wood, ed., *Derrida: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 9.

To open an essay with the question of responsibility to a thought precisely of responsibility from which a lesson of responsibility is learned goes against the grain of both those imperatives. For it is, first, to show that one is already partisan, and, secondly, it is to reveal that one's anxiety is for one's responsibility to the text, not the other way around. Yet, is there not something like a resemblance between those imperatives—requiring objectivity toward, or relevance from, the text—and my opening question? For have we not guessed that the early lesson of disinterested objectivity was, in fact, an unacknowledged partisanship to a sort of universalist humanism which dictated that one show, even if by the way and by default, that the literary or philosophical text in general is good. And as for the other, does one not, given the current demand for the justification of an interest in “deconstructive philosophical speculation” in a politically inclined female migrant, demonstrate again and again its relevance to such inclinations and such provenance?

How, then, to be responsible to the warning for:

a community of well-meaning deconstructionists, reassured and reconciled with the world in ethical certainty, good conscience, satisfaction of services rendered, and the consciousness of duty accomplished (or more heroically still, yet to be accomplished)?²

or to the reminder that it is especially when the philosopher—or anyone—tries and tries to explain and reveal, and the respondent tries and tries to receive the explanation and the revelation, that the something that must of necessity not go through is the secret and changeable “essence” of that exchange?

Perhaps there is no answer to this question but the constant attempt “to let oneself be approached by the resistance which the thinking of responsibility may offer thought.”³ Perhaps to be responsible to the question of responsibility is not to resist what will have happened, that the reader(s) will have judged, necessarily with, and in spite of, standards, necessarily related and different. In this the thought of responsibility is a more affirmative formulation of what was written thirty years ago: “[T]hought is . . . the blank

2. Derrida, “Passions,” 15. The following passage is my understanding of pages 20–22 of the same text.

3. Jacques Derrida, “Shibboleth,” in Derek Attridge, ed., *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 373; wording modified.

part of the text.”⁴ If deconstruction comes tangled with responsibility to the trace of the other, the reader(s) stand(s) in here as the indefinite narrow sense of that radically other which cannot even (have or) be a face.

For this reader, the difficult giving of permission to be approached by that which most resists thought is susceptible to a literal translation (with all the necessity and impossibility that translation calls for and by which it is called).⁵ This specific “translation,” in this essay, takes off from a literal understanding of statements such as the following:

[T]hese new responsibilities cannot be *purely* academic. . . . Between . . . [the principle of reason and an-archy] . . . only the setting-to-work [*mise-en-oeuvre*] of this “thought” can decide. . . . To claim to eliminate that risk by an institutional program is quite simply to erect a barricade against a future.⁶

One attempts, then, to set the thought of responsibility to work in ways that are not *purely* academic. The peculiar (con)textualities of the theaters where each of these attempts is made inscribe an experience of the necessity of such translations and their impossibility. These experiences also teach how conservative it is to remain content with radical institutional programs.

Not being a philosopher by talent and training, I cannot philosophize the delicate ruptures involved in the brutality of these literal translations. That more profound speculation would look upon the night of non-knowledge and non-rule in which all decisions are taken, even when it is the most detailed knowledge that has been set most responsibly to work. (This sentence already begs the question of responsibility, assumes its

4. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 93.

5. For the necessity and impossibility of translation, see Jacques Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel,” in Joseph F. Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165–207.

6. Jacques Derrida, “The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils,” *diacritics* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 16, 19; my emphasis. For an indication of a distinction between this and Gianni Vattimo’s discussion of “setting-to-work” in Heidegger, see my “Psychoanalysis in Left Field; and Field-working: Examples to Fit the Title,” forthcoming in Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow, eds., *Speculations After Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Most philosophical studies of alterity in deconstruction ignore this “activist” or changing-the-world category of the nonphilosophical as interpretation’s other.

nature known.) The space of this essay may be distinguished from those more perilous watches as the quicker tempo of the eve and the morning-after of that night, the night of non-knowledge, when a just decision tears time, the time of effect following just cause.⁷ What the two spaces share is that “the limit of . . . [the] formalization . . . [of a problematic is] a sort of intermediary stage.”⁸

This is perhaps one way of being responsible to the thinking of responsibility, that whatever is formalizable remains in a sort of intermediary stage. The rest cannot be *purely* formalized. These steps must be formally taken *and* experienced as limits before the usual beginnings can be made. Full formalization itself must be seen not as impossible but as an experience of the impossible, or a figure for the impossible, which may be to say the “same thing.”⁹

I can formalize responsibility in the following way: It is that all action is undertaken in response to a call (or something that seems to us to resemble a call) that cannot be grasped as such. Response here involves not only “respond to,” as in “give an answer to,” but also the related situations of “answering to,” as in being responsible for a name (this brings up the question of the relationship between being responsible for/to ourselves and for/to others); of being answerable for, all of which Derrida presents within the play, in French, between *répondre à* and *répondre de*. It is also, when it is possible for the other to be face-to-face, the task and lesson of attending to her response so that it can draw forth one’s own. (I believe both Derrida and Luce Irigaray have seen the psychoanalytic model at its impossible best to accede to this sense of responsibility.)¹⁰

7. Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, a special issue of the *Cardozo Law Review* 11, nos. 5–6 (July–Aug. 1990): 967.

8. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ix–x.

9. Derrida says this of justice (“Force of Law,” 947) and of the gift (not a figure but “the very figure of the impossible—a distinction we cannot elaborate here” (*Given Time*, 7). Am I right in thinking that every word is susceptible to this sea-change? “But such is the condition of all the words that we will be using here, or all the words given in our language—and this linguistic problem, let us say rather this problem of language before linguistics, will naturally be our obsession here” (*Given Time*, 18).

10. For Derrida, it surfaces in that cryptic sentence—“I am psychoanalytically irresponsible”—in “Geopsychoanalysis: . . . ‘and the rest of the world,’” *American Imago* 48, no. 2 (1991): 203–4. For Irigaray, see “The Limits of Transference” and “The Poverty

With this formalization of the problematic of responsibility, seen as an intermediary stage, caught between an ungraspable call and a setting-to-work, this essay will offer two readings, of Derrida's *Of Spirit* and of the Conference on the World Bank's Flood Action Plan in Bangladesh.¹¹ My readings will insist that (the thinking of) responsibility is also (a thinking of) contamination. If one will, then, seem to have shown that deconstruction is relevant to what is called the political sphere, after all, it will be the moment to ask you to remember that such demonstrations can only happen within the intermediary stage.

1. Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question

Of all the texts of Derrida that I have read, this seems to me to be the one that assumes in the reader a careful and intimate reading of all the texts on method that have come before, a familiarity with a specialized vocabulary that might otherwise seem deceptively "metaphorical" or transparent. It is, therefore, a "secretive" text, both in the colloquial, and in the Derridian, sense. In the first sense, because it seems to guard its own secret, it is difficult to understand. (To a careless speed-reader, it will even provide confirmation of stock responses.) In the second sense, because, even though to the responsive reader, the text wishes to reveal itself to the full, it still seems to leave the reader with questions. There is nothing authorized about the reading I offer below, and especially about the "reasons" that I submit for the secretiveness of the text. Indeed, I have not tried to pry out the secret by referring to less secretive writings by Derrida on the Heidegger question. The secrecy of the secret does not disappear with revelation. "The secret never allows itself to be captured or covered over by the relation to the other, by being-with or by any form of 'social bond.' . . . No *responsiveness*."¹²

One of the reasons for the "secretiveness" may be the impossibility of a fully justified position of accusation.

of Psychoanalysis," in Margaret Whitford, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1991), 105–17, 83–84.

11. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). This work is hereafter cited in my text as OS. The conference took place at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, 27–28 May 1993.

12. Derrida, "Passions," 24. "Responsiveness" in English in the original.

In one respect, *Of Spirit* traces Heidegger's seeming failure of responsibility toward his own thinking. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger had found it prudent to keep the question of the spirit open, broachable only within quotation marks, if at all.¹³ Already in the opening pages of his text, Derrida suggests that, in fact, Heidegger's entire earlier philosophy was dependent upon a question of the spirit that was merely avoided or foreclosed. The spirit works away at the text, finally to emerge with a terrifying role, perhaps precisely because its question had been avoided. Toward the end of section 5, Derrida demonstrates this with reference to the Rectoral Address¹⁴: "[S]uddenly, with a single blow . . . , the lifting of the quotation marks marks the raising of the curtain. . . . [T]he entry on stage of spirit itself. . . . Six years later, and here we have the *Rectorship Address*" (OS, 31; I take responsibility for extrapolating from this closely orchestrated prose).

Here, for the first time, Derrida writes, Heidegger defines spirit. The definition is not in contradiction with *Being and Time*, for spirit still does not seem to belong to subjectivity, "at least in its psychical or egological form" (OS, 37). We are not speaking, in other words, of the human spirit, even in the most metaphysical sense. Thus, by appealing to such a "spiritual force," unattached to the merely human, the address may

seem . . . no longer to belong simply to the "ideological" camp in which one appeals to obscure forces—forces which would not be spiritual but natural, biological, racial, according to an anything but spiritual interpretation of "earth and blood." (OS, 39)

But, and this is why we must proceed cautiously, every comparable gesture turns back "against its 'subject'"—against, if I may say so, its agent, for "one must . . . use this word, in fact. . . . Because one cannot demarcate oneself from biologism, from racism in its genetic form, one cannot be *opposed* to them except by reinscribing spirit in an oppositional determination" (OS, 39). Thus, one binds the philosophical a-partness of spirit by determining it into a narrow sense as that which is the opposite of biologism or genetic racism. It loses its (non)character of guarding question. Hence, it no longer remains prior to—or outside of—all differences between sub-

13. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962).

14. Martin Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University: Address, Delivered on the Solemn Assumption of the Rectorate of the University Freiburg: The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," trans. Karsten Harries, *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (March 1985): 467–502.

ject and whatever is not subject. It belongs to the subject(s) who rallies (or rally) in its name. It becomes negotiable. It is made to take a side and thus becomes unilateral. Thus,

reinscribing spirit in an oppositional demarcation, . . . once again mak[es] it a unilaterality of subjectivity, even if [especially?] in its voluntarist form. This constraint . . . reigns over the majority of discourses which, today and for a long time [he cannot say forever] to come, state their opposition to racism, to totalitarianism, to nazism, to fascism, etc., and do this in the name of an axiomatic—for example, that of democracy or “human rights”—which, directly or not, comes back to this metaphysics of *subjectivity*. . . . The only choice is the choice between the terrifying contaminations it assigns. Even if all forms of complicity are not equivalent, they are *irreducible*. The question of knowing which is the least grave of these forms of complicity is always there—its urgency and its seriousness could not be overstressed—but it will never dissolve the irreducibility of this fact. . . . [I]t calls more than ever, as for what in it remains to come after the disasters that have happened, for absolutely unprecedented responsibilities of “thought” and “action.” (OS, 39–40)

I have quoted this passage at such length because it should be read carefully and slowly. No academic eager to take sides (in “thought”) cleanly without any “active” responsibility wants to acknowledge the final and irreducible complicity between *all* unilateral binding of the spirit in a single cause. And all sustained “activists” know that victories are warnings, without being able to articulate it philosophically, and often silencing that knowledge in the interest of the decision. Derrida attempts to deconstruct that gap. It is not that we must not take sides. We must continue to know, and to make known, “which is the least grave of these forms of complicity.” It is just that the decisive testing of the intellectually clear “thought”—which can construct systemic ways and means of avoiding logical risks through the fine-tuning of knowledge—must therefore be in “action,” the element of which is the risky night of non-knowledge. This is a position against the vanguardism of theory, not against risk-taking. It is not heroic enough for armchair left liberals. But for those of us who have seen Gandhi’s *Rām-Rājyā* (the kingdom of Rāma), where, to give Gandhi the benefit of a doubt that he perhaps did not fully deserve, Rāma was a nomination of the spirit of indigenous democracy, become the excuse for a state on the brink of a fascism committed to the genocide of Muslims; and who have seen Marx’s

project of the proletariat's collective use of reason (class-consciousness), where rationality is the nomination of the human spirit, become an imperialism that, in postcoloniality, hankers after an underdeveloped capitalism as an alternative to genocide; and for those of us who daily see the covert and overt violence regularly practiced by the ideological and systemic manipulation of rational principles, such as due process, human rights, and democracy—these warnings must be taken seriously. We cannot necessarily assume, however implicitly, that the European-style invocation of spirit is uncontaminated, whereas other invocations of spirit are by definition ignorant or fundamentalist.¹⁵ The passage I have quoted is hard to understand only if the lessons of history (“the disasters that have happened”) have not been heeded. Indeed, inspirational academic heroics must resist understanding here. The implacable logic of the terrifying contamination is doing its supplementary labor in these becomings, these happenings. A “responsible” thought describes “responsibility”—caught in a question necessarily begged in action—as attending to the call of that irreducible fact. This is a practical position, an elaboration of the earlier position that, in effect, practice norms theory.¹⁶

15. I have discussed this at greater length in “A Critique of Multiculturalism,” a paper presented at the Nordic Conference on “Social Movements in the Third World: Economy, Politics, and Culture,” forthcoming in an anthology on multiculturalism edited by Thomas Keenan, to whom my thanks for an astute first reading of this essay, and for insisting that I spell out my surreptitious argument on contamination.

16. This statement is shorthand for the position that can be developed from passages such as the following: “No constituted logic nor any rule of a logical order can, therefore, provide a decision or impose its norms upon these prelogical possibilities of logic. . . . They are (topologically) [since the “‘structural unconscious’ . . . is absolutely excluded” by the sort of inspirational academic heroics I describe, this “metapsychological” notion may be incomprehensible] alien to it, but not as its . . . ‘radical’ foundation; for the structure of iterability [alteration in every practice, including theoretical utterance] divides and guts such radicality. . . . [T]heory’ is compelled to reproduce, to reduplicate, in itself the law of its object or its object as law; it must submit to the norm it purports to analyze” (Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988], 93, [74], 97). Luce Irigaray’s formulation, with reference to psychoanalysis as theoretical system, is useful for us here: “Will you object that we would be straying into the realm of anything goes? Then you are admitting that you have forgotten that any living body, any unconscious, any psychical economy brings its order to analysis. All you have to do is listen. But an order with the force of an a priori law prevents you” (Irigaray, “Poverty of Psychoanalysis,” 83–84). For a discussion of body/unconscious/drive-instinct economy and psychoanalysis as system, I take the liberty of directing the reader’s attention to my “Love,” under consideration with *American Imago*.

As a practical academic, it is my unauthorized conviction that it is because of this academic resistance to acknowledgment of complicity that Derrida writes this most painful text in a language that must be learned: in other words, it may be accessible to a reading that is responsible to the text. (The steps of such a reading are laid out in Paul Celan's search for Lenz embedded in "Shibboleth.")

But why is this text painful? I think because in a sense more restricted than the general position outlined above, deconstruction cannot not acknowledge complicity with Heidegger. Precisely because of "responsibility," Derrida cannot, and indeed will not, unlike Richard Rorty, simply separate the man from the work.¹⁷ I have been arguing, in a certain way, that Derrida's is "a teaching language." And indeed that is what Derrida says of the Heidegger of the Rectoral Address:

Here we have a teaching language. . . . No more than in 1933 does it rehabilitate the concept of spirit deconstructed in *Sein und Zeit*. But it is still in the name of the spirit, the spirit that guides in resolution toward the question, the will to know and the will to essence, that the other spirit, its bad double, the phantom of subjectivity, turns out to be warded off by means of *Destruction*. (OS, 41)

I have been spelling out so far that, according to Derrida, the phantom of subjectivity cannot be warded off. Indeed, that is the responsibility Heidegger gives up and thus moves relentlessly toward unilaterality. This unilaterality has a bad trajectory, because the philosophy of *Destruction* cannot be used to ward off accountability, answerability, responsibility as *répondre de*.¹⁸ It can only ever be a reminder of its open-ended and irreducible risk.

You will remember that between the journal and the book-form publication of *De la grammatologie*, Derrida changed the word *déstruction* to *déconstruction*. Heidegger's case demonstrates why *Destruction* (as task) must not be used to ward off responsibility but rather (as event) must be acknowledged as a reminder of how we are written. Unable as we are

17. Richard Rorty, "Taking Philosophy Seriously," *New Republic*, 11 Apr. 1988, 31–34.

18. Since many positions against deconstruction are based on hearsay, this is the most common accusation brought against it. In the *New York Times Book Review*, for example, Walter Reich casually remarks that the denial of the Holocaust owes something to "a number of current assumptions, increasingly popular in academia, regarding the indeterminacy of truth" ("Erasing the Holocaust," *New York Times Book Review*, 11 July 1993, 34).

(and should be) not to take sides, Derrida is therefore also speaking of the folly of “doing” deconstruction as if it were fully under our control. (This, of course, also relates to the conviction that the decisive ethico-political evaluation of thought is not self-contained but is in its setting-to-work.) In other words, paradoxically (impossibly), yet necessarily, in the setting-to-work, deconstruction may be bound to good or bad uses. This *is* the double bind of deconstruction, its peculiar humility, responsibility, and strength; its acknowledgment of radical contamination. It can be undertaken by someone who has learned it to philosophize with it, against philosophy. Even “knowing” it is not enough, just as knowing the rules of a card game does not mean that you have learned to play it well. Deconstruction is caught between the high rollers of the establishment who, without the patience or the training to read the material carefully, congratulate themselves on having discovered its lack of moral muscle; and the “defenders”: those who claim it learnedly for philosophy, disowning its dependence on the un-philosophical or diagnosing the latter as simply literature; and those who do “correct politics” with it.¹⁹

But Nazism is a consequence that requires a careful reckoning of the lesson of deconstruction; not a denunciation that will please academics, but also not a defense that will endorse the two different kinds of defenders. It is in this position that Derrida writes for those who will read with care. We must not forget that the object of his investigation is still a speech that is given at a university, and the point of his critique is that *Destruktion* cannot be used to ward off the dangers of the necessarily unilateral subject. Before we pursue the critique further, it might therefore be pertinent to quote

19. And, if it is “literature,” it is where literature also is given over to its other, however the (con)text would limit it. This note is sounded all through Derrida’s work. A recent articulation: “Suppose we knew what literature is . . . we still could not be sure that it is literary through and through [*de part en part*]. . . . Nor could we be sure that this deconstructive structure cannot be found in other texts that we would not dream of considering as literary. I am convinced that the same structure, however paradoxical it may seem, also turns up in scientific and especially juridical utterances, and indeed can be found in the most foundational or institutive ones. . . . In the suggestion that a deconstruction of metaphysics is impossible ‘to the precise extent that it is “literary,”’ I suspect there may be more irony than first appears. . . . For a deconstructive operation *possibility*, becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches would rather be the danger” (Derrida, “Invention of the Other,” in Attridge, *Acts of Literature*, 327, 328; translation modified. The embedded quotation is from Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979], 131).

another statement of it in a speech given by Derrida himself at Columbia University, where he spoke of the responsibility of the academic in a modern university, necessarily imbricated with the structures of a postindustrial managerial society: "One can doubtless decenter the subject, as is easily said, without retesting the bond between, on the one hand, responsibility, and, on the other, freedom of subjective consciousness or purity of intentionality."²⁰ Heidegger, in using *Destruktion* as if he could control it, bypasses this challenge with murderous consequences. The armchair deconstructor, decentering his or her subject at will,

denies the [prior] axiomatics *en bloc* and keeps it going as a survivor, with minor adjustments *de rigueur* and daily compromises lacking in rigor. So coping, so operating, at top speed, one accounts and becomes accountable for nothing: not for what happens, not for the reasons to continue assuming responsibilities without a concept.

How would it be if a fully deconstructive or *destruktiv* text could be produced? Its surface would be "given over to . . . an animal machine . . . a figure of evil" (OS, 134). Let us pursue this enigmatic pronouncement.

In the section that follows the passages we have been reading, Derrida reads Heidegger as the latter names the animal, and exposes a humanist teleology for Heidegger's "deconstruction of ontology" (OS, 57).²¹

20. Jacques Derrida, "Mochlos; or, The Conflict of the Faculties," in Richard Rand, ed., *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 11. The next quoted passage is from the same page. This passage is also worth considering, because, three pages before this passage, Derrida brings up Heidegger's Rectoral Address, offers a short analysis, and remarks: "I cannot explore this path today" (8). I believe the exploration in *Of Spirit* leads him to a different conclusion from the one offered in "Mochlos."

21. *Of Spirit* takes up a question that was first put forward in 1968 ("Ends of Man," in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press], 1982): "The 'destruction' of metaphysics or of classical ontology was even directed against humanism. . . . [But, t]he subtlety and equivocality of this gesture [of a return to man], then, are what appear to have authorized all the anthropologicist deformations in the reading of *Sein und Zeit*" (118, 127). *Of Spirit* makes Heidegger himself also responsible for such a "deformation." Further, "[i]n the thinking and the language of Being, the end of man has been prescribed since always . . . in the play of *telos* and death" (134). As we have seen, in *Of Spirit*, death in Heidegger is seen to be without a semantic content. "Are we to understand the eve as the guard mounted around the house or as the awakening to the day that is coming, at whose eve we are? Is there an economy of the eve?" (136). The economy of the eve is a responsibility that must annul the call even as it recalls it in a "link without link [*lien sans lien*] of a bind and a non-bind"

Let us focus on the comment on that most Heideggerian/Derridian gesture, the “sous rature.”²² It might be thought of as a gesture of warding off—keeping a thing visible but crossed out, to avoid universalizing or monumentalizing it. As we have been reading it, this gesture can only be used (indeed must be performed in deconstruction as task in view of deconstruction as event) in the form of a warning of an irreducibility outside of intentional control, rather than a controlled gesture of saving oneself from the worst consequences of that irreducibility; as in Heidegger’s implicit reliance upon *Destruktion* in the Rectoral Address.²³ The gesture in Heidegger’s *Zur Seinsfrage* seems not inconsonant with this:

Heidegger proposes to write the word Being under a line of erasure in the form of a cross (*kreuzweise Durchstreichung*). This cross did not represent either a negative sign or even a sign at all, but it was supposed to recall the *Geviert*, the fourfold, precisely, as “the play of the world” . . . [which]—recalled in this way by an erasing of “Being”—[allows the decipherment of] the becoming-world of the world. . . . It means in this case that one cannot derive or think the world starting from anything else but it. But look at this other proposition of crossing-through (*Durchstreichung*) from twenty-five years earlier. (*OS*, 52)

And we flashback to the animal. I will attempt the daunting task of summarizing Derrida’s itinerary.

Derrida deduces a certain “anthropomorphic or even humanist teleology” in the thinking of *Dasein* in view of the difference between “the

(Derrida, *Given Time*, 27). And finally, “[i]s not this security [of ‘Being is the nearest’] what is trembling today . . . [and t]his trembling is played out in the violent relation of the whole of the West to its other, whether a ‘linguistic’ relationship . . . , or ethnological, economic, political, military, relationships, etc. . . . It is precisely the force and the efficiency of the system that regularly change the transgression into ‘false exits’” (133, 134–35).

22. I should perhaps mention that Henry Staten (*Wittgenstein and Derrida* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984]) had mentioned to me in conversation that, upon being asked his opinion of my introduction to *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), Derrida had said that I had overemphasized the “sous rature.” This entire discussion might therefore be marked by a peculiar excess, in its own way a failure and a feature of my responsibility.

23. This tone, as far as I know, was sounded by Derrida only once, when speaking to the Société française de philosophie in 1968: “I have attempted to indicate a way out of this framework via the ‘trace,’ which is no more an effect than it has a cause, but which in and of itself, outside its text, is not sufficient to operate the necessary transgression” (“Différance,” *Margins*, 12).

animal's privation [*Entbehrung*] from *Dasein*'s privation [*Privation*] in comprehension of the world" (OS, 55, 54). The animal "lack[s] access to the entity as such . . . as if . . . the Being of the entity . . . were crossed out in advance, but with an absolute crossing-out, that of privation" (OS, 53). This is not the philosophical crossing-out that the philosopher must practice to "recall" that *Dasein* cannot get behind the world worlding. It is a "crossing-through of the crossing-through" (or being-crossed-through) (OS, 56).

Further, "the animal can be after a prey, it can calculate, hesitate, follow or try out a track, but it cannot properly question. . . . [I]t can use things, even instrumentalize them, but it cannot gain access to a *tekhnè*" (OS, 57). Thus, in terms of the question and of technology, *Dasein*'s definitive predications, "it is always a matter of marking an absolute limit" between *Dasein* and the animal (OS, 54).

Yet, "the lizard" (Heidegger's example) does have "a relationship with the sun—and with the stone [Heidegger's example of the non-living], which itself has none" (OS, 52). Derrida extends the set, or *ensemble*, that predicates the animal: "We should now have to say of spirit what one says of the world for the animal: the animal is poor in spirit [*Geistarm* as it is *Weltarm*, as it were], it has spirit but does not have spirit and this not-having is a mode of its being-able-to-have spirit" (OS, 55).

It is important that the animal is absolutely off-limits to the deconstruction of ontology. Heidegger can only mention, not use, "the animal crossing-through"; or rather, his philosophy is used by it, although he implies a negative "hierarchization and evaluation" by using "the words 'poverty' and 'lack' [*Entbehrung*]" about the animal:

What is signaled by this animal crossing-through, if we can call it that? Or rather, what is signaled by the word "crossing-through" which we write a propos of the animal "world" and which ought, in its logic, to overtake all words from the moment they say something about the world? (OS, 54)

For the animal has some relationship with the world, and yet the animal is absolutely marked off from *Dasein*. Therefore, every inauguration of the world by *Dasein* is struck through by the inaccessible animal. Heidegger's philosophy "responds" against its grain to the animal by the formalizable logic of contamination—not just a threat, but a compromise:

Can one not say, then, that the whole deconstruction of ontology, as it is begun in *Sein und Zeit* and insofar as it unseats, as it were, the Cartesian-Hegelian *spiritus* in the existential analytic, is here threat-

ened in its order, in its implementation, its conceptual apparatus, by what is called, so obscurely still, the animal? Compromised, rather, by a *thesis* on animality *in general*, for which any example would do the job. . . . These difficulties—such at least is the proposition I submit for discussion— . . . bring the consequences of a serious mortgaging [*hypothèque*, the word for a large mortgage loan taken out, for instance, to finance the purchase of a house] to weigh upon the whole of his thought. (OS, 57)

This is an indictment, and Derrida stands behind it: “Such . . . is the proposition I submit.” It may be remembered that the discussion of correct politics began with the impossibility of avoiding the unilaterality of subjectivity. In Derrida’s reading, that is one of Heidegger’s major *philosophical* irresponsibilities in the period of the Rectoral Address: to try to ward off that unilaterality by way of the crossing-through of *Destruktion*. In this chapter, we see “the epoch of”—both the era of and the bracketed-in philosophical region of—“subjectivity”—given the adjective “Cartesian-Hegelian” (OS, 55). And, in the passage quoted at length, the deconstruction of ontology insofar as it unseats the Cartesian-Hegelian *spiritus*—by withdrawing it from subjectivity—is claimed to be threatened, or, rather, compromised, by the animal. It is in this context that Derrida brings up the question of a specifically political responsibility again.

Between the stone and *Dasein*, the animal is “the living creature.” “[P]rivative poverty indeed marks the caesura or the heterogeneity between non-living and living on the one hand, between the animal and human *Dasein* on the other” (OS, 55).

[This] absolute limit between the living creature and the human *Dasein*, tak[es] a distance not only from all biologism and even all philosophy of life (and thus from all political ideology which might draw its inspiration more or less directly from them) but also . . . from a Rilkean thematics which links openness and animality. Not to mention Nietzsche. (OS, 54)

Derrida does not mention Nietzsche much in this book. But here is one indication why, for him, Nietzsche remains a less dark figure: because he reckons with the living animality of the human. As for Heidegger, Derrida asks,

What is being-for-death? What is death for a *Dasein* that is never defined *essentially* as a living thing? This is not a matter of opposing death to life, but of wondering what semantic content can be given to

death in a discourse for which the relation to death, the experience of death, remains unrelated to the life of the living thing. (OS, 120)

It is not only that *Destruktion* cannot be used to avoid the unilaterality of subjectivity when spirit is bound by a stand taken in its name. That, as it were, is the limit above. But it is also that, not being able to fill life and therefore death with meaning, not having made room for the animal-in-the-human, Heideggerian philosophy cannot be a philosophy of life that is, as it were, the limit from below.

We must keep these earlier elaborations in mind when Derrida discusses Heidegger's refusal of evil to the animal because evil is spiritual (*geistlich*) (OS, 103).²⁴ By Derrida's reading, I can suggest that "we should now have to say of evil what Derrida says of spirit for the animal: the animal is poor in evil [*Bösarm* as it is *Geistarm*, as it were], it has evil but does not have evil and this not-having is a mode of its being-able-to-be/have evil" (see page 31).

The discussion of the animal emerges in *Of Spirit* in the wake of a typographical gesture, the crossing-out. We may now be ready to read the passage about the fully Heideggerian text:

To dream of what the Heideggerian corpus would look like the day when, with all the application and consistency required, the operation prescribed by him at one moment or another would indeed have been carried out: "avoid" the word "spirit," at the very least put it in quotation marks, then cross through all the names referring to the world whenever one is speaking of something which, like the animal, has no *Dasein*, and therefore no or only a little world, then place the word "Being" everywhere under a cross, and finally cross through without a cross all the question marks when it's a question of language, i.e., indirectly, of everything, etc. One can imagine the surface of a text given over to the gnawing, ruminant, and silent voracity of such an animal-machine and its implacable "logic." This would not only be simply "without spirit," but a figure of evil. (OS, 134)

Deconstruction or *Destruktion* cannot become a matter of obeying and applying an obsessive typography, of qualifying everything one reads, writes, or says: "everything, etc." One must recall that these typographi-

24. For a full appreciation of the argument of the book one must follow carefully Heidegger's curious trajectory regarding the word *spirit*, its citation, and the valorizing of related words, painstakingly outlined in it. In this passage, an earlier relationship between *geistig* and *geistlich* is shown to have been altered.

cal gestures are ways of *recalling* limits that one cannot cross rather than acting out theoretical safeguards against all previous philosophy. The spirit cannot be bound by politicizing in its name, but Heideggerian philosophy cannot give itself over to its own open animality, either; and it has no typographical arsenal for recalling that limit. And therefore, since the paragraph I quote above is constructed by imitating the “logic” of dreamwork, it is that unprotected flank that provides the name of the text where every wish of a *destruktive* philosophy is fulfilled, everything you want to say is eaten up, the Nietzschean philosopher’s self-modeling on the cud-chewing (ruminant) cow goes out of control, not responsible before the spirit but taken over, not by the animal (for it is out of reach) but by an animal-*machine* that is crossed-through before crossing-through.²⁵ Remember: the animal cannot be evil by this philosophy. Therefore, in the dream of its fulfillment, (the surface of) the text controlled by the animal (machine) is (a figure of) evil. To get the force of “figure,” I can, once again, turn to “Shibboleth,” my vade mecum of responsible reading.²⁶

This is an indictment of Heidegger’s irresponsibility to, and in, philosophy, the irresponsibility of that philosophy from its powerful start. It is not the cop-out of: philosophy good, man bad. An ex-Derridian said to me recently, “Heidegger was a Nazi, and Jacques should have said it.” This assumes that Derrida does deconstruction when he philosophizes, but turns it off when there’s need for plain talk. It seems more responsible that, instead of falling back on the deceptive simplicity of a proposition (Heidegger was a Nazi) and taking that as sufficient fulfillment of his philosophical responsibility, this philosopher, who has unceasingly deconstructed propositions, would philosophize with all stops pulled out, without denegating his complicity, to present Heideggerian philosophy as *pharmakon*, what could have been medicine turned into poison.²⁷

It is not necessary to utter that proposition, after all. Heidegger simplified matters by taking out party membership.

25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), 23.

26. In “Shibboleth,” a “figure” recalls an impossibility, here perhaps the impossibility of the animal. In a brilliant passage where figure and trope become synonyms, Derrida recalls Ulysses by using “polytropy,” Homer’s first predication of his hero. Derrida’s search for Ulysses, that other Mediterranean given over to troping, is all over his text. For his “schoolmates,” the shape of the word *figure* leads into all the binds and double binds of responsibility (“Shibboleth,” *Acts of Literature*, 386–87).

27. For *pharmakon*, see Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 95–117.

The liberal Euro-U.S. academic, unceasingly complicitous with the text of exploitation, possibly endorsing child slavery every time s/he drinks a cup of tea, paying taxes to destroy survival ecobiomes of the world's poor, sometimes mouthing a "Marxism" liberal-humanized out of existence, and *talking* no doubt against U.S. military aggression, profoundly irresponsible to the academic's one obligation of not writing on something carelessly read, cannot understand the complexity of this verdict. For them the happy euphoria of being in the right. That their relationship to dominant capital is not unlike deconstruction's to Heidegger and therefore involves "responsibility" is not something they can arrive at through their own thinking, which will not open itself to what it resists. And they are certainly not willing to see if they are able to learn it through deconstruction. For them, deconstruction remains caught in the competition of whose sword is sharper.²⁸

Of Spirit is concerned with philosophical argument, semantic content, rhetoric, and typography, all of which recall limits (and all of which must remain open to "setting-to-work"). It is therefore noteworthy that the dream of the saturated Heideggerian corpus is not connected to an argument but staged as a momentary and declared pause in square brackets in a long footnote about the "markers and signs" in Heidegger, of "imperceptible—for Martin Heidegger as much as for anyone[—] . . . strata appear[ing] prominent after the event," concerning an "example . . . more and other, than an example," regarding "the very origin of responsibility," signs and markers that

assign . . . so many new tasks to thought, and to reading . . . not only for *reading* Heidegger and serving some hermeneutical or philosophical piety. Beyond an always necessary exegesis, this rereading sketches out another topology for new tasks, for what remains to be situated of the relationships between Heidegger's thought and other places of thought. (OS, 132–33)

In other words, the dream floats up where Derrida appears to be rescuing his thought by way of his "new politics of reading," which may seem to be a case of: thought salvageable, man limited.²⁹ Trying to learn "the

28. "Whoever transposes the radical critique of reason into the domain of rhetoric in order to blunt the paradox of self-referentiality, also dulls the sword of the critique of reason itself" (see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987], 210).

29. For this new politics of reading, see Jacques Derrida, "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography*,

silent dramaturgy of pragmatic signs” in deconstruction in my own way over the years, I have followed the track of markers and signs in *Of Spirit* (the “dream-work,” as it were), to offer an unauthorized “wild analysis.” I cannot forget that Freud’s main criticism of wild psychoanalysis was its irresponsibility, its ignoring of the robust response-accountability structure of transference.³⁰

••••

(Is it simply this feeling of unease that makes me sense a similar moment of unease in Derrida? He openly censures Heidegger for his disloyalty to Husserl, again in terms of irresponsibility to his own philosophy of crossing-out:

And the fact remains, beyond any possible contestation, that he erased [he didn’t cross out this time, he erased] the dedication of *Sein und Zeit* to Husserl so that the book could be republished, in a gesture which reconstitutes the erasure as an unerasable, mediocre, and hideous crossing-out. [OS, 121]

But in the same note, he points out [and to me, as a product of imperialism, this is a rare courage] that, in a

text delivered in 1935 in Vienna . . . [r]ight after asking the question “How is the spiritual figure of Europe to be characterized?” Husserl adds: “In a spiritual sense clearly the English dominions and the United States belong to Europe, but not the Eskimos or the Indians of the traveling zoos or the gypsies who permanently wander as vagabonds all over Europe.” [OS, 121]

He is even aware of the hierarchization and racism internal to an imperialist mind-set:

It is apparently necessary, therefore, in order to save the English dominions, the power and culture they represent, to make a distinction between, for example, good and bad Indians . . . and this reference to spirit, and to Europe, is no more an external or acciden-

Transference, Translation, trans. Peggy Kamuf and Avital Ronnell (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 29–32.

30. Sigmund Freud, “Wild Psychoanalysis,” in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psycho-Analytic Works*, trans. James Strachey, et al. (New York: Norton, 1961), 11:219–27.

tal ornament for Husserl's thought than it is for Heidegger's. It plays a major, organizing role in the transcendental teleology of reason as Europocentric humanism. . . . The question of the animal is never very far away: "just as man, *and even the Papuan* [my emphasis—J.D.] represents a new stage in animality in contrast to the animals, so philosophical reason represents a new stage in humanity and in its reason." [OS, 122]

Having pointed this out, Derrida engages in balancing the two sides:

Would [Heidegger] have thrown the "non-Aryan" out of Europe, as did he who knew he was himself "non-Aryan," i.e. Husserl? And if the reply is "no," to all appearances "no," is it certain that this is for reasons other than those which distanced him from transcendental idealism? Is what he did or wrote worse? [OS, 122]

It is then that I can hear unease. "Where is the worst [*le pire*]? That is perhaps the question of *spirit*."

Why does he cite the title of his book there? In French, the monstrative is even stronger: "voilà peut-être la question de *l'esprit*."³¹ Is it that an exercise in judgment, weighing the good against the bad, cannot not be, in a certain sense, a failure of the open-endedness of responsibility or the indeconstructibility of justice? I cannot know, but I mark the moment.)

••••

Let us return to the note on the animal-machine. At the end of the dream-pause, before marking the end, Derrida writes: "The perverse reading of Heidegger." Perverse, but possible, not idiosyncratic; *the* perverse reading.³² The article is not indefinite. And the French—"la lecture perverse de Heidegger"—even allows "Heidegger's perverse reading."

It may, of course, be said that *Of Spirit* attempts to con-verse with Heidegger, to turn with him into the dark, perhaps perverse, recesses of his philosophy as it juggles with spirit. I could take *perverse* in the colloquial sense and contrast it to Derrida's critique of the eminently sane supporters of the later Heidegger.

31. Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 96.

32. Derrida, like Milton, is often a creative literalist of Latin in the vernacular. *Per-verse* carries the possible double charge of "through (its) turning," as well as the more common "by turning away," "turning in the *wrong* direction."

Let us turn to the structuring of this long footnote, which deals precisely with the question: Has the question been preserved in another form in the later Heidegger? The sentence this long note divides runs as follows: "Language, always, *before any question*," [note reference] and in the very question, comes down to [*revient à*] the promise" (OS, 94). The note glosses the thought of what is anterior to the question. And it prepares us to weigh the next sentence: "This would also be a promise of *spirit*."

Let the reader work out the citing of the title of the book again at this juncture where the promise (thought must obey it to be thought) is judged harshly over against the question (thought must recall the responsibility to be answerable).

In the footnote proper, Derrida lets texts of the later Heidegger lengthily point at the now "pre-originary pledge [*gage*] . . . [which] engage[s] . . . [the question] in a responsibility it has not chosen and which assigns it even its liberty" (OS, 130); but then he offers his own comment, in tones of unmistakable emphasis:

But it has to be admitted that the thought of an affirmation anterior to any question and more proper to thought than any question must have an unlimited incidence . . . on the *quasi*-totality of Heidegger's previous path of thought. . . . [T]his step transforms or deforms (as you like) the whole landscape to the extent that that landscape has been constituted *before* [*devant*] the—inflexible—*law* of the most radical questioning. . . . [L]et me recall that the point of departure of the analytic of *Dasein*—and therefore the project of *Sein und Zeit* itself—was assigned by the opening of *Dasein* to the question; [here Derrida again brings up Cartesian-Hegelian subjectivity] and that the whole *Destruktion* of ontology took as its target, especially in post-Cartesian modernity, an inadequate questioning of the Being of the subject, etc. This retrospective upheaval can seem to dictate a new *order* . . . to construct a quite different discourse, open a quite different path of thought . . . and remove—a highly ambiguous gesture—the remnant of *Aufklärung* which still slumbered in the privilege of the question. (OS, 131)³³

33. In view of the sentence that follows, it may not be irresponsible to claim that Derrida is here deeply troubled about Heidegger's letting go of the last vestige of the Enlightenment. Derrida's own ambiguous attitude toward the Enlightenment, which he honors in Leibnitz's formulation of the accountable principle of reason (*principium reddendae rationis*) more than in Kant's formulation of the public use of reason, is indeed to that which

I have encountered many uncomprehending readings of this text, particularly from readers who imitate the snazz without working on the intimidatingly precise argument. The point is, of course, that it is not an open denunciation but the double bind of deconstructive responsibility, practiced in the philosophizing, hard to shoulder, hard to recognize. But what is one responsible for?—for the understanding and applause of impatient academics? I therefore take the liberty of recommending a slow reading of the next sentence: “In fact, without believing that we can henceforth not take account of this profound upheaval, *we cannot take seriously the imperative of such a recommencement*” (my emphasis). He gives his reasons, and it is after this that he proposes a “new strategy,” “another topology,” and, strictly speaking, begins the last movement of *Of Spirit*, deconstructing Heidegger, for his “schoolmates,” those who have learned that deconstruction is not exposure of error but “a new politics of reading.” In the footnote, he says no more about new strategy (although the text will henceforth and gradually declare his own [de]construction of Heidegger more and more), because “my purpose bound me to privilege the modalities of avoiding (*vermeiden*)—and notably the silent dramaturgy of pragmatic signs” (OS, 133).

Curiously enough, it is after this enigmatic sentence that the footnote pauses upon the dream of the full-dress production of the drama of pragmatic signs: a figure of evil. And this dream of a figure comes before the

can recall a limit in its very extensive resource: “Even if the gift”—and I believe responsibility may be one name of the necessary and impossible immediate transformation of the gift into simulacrum—“were never anything but a simulacrum, one must still *render an account* of the possibility of this simulacrum. And one must also render an account of the desire to render an account. This cannot be done against or without the *principle of reason* (*principium reddendae rationis*), even if the latter finds there its limit as well as its resource” (Derrida, *Given Time*, 31; for the Leibnitz reference, see Derrida, “Principle of Reason,” 7f.). Again, “[n]othing seems to me less outdated than the classical emancipatory ideal. We cannot attempt to disqualify it today, whether crudely or with sophistication, at least not without treating it too lightly and forming the worst complicities. But beyond these identified territories of juridico-politicization on the grand geo-political scale, other areas must constantly open up that can at first seem like secondary or marginal areas” (Derrida, “Force of Law,” 971–73). Derrida’s critique of Heidegger, rendered in my irresponsibility for cruder readers, is that he let go of the Enlightenment (which may have opened up to margins) in the name of a spirit that can be traced to a “Europe” that cannot open up to margins. Incidentally, on a more restricted scale, our relationship to capitalism, and Derrida’s and my relationship to imperialism, indeed feminism’s relationship to both (divided along North-South or postcolonial lines), shares the structure of the relationship between possibility and the principle of reason.

final paragraphs of the footnote, which seem to admit that even in the later Heidegger, “the proper of man arrives only in this response or this responsibility” (OS, 135). Derrida is duty-bound to admit this, for “at the Essex conference . . . Françoise Dastur reminded me of this passage of *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, which indeed passes question. I dedicate this note to her as a pledge of gratitude” (OS, 136). A philosopher’s responsibility is to acknowledge a counterexample to his general argument. In order to show, I think, that it is no more than a passage that passes question—that utters “Shibboleth” with the correct accent, as it were—Derrida launches this elaborately orchestrated note to show further that the only way to respond to the thought of responsibility that Heidegger betrayed is to deconstruct *Destruktion*: another strategy . . . ³⁴

In keeping with the strategy of the deconstructive project, this chapter in the book has already begun to chip away at the identity of the man named Heidegger, first by constructing Trakl as Heidegger’s ventriloquist, upon Derrida’s own contestatory authority, as follows:

What is spirit? the reply is inscribed in maxims which translate certain poetic statements by Trakl. . . . [F]or lack of time I will have to restrict myself to the gross affirmation which I think is hardly contestable: statements like those I have just cited and translated by *spirit in-flames* are obviously statements of Heidegger. Not . . . productions of the subject Martin Heidegger. (OS, 84–85)

Next, Derrida undermines “Heidegger’s identity” another degree by imposing the word *revenant* upon the Trakl-Heideggerian stranger whom the spirit follows on a “journey [that] would permit an interpretation . . . more ordinary . . . than . . . the origin and decadence current in the dominant, i.e. metaphysico-Christian interpretation” (OS, 89). “His step carries him into the night,” writes Derrida,

like a *revenant*. . . . “*Revenant*” is not a word of Heidegger’s, and no doubt he would not like having it imposed on him because of the negative connotations, metaphysical or parapsychic, that he would be at pains to denounce in it. I will not, however, efface it. (OS, 89)

There is no serious attempt to justify these impositions at this stage in the text. And in a couple of pages, a crucial sentence will be divided by the

34. For the reference to the correct password, see Derrida, “Shibboleth,” 399–409. Speculation opens here by way of a judgment of Heidegger through the subjects of diaspora and migrancy.

long footnote we have read. (What is it to say “for lack of time I will . . . [make] a gross affirmation” when one is looking forward to a beautifully shaped seven-page footnote?) “Martin Heidegger”’s authority is being deconstructed here, his text taken over (or cathected?) by “another strategy,” a greater responsibility than allegiance to a proper name.

If Trakl’s statements are statements “of Heidegger,” what does it mean to say, as Derrida will in the next chapter, after a careful discussion of what “origin-heterogeneous” (in place of the earlier position of the question at the origin) might mean in Heidegger, that

the gestures made to snatch Trakl away from the Christian thinking of *Geist* seem to me laborious, violent, sometimes simply caricatural, and all in all not very convincing. . . . It is with reference to an extremely conventional and doxical outline of Christianity that Heidegger can claim to de-Christianize Trakl’s *Gedicht*. What is *origin-heterogeneous* would in that case be nothing other—but it’s not nothing—than the origin of Christianity: the spirit of Christianity or the essence of Christianity[?] (OS, 108–9)

No, it’s not nothing. The final Heidegger (is it the one with the proper name?) is being delivered over to that very metaphysico-Christianity he mightily contested. And after this, the book launches an exchange between Heidegger and his Christian apologists—“[s]ince I’m doing the questions and answers here, I imagine Heidegger’s reply” (OS, 111)—each vying to claim the other’s space, casually ecumenical, this Heidegger even accommodating the Judaic “spirit” (*ruah*) with an “I am opposing nothing . . . no[t] even (I’d forgotten that one) [the discourse] on *ruah*. . . . I said it is on the basis of flame that one thinks *pneuma* or *spiritus* or, since you insist, *ruah*, etc.” (OS, 111, 112). “Those I [Derrida] called theologians” had, in their turn, enthusiastically invoked “my friend and coreligionary, the Messianic Jew. I’m not certain that the Moslem and some others”—Heidegger’s “etc.” matches this—“wouldn’t join in the concert or the hymn” (OS, 110, 111).

In this easy multicultural chat, a whitewashed Heidegger answers reproaches with “I follow the path of the entirely other” (OS, 113). The call of the entirely other, to which one bears responsibility, and which the question recalls, has now been made into this. And “crossing is not a neutral word,” Derrida writes, “[it] runs the risk . . . of recalling the cross-shaped crossing-through under which one leaves being [*l’être*] or God to suffer” (OS, 112; word order changed). The crossing-through itself is given over to Christian metaphysics as Christ the man (*Dasein?*, *l’être* is in lowercase) is crossed-over on the Cross as God under erasure. Perhaps I am speak-

ing irresponsibly here, but this last movement of the book seems to me to confront European Christianity in its profound anti-Semitism even in its self-consciously ecumenical pose.³⁵ Indeed, introducing this last moment is a fairly straightforward passage:

One can, then, imagine a scene between Heidegger and certain Christian theologians. . . . It would in truth be an odd *exchange*. . . . We are talking about past, present, and future “events,” a composition of forces and discourses which seem to have been waging merciless war on each other (for example from 1933 to our time). We have a combinatory whose power remains abyssal. In all rigor it exculpates none of the discourses which can thus exchange their power. It does not leave a clean place open [*ne laisse la place nette*] for any arbitrating authority. Nazism was not born in the desert. We all know this, but it has to be constantly recalled. And even if, far from any desert, it had grown like a mushroom in the silence of a European forest, it would have done so in the shadow of big trees, in the shelter of their silence or their indifference, but in the same soil. . . . In their bushy taxonomy, they would bear the names of religions, philosophies, political regimes, economic structures, religious or academic institutions. In short, what is just as confusedly called culture, or the world of spirit. (*OS*, 109–10)

“Whose power remains abyssal.” The word *abyssal* combines both the nuances of the abyss and the interminable counterreflection of the *mise en abîme*—the facing mirrors on the heraldic blazon. The potentiality for something like Nazism (and I, quite without authority, would include here the demonization of that other People of the Book, Islam) is an always possible potential in Christian Europe’s cultural heritage. When, at the end of the book, we read that the only hope is in the shuttle of dialogue—“it’s enough to keep talking, not to interrupt”—we cannot forget the grim description of such exchanges in the passage above (*OS*, 113). The imagined exchange between the final Heidegger and his contemporary interlocutors can achieve nothing. And *Of Spirit* ends with a deliberate disregard of Heidegger’s philosophical cautions, even as a parody of Heidegger’s first principle is offered: the spirit will do the rest. But this spirit is a ghost (there is an interesting printer’s error in the translation, almost as if the translators cannot brook

35. I take the liberty of referring to my discussion of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* in “Psychoanalysis in Left Field,” 58–60.

such irreverence), it is in flame as well as ash, and it is unavoidable. In the version of *Of Spirit*, Martin Heidegger and the question dead-end in this shuttle, a caricature of the response-structure of responsibility. The deconstruction of Heidegger has taken off elsewhere, following the track of a responsibility Heidegger himself gave up, halfway to its testing in its setting-to-work. One must learn to read in order to see it happen, to respond to the argument. This is not the conflation of literature and philosophy.³⁶ It is the use of the resources of writing to philosophize.

2

This unauthorized formalization of the silent dramaturgy of *Of Spirit* is no more than an intermediary stage. I want now to offer another instantiation of what I have learned from this text of responsibility: the animal-machine of fully programmed information, and a “European” combinatory whose power remains abyssal, so that the two sides seem to engage in an interminable conversation, while a specter does the rest. I am, of course, miming a progression of images rather than, strictly speaking, following an argument. Is this responsible to the text? But concept and metaphor are in each other.³⁷

3. Conference on the Flood Action Plan (FAP) in Bangladesh, European Parliament, Strasbourg

I do not read here the silent dramaturgy of pragmatic signs that convention considers decadent to “read,” because it is nothing but the transparent scaffolding that supports the text of reason. I read, rather, the dramaturgy of the apparently unrehearsed staging of what convention regards to be (the transparent textuality or theater of) facts. I rush in to supplement where Derrida postpones:

And as, since the beginning of this lecture, we have been speaking of nothing but the “translation” of these thoughts and discourses into what are commonly called the “events” of “history” and of “politics” (I place quotation marks around all these obscure words), it would also be necessary to “translate” what such an exchange of places

36. For a dismissal of Derrida as conflating philosophy and literature in their disciplinary senses, see Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 185–210.

37. Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” *Margins*, 207–57.

can imply in its most radical possibility. This “translation” appears to be both indispensable and for the moment impossible. (OS, 109)

The “moment” in that last sentence may be standing in for the indefinitely differential prow of the present on the move. But I literalize. I aim to sidle into the parenthesis to see what script puts quotation marks around those obscure words in another text, not only translated from Europe but transferred, yet remaining the same. I read the unfolding of a small conference arranged by the Green Party at the European Parliament.

So much has been written about the relationship between orators and rhetors that it seems unnecessary to belabor the point. Derrida himself has written on the elaboration of that topic in Rousseau.³⁸ The parliamentary setting, with its representatives, who must *vertreten* (represent) rather than *darstellen* (represent), has been exposed by Marx by way of a sustained theatrical metaphor.³⁹ What is also surely obvious is the monumentalized role that the delicate and irregular beat of responsibility-as-accountability plays here. The Members are responsible to their constituency. Derrida has indirectly written about the conventions of the representation of “the public,” to whom the representative is responsible, in “Call It a Day for Democracy.”⁴⁰

Let us also remember the other, slightly odder sense given to “responsibility”: the transference of “responses” volleyed from one subject to another, drawn by a *mise en abime*. There is a *mise en scène* of this in the structuring of a *parlement*—a place where men (typically) reason together.

Let us add to this that the conference was arranged by a group—with a representative in Parliament—that feels responsible to Nature (animal as well as a world worlded as “earth”) as the Other of the Human—a group self-consciously responsible for the picking back up of the abdicated responsibility of being human-on-earth, as it were, and representative of those who have recalled this responsibility, those human beings who are fully human, at last. It may, I think, be said that they speak in the name of spirit against technologism and capitalism. Does this “re-inscribing of spirit in an oppositional demarcation” make it a unilaterality of subjectivity? And how terrifying is the contamination?

38. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 229–68 and *passim*.

39. Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Surveys from Exile*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1974), 143–249.

40. In Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 84–129.

If at an academic conference one's ostensible responsibility is firstly to "truth," secondly to oneself—since it is oneself that one must represent—and thirdly to the audience—to whom one must communicate—and all these have, as we know, their attendant practico-philosophical problems—a conference with a registered audience (who are, in such a situation, Rousseauistically called "participants"), where the obligation of the speakers is to represent a specific national perspective through international concern, as they are ranged in a facing space, carries the representation (*Darstellung*) of direct "responsibility" (as if *Vertretung*) into a certain abyssality by borrowing from the resources of the theater, resources that are freely discussed in the planning and recognized in the event even as they are automatically dismissed by protocol.⁴¹ This last awkward sentence must be given the flesh and blood of empirical detail. But there is yet another codicil to be added to the account of how "political" and "human" responsibility was, in this case, bound to a structure.

(And the very thought of the codicil calls for a caution. There can be no assumption that "pure" responsibility can appear, unstructured and unstaged. The call is a gift, but the response is, unavoidably, an exchange-effect. This is the stimulus of a persistent critique, which must forever try to maintain the precarious balance between construction and destruction: deconstruction.)

The codicil, then: The entire set described in the text was staged as a dialogue, between the forces of "Development" and the voices of a "developing nation," charging the Developers with constructing a theater of responsibility to disguise the mechanics of unrestricted capital investment.

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(*Dialogue* is, in fact, the accepted proper name of responsibility as exchange-of-responses, implicitly understood as the flow of propositions or constations rather than responses from both sides. It is a word given status and currency by the participatory movements in the sixties that have displaced themselves in the New Social Movements of the seventies and the eighties, of which the European Green Party is an inheritor. I have already indicated a possible scenario of responsibility that can be constructed out of the party's presuppositions, broadly understood. This other feature, the implementation of that responsibility through dialogue,

41. For a tabulation of the practico-philosophical problems of communication at an international conference, see Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Margins*, 309–30.

is the translation of the presupposition into technique. The thinking of the relationship [or nonrelationship, or "relationship"] between justice and law inaugurated by "the Force of Law" inevitably determines my understanding of the relationship between responsibility and dialogue.⁴² For I think it is right to say that in that word, in this particular Anglo-U.S. usage, the "false" etymology of "dia," as the two that converse, mingles with the "original" sense of something coming about through the telling, the middle voice of *dialegesthai* mingling also with telling, as in a calculus. But let this remain a parenthesis, for to dwell on this would restrain us from the empirical narrative. Yet, let it be said that the often repugnant and smug congratulation that the inclusion of empirical narrative brings to an academic in the humanities is even less productive when unaccompanied by such musings.)

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Indeed, the conference was organized for the establishment of a dialogue. The word *dialogue* (and *confrontation*, about whose relationship to responsibility much could be written) was repeatedly used in the conference literature precisely as that phenomenon the establishment of which would be the first step toward the restoration of responsibility. Let me quote a sentence that will highlight the justice/law, responsibility/dialogue route that must be taken as given in order to decide, necessarily in the night of non-knowledge: "The legal basis for public consultation and people's participation must be ensured first . . . [in order] to have a meaningful dialogue with the World Bank."⁴³

I am speaking of a conference that has been described in the following way:

In a victory for Green Party activists from France, Germany, and the Netherlands, the European Parliament will host an unprecedented open debate of the merits of the FAP May 26 and 27, 1993, where project opponents will have an opportunity to present their case directly to many of the governments funding the scheme.

Let me give the bare bones of the situation. (If Derrida had been obliged to give gross affirmations for lack of time, I am obliged to summarize,

42. Derrida, "Force of Law," 947.

43. Farhad Mazhar, as quoted in Leonard Sklar, "Drowning in Aid: The World Bank's Bangladesh Action Plan," in *Multinational Monitor* (Apr. 1993): 13. The following passage is from page 8 of the same piece.

because I can expect no familiarity with the background of Development in the readership of deconstruction.)

Bangladesh is a small, fertile country continually in the making by the play of huge young rivers. These young rivers rise in the neighboring countries and gather force until they reach Bangladesh on their way to the Bay of Bengal. They deposit enormous quantities of silt as their waters divide into innumerable tributaries as they reach the open bay. It is quite like the way the great blood vessels finally break into capillaries to disperse into the skin. The entire country, apart from the mountains to the north and east, is thus soft alluvial deposit, and the coast is a collection of many small shifting deltas covered by mangrove swamps.

Because these rivers are young and strong, they move. When the Brahmaputra River is at maximum flood, for example, bedforms up to 15m[eters] high migrate downstream as much as 600 m/day. . . . Lateral channel movements as high as 800 m/yr are common. . . . Many experts consider the confinement of such rivers to be impossible. . . . [This is also] one of the world's most earthquake-prone locations. An active fault line lies along the northern edge of the delta, at the foothills of the Himalayas. The largest earthquake on land known to seismologists, registering 8.7 on the Richter scale, occurred in this region in 1897. . . . Witnesses reported that the quake caused plumes of water to gush from the ground. . . . In areas of recent sand and silt deposition with high water tables, such as the Bengal delta, earthquakes lead to liquefaction, the temporary loss of strength of sands and silts, which behave like viscous fluids rather than soils.⁴⁴

It may be said, only half fancifully, that the grounding of the ground is evident here as one thinks from the worlded world. What is crossed out has been already, and is being crossed out, by the moving weave of water.

At Bangladesh, the land mass of the Indian subcontinent narrows, and the Himalaya is squeezed up into its highest peaks. Thus, the monsoon winds here travel much longer over ocean and sea, gather force in the incopious width of the Bay of Bengal, and dash more quickly at a much higher mountain wall. It is a country of great rains.

In this combination of turbulent flowing and pouring—keep the distinction in mind for later—the Bangladeshi fisher-folk and grass-roots peas-

44. James K. Boyce, "Birth of a Megaproject: Political Economy of Flood Control in Bangladesh," *Environmental Management* 14, no. 4 (1990): 424.

ants have been used to living with water, even yearly flooding, forever. Every thirty years or so, there are devastating floods. They have learned to bear this, not quite to cope with the extraordinary inundations, but to bend with them and rise again. As for the yearly floods, they have learned to manage them, welcome them, and build a life-style with respect for them. Indeed, the moving floodwaters leave algae that alleviate the need to fertilize, and Bangladesh notionally produces enough to feed the entire population. (I must keep to the point of the essay and therefore cannot speak of the internal class exploitation and lack of interest in land reform.) I will touch upon this later in the essay.

The Bangladeshis' main source of protein is fish. The grass-roots fisher catches fish in rivers and waters that are still common property.

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(On my level of miming the logic of the concept-metaphor, is it absurd to ask if the relationship between *Dasein*-animal-world is different here from Heidegger-lizard-stone? It is in the context of the Flood Action Program in Bangladesh that I began to get my kind of handle on Derrida's obstinate insistence, in the face of learned participants in his seminar who cited Heideggerian passages apparently to the contrary, that Heidegger never speculated on eating. And his equally insistent refrain: What is it to eat?⁴⁵ If, in a certain conventional theology, to eat God's flesh is to establish exchange with spirit, what is established by eating mere flesh [or fish]? Is the argument on the fetish, contrasting the two, akin to the humanist teleology of [Heidegger's] Christian metaphysics in the differentiation between *Dasein* and the animal? When the anthropologist learnedly transforms the racist language of the fetish into the scientific discourse of the totem, how much by subreption [as in Kant's analytic of the sublime] does the psychoanalytic set subl[im]ate all of this from "real" castration to circumcision as [recalling the fear of] "castration," so that the self-conscious [super-egoic] sense of responsibility, recognizable as such, takes quite another form?⁴⁶ How does the ecology of fish-eating in the geology of turbulent youthful rivers transform the eating of sacrificial flesh in Islam, of which these circumcised subalterns are devoutly observant in season, as far as means will allow?

45. See also Jacques Derrida, "Eating Well," in Eduardo Cadava et al., eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 96–119.

46. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernhard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 96. Freud, "Moses and Monotheism," in *Standard Edition*, 23:91, 122, 190n.

Because these people are poor, are they not human enough for philosophizing on the basis of their lives, as did Heidegger starting from the generally human? Especially if they occupy Derrida's question to Heidegger—"What is it to eat"—from a position that is not-quite-not fetish/totem, yet marked by sacrifice and circumcision?⁴⁷ How does the question of woman complicate each one of these categories? Has Heidegger ever been faulted because today's Bavarian grass roots may not think as he does?

But I am dragged beyond my summary by the problematic of [wo]man-fish-water. Let us resume.)

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In 1988, there was a disastrous flood—one of the three expected in a century. It is alleged that Danielle Mitterrand, who was in the country at the time, spoke of the devastation to her husband—of course, she knew nothing of what has been summarized so far—and François Mitterrand—ironically, his name means "middle landowner," a traditional small-time class-exploiter of the common-property landless grass roots—decided to make flood control in Bangladesh the centerpiece of Third World Aid at the Paris Summit.⁴⁸

FAP (Flood Action Plan) 25, the first French plan, is an allegory of right reason (Figure 1). To impose upon the changeful riverscape the straight lines of massive "pharaonic" embankments is the plan.⁴⁹ Just over ten billion dollars are being circulated to generate further capital according to the changeful laws of the International Monetary Fund. The governments of the Group of Seven countries are involved as "donor" countries.⁵⁰

47. It is striking how, in neighboring India, where the dominant culture is "polytheist" in its imaginary, the same great rivers are symbolized as mothers/goddesses. One only has to cross the border to feel the weight of the shift. I have gropingly discussed the "polytheist" imaginary in "Response to Jean-Luc Nancy," in Juliet Flower MacCannell, ed., *Thinking Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

48. If the story is true in its detail, one is put in mind of the representation of Defoe's "Susan Barton" in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (New York: Viking, 1987), discussed as the clumsy interfering benevolence of the "motivated" white woman in Spivak, "Theory in the Margin: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*," in Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson, eds., *The Consequences of Theory: Selected Papers of the English Institute, 1987–88* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 154–80.

49. Boyce, "Megaproject," 421.

50. For a list of donors, see *Bangladesh Action Plan for Flood Control: Achievements and Outlook: An Update* (World Bank: Nov. 1992), 14. The recent agonizing over the

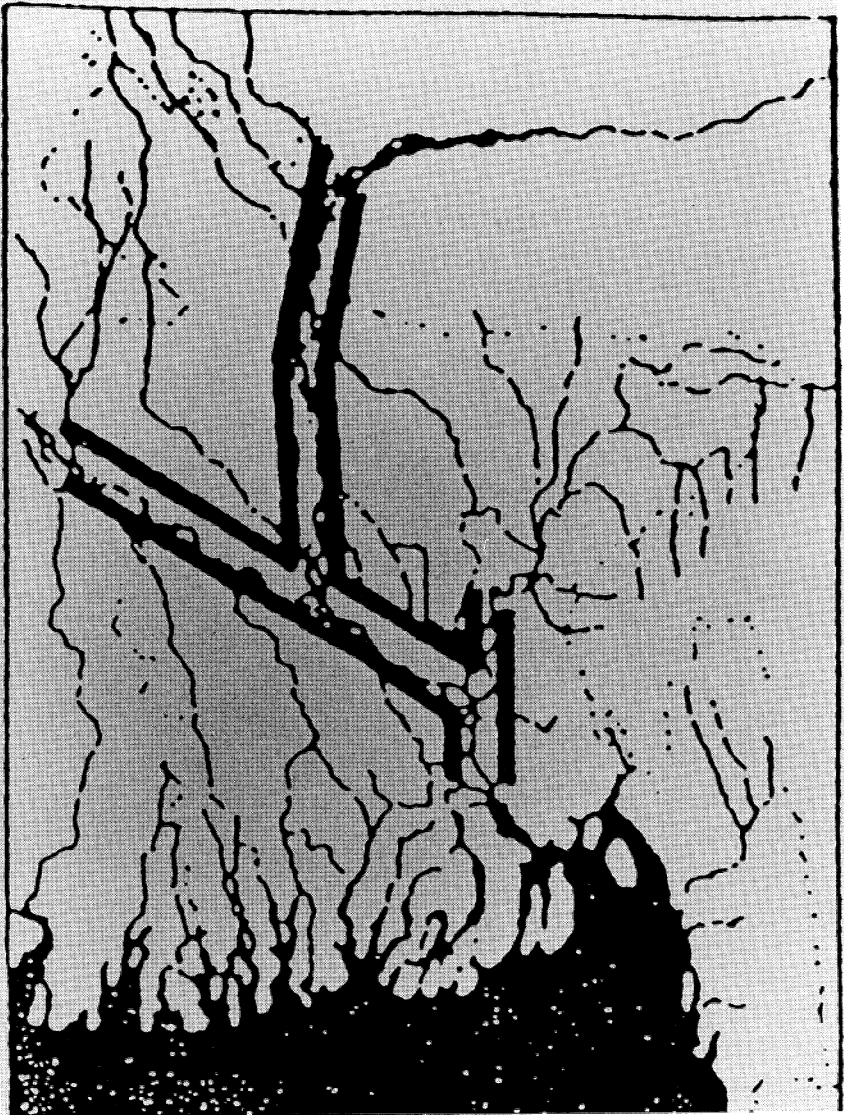


Figure 1. Flood Action Plan 25, from Boyce, "Megaproject," p. 425.

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(If *dialogue* bears a mark, so does *donor*. Who deserves that appellation? Who gives or can give? The gift is a limit that permits and annuls all recognizable human giving.⁵¹ But here, far from that limit, the name of giving is scientifically appropriated for coercive lending, solicited by comprador capital and a compromised state, used as staging props for a nation seeking alms.⁵² Is responsibility to be produced by a debt trap?⁵³ This monstrosity—a bonded donation—mortgages the future of the country.⁵⁴ I foolishly read philosophy as blueprint here:

Know still what giving *means* [*veut dire*, literally, wants to say], *know how to give*, know what you want and mean [*veux dire*, literally, wants to say] when you give, know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, commit yourself [*engage-toi*, literally, stake yourself?] even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy a chance.⁵⁵)

The World Bank coordinates the effort, shored up by innumerable business enterprises and consultancies and government allocations and international agencies. The country is “consultantized,” the possibility of agitation for peoples’ rights effectively blocked, since the de facto law is in the hands of the donors via a Flood Protection Coordinating Organization set up by executive decision of the Ministry of Water Development, which describes itself as an ad hoc staff body, directed by the “donors’” own policy

role of the high embankments or levees over the Mississippi in the United States flood disaster of 1993 will make the issue clear to American readers. “The peak flow of the Ganges-Brahmaputra confluences in the Bengal delta is more than double that of the lower Mississippi” (Boyce, “Megaproject,” 424).

51. Derrida, *Given Time*, chap. 1, 6–32.

52. A rough explanation of this process is offered in “Återbesök i den globala byn” [The Global Village Revisited], in Oscar Hemer, ed., *Kulturen i den globala byn* (Lund: Ægis, 1994), 161–96.

53. The classic explanatory and informative text here is still Cheryl Payer, *The World Bank: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Monthly Review, 1982).

54. A point made by Dr. Syed Hashemi, Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University, at the conference. See also Sklar, “Drowning”: “[T]he true beneficiaries of the plan will be foreign consultants and contractors who will collect hundreds of millions of dollars in fees, the cost of which will be added to Bangladesh’s already crushing foreign debt” (8).

55. Derrida, *Given Time*, 30.

requirements. There is, in other words, no accountability here. It is not conceivable that some First World consulting agency will, first, be tracked down after the organization has been dismantled; and, second, respond at the subaltern's call.⁵⁶ (In other words, the element of legal calculus of one sort in the name of a collectivity of individuals conceived in terms of tirelessly gathered details of life and living has been blocked. The certainty that Justice always eludes these calculations makes it all the more important that their possibility be sustained. "[I]t is just that there be law."⁵⁷)

We must recall that Development is the dominant global denomination of responsibility: The story is that the rich nations collectively hear the call of the ethical and collect to help the poor nations by giving skill and money. There are, therefore, elaborate and visible structures of public consultation in place. The ways in which these structures are manipulated—well-publicized occasions of exchange that are minimally disseminated or not disseminated at all, promises that are made without intention of performance ("pure" performatives), and in-house decisions not to honor the results of consultation, being only a few—can be documented.⁵⁸ It was to redress the imbalance between structural rights and the possibility of their exercise that the European Green Party called the most public meeting it could devise.

Knowing that responsibility in its setting-to-work can never reduce out the unilaterality of subjectivity, we still compute how the form of complicity of the Green Party and the World Bank (shorthand for all the parties involved in the FAP) are "not equivalent."

Undoubtedly, these are two "European" ways of helping the "people" of Bangladesh. For the World Bank, the "people" is the name of the final instance of justification for its enterprise. The justification, always crudely formulated, is a parody of Marx's conclusion, based on Victorian Britain, the herald of modern imperialism, that capitalism maximizes social productivity. Marx was involved in working out how the interest of capitalism could be diverted from capital to the "social," how poison could be measured into medicine. I have discussed elsewhere how the concept-metaphor of the

56. Point made at the conference by Dr. Mohiuddin Farooque, Secretary General of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association.

57. Derrida, "Force of Law," 947.

58. For detail, see Shapan Adnan and Abu M. Sufiyan, *State of the FAP: Contradictions between Plan Objectives and Plan Implementations* (Dhaka: Research and Advisory Services, 1993).

“social” betrayed Marx.⁵⁹ The thought of responsibility can come to supplement that betrayal.

The World Bank is not involved in the diversion of interest from capital to “social.” The “people,” rather far from Marx’s tough rationalist definition of the “social,” remain a promised possible beneficiary of the trickle-down from capital-intensive “social productivity.” The real interest remains the generation of global capital through consultant and contractor.⁶⁰ The World Bank does not merit the deconstructive reading and supplementation that Marx’s attempt commands. We owe it no such responsibility. It falls far short of the call.

The Green Party as such, on the other hand, whatever the sympathies of individual members, does not act in the name of the “people” as the last instance. Their last instance is “Nature,” even though it is always Nature-for-the-human as the human-for-Nature. Here, we can take all the precautions against imagining that Nature can ever be anything but that which comes back after and before the human.

This said, we can now notice that the elaborate dramaturgy of the parliament/conference structure of responsibility/representation keeps the party on the other side of the subaltern as well. Yet, we certainly will not consider this distance equivalent to the rapacious double-talk of the World Bank. One can act “politically” to make the distinction clear. Thus, somewhat haphazardly, selected members of the Bangladeshi opposition to the FAP responded positively to the party’s call. But they felt it inappropriate to sign the resolution drawn up for the support of the Bangladeshi people by interested members of the European Community.

One might think that pointing out this complicity between the party and the bank is enough proof of “a combinatory whose power remains abyssal.” These are two faces of “Europe,” after all—global and bloated, earthy and ascetic. But one must note, once again, the former’s formal refusal of responsibility, even as “exchange.” The following principals sent belated letters of refusal to the invitation to the conference, pleading an indefinite obligation: J. I. M. Dempster, Panel of Experts; Fritz Fischer, Ger-

59. Spivak, “Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida,” *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 97–120.

60. “Most World Bank disbursements flow right back again out of borrower countries in the form of procurement contracts, and the lion’s share of these contracts go to the ten richest industrialized nations” (Bruce Rich, Attorney for the Washington, D. C.-based Environmental Defense Fund, quoted in Sklar, “Drowning,” 13).

man Executive Director (World Bank); M. H. Siddiqi, Chief Engineer, Flood Plan Coordination Organization, Ministry of Water Development and Flood Control, Government of Bangladesh; John Clark, International Economic Relations (World Bank), Joseph Wood, Vice President, South Asia Region (World Bank), Ross Wallace, Resident FAP Coordinator (World Bank). Others, such as the representatives of the French government, refused with telephone messages. A Mr. Van Ellen, whose designation is not immediately clear from his faxed communication, offered the most interesting response: "I consulted in The Hague with the Netherlands Government and here in Dhaka with the Government of Bangladesh (FPCO), the World Bank, and [the] panel of experts. I have been advised not to participate and as a consequence I have to decline your invitation." The World Bank's Water Resources Advisor (Asia Region), W. T. Smith, provided the curtest refusal: "I regret I will not attend since I am not currently involved in the FAP."⁶¹

The monumental structure of any conference attempts to control the turbulent flow of new and old thought in the name of intellectual and professional responsibility. Let us attempt to draw an analogy between this and the nature of the Flood Action Plan. I have already indicated the broad similarity: the monumental pharaonic concrete hard structures are built in an attempt to control the turbulent young waters of the great rivers. We will see at the end how both—though not in equivalent ways—serve to silence the subaltern. But now let us take the analogy in another direction.

Let us think of these stupendous drains, driving the continually shifting text-ile waters by the violence of reason into the shortest route to the sea as the violence of Reason itself, driving the continually differentiating text-ile of meanings into the shortest route to Truth. But the absolute fulfillment of these drain-dreams and their attendant systems would be the perverse dream of Reason against that principle of reason which is obliged to give an account of itself, fulfilled in every detail, for itself: an animal-machine; with all inconsistencies programmed, the land reduced to whatever can be fed into Geographical Information Systems, its surface given over to that ruminant gnawing. This implacable logic began with the systematizing of land into survey in early modern Britain, the condition and effect of conquest and imperialism.⁶² The worlding of infinite geometries for control of the country as information is its working-out. It is in the interest of this that cul-

61. All correspondence available in the dossier of the conference.

62. Crystal L. Bartolovich, "Boundary Disputes: Surveying, Agrarian Capital and English Renaissance Texts" (Ph.D. diss.: Emory University, 1993).

ture fishery, projected as a replacement for the capture of fish moving with flood and moving water as common property, will systematize the bounded rivers into private property and export, and establish the systematization of agri-capital.

This is a dream that requires the kind of unconnected monitory pause that a deconstructive censor let slip in that long footnote of *Of Spirit*. Nazism, which showed the risk of *Destruktion* literalized, was, ostensibly, defeated, although the demonization of Islam and the progressively militant xenophobia in Europe and the United States give proof that the “big trees” in the “European”—by Husserl’s expanded definition of Europe—forest that sheltered Nazism can still be, however confusedly, called “culture, or the world of spirit.”⁶³ This dream, the animal-machine of exploitation fully transforming land into information for a manipulation that will obey a myriad minute rules of programming also belongs to that culture, that spirit, in the name of Reason—the public use of reason—“white” mythology.

It is the subaltern, the fisher and the grass-roots peasant, who produces a constant interruption for the full *telos* of Reason and capitalism, for those who have the patience to learn. I will tax my readers’ patience with one example among many.

Living in the rhythm of water, the Bangladeshi peasant long sowed two types of rice paddy seed. One of them survived submerged in water, the other came to full growth after the season of rain and flood. In 1971, agricultural reformers introduced a different variety of rice for a single high-yield

63. One or two conferences do not constitute evidence, but even one conference provides a counterexample to statements such as “it was precisely insofar as Heidegger remained faithful to certain precepts of ‘Western thought’ that he was *prevented* from identifying wholesale with the ‘racial-biological thinking’ of the National Socialists: a party whose doctrines and deeds represented . . . *the very negation of that tradition*” (Richard Wolin, “‘L’Affaire Derrida’: Another Exchange,” *New York Review of Books* 11, no. 6 [25 Mar. 1993], 66). As we have seen, Derrida values the monitory virtue of the Enlightenment and the accountable principle of reason. It is the unreasonable confidence in the European tradition that he warns against.

In July 1992, I attended a conference on Global Civilization and Local Cultures in Darmstadt, Germany. The country was ablaze with violent xenophobia. The conference did not once mention this, but spent three luxurious days on the assumption that Civilization was the Enlightenment (Habermas today), the theoretical champions of the local (read fragment) were the “postmodernists,” and the good local color would be discovered by enlightened cultural relativism toward exotic practices. This is what is meant by Nazism (xenophobia today) growing up in the shelter of the big trees in the European forest (confusedly) called culture.

crop. In the intervening years, the peasant has quietly and gradually shifted the time of sowing of this modern crop to Phalgun–Chaitro (February–March). As was their established custom, accommodating the play of land and water, they now sow pulses and vegetables before this. And now, at the reaping time of the new crop, the old flood-seed is sown, so that in the rain and flood-time, the fields are once again full of that submersible paddy.⁶⁴ (By contrast, the land “protected” from water by the embankments loses the fertilizing algae, thus providing an opportunity for the enhancement of the debt trap and the destruction of the ecobiome by the peddling of chemical fertilizers.) I hesitate to call this silent interruption “flood management” by exporting a metaphor of Nature as the “great *laboratorium*, the arsenal which furnishes both means and material of labor,” coming from (what is confusedly called) European culture, producing an evolutionary account.⁶⁵ I hesitate to denominate the responsible deconstruction (learning critique from within, leading to a new setting-to-work, as in Derrida’s reading of Heidegger) as “technology transfer,” as if a “gift” from a superior civilization.

Count this interruption in the nature of a permanent parabasis, the peasant’s rather than the philosopher’s disarticulated rhetoric, a setting-to-work, not an explication, of the philosopher’s dream. Ask the question again: What exactly does the fulfilled dream of Reason bring about on its way? If the subaltern offers us, say, learning, and the ecological deconstructor supplements this with the persistently intermediary stage of its transformation into exchangeable, but internalized, knowledge (not merely knowledge of knowledge), the “murderous” supplement of the animal-machine bypasses the implication of responsibility with subjectivity, even freedom of intention, and substitutes information command. This figure of evil continues the work of imperialism by destroying what is, no doubt confusedly, called “culture,” in this case a popular culture, traditional learning and knowledge, traditional agronomic patterns, and, what I have left until last, the traditional pattern of subaltern women’s freedom on the impermanent floating islands, or *chors*.⁶⁶ In place of the destroyed culture of learning, a continually ex-

64. I am grateful to Muhammad Ghulam Mustafa Dulal for providing these details of quiet change in connection with a flood-management project with “compartments” controlled by locks. I cannot, of course, claim that such changes have taken place all over Bangladesh.

65. Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973), 471; translation modified.

66. These points were presented by Mushrefa Mishu, President of the Bangladesh Student Unity Forum, at the conference. I hope the reader will forgive a long quotation, inserted into this already too-long essay, to illustrate the relay from imperialism to De-

panding amount of money continues to be spent, on the aid-debt model, to collect hydrological data, as if nothing had been known. A large section of the postcolonial subjects of Bangladesh is, of course, crazy about Geographical Information Systems, and not in the service of accountable reason. They provide the “European” interminable dialogists the opportunity to invoke “the Bangladeshis” as the willing beneficiaries, just as the interminable dialogists at the end of *Of Spirit* had invoked the “Messianic Jew . . . and the Moslem” (OS, 111).

The question or affirmation about the intractable agency of the specter is left open at the end of *Of Spirit*, since its textual function is nothing more (and nothing less) than the transcription of spirit as ghost.⁶⁷ Derrida has written elsewhere on spectrality in connection with Marx.⁶⁸

Is it possible to imagine that, since responsibility must bind the call of the ethical to a response, that one must act here as if responsibly to the specter called “commune-ism,” whose threat Development must des-

velopment and the continuity of subaltern insurgency, a permanent parabasis: “By the mid-eighteenth century, the Bengalis had extensively engineered the delta, both to protect against floods and to ensure that the silt-bearing river-waters could fertilize and irrigate fields. The first Britons to travel across the delta reported seeing thousands of kilometers of canals and embankments. . . . What they never realized, says Willcocks [the imperial water engineer who first made sense of the structures in a report published in 1930] was that the primary purpose of the canals was to irrigate and fertilize the land of the delta. . . . The British oversaw the gradual destruction of the ancient feudal system under which landlords forced peasants to maintain the dykes and clear the canals. . . . As the canals silted up, they began to overflow and became, for the British, ‘a menace to the country.’ Inspectors were appalled to see that the peasant farmers continued to cut holes in the canals, and the British police, who tried to stop them. . . . Willcocks concluded with proposals for the restoration of the ancient works, in order to ‘bring in again the wealth which central [the larger part of today’s Bangladesh flood plain] and west Bengal once enjoyed.’ . . . The ancient works took many years to construct. They were built, moreover, in small steps, bending to the will of the rivers at each stage. It was a training, rather than a taming, of the rivers. The Bangladeshi authorities and their foreign advisers today show neither the patience nor the contrition to adopt such an approach. They want to mould the rivers to their design” (Fred Pearce, *The Dammed: Rivers, Dams, and the Coming World Water Crisis* [London: The Bodley Head, 1992], 243–45). The peasants and fishers are still cutting embankments.

67. If the French *revenant* provides one sort of link with the entire chain on *venir* in Derrida’s work to the extent that the subterranean neologism *é-venir* occupies the place of the presenting of the present, the English provides its own kind of commentary by clandestinely making visible Heidegger’s kinship with Christian metaphysics: the holy ghost.

68. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

perately hold at bay? That setting-to-work need not call on a European left monoculture.⁶⁹ This space of intimate learning, of human-animal-watery ground, is, after all, an ongoing response to the weave of land and river by the landless and on common waters. Nothing but an intermediary question can be posed and left suspended in the space of an essay.

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Because we have less power than the World Bank, and because some of us are of color, when we confront the World Bank, we sometimes claim that the subaltern speaks. Also, as I have indicated before, if an academic includes empirical details in her essays, joins demonstrations, participates in international conferences with political-sounding titles, and engages in solidarity tourism, we think of her as an activist. Such assumptions might be put in their place by the fact that (1) the World Bank took little notice of the organized protesters at the conference; and (2) in order to locate the subaltern, the heterogeneous collection of subjects in the space of difference—from the two “Europes” *and* from those who can protest at a conference at a parliament—we will have to cross other frontiers. This conference was, however, an intermediary stage of strategic and tactical setting-to-work that involved a range from heads of the donor states all the way down to low-level functionaries of the client state, people involved, directly and indirectly, in making decisions and implementing them, decisions not always made in the night of non-knowledge, and affecting the subaltern.

To address (1) above concretely, I cite extracts from an internal memo circulated by the deputy director of the Environment Department of the World Bank. This is his answer to the question, “What happened at the conference?”:

There must have been 30–40 Bangladeshis present (all seemingly opposing FAP), with a smaller group of about six, who were official speakers. These, I understand from Ross Wallace, are the standard characters appearing at all the FAP events in Dhaka. They are, as you know, extremely articulate, and complement each other very well. Professor Shapan Adnan gives the fact in great detail, K[h]ushi Kabir gives a sociological perspective (giving emphasis to the income distributional and women’s issues) [Ms. Kabir had in fact been

69. I borrow this term from Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology* (London: Zed, 1993).

surprisingly silent about women this time]. Dr. Hashemi (a very sympathetic person I thought) gives the economic, Mohiuddin Farooq[ue] presents the legal questions (a very nice fellow, but didn't make much sense), and a young woman (Mushrefa Mishu) who is president of the Student Unity Forum, gives the passionate anti-colonial anti-establishment stuff, which the adults wouldn't get away with.⁷⁰

This is a silencing of protest, of course. Anti-imperialist discourse is put in its place with cynical flippancy. In case the World Bank should be obliged to back down (the protest meant something, after all), as they were in the case of the Narmada Valley Project in India in March, 1993, a formula for recoding defeat as victory is given in advance:

A clear statement from the Bank on the size and composition of the program emerging from the Regional Studies could perhaps help position us better from an external relations standpoint—although perhaps not with the government. Absent that, the opposition will strengthen in Europe and possibly in the US, and if a year from now a much more modest program does emerge, the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations, presumably Bangladeshi] will claim victory.

This makes it clear that the interminable exchange is indeed between Europe and Europe. The "others" can be dismissed as poor players, a stale act. But we must also note that the issue is how to claim responsibility for a "victory," to stage recapitulation in such a way that it looks like a responsible response to reasoned inquiry. All responsibility is a simulacrum of responsibility, perhaps. But all complicities with this necessity are not equivalent. And what Derrida has said, with justified irritation, about those who respond to responsibility with the cant of the decentered subject is nothing compared to what can be said to those who act out the reasoned responsibility of Europe to the people of the rest of the world in the interest of the self-determination of international capital:

Whence comes the law that forbids one to forgive whoever *does not know how to give*? "I saw then clearly that his aim had been to do a good deed while at the same time making a good deal; to earn forty cents and the heart of God; to win paradise economically; in short, to pick up gratis the certificate of a charitable man. . . . To be mean

70. Andrew Steer, "All-in-One Note," internal memo dated 5 June 1993.

is never excusable, but there is some merit in knowing that one is; the most irreparable of vices is to do evil out of stupidity.”⁷¹

The first of “seven broad points” to which the deputy director of environment reduces “the myriad grumbles about FAP” is that the “talk about participation is just that—talk. There is no genuine effort on the part of anyone to ask the rural poor what they think or want.” It is to be noted that no remedy is indicated for this problem anywhere in the memo. No genuine effort can, of course, be made by the programming dream of the perfect animal-machine to accommodate the singular rhythm of human/animal/water. And, on the mundane register, it is absurd to think that the ethical rhythm of responsive transference with the Bangladeshi subaltern can ever become the necessary, but impossible, goal for the functionaries and associates of the bank. The infinite care with which Derrida had compiled a list of the duties of the new Europe, and then reminded the self-same Europe that a list of quite other duties silently supposes it, can never become a part of the bank’s investment in Development.⁷²

The point is, however, that even when the bank is questioned by the representatives of a Europe that is responsible to the human being in Nature, the subaltern is silenced. In conclusion, a few hints.

The feasibility of sane technology transfer by building on traditional flood-management methods was elaborated with care and precision by the president of the International Rivers Network, based in Berkeley. No one but the Bangladeshis knew that in the overlong Bengali speech of Abdus Sattar Khan, an aging leader of the peasant movement, this flood-management technique, and the detailed account of all the major rivers in Bangladesh, was given in an old-fashioned perorative way.

I am not romanticizing this particular person. He is not a “great leader” and is apparently not specifically associated with the mobilization against the Flood Action Plan. I certainly do not know enough about him to credit him with authenticity, simply because, in that company of card-carrying international activists and Development officials, he seemed a guileless old man. But there can be little doubt that he was staged as a slice of the authentic, a piece of the real Bangladesh.

If the World Bank’s internal memo represents the silencing of protest, the misfiring of the staging of this elderly man is also a species of silencing.

71. Derrida, *Given Time*, 31, 32–33. The embedded quotation is from Baudelaire, cited in “Counterfeit Money.”

72. Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 76–80.

The way the shape of his words escaped the monumental structuring of the theater of Old Europe, which determined the “dialogue,” was pathetically trivial. But even here, we are not in the register of the speech of the everyday frustration of the quietly “flood-managing” fisher and farmer with the incomprehensible giant systematically destroying their established rhythm of existence.

It is often forgotten that the persuasive accomplices of the World Bank are, in appearance, well-meaning, educated Bangladeshis extending help to these subalterns. The first impulse that comes from below is of trust-in-responsibility. And, indeed, Sattar Khan had come to the conference trusting, trusting that his old-fashioned, fact-filled speech against the FAP would be heard. And, although in his case the trust was not in principle misplaced, there was such a great gulf fixed between his own perception of how to play his role in a theater of responsibility and the structure into which he was inserted that there was no hope for a felicitous performance from the very start. In order to hear him, “Europe” would need him to represent responsibility, *by reflex*, in “Europe” ’s way. In other words, he would have to change his mind-set. That is how the old colonial subject was shaped. When we do it, we call it education.

To begin with, the European Parliament had no provision for simultaneous translation from the Bengali. In the event, an imperfect English translation was read out of synch by a Bangladeshi who was attending (“participating in”) the conference, and it was this imperfect, well-meaning, amateur production that was available through the headphones in simultaneous translation in the other conference languages. For the first time, the hall was full of impatient hubbub: “European” discipline was breaking down. The man’s style, practiced on a lifetime of subcontinental popular oratory—another theater that Kipling was already mocking in the nineteenth century—declaimed with now-ridiculous passion to an absent audience. (The Bangladeshis present, from a younger, more professional generation, swung between embarrassment and sympathy.) Of course, Sattar Khan’s paper far exceeded the twenty allotted minutes. In the monumental structuring we inhabit, the exceeding of allotted time is negotiable and depends on gender, status, and the temperament of the moderator. In this case, the benevolent egalitarian young U.S. moderator cut the speaker off. Sattar Khan responded, in generally incomprehensible Bengali, with a “Friend, I am a poor peasant”—which was not, strictly speaking, the case, but under the circumstances, a fair rhetorical representation and, I have no doubt, infinitely more effective in those simulacra of parliamentarianism that we

encounter in former colonies, where the battle *is* between who is and is not a colonial subject rather than on grounds of cultural difference—"you must hear me out!" Therefore, he was, of course, allowed to continue by way of a gesture of benevolence toward someone who could not understand the rules. He read then at breakneck speed, and the entire *ad hoc* effort at translation collapsed.

This incident can only stand in for the subaltern's inability to speak, for Mr. Sattar, a middle-class peasant party leader, was far, indeed, from the landless peasant and the grass-roots fisher, however "indigenous" he was by contrast with the other participants. It stands in successfully, however—by virtue of the fact that the subaltern's inability to speak is predicated upon an attempt to speak, to which no appropriate response is proffered.⁷³ It is, in fact, a failure of responsibility in the addressee that can be reckoned irrespective of the fact that all communication is infected by *destinerrance*.⁷⁴

In 1991, before I had read *Of Spirit*, I had written as follows about the subaltern inhabitants of the cyclone- and tidal-wave-prone southeast coast of Bangladesh:

If this was an eco-logic where the unlikely material subject was the pulse of the tide and the rhythm of the water-logging of the wind, I was in no way ready, daily encountering these very people's savvy discussions of the U.S. Task Force . . . simply to narrativize them as an earlier pre-scientific stage where the proper help was to "control" Nature so that these people could be redefined as passive. . . . What would it be to learn otherwise, here? Better offer the contradiction: they will not move except as unwilling refugees. . . . I could respect the relief workers' bemused on-the-spot decision that this other kind of resistance to rehabilitation must not be allowed to develop into an aporia. But the vestiges of intellectual sophistication I possessed saw through with distaste the long-distance theorist's dismissal of the aporia as anachrony or his embracing of it as the saving grace of a-chrony. I was adrift.⁷⁵

73. I have tried to show an extreme case of this, where a woman tried to "speak" insurgency against a regulative psychobiography by inscribing her body in death, and at a deferred time, and yet was not able to secure a response, from upwardly mobile women of her own family, two generations removed ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Master Discourse, Native Informant*, Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

74. Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 123.

75. Spivak, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 728–29.

This unwillingness to leave the land is rather easily accounted for by the “good Europeans” as a justified fear on the part of the poor that they will “be deprived” of the land by evacuating, or “the increasing lack of waged work in rural areas.” I am not satisfied with so easy a reasoning.⁷⁶ Was there no lesson there at all to learn, then? Is the subaltern transparent?

This may seem inconsequential to the reader, but it is precisely this type of uncaring damming of a drift that marks Heidegger’s generalization of the animal. There is, according to the view I am discussing here, no gauge of intention but rational expectations, logical self-interest, reason written by something confusedly called European common sense. The subaltern mental theater is no bigger than this, just as for population control, the subaltern female is nothing but a crotch. There is something like a relationship between this and the perverse dream of fulfilled Reason, although all complicities are not equivalent.

No doubt these easy generalities come out of exchange with local people, sometimes through relayed networking, rightly perceived as a contrast to the World Bank’s structured alibi for consultation with the subaltern. Yet, the complicity is in that abyssal power of “European” exchange, for responsibility is still traduced here by impatience and inattention. I will close with an example of the silent gnawing of such a betrayal.

In “Birth of a Megaproject,” James Boyce, an authoritative witness against irresponsible Development, claims that “[t]he Bengali language distinguishes between the normal beneficial floods of the rainy season, which are termed *barsha*, and harmful floods of abnormal depth and timing, which are termed *bonna*. The English word flood conflates these two very different phenomena.”⁷⁷ The sources cited are Bangladeshi. Boyce’s observation is repeated in a number of subsequent Western articles; I am presuming that Boyce is the source of this. His interpretation of the information is incorrect, in a way common to genuine, but anthropologicistic, Euro-U.S. benevolence, as if someone, hearing people use “see you later” and “see you soon” interchangeably, should claim for the English language a profound philosophy of time where *soon* and *later* were identical.

Professor M. Aminul Islam, who is cited by Dr. Paul, Boyce’s direct source, writes as follows:

76. See, for example, an otherwise excellent piece by Peter Custers, “Banking on a Flood-Free Future? Flood Mismanagement in Bangladesh,” *Ecologist* 22, no. 5 (Sept.–Oct. 1992): 244, 246.

77. Boyce, “Birth of a Megaproject,” 419.

In all the three study villages flooding is referred to [as] *barsha* and *bonna* [This idiosyncratic construction carries a trace of the names of two different kinds of times, perhaps]. . . . *Barsha* (June–October) is a normal inundation and is taken as a benevolent agent. . . . *Bonna* is perceived as disastrous.⁷⁸

Neither of these native Bengali speakers is making a claim for Bengali (or, indeed, many north Indian languages), where *barsha*—← Sanskrit *varṣā*, a nominal construction from the verbal root *vr̥ṣ*, meaning, roughly, “to drop *down*”—means “rain” or “rainy season.” What they are claiming is that, in their study area and in “ecologically similar” areas, when the subaltern says “the rains,” s/he includes a certain normal inundation. If time and historical circumstance had obliged the English speakers to take as much trouble with Bengali as a foreign linguist has to with European languages in order to venture a remark about meaning in published prose about the general language, this “authoritative” comment on Bengali would not have been offered. And I am not speaking of high Bengali either but of the mother tongue spoken by the illiterate expert of “flood management.” *Monthlies* and *bleeding* are not good and bad words for bleeding in the English language.

In the context of this water-borne land still in the making in the rough theater of mountain and wind, the strict differentiation between rain and flood fixed in the (Indo-)“European” mind-set is persistently deconstructed, the one implying the other. When the balance is disturbed so that the opposition begins to come clear again, the signification is: disaster. However sympathetic the intention, to rob the mother tongue of the subaltern by way of an ignorant authoritative definition that is already becoming part of the accepted benevolent lexicography is a most profound silencing.

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These words, too many, can only point you toward such silences.

78. M. Aminul Islam, “Agricultural Adjustments to Flooding in Bangladesh: A Preliminary Report,” *National Geographic Journal of India* 26, nos. 1–2 (Mar.–June 1980): 50.