Introduction: Derrida and the future of . . .

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> Thus we no longer know whether what was always represen-
> ted as . . . "supplement," "sign," "writing," or "trace," "is" not . . .
> "older" than presence and the system of truth, older than "his-
> tory." Or again, whether it is "older" than sense and the senses:
> older than the primordial dator intuition, . . . older than see-
> ing, hearing, and touching . . . not more "ancient" than what is
> "primordial."
>
> *Speech and Phenomena*

> the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines . . .
> its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much
> as it records the event.
>
> *Archive Fever*

> Of course, if one defines language in such a way that it is reserved
> for what we call man, what is there to say? But if one re-inscribes
> language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass
> it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. I am
> thinking of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *différance*.
> These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no
> language, *are themselves not only human* . . . I am speaking here of very
> "concrete" and very "current" problems: the ethics and the politics
> of the living.
>
> "Eating Well"

I. WAGER

One could speak here of many things: the event horizon, the pros-
thetic earth, the absolute translation of legacies, the gambling of alter-
native futures, memory grids that give place to or transform institutions
from within, the hyper-politics of the allomorphic archive, experimental
chronographics – all part of the Derridean wager. Perhaps. What links
them is that they could arise out of a volume of trans-disciplinary essays

which addresses, today, the state of Derrida's project in relation to the "future," if there is a relation as such, of the Humanities, and perhaps the "human."

A break or betrayal, certainly an organizing incision is required at the outset.

While developing over four decades through an astonishing array of styles or strategies, performative experiments, and targeted interrogations, Derrida's project has been entirely consistent with his opening gambit. Here is how Derrida announced this:

> The use of language or the employment of any code which implies a play of forms – with no determined or invariable substratum – also presupposes a retention and protention of differences, a spacing and temporalizing, a play of traces. This play must be a sort of inscription prior to writing, a protowriting without a present original, without an *arche*. From this comes the systematic crossing-out of the *arche* and the transformation of general semiology into a grammatology, the latter performing a critical work upon everything within semiology – right down to its matrical concept of signs – that retains any metaphysical presuppositions incompatible with the theme of *différance*.[1]

How does a reading of the "trace," spacing, the mark, and *différance* transform not only the inherited legacies of the West (for this would amount, only, to an annotation to an archive of knowledge), but actively translate its terms, eviscerate and re-assemble them in difference, interrupt the received programs of perception, interpretation, and experience – and in the process of altering this past or archive, the very functioning of it, hold open the space for the arrival of the unprecedented event, of a virtual or alternative "future" to those programmatically foreseeable (a "future" necessarily *monstrous* since unprogrammed)? That is, whatever Derrida's institutional place or *places* today within the Academic disciplines – and there is no one answer to this, given the play of presence and absence – the stakes of this enterprise never were canonicity, but something perhaps like a translation or recalibration of mnemonic orders to set the stage for, perhaps, other events, decisions, and transformations "to come." Numerous interventions in Derrida's work have targeted specific problems and fields – from law to architecture, literature, ethics, technology, religion, aesthetics, history, politics, and so on – but if one were to try to identify or visualize the "trace," one could not, though nothing could enter the realm of perceptibility, language, thought, or history in its absence. "Older" than history or the senses, it would traverse the site of archival management retaining the possibility of interruption, intervention, much as the mark does all textual agencies on the most micrological of levels, much as "spacing," representable (if at all) by or

as mere interval, like a series of slashes, sustains all visibility, all temporalization, all "writing." If Derrida's entire project is a wager nonetheless, it is important to recall the *ante* on the table, which today if anything has only been upped by the impasses which might put the possibility of the "future" in question variably. The upping of the ante – the rendering hyper-political, we might say, of that concerned with the pre-originary effect of thinking the "trace" – has also come from without: say, the University in "ruins," the rule of corporate globalization, "Marxism's" defensive retreat, global warming, and the havoc or eviscerations of terrestrial reserves (species extinction, potable water, fossil fuels, and so on).[2] If the "Humanities" are caught in a double cross-site of University and cultural priorities, they are at once targeted and preserved as a legacy of a humanistic program which archived temporality and value. Out of joint with cultural pragmatisms and consumer culture or the hegemony of techno-science, its monumentalization is as much valued, it seems, as its transformation into active projects of translation would be blocked, returned to a service industry for the maintenance of an ideology of transparency that confirms an arrestation in a rethinking of technicity generally. The broad retreat of contemporary pedagogy in the feudal structure of University rule is too obvious to need addressing, except to note where the *virtual* legacy of the forces, laws, traces, and mnemonic performatives that would be translated – and actively transformed – by alternative relay and reading models threatens the dominant academic sites of today's horizons: at risk of enslavement or reduction to a service capacity, their "future" might depend upon an active translation of linguistic and perceptual premises (hence, a certain model of the "human"). The "Humanities" may appear, at present, pre-inhabited by a *mal d'archive* or "death drive" confirmed by the institutional "pragmatism" which brackets them by fulfilling that drive – subsidiary, all the while, to economic forces that legislate definition and place.

Derrida has his way of pointing to an irreality that can no longer be situated as such in these terms, as in the opening of the third chapter, "Wears and Tears (Tableau of an Ageless World)," in *Specters of Marx*:

The time is out of joint. The world is going badly. It is worn but its wear no longer counts. Old age or youth – one no longer counts in that way. The world has more than one age. We lack the measure of the measure. We no longer realize the war, we no longer take account of it as a single age in the progress of history. Neither maturation, nor crisis, nor even agony. Something else. What is happening is happening to age itself, it strikes a blow at the teleological order of history. What is coming, in which the untimely appears, is happening to time but it does not happen in time. Contretemps. *The time is out of joint*.[3]

To examine "deconstruction" as a wager is, perhaps, not to rehearse again the techniques of reading or the assault on metaphysics that provided the earliest context for the polemics surrounding its reception. It might, instead, direct itself primarily to what Derrida terms affirmative "deconstruction" (of which, differently, there would nonetheless be no other kind).

An incision may be required to resituate these stakes, this *ante* that was on the table before any among us arrived. How is a "future" – if unpreconceived and therefore "monstrous" – held open against the automated closure of installed laws which police and regulate perception, hermeneutic machines that preinscribe decisions, models of reference and action, and so on?[4] If the programming of institutions and regimes of memory management stand to be opened to a radical (and non-human) alterity that welcomes the "event," the received programs we find ourselves in are not only implicitly judged as *faulted*, as forecasting a certain doom, as a *mal d'archive* turned against itself beyond the "histories" of metaphysics or the economies of phallogocentrism that are openly targeted. If there is a *fault* in this state without horizons, that which is "older" than history itself and standing apart from it can critique or recast its program – like the injunction Hamlet receives from the visored ghost ("Do not forget!"), an imparted "knowledge" contradicted by the court or appearances to the point of folly, much as the logics of the "trace" would be contradicted too by the rhetoric of empiricisms, realisms, hermeneuticisms, pragmatisms, materialisms, and so on, for which an assumed transparency of language would be both premise and alibi. It must be possible to hypothesize, as Benjamin does in the *Theses on History*, a rupture, shock, or caesura in which an orchestrated program or past can itself be suspended, disinscribed, and through which other inscriptions can take place, opening new questions and new "responsibilities" that traverse the human and the non-human, animate (or animal) and inanimate, technicity, ethics, and decision. For the "future" cannot arrive without a mark that prepares, or invites, its place – and the site of translation, today, in the fields represented by the "Humanities" or trans-disciplines represented in this volume, offer an occasion to survey that movement, the state of the wager perhaps, its advance or regressions, formalized paralyses or incisions. If we may speak today of *upping the ante* it is as the rendering hyper-political of the pre-originary logic of "trace."[5] What will seem a translation of legacies undertaken by Derridean reading is not from one language into another, such as a new reading technique or set of textual premises. The wager at issue involves

how regimes of memory management (hermeneutics) precedent to pre-ception, certainly, program or produce calculable forms of life, decisions, experience, or how the archive is pre-inhabited in this way by an ill, a fault (again), a *mal d'archive* whose formalizations foreclose the "future" in determinant ways.

To approach this site, we may need to recall some of the tools Derrida brings into play. And this is why reading becomes an agency of interven-tion in the opening to redecision not only of mnemotechnic programs and hermeneutic rules, but what Benjamin calls the "sensorium" (by which the world is produced and processed, reference assigned, laws in-teriorized). Reading, that is, which sides with a movement of the "trace" or mark or spacing before any semantic unit or grammar can pretend to legislate sense; reading which, variably, ensconces the text-event in a per-formativity without ground (authorial dictate, generic law, the "proper" more generally); reading as tool and weapon; readings for which, say, the *phoneme* might appear the labyrinthine precedent, and betrayer, of any phenomenology: for only by this disruption of the hermeneutic regime which includes a programming of the senses does an opening to a "fu-ture" or "event" occur that is not, merely, another "tomorrow." Specif-ically, if the Derridean wager offers itself in some ways as transitional, as a bridge or crossing, it might be said to (dis)assemble in the process a grid, a web, a network of disruptive nodes or points in which this is underway but also against which new combinations may be staged or begin to take root. This transitional site is Mosaic to the degree it can ap-pear to exceed one law (or semantic regime) with the prospect of other responsibilities which are no longer only "human" but traverse living and dead, past and future, terrestrial dwelling and ethics. If mnemonic inscriptions program both the senses and interpretive rituals, Derrida's wager may be said, in short, to address what is at issue in disinscribing such a pre-recording – what will be experienced as "loss," no doubt, by certain communities, and hence as a "nihilistic" moment – and re-inscribing otherwise, within a new opening or hospitality to alterity, to a non-human Other. This difference from the perception of "decon-struction" as a nihilist or relativistic practice, even a merely deseman-ticizing one, to that of a project positioning a break with a provenly nihilistic historicism and humanism, in an open wager directed toward a "future" it cannot, itself, expect to arrive on its watch or even rec-ognize, is decisive, and decisive for evaluating what transformations in the disciplines, the Humanities, or the archive itself may or may not be underway.

If reading Derrida entails a labyrinthine movement, then, it is as a
performative and at times vertiginous mobility where strategies and logics
replicate in explosive variants and viral elaborations. One may choose, as
a reader, one among other threads to hold in entering these translational
scenes. For if Derrida anticipates and insists on an "other writing" that
pre-inhabits and ruptures hermeneutic laws, disinvests master terms,
alters the hegemony of conceptual networks from within – if a plethora
of strategies and inventions fan out across the field of Western legacies
which remark and dislocate received machines of sense – one can pretend
to reduce this to two clashing logics: that of the "trace" and that of the
received mnemonic program or law.

The "trace" partakes of the logics and movement of the mark and
of spacing. If in "human" thought and perception there is language at
work, that entails the movement of an irreducible element that can parse,
re-arrange, micrologically question or translate – that is, hyperbolically
read – how textual events may appear formalized to organize memory,
manage knowledge, or legislate (often against themselves) the senses.[6]
This factor is sometimes called simply (and somewhat misleadingly)
"writing." The mark or trace, occluded from the field of linguistic thought
to preserve a fabled transparency of perception or "communication," on
which again all rhetorics of realism, historicism, phenomenology, em-
piricism, pragmatism, mimeticism, and spiritism variably rely, provokes
a rereading of the entire field of mnemonic experience or textual legacies
as well as all that derives from it: hermeneutic rituals, the programming
of so-called perception, the management of political memory, juridical
and aesthetic institutions, ethics, the problematic or prospect or defini-
tion of temporal inscription. This logic triggers an irreversible scene of
translation – a difference or *différance* (at once a temporal and spatial
movement) that transports from viewing "human speech acts" as con-
ventions managed by the will to performatives without ground traversed
by non-human traces, without a secure horizon of occurrence (with-
out a "now," as opposed to a skein of retentive and protentive traces,
gathering, determining, effacing). One can be excused for projecting
the figure of a historial bottleneck – as if every problematic, every dis-
cipline, must be recalibrated and re-initialized before the play of the
"trace."[7] Here would be recast the functioning of the archiving archive
out of which experience, decision, and virtual futures would be given
space to occur or not. The trace, non-human, dispossesses the economy
of a dwelling predicated on a binarized occlusion of the (non-human)
Other and opens these networks of mnemonic laws to possible default,

to a disassembly that permits a re-assembly maintaining the logics of spacing and trace – that is, a hospitality toward the non-human Other that is structural, open to recalibrations not only of archival politics but the technicity of geothanatological and epistemo-political effects. In this seemingly minimal wager – that of "trace," spacing, or the mark – there would be perhaps nothing more than a gambling of (an) virtual earth(s), assuming that everything which determines human institutions depends on regimes of memory management and the semantic controls that effect it. That is, it involves the possibility or event of dis-inscription and re-inscription.[8]

How would the former be effected? How would the former be proffered, if the pre-recordings precede even our notion of the "past," since they manage the definitions (or produce the narratives) which define anteriority, and how would the latter (re-inscription) be determined and installed so as to make place for the (deferred) possibility of the "event" (which that inscription is)? How does the recording archive produce the event that it (would) records, thus altering the past and rendering the "event" possible? How does this "translation" induced by a thinking of trace – not from one language to another, but within every so-called "language" (of which there never is "one") by an "other language" or writing which does not yet exist but pre-inhabits each – yield an ethics, a politics, a conception of religion haunted by technicity? What shapes or trajectories does an affirmative deconstruction take, as if to say "today"?[9]

2. DIS(AS)SEMBLING MOSAICS

> This concept of responsibility is inseparable from a whole network of connected concepts (property, intentionality, will, conscience, consciousness, self-consciousness.)
>
> "Force of Law"

The trace is unrepresentable unless as a correlative of *spacing* we thought of it metaphorically as a series of slashes or bars (a signature used, interestingly, throughout Hitchcock to dissolve the mimetic pretext of visibility), or in "phonemonological" terms a sort of aural knocking – as at a *séance*, under the table. As in the closing of "Plato's Pharmacy": "The night passes. In the morning, knocks are heard at the door. They seem to be coming from outside, this time . . . Two knocks . . . four . . ."[10] This "knocking" is from an outside which is not one except, perhaps, as an effect whose dispossessing pre-inhabitation is or must be quieted, effaced, or contained (to create an "interior" effect). During the analysis

of "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida stops at the site of *khora* in the *Timaeus*, where he places a bookmark: "Here is a passage beyond all 'Platonic' oppositions, toward the *aporia* of originary inscription . . . The *khora* is big with everything that is disseminated here. We will go into that elsewhere" (160–61). This "elsewhere" will be the non-place of *khora* it/herself, the faux (a)maternal (or "(a)material") prospect of pre-originary inscription, as well as Derrida's later essay of that name, a pre-originary (non)site where programs and inscriptions are installed:

the being-programme of the programme, its structure of pre-inscription and of typographic prescription forms the explicit theme of the discourse *en abyme* on *khora*. The latter figures the place of inscription of *all that is marked on the world*.[11]

Yet here, too, we are close to imaging within the Derridean weave a site where the disinstallation or re-inscription of world can be, despite its non-place, approached or marked: "a place where everything is marked but which would be 'in itself' unmarked" (109). As for the role Plato has taken in the so-called history of metaphysics: " 'Platonism' is thus certainly one of the effects of the text signed by Plato, for a long time, and for necessary reasons, the dominant effect, but this effect is always turned back against the text" (119–20). "Against the text," like a *mal d'archive* that simultaneously imposes a hermeneutic regime and installs a software whose arc entails eventual self-cancellation.[12] The *mal d'archive*, the "radical evil" of and within the archive, constitutes the archive yet turns it against itself ("There is not one archive fever, one limit or one suffering of memory among others: enlisting the in-finite, archive fever verges on radical evil").[13] What emerges, or can be profiled in this non-site, *khora*, is the backloop of the pre-inscription, the pre-recording which includes, projects, or programs an itinerary – since a "hermeneutic" is also an epistemo-political regime – which will occur according to this law, a history which evades the "event."[14] The logic allows us to conceive, then, of what the event of dis-inscription – for this is the effect of the Derridean readings of Plato alluded to – intervenes in, in optioning another set of horizons:

Everything happens as if the yet-to-come history of the interpretations of *khora* were written or even prescribed in advance, *in advance and reproduced and reflected* in a few pages of the *Timaeus* "on the subject" of *khora* "herself" ("itself"). With its ceaseless re-launchings, its failures, its superimpositions, its overwritings and reprintings, this history wipes itself out in advance since it programs itself, reproduces itself, and reflects itself by anticipation. Is a prescribed, programmed, reproductive, reflexive history still a history? . . . hence what I am saying about

khora gives a commentary, in advance, and describes the law of the whole history of the hermeneutics and institutions which will be constructed *on this subject*, over this subject. (99)

A history whose institutions and hermeneutics in all variations are pro-grammed by the event which that same history stages itself or covers over, turns against ("The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself"),[15] yet leaves intact as *transperformative* – if such a prescripted itinerary can be called a "history" – is opened anew to disinscription and re-inscription, its pre-recordings rendered again virtual. *Khora* assumes the position of the (non)mother, the undoing of materiality and maternity before what is pre-originary, where the world is assembled by marks which, nonetheless, are to it/herself "neither sensible nor intelligible" (96).

This is the non-site of virtual disinscription and re-inscription of the world, impossible, without relation to phenomenality. *Khora* would be anterior, *ante*, even to archive: "As much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future" (33).[16] The metaphorics of "mother" is exposed as prosthetic, a site of marking and spacing, like the earth, *Geo*, which stands to be re-inscribed at this site which the transperformative draws toward.[17]

The knocking at the *séance* table stands to interrupt, dis-assemble, or micrologically open any mnemonic program or language, like the spac-ing or trace which attends the spectral setting of an unending translation. This movement of the trace preinhabits the languages and house or lega-cies of the tradition. I mark these matters since it frames the "deconstruc-tive" project at a slight remove from what I will call the reference wars of the academy whose polemics have at times defined, and cauterized, the intervention at issue – which would be neither that of new techniques of academic reading, as such, nor an aestheticization of the political. If in the knocking of the *séance*, which the logic of the trace or mark signals, the management of anteriority stands to be reconfigured, it is to make an opening of and toward the possibility of the event or the arrival of virtual futures. The model for this is a translation that is without end since it does not move from one to another so-called language. Any given lan-guage(s), any monolinguism apprehended as a pretended unity, would appear already spoken by one who (or that) is also not "of" that lan-guage, not coincident with it, hence preinhabited by another language experience or language not yet existent – "the ante-premier . . . (or) pre-originary language" ("Monolinguism," 21). This is not introduced by an outside, another language, but recalls Benjamin's inverse trope of *reine*

Sprache,[18] that is, the sheerly (a) material trace-scapes out of which any particular language would be assembled and which would allow a given text to be perpetually resolved into these trace-scapes, in different combinations, by the act of translation as if caught in the transition between two "languages." In the case of the North African Derrida :

> this "inside" of French inscribes within the relationship-to-itself of language, inside its auto-affection so to speak, an absolute outside, the hardly audible or legible reference to that *entirely* other ante-premier language, that degree zero-minus-one of writing which leaves its ghostly mark "in" the so-called monolanguage. This translation translates itself into an internal (Franco-French) translation, playing with the non-identity with itself of all language. No such thing as *one* language exists. (21)

This "structural opening" onto the idea of the future Derrida terms, again, "messianism, that originary promise without a literal content" (23). Translation as hyperbolic *crossing*, or suspended crossing *over* (*Übersetzung*), presents a "structural opening" within the orders of memory, the archive and, independently of all relational defamation, what is called *khora* – the site of pre-inscription. The hospitality of this model to the era of tele-technicity is apparent (and perhaps misleading): the assumption of sheer exteriority without a definition of the "private," the affirmative interface with hypertextual models, the alertness to tropes of "software" that run programs, and so on.

To transpose or translate further or at random, some logics which attend the non-site of *khora* surface not only in the archive or "absolute translation," but in Derrida's analysis of the "apocalyptic tone" ("an apocalypse without apocalypse"), or even literature and "the secret." The political necessity of the latter is stressed, as when the relatively recent or modern "institution" of literature is defined as what allows *everything to be said*: "No democracy without literature; no literature without democracy."[19] Such a *literature* always situated within and against a phantasmal state-control of internalized linguistic censorship marks itself by a logic of "the secret" whose "non-phenomenality is without relation, even negative, to phenomenality" ("Passions," 21). Moreover, if the machinery and presuppositions of reference are retracted and rewired through the non-mystical and contentless formalism of the "secret," the latter's retreat generates the fiction of a relation: "The secret is that one here calls it secret, putting it for once in relation to all the secrets which bear the same name but cannot be reduced to it. The secret would also be homonymy, not so much a hidden resource of homonymy, but the