Gérard Huber has distinguished between . . . (a decision does not wait, the
decision cannot wait for levels to be distinguished). Well then, since we can-
not wait for these oppositions to be analyzed, for these levels be distin-
guished, for the discussion to be over and for satisfactory conditions to be
found to act and make decisions, given that urgency and precipitation are
part of the very essence of the decision, our duty here is to discover and to
invent, each and every time, in singular situations, that is to say, without a
given rule. Our duty is to invent, to give the rule. And the example. Thus,
not to wait and to know how to wait at the same time. It is vertiginous, but
only in this situation can decisions be made. Not to wait, while holding one-
self back nonetheless to continue to reconsider things; a responsible deci-
sion, if there is one, always comes at this price, as does vigilance, as does
everything that might tear us from our dogmatic slumber, if this is possible.

Nietzsche and the Machine

R.B.: It has been an insistent point on your part, informing the reading
strategy of each of your engagements with Nietzsche’s philosophy, that
there is no one truth to Nietzsche or to Nietzsche’s text. Your relations to
Nietzsche distinguish themselves explicitly from those of Heidegger, which
are marked by a persistent, if not anguished, desire to contain Nietzsche
within the history of Being. As you observe in Otiobiographies, “The future
of the Nietzsche text is not closed.” I hope that my questions keep to the
spirit of this remark, not only by remaining as open as possible but also be-
cause they concern the future(s) of Nietzsche (what Nietzsche had to say of
the future as well as the future of Nietzsche’s thought today). I want, nev-
evertheless, to engage you with the Nietzsche text in relation to a specific his-
torical context: that of a world emerging—politically, economically, and
culturally—from the Cold War. The general orientation of my questions is
thus not related too intently to questions of interpretation (whether of
Nietzsche’s text, your texts, or your texts on Nietzsche); it is guided, rather,
by the consideration of the name Nietzsche as an “index” of a series of prob-
lems that are ever-more pressing at the end of the Cold War—namely, the
relations between government, technology, justice, and the future. Let the
name of Nietzsche in this context be a way of opening up possibilities of ap-
proach to these problems. I should like to entitle the interview “Nietzsche
and the Machine.”

QUESTION ONE: I will start with a very general question. When one
considers all the writings that you have published to date, one is struck
by a paradox. Since "Force and Signification" in *Writing and Difference*, various voices of Nietzsche have intimately inhabited your work, and yet, compared to the long analyses of Husserl, Plato, Hegel, Freud, Blanchot, etc., you have written, or at least published, few pieces explicitly on Nietzsche. Is there a particular reason for this?

J.D.: In response to question one—this apparent lack of sustained reflection on Nietzsche can perhaps be explained by following one of the threads of your introduction. I have indeed found it difficult to bring together or stabilize, within a particular configuration, a "thought" of Nietzsche. By the term configuration I mean not only a systematic coherency or consistency (no one has seriously tried to identify a philosophical or speculative "system" in what is called—a proper name more problematic and enigmatic than ever—*Nietzsche*) but also the organization of an ensemble, of a work or corpus, around a guiding meaning, a fundamental project or even a formal feature (of writing or speech). It is this irreducible and singular multiplicity, this resistance to any form of Versammlung, including that of the end of metaphysics (in the sense that Heidegger's interpretation constitutes an attempt to "arrest"—comprehendere rather than verstehen—the essential elements of Nietzsche's unique thought within such an end): it is this irreducibility that it has always seemed to me more just to respect. The diversity of gestures of thought and writing, the contradictory mobility (without possible synthesis or sublation) of the analytical incursions, the diagnoses, excesses, intuitions, the theater and music of the poetic-philosophical forms, the more-than-tragic play with masks and proper names—these "aspects" of Nietzsche's work have always appeared to me to defy, from the very beginning to the point of making them look somewhat derisory, all the "surveys" and accounts of Nietzsche (philosophical, metaphilosophical, psychoanalytic, or political). As you say, several voices can be heard; they return with an insistence that, I believe, will never cease, and that demands these voices never be reduced to a "monology." In this sense, such voices already resound in their future, in the reserve with which, to use a very Nietzschean figure, they are "pregnant." What will Nietzsche's future be? This question has always left me on the verge of a "general repetition" of Nietzsche.

That said, I have, mutatis mutandis, a similar feeling for those thinkers to whom I have apparently devoted more lengthy analyses. What I have just said about Nietzsche, I would also say about Plato, Hegel, Husserl, Freud, Blanchot, and so on. My writing on them remains fragmentary, oblique, elliptical, open—I hope—to surprise and to the return of other voices. And so your question cannot be answered. Now, what is the privilege of Nietzsche in this respect? I don't know: he is perhaps, of all them, the most mad! Two consequences are to be drawn from this: first, through this madness thought is perhaps unleashed all the more violently and with all the more freedom; second, it is unleashed with all the more suffering. As a result, one must forbid oneself—with Nietzsche above all—to force his name into the straight jacket of an interpretation that is too strong to be able to account for him, in that it is claiming to recognize the identity of a meaning, of a message, of the unity of a word, or of a particular work.

**Question Two:** Your work has often been criticized for being too "Nietzschean." Informing such criticisms is a very determined reading of Nietzsche and of yourself that argues (whatever the differences of each critique) that your work, by following Nietzsche too closely, falls into an uncritical and irresponsible irrationalism and replaces rational norms of philosophical thinking with the creative playfulness of art. I would like to ask you two related questions in this context. First, has the predominantly "literary" reception of your work in the anglophonics world (and particularly the United States) detracted from a certain philosophical necessity to your consideration of the literary text? In this context it would appear that this necessity has been partially covered over by the accusation, leveled against deconstruction, of "Nietzscheanism." Second, and more particularly, following this reception of deconstruction ("Derrida's work is ultimately irrational and relativist"), how do you consider your relation to Nietzsche in "White Mythology"? In this often misunderstood essay (as you yourself point out to Paul Ricœur in "Le retrait de la métaphore"), you deconstruct any attempt—and here the early Nietzsche's reduction of truth to metaphor is paradigmatic of this empiricist, if not modern, attempt—to reduce the founding concepts of philosophy to the sensible word. I will come back to the moves of this essay in a moment. Can I ask you here, how the deconstruction of Western philosophy, of which "White Mythology" is one sustained example, differs from Nietzsche's overriding belief that the Western tradition needs to be destroyed? What are the differences between deconstruction and destruction?
J.D.: First, the accusation of "Nietzscheanism" makes no sense in its own terms. As the last answer made clear, the more faithful one may claim to be to Nietzsche, the less one can make a claim on the identity of a particular "feature" of Nietzsche's thought. The closer one is to "Nietzsche," the more one is aware that there is no such thing as the Nietzsche-text. This text demands interpretation in the same way that it argues that there is no such thing as an entity, only interpretations—active and reactive—of that entity. "To be Nietzschean" is a journalistic slogan that cannot cope with the names and pseudonyms of Nietzsche; its raison d'être is, ultimately, to conjure away anxiety.

Second, it is wrong to argue that Nietzsche is irrational and wrong, therefore, to say that deconstruction is also irrational following its passage through Nietzsche. This is hopelessly simplistic. There are many more names in this historical configuration of which deconstruction forms a part than that of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, yes, but also Heidegger and Benjamin, and so forth. The term irrational fails totally to come to terms with the "method" of genealogy. The point will come up again when we discuss question four. Genealogy is an attempt, in Nietzsche's eyes, to give an account of the history of reason. There may be problems with this account, it may at times go too quickly, but as such, genealogy inscribes itself in the back of reason; it cannot be, accordingly, an irrational procedure of thinking. The method and purpose of genealogy preceded and exceed such distinctions, re-organizing the tradition's identifications of what is rational and what is irrational. To accuse either Nietzsche, or those thinkers partly inspired by this account of reason, of irrationalism, is to fall back into a discursive position that genealogy exceeds.

The third point concerns the question of the literary reception of deconstruction in the Anglo-American world. Just one remark, here, since the issue is extremely complex. If it has been the case that deconstruction passed initially through literature rather than philosophy departments, there is a clear reason for this. Literary theory, especially in America, was more ready to listen to arguments and strategies of attempts to get behind reason's back than institutional inscriptions of philosophy. The politics of these departments (or at least some of them; those which were receptive, precisely, to deconstruction) were, in this sense, more philosophical.

Fourth, you ask in your question what the differences are between deconstruction and destruction. You have said the essential in questions two and three, so let me add something else: the question of originary affirmation. To take up again the three thinkers Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Benjamin, it is quite clear that something is happening at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth for thinking to want to affirm the future. However negative, however destructive one's account of the history of the West may have become at this time, something is calling thought from the future; it is this call that makes both the passage via destruction, and an affirmation within this destruction, absolutely necessary. What do I mean by this? Before setting up tribunals or criticizing particular discourses, schools, movements, or academic tendencies, one must first admit that something is perhaps happening to humanity in the crossover from the nineteenth to the twentieth century for affirmation, for an affirmation of the future or of an opening onto the future, to be marked within a discourse of apparent destruction or mourning. Think of the problem of messianicity in Benjamin, the question of the future in Nietzsche, the privilege of the futural ecstasy in Heidegger. These thinkers are all thinkers of the future. . . . Now, why is it that any opening onto the future, both yesterday and today, passes through what looks like a destruction, a negative destructuration? Nor is it simply these three thinkers, either. However important their thought may be, they are symptoms of, spokesmen for something that is taking place in the world—at least in the West—that causes affirmation to be carried through by a devastating upheaval, a sort of revolution that cannot proceed without destruction, without separation or interruption, or without fidelity. For these thinkers are also thinkers of fidelity, of repetition—eternal return in Nietzsche, the question of Being in Heidegger, which, conveyed through an initial destruction, is presented by Heidegger as repetition, and so forth. These thinkers of the future are at the same time thinkers of eternal return, of repetition. So, my question is the following: why is it that this reaffirmation can have a future only through the seism of a destruction? But this is hardly a question; rather, it is the experience of what is taking place, of the revolution that bears us along. One can describe this movement as a seism, an earthquake, a maelstrom, or even a chaos, and there is a certain truth to this description. For the above are thinkers of the abyss (Abgrund), of chaos, of khaein—that is, where there is an opening, where the mouth gapes, and one does not know what to say, here there is an experience of chaos.
QUESTION THREE: It could be argued (I think here of Geoffrey Bennington’s recent appraisal of the essay in “Derrida base”) that “White Mythology” enacts an adventure of thinking typical of deconstruction’s strategies toward, on the one hand, the discipline of philosophy, and, on the other hand, those of the human sciences. Your relation to the position of metaphor in the philosophical text is, consequently, one forceful enactment of deconstruction’s displacement and re-organization of the metaphysical opposition between the transcendental and the empirical. To recall the major gesture of “White Mythology”: on the one hand, you show that it is impossible to dominate philosophical metaphorics from outside philosophy, since the attempt meets with an essential limit in the fact that the very concept of metaphor is a philosophy based on the metaphysical difference between the visible and the invisible, etc. On the other hand, and for the same reason, you argue that philosophy is incapable of dominating its metaphorical productions, since in its very attempt it would deprive itself of that which sustains it. “White Mythology” traces this double impossibility leaving itself and the reader in an aporetic and uncontrollable “position,” neither inside philosophy nor outside it, in another science that would wish to dominate philosophy (linguistics, psychoanalysis, history—the list would include, precisely, all modern endeavors to make thought finite).

This said, I have two questions. In what way is this ambivalent “saving” of philosophy, its re-inscription, different from Heidegger’s wish in his Nietzsche lectures of the 1930s to save Nietzsche’s thought from his Nazi contemporaries’ consideration of it as “a philosophy of life”? Heidegger opposes the anti-conceptualism of these readings by placing Nietzsche within metaphysics. You have yourself suggested on various occasions (Of Grammatology, “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing,” Spurs/Eperons: Les styles de Nietzsche, “Interpreting Signatures, Nietzsche/Heidegger: Two Questions”) that Heidegger thereby “loses” Nietzsche. In what ways does your double move toward the place of metaphor in the philosophical text save and lose Nietzsche differently?

J.d.: There are two questions in your question three. I will respond to both of them through the problematic of life. First, yes, I do not have the same approach to Nietzsche as Heidegger does for reasons of history, of generations, and of context. I am not writing between the two world wars. My major concern is not to prize Nietzsche from Nazi reappropriation. My approach is different as well, because I am deeply suspicious of this kind of maneuver. As I make clear in Otobiographies, it is not by chance that Nietzsche could be reappropriated by Nazism. Heidegger’s history of Being, his metaphysics, cannot cope with this contamination. My first concern, then, is not to “save” Nietzsche, although I understand why Heidegger wanted to save Nietzsche by showing that his thought was not simply a philosophy of life. At the same time, I am aware that the question of life is much more obscure and difficult than Heidegger claims. Indeed, if there is one theme in Heidegger’s work that makes me very uneasy, it is the theme of life. I, like everyone, want to be a vigilant reader of the political risks of biologism following its particular use of the concept of life, and yet the question of life is much trickier than Heidegger makes out. Heidegger’s gesture is, in fact, extremely equivocal: he cannot save Nietzsche from the biologism and racism in which the Nazis want to enclose him except by making him a metaphysician; the last of the metaphysicians; that is, by reducing him in turn. I have tried to formalize this scene in several texts: Heidegger saves Nietzsche by losing him and loses him by saving him. I try to read Nietzsche—the thinker of the “perhaps” (Vielleicht), as he says in Beyond Good and Evil—in a much more suspensive manner to avoid these reductive gestures and affirm something else.

Regarding your second question, I cannot bring together anything whatsoever in Nietzsche, whether it concern life or anything else. On the contrary, I am neither able to, nor want to, save Nietzsche. My relation in general to thinkers just does not follow this kind of logic. Deconstruction cannot pose the problem of the proper name in terms of levels of allegiance or nonallegiance. There is no trial in this sense. There are, for example, discursive elements in Nietzsche that lend themselves to Nazi reappropriation; one can discern a lineage from Nietzsche to Nazism, and this cannot be ignored. At the same time, there are many other elements, sometimes the very same elements, many other strands of thought, sometimes the same strands, which are far from reducible to either the enterprise of Nazism or that of Heidegger. As I have said in Of Spirit, Heidegger’s gesture actually capitalizes on the worst—the sanctioning of Nazism and the metaphysical counterappropriation. It is important in this context to take Heidegger’s Nietzsche and show that there are other possibilities in Nietzsche that are not programmed by a history of metaphysics, that there are moves that are stronger, that go further.
than what Heidegger calls the *history of the completion of metaphysics*; moves that actually put in question Heidegger himself: his reading of Nietzsche in particular and his philosophical orientation in general. Briefly, there exists a reserve in Nietzsche that allows one to read Heidegger's own thought genealogically.

Perhaps it is a little clearer now what I meant earlier when I spoke of my preference for texts that are open, multiple, fragmented. As for Nietzsche, there are parts that the Nazis could take, there are parts that Heidegger could take, and parts that resisted Heidegger, which are "stronger" than Heidegger's thought. The openness of the Nietzsche-text does not prevent me at the same time—from knowing, feeling, and recalling that this multiplicity has a singularity to it; that, despite everything, it carries the name and pseudonyms of Nietzsche, that there has been an event called, among many other names, *Nietzsche*. I am concerned to reflect on the historical-theoretical possibility of this singularity, however open and chaotic (in the positive sense) it has proved to be.

**Question Four:** I will now turn more explicitly to the ethical implications of Nietzsche's "destruction" of the Western tradition. This "destruction" always already implies a re-evaluation of values given that, for Nietzsche, science is a reactive evaluation of life. In *The Will to Power* he notes,

> My insight: all the forces and drives by virtue of which life and growth exist lie under the ban of morality; morality as the instinct to deny life. One must destroy morality if one is to liberate life.2

In a gesture that is in part the same as his reduction of truth to metaphor, Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* performs this destruction of morality by ascribing all ethical ideals to a reactive force hostile to life: what has always been understood as morality is either immoral or uses immoral means to attain its own end. In this sense morality has never been, never taken place, and it is ultimately derived as a set of reactive affects from the will to power. At the end of your readings of Lévi-Strauss (in "Violence of the letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau" in *Of Grammatology*), having deconstructed Lévi-Strauss's opposition between writing and speech, you remark: "There is no difference without the presence of the other but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing. Arche-writing is the origin of morality as of immorality. The nonethical opening of ethics. A violent opening. As in the case of the vulgar concept of writing, the ethical instance of violence must be rigorously suspended in order to repeat the genealogy of morals."3 First, to what extent does Nietzsche's reduction of morality to life prevent him from thinking the necessity of law of which you have spoken about at length (for example, "Before the Law") and, therefore, from thinking the "prescriptive" modality of his own text? Second, in what ways does your final call to a repetition of the genealogy of morals (although the essay is already engaged in this repetition) differ from Nietzsche's enterprise, explicitly concerning the question of violence?

J.D.: So as not to repeat several of your arguments, let me tackle question four head-on. I am very unsure that, when Nietzsche speaks of a destruction of morality, he is speaking against any law whatsoever. I believe there to be a relation in Nietzsche to the law—not, obviously, what one calls "the moral law"—that takes the form of a step back behind the ethical to explain it. I would call this gesture of thought arche-ethical. The move can be found in Heidegger, in his analyses, for example, of *Gewissen*, *Bezeugung*, and *Schuldigsein* in *Being and Time*, which concern a pre-ethical, pre-moral, pre-juridical conscience. Just as Heidegger attempts to return to an instance or space of originarity that precedes the ethical and thereby gives an account of it, so Nietzsche's genealogy of morals can be seen as the effort to get behind the moral and the political. *Qua "genealogy,"* Nietzsche's gesture cannot fail to reaffirm or promise something that can be called arche-ethical or ultra-ethical. This "something" is of the order of the law or the call [appeal]: without it, genealogy would be impossible. The critique of the ruse of life is, in fact, carried out in its name. I am not just referring, then, to a possible reading of Nietzsche in terms of law: The law of which I speak is constitutive of Nietzsche's destruction of morality in the first place.

When, for example, Nietzsche speaks of the prejudices of philosophers, when he espies the ruse of life behind each philosopher, he must set up his analysis under the sign of truth, no longer in the sense of *adequatio* or *aletheia*, but in the sense of an opening to the law of truth or to the truth of law. This law—another name for which is eternal return—is the same thing as reaffirmation. Nietzsche's so-called destruction of morality is, consequently, far from being a destruction of law. On the contrary, Nietzsche's genealogy of morality implies an affirmation of
Whatever these paradoxes, there is always law [il y a de la loi]. The law, or this "must," can, indeed, be read in all the prescriptive modalities of Nietzsche’s discourse. When he speaks of the different hierarchies of force and of difference of force, there must also be law. The reversal of values or their hierarchical ordering presupposes law—hence the foolish simplicity of aligning Nietzsche’s thought with relativism. To respond to your question fully, we would need to turn to the problematic of “value,” to Heidegger’s critique of value in the thought of Nietzsche and of others—but an interview is not the place to do that.

R.B.: I would like to insist on the relationship you are making between the law, affirmation, and promise, to chart some important distinctions within what is often called contemporary French thought. For many readers of Nietzsche—within or without Heidegger—Nietzsche reduces the question of ethics to that of life. To do so, he has to return the question of ethics to a history of morality, although this history of morality is ultimately underpinned nonhistorically by a hierarchy of forces or puissances. Foucault follows the “Nietzschean” path of historicization, actively forgetting the problem of law which, as a happy positivist, he cannot consider methodologically. You showed very early on in “Cogito and the History of Madness” the aporias to which such a path leads. Although the essay does not concern Nietzsche’s philosophy explicitly, your reading of Foucault’s inability to reduce the logos to history anticipates what you have just said on the “method” of genealogy. As for Deleuze and early Lyotard—I am comparing those of you who have represented, for many, a “corpus” of thought—the name of Nietzsche is obviously not neutral since it has often served as one important thread that gathers you into this corpus; they follow the “Nietzschean” path of force. By doing so, they certainly prove to be more philosophical than Foucault, but they seem equally to avoid, even denegate the problematic of law. Hence their respective readings of force in terms of energy and intensity. For you, it always seemed to be more complicated: like Deleuze, you argue (in your early essay “Force and Signification”) that force in Nietzsche is always a difference between forces, you show that this difference cannot be historicized; but you also argued at the end of that essay—and what you have just said I believe to be a radicalization of your earlier argument—that force and law are inextricable. Could you speak more of this complexity in terms of what you are calling today the promise?

J.D.: Take, as an example, the passage in On the Genealogy of Morals where Nietzsche says, to gloss:

“Up to now philosophers have always believed—and this prejudice constitutes them—in the logic of opposition or contradiction, that two contradictory things cannot get along with each other—hence the contradiction or dialectic, which will try to reconcile these contraries. Now, however, philosophers must not only learn to welcome contradiction as such, learn to understand that contradiction is not really contradictory; we must also come to accept a logic of ‘perhaps’ in which the so-called contradiction is neither this nor that, but perhaps something else. This logic concerns chance and the future. The future can only be of the nature of ‘perhaps,’ so philosophy has never been able to accept the future. . . .”

At this point Nietzsche announces a philosopher of the future, a philosopher of “perhaps,” saying that philosophers have been like this or that up to now, but that soon there will come a new philosopher—and this is what he means by “new”—who will think the “perhaps” dangerously (“this dangerous perhaps,” he calls it). This example—there are many others—shows that Nietzsche’s demolition, his reversal of all values, his critique and genealogy are always made in the name of a future that is promised. The promise does not come over and above the critique, as a post-face at the end. The promise inspires the critique in the first place. This new philosopher is already there, already announced through the way in which Nietzsche presents himself, even in his most hubristic and hyperbolic moments. The presentation shows that he partakes of the promise himself, that the promise is not something that one hears from elsewhere; like all promises, it must be assumed. For a promise to be assumed, someone must be there who is sensitive to the promise, who is able to say, “I am the promise, I am the one to promise, I am the one who is promising, and I am promising the coming of a new philosopher.” This means that the one who is promising is already the promise or is almost already the promise, that the promise is imminent. This reflection upon imminence—the category of imminence together with that of “perhaps”—is what bears this promise. I am not using the term promise in the sense that Heidegger would use it, that of a god who would come to save us, but in the sense of the promise that here I am, that what I am doing, I am doing here, in this text here, saying performatively what I am saying.
There is a promise, then, in the very move of genealogy, in its most destructive, "negative" moments, and this promise has to be attended to, has to be theorized as far as possible. Only in this way can its effects be negotiated in an interesting manner. These effects are everywhere. Take, since you referred to it, Nietzsche's analysis of force as the difference between forces. The analysis, notably in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, is always commanded by an attention to a possible reversal in the logic engaged with. Nietzsche is fascinated (intrigued and alarmed) by the way in which reactivity causes the weakest to become the strongest, by the fact that the greatest weakness becomes stronger than the greatest strength. This is the case with Platonism, Judaism, and Christianity. This law of inversion is, of course, what makes the promise just as easily very strong as very weak, very strong *in* its weakness. As soon as there is reversibility, this principle of inversion, Nietzsche himself cannot prevent the most puny weakness from being at the same time the most vigorous strength. Hence, this logic of force bows to a law stronger than that of force. The logic of force reveals within its logic a law that is stronger than this very logic. We are witnessing here a virtuality that escapes what is normally attributed to the authority of Nietzsche's name or Nietzsche's discourse. In other words, this discourse *is also* the most disarmed and disarming. When Nietzsche says that the strong have been made slaves by the weak, this means that the strong are weak, that Nietzsche comes to the rescue of the strong because they are weaker than the weak. In a certain sense, by coming to the aid of strength, Nietzsche is coming to the aid of weakness, of an essential weakness. It is in this essential weakness that one can locate the place of the "arche-ethics," of the "law" that I mentioned earlier. One must defend the weakest who are pregnant with the future, because it is they who are the strongest. Here the oscillating play—one which is as much political and moral as it is philosophical—is difficult to stop: to speak in the name of the strongest in Nietzsche is also to speak in the name of the weakest. One can always argue, just as with Heidegger, that a particular discourse of Nietzsche is anti-Judaic, anti-Platonic, anti-Christian and hyper-Judaic, hyper-Platonic, hyper-Christian. There will always be someone to say, "Yes, your deconstruction of the Judaic and Christian aspects to St. Paul is made in the name of a message that is hidden in Judaism, in Christianity, in Islam, even in twentieth-century thought. You are 'hyper,' you speak 'hyper' at the very moment that you are speaking 'against.' You are in the process of developing a discourse that is hyper-Jewish, hyper-Christian against these very instances." And, in a sense, this person is right.

There are many indices in Nietzsche that show the above machine of hyperbolization to be constantly at work; it is this process of hyperbolization that_restart* the machine. And the point does not just apply, of course, to Nietzsche.

**R.B.:** To take up the wording of question four, you once said in *Of Grammatology* that one had to suspend the ethical instance of violence to repeat the genealogy of morals. We will come to the problematic of violence in a moment. In the context of your response to this question and of your more recent strategies of reading, could one say that this repetition of genealogy consists in showing that there is the "messianic" in Nietzsche?

**J.D.:** Yes, so long as one follows through my re-inscription of the term. In, for example, *Specters of Marx*, I distinguish the messianic from any form of messianism. The messianic concerns a notion of the future that precedes—is the very condition of—the future constituting messianism. The messianic is heterogeneous to messianism in the precise sense that the horizon of the messianic is indeterminate. Messianism will saturate this absence of horizon by turning it into a horizon. Not only would I want to show this through a fairly abstract analysis, on the basis of all the predicates that seem to me to make up the concept of messianicity—annunciation of an unpredictable future, relation to the other, affirmation, promise, revolution, justice, and so on—but less abstractly, more immediately, I would want to show the difference in, for example, the *tone* of Nietzsche, which is prophetic and messianic. *Also sprach Zarathustra* is a countermessianic book, but, of course, any countermessianic text is at the same time messianic. Even when Nietzsche laughs at prophetic and messianic preaching, he nevertheless assumes the same tone to laugh at it. He presents himself as the countermessiah; the Antichrist is messianic, *Ecce Homo* is a messianic text.

**R.B.:** Yes, but isn't this where one could say that Nietzsche remains "Platonic"? After all, his prophetic tone could be considered metaphysical, revealing Nietzsche's inability to mourn the tradition in his very move against it.
J.D.: Yes, it is that also.

R.B.: Perhaps we can restate this complication—the difference between two kinds of future, one an absolute futurity that allows for the future, the other a temporal horizon called the future that actually closes off the future—when we come to questions seven and eight. Can we turn in the meantime to question five?

QUESTION FIVE: My last two questions take me to the relations between violence and justice. For Nietzsche, the founding of any law is necessarily violent. It is only once the law is instituted that normative criteria of justice and injustice come into play. It is, however, an illusion, a reversal of cause and effect to claim that these criteria precede and guide the institution of the law. The imperative declaration of law is rooted in exceptional conditions since they constitute a partial restriction of the will to life, which is bent on power, and are subordinate to its "goal" as a means of creating greater units of power. A legal order is thus doubly violent; both in its institution and in its constant struggle, once instituted, with the powers of life. Heidegger's understanding of justice in Introduction to Metaphysics (his reading of dike in the second major speech of the chorus in Antigone) is marked by this account of the juridical and political. To go quickly: in this reading there is a singular stress on the Nietzschean "moment [Augenblick]" of decision in and through which the "statesman" sets the worlding of the world (its original polemos) into political form without covering this world over. Although this setting is, as for Nietzsche, contingent, Heidegger gives it a certain ontological priority, one that accords with his prior stress in Being and Time on the future ecstatics of temporality and with his later attempts to ground national socialism philosophically. Now, given that this moment of decision in both Nietzsche and Heidegger is inscribed within a philosophy of the will (one that you have always placed in suspicion), given also that your account of originary violence and of the subsequent violence of all laws is, however, not entirely dissimilar in "Violence of the Letter," how does your thinking of the relation between violence and justice "avoid" a prioritization of the moment of political decision? I realize that this question is enormous, perhaps engaging with all your thinking, and I will be coming back to it constantly (if almost inversely) in the following question.

J.D.: Going straight to the end of your question, I would hesitate to say that I am not proposing a philosophy of decision. I believe that if there is such a thing as justice or responsibility, there must be decision. However, it is only the implication of the decision that is irreducible. Hence I always say: "The decision, if there is one, must interrupt causality, be revolutionary, and so on." I say, "if there is one," not because I doubt that there is one, but because, simply, I don't know if there is one. A decision, if there is such a thing, is never determinable in terms of knowledge. One cannot determine a decision. Whenever someone says, "A decision was made there and then. I know this to be so, and I also know what the decision was," that person is mistaken. A decision is an event that is not subsumable under a concept, a theoretical judgment or a determinant form of knowledge. If it could ever be subsumed, there would no longer be the need for a decision. A decision, if there is one, disappears in its appearance. Thus, the implication or presupposition of the decision is a particular type of presupposition. The same thing applies to all concerns closely related to the problematic of a decision. For example, responsibility, freedom, and justice can never form the object of a determinant form of knowledge. This is not to say that they are obscure or occult; they are simply not homogeneous with theoretical knowledge of determinant judgment, with what makes something present as an object or theme.

That a decision cannot become an object or a theme for knowledge is the very site of violence. You recall at the beginning of question four the violence accompanying the institution of any law—this institution can be nothing but violent not because it is a violence accompanying the transgression of the law, but because there is as yet no law. What precedes the law cannot not be violent for the law. The violent movement that imposes the law is a violence that is both asymmetrical and heterogeneous to every transgression that could then be identified in the name of the law. Once this institution has taken place, one can of course always contest—and this is the history of all revolutions—the imposition of the law, argue that it was violent and unjust, seek reparation, revolt against it, and so forth. Such dispute is necessarily endless. If, however, the laws in question, whether they be general or particular, are violent for the reason adduced above and are deconstructible—that is, they can be considered to be a historical artifact that is suitable for analysis and deconstruction—that in the name of which one deconstructs is not in
the last instance deconstructible. I call this irreducibility justice. In
_Specters of Marx_ I oppose this concept of justice—as disjunction, as
“being out of joint,” as what is always already “out of joint”—to what
Heidegger says of dike that he opposes (and, in a certain sense, rightly
so) to what one commonly calls justice. This justice he prizes from a
whole history of the juridical and of juridical representation. The con­
cept of justice that I am elaborating is opposed to the Heideggerian one
of dike as joining, as Fug, as bringing-together; it suggests that justice is,
and must be, a discordance. As soon as justice implies a relation to an­
other, it supposes an interruption, a dis-joining, a disjunction or being­
out-of-joint, which is not negative; an out-of-jointness that is not de­
constructible, that is justice as deconstruction, as the possible
deconstruction of any determined law [droit].

_R.B._: You began your response to this question by stating firmly
that it would be wrong not to see your philosophy as a philosophy of de­
cision, and all you have just said points to the way in which your think­
ing could be seen as an endless and varied reflection—philosophical,
ethical, political—on the irreducibility of the moment of decision. I am
aware that both on the continent and in the Anglo-American world this
aspect of your work causes confusion, so I would like us to stay with my
question for a moment. There seem to be at least two criticisms leveled
against deconstruction concerning the problematic of decision; a prob­
lematic, which, as you say, implies that of freedom, of responsibility, and
of justice—the stakes are consequently high. First, your work on dif­
ference is seen to be concerned with a restless movement of deferral, with
the remainder that any work on paradox implies, and that, as a result,
you are little interested in the moment of arrest, the moment of deci­
dion. Following this sort of argument, your philosophy cannot, given its
very merits, constitute a philosophy of decision. This second criticism,
which one hears a lot in the Anglo-American world, runs something like
this: “when it comes to the question of violence, to the crucial role vio­
ence plays in Derrida’s thought, one sees that Derrida is following
Heidegger’s fidelity to thinking closely, that his ‘originary violence’ is in­
fact a mystification of something that needs to be either developed, or
accounted for, in historical and social terms, that this violence of the law
before the law is a violence that is blind. Derrida’s understanding of orig­
inory violence thus leaves us blind in turn as to the specificity of each

_and every judgment.” In the worst cases, both criticisms end up saying
the same thing: namely, that deconstruction leaves the notion of justice
undetermined, and therefore prey to the most evil reappropriations. How
would you respond?

_J.D._: First, I do not accept the term blind. The accusation derives
ultimately from my argument that a decision, if there is one, cannot take
place without the undecidable, it cannot be resolved through knowledge.
Given the nature of the misunderstanding, let me sum up this point sim­
ply and in a pedagogical manner. As to a decision that is guided by a form
of knowledge—if I know, for example, what the causes and effects of
what I am doing are, what the program is for what I am doing, then there
is no decision; it is a question, at the moment of judgment, of applying
a particular causality. When I make the machine work, there is no deci­
sion; the machine works, the relation is one of cause and effect. If I know
what is to be done, if my theoretical analysis of the situation shows me
what is to be done—do this to cause that, etc.—then there is no moment
of decision, simply the application of a body of knowledge, of, at the very
least, a rule or norm. For there to be a decision, the decision must be het­
erogeneous to knowledge as such. Even if I spend years letting a decision
mature, even if I amass all possible knowledge concerning the scientific,
political, and historical field in which the decision is to be taken, the mo­
ment of the decision must be heterogeneous to this field, if the decision
is not to be the application of a rule. If there is such a thing as a deci­sion—the point must always be recalled—then a decision must first be
expounded. Of course, I am not advocating that a decision end up deci­sing anything at any moment. One must know as much as possible, one
must deliberate, reflect, let things mature. But, however long this process
lasts, however careful one is in the theoretical preparation of the decision,
the instant of the decision, if there is to be a decision, must be hetero­
ergeneous to this accumulation of knowledge. Otherwise, there is no res­ponsibility. In this sense only must the person taking the decision not know
everything. Even if one knows everything, the decision, if there is one,
must advance toward a future that is not known, that cannot be antici­pated. If one anticipates the future by predetermining the instant of de­cision, then one closes it off, just as one closes it off if there is no antici­pation, no knowledge “prior” to the decision. At a given moment, there
must be an excess or heterogeneity regarding what one knows for a decision to take place, to constitute an event.

R.B.: This excess is the experience of death?

J.D.: Yes, indirectly, but the point cannot be followed up here, it would take too much time! Let me stick to answering your previous question. The preceding does not imply that the decision is blind. On the contrary, a decision must be as lucid as possible. And yet, however lucid it is, as a decision, it must advance where it cannot see. This blindness is not a lack of knowledge—I repeat, it has nothing to do with what could in principle come to know—it is the very structure of any decision, what relates all decisions, immediately, to the undecidable. If there is no “experience” of the undecidable at the moment of decision, then the decision will be nothing but the mechanical application of a rule. At a given moment, I must not know whether it is better to do this or that, I must in this sense be radically “ignorant” for there to be a decision. All that I am saying here is nothing but the modest analysis of the concept of decision; in other words, it is implied by the concept of decision itself. Now, as I mentioned earlier, as for knowing whether a decision has ever taken place, given the very concept of decision, I can never know, in the sense that it is structurally impossible for me to have an objective knowledge of it. It is the same thing for the concept of responsibility. Whoever says that he is responsible, that he has assumed “his” responsibilities has mistaken the meaning of responsibility. One can never know if one has been responsible or not, one cannot have a good conscience: “I made the right decision,” “I fulfilled my responsibilities,” “My debts are paid,” “This is where my (or your) responsibility lies,” and so on—all such statements are contrary to the essence of responsibility as well as to the essence of a decision. This is why responsibility is infinite. It is infinite because of the finitude of the one who “decides” or who “takes responsibility.”

To answer your question head-on, I would quite simply say that not only is the language I am using neither antiethical nor antipolitical, not only is it a language that assumes the moment of decision, it is literally the most ethical and political way of taking seriously what is implied by the very concepts of decision and responsibility. In this sense, what I am proposing could not be more ethical or political! Let me conclude this point by saying that those who accuse deconstruction of irresponsibility, of blindness, of arbitrary violence, or of indecision or hesitation are—according to the radical structure of the decision that I have developed—enacting the very thing of which they are blaming the accused. To show this in detail—and following all that I have said about the essence of a decision, this detail is crucial—would again demand more time and care than an interview can allow.

R.B.: You have nevertheless made it very clear that an experience of the undecidable or aporetic (I am also thinking here of your essay on aporia in the very recent _Le passage des frontières_) is the passage through which a decision must pass if it is—

J.D.: If it is to come close to being a decision, if there is such a thing as a decision. Not only will one never know whether a decision is good or bad, one will never know whether there was a decision, whether a decision took place as such. And this is the only condition for there to have been a decision.

R.B.: To anticipate my last question here, since it is appropriate. This experience of the aporia, which can appear to many people to be a refusal of the necessary relation between a decision and a particular “moment” in time, this experience allows, in your eyes, for the future, it allows the future to arrive as a future (and not a future present) and so allows for the future of the decision (a future in which decisions can “take place” and decisions in which the future is not anticipated). I would want to stress here that you are speaking of undecidability at a moment in time when more and more “decisions” are closing off the future.

J.D.: To allow the future to arrive as the future—if, in other words, the future is precisely that . . . the future—is not to be understood in a passive sense. This relation to the future is active, it is affirmative; and yet, however active it is, the relation is also a passive one. Otherwise the future will not be the future. As for decisions that close the future off, are they indeed “decisions”?

R.B.: Perhaps we can come back to this when we again discuss your understanding of the “promise.” Shall we turn now to question six?

**QUESTION SIX:** Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals is a forceful critique of progress and of modern democracy: not simply because of his
nonnormative exposition of justice, but also because democracy is considered as a reactive organization of human beings that increasingly makes humanity undifferentiated and calculable. Democracy is the political realm in which man is delivered over to the reactive power of reason. Before engaging more explicitly with the question of technology, could I ask you how your analysis of originary violence situates you of democracy? Is it because Nietzsche fails to situate the question of law in the effraction of originary violence that he wraps up so quickly the problem of democracy? Or, is there another thinking of democracy in Nietzsche that simultaneously goes against the overriding tone of his critique?

J.D.: My response will be rapid and minimal. I do not believe that Nietzsche's critique of democracy concerns democracy in general, certainly not what I call the democracy to come. It seems to me that Nietzsche isolates several traits particular to democracy as it existed in his time, in other words, he focuses on a highly determined form of democracy. What he says about this particular democracy is sometimes apposite and just; he can touch the very springs—necessarily hypocritical and undemocratic—of what moves forward under the banner of democracy. But—and this takes us immediately back to the "hyper-ethical" procedure of genealogy—this critique is made in the name of what I would call a democracy to come, which is a quite different concept of democracy from the one critiqued by Nietzsche. What we were saying earlier about the call and the promise opens up a notion of democracy that, while having something in common with what we understand by democracy today, notably in the West, is reducible neither to the contemporary reality of "democracy" nor to the ideal of democracy informing this reality or fact. I have highlighted this difference at length in Specters of Marx. Since, in my eyes, Nietzsche critiques a particular form of democracy in the name of "a democracy to come," I do not consider Nietzsche to be an enemy of democracy in general. Those who say so are going far too fast; it is they who have little understanding of responsibility, of the complexity of the ethical and the political; it is they who are flattening out the future. Nietzsche will always get the better of them. No, although one cannot subscribe to all that Nietzsche says when he lambastes the democracy of his day—far from it—I believe Nietzsche to have espied particular risks in what he foregrounded under the name of "democracy," in the various traits of society that rallied round the principle of "democracy." There are at the same time critical and genealogical motifs in Nietzsche that appeal to a democracy to come. Since all of this has to be shown through the text, it is difficult to improvise further. Let this be the protocol of an answer to your question.

R.B.: Question seven, then.

QUESTION SEVEN: I would like at this juncture to focus very particularly on what you say of Heidegger's Rektoratsrede in Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question. I recall that in Of Spirit, in what is an extremely dense and complex passage, you criticize virulently the effects of Heidegger's founding "spiritualization" of biological racism. Whereas, elsewhere (Spurs) you have recognized a certain necessity to Heidegger's philosophizing gesture—at least concerning Nietzsche's empiricism—here the problems of this gesture—as one that spiritualizes biology—is explicitly analyzed within the political context of Heidegger's engagements with Nazism. Let me quote the passage in full:

Because one cannot demarcate oneself from biologistism, from naturalism, from racism in its genetic form, one cannot be opposed to them except by re-inscribing spirit in an oppositional determination, by once again making it a unilaterality of subjectivity, even if in its voluntarist form. The constraint of this program remains very strong, it reigns over the majority of discourses which, today and for a long time to come, state their opposition to racism, to totalitarianism, to fascism, etc., and do this in the name of spirit, and even of the freedom of the spirit [Note: This liberty of Spirit always runs the risk rigorously determined by Hegel: that of a merely formal liberty and of an abstract universality] 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. And the pitfalls of the strategy of establishing demarcations belong to this program, whatever place one occupies in it. The only choice is the choice between the terrifying contaminations it assigns. Even if all the 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 over-stressed—but it will never resolve the irreducibility of this fact. This fact [fait], of course, is not simply a fact. First, and at least, because it is not yet done [pas tout à fait]: it 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." . . . In the Rectorship Address, this risk is not just a risk run. If the program seems diabolical, it is because, without there being anything fortuitous in this, it capitalizes on
the worst, that is, on both evils at once: the sanctioning of Nazism, and the gesture that is still metaphysical.4

As Dominique Janicaud has noted in *L’Ombre de cette pensée: Heidegger et la question politique*, it would be difficult to find a greater accusation of Heidegger. My question concerns, however, the so-called program of logics that you allude to in this passage. I note that you make a similar, if more local, intellectual gesture in *Ostobigraphies* concerning the necessary contamination of Nietzsche’s texts by Nazi ideology. There it is a question of “a powerful programming machine” that relates, before any human intention or will, the two contrary forces of regeneration and degeneracy in Nietzsche’s early *On the Future of Our Educational Establishments*, determining in advance, before any historical eventuality, that each force reflects, and passes into, its other. We are here, perhaps, at something like the “heart” of deconstruction given its concern with what you call *the lesser violence* in “Violence and metaphysics” (*Writing and Difference*).5

My question, after this necessary preamble, is short: in what sense have, for you, *all* thought and *all* action up to today been inscribed within this machine? And, how do you understand those enigmatic words “absolutely unprecedented responsibilities” of thought and action? In what sense, “absolutely”?

**J.D.:** First, I certainly believe that the contaminations discussed in this passage are absolutely undeniable. I defy anyone to show a political discourse or posture today that escapes this law of contamination. The only way to do so is in the form of (de)negation (*Verneinung*), the law of contamination can only be (de)negated. If it is true that these contaminations are inevitable, that one cannot side-step its law whatever one attempts to do, then responsibility cannot consist in denying or (de)negating contamination, in trying to “save” a line of thought or action from it. On the contrary, it must consist in assuming this law, in recognizing its necessity, in working from *within* the machine, by formalizing how contamination works and by attempting to act accordingly. Our very first responsibility is to recognize that this terrifying program is at work everywhere and to confront the problem head-on; not to flee it by denying its complexity but to think it as such.

Second, this means that the political gestures that one will make will, like all political gestures, be accompanied by discourse. Discursivity takes time, it implies several sentences, it cannot be reduced to a single moment or point. On each occasion one will have to make complex gestures to explain that one is acting, despite contamination, in this particular way, because one believes that it is better to do this rather than that, that a particular act chosen is in such-and-such a situation more likely to do such-and-such than another possible act. These gestures are anything but pragmatic, they are strategic evaluations that attempt to measure up to the formalization of the machine. To make such evaluations, one has to pass through thought—there is no distinction here between thought and action, these evaluations are *actions of thought*. Whoever attempts to justify his political choice or pursue a political line without thought—in the sense of a thinking that exceeds science, philosophy, and technics—without thinking what calls for thinking in this machine, this person is not being, in my eyes, politically responsible. Hence, one needs thought, one needs to think more than ever. Thinking’s task today is to tackle, to measure itself against, everything making up this program of contamination. This program forms the history of metaphysics, it informs the whole history of political determination, of politics as it was constituted in ancient Greece, disseminated throughout the West and finally exported to the East and South. If the political is not thought in this radical sense, political responsibility will disappear. I would not go so far as to say that this thought has become necessary only today; rather, today more than ever, one must think this machine to prepare for a political decision, if there is such a thing, *within* this space of contamination. Very simply, then, what I am trying to do is to prepare for such a decision by tackling the machine or law of contamination. For reasons that should now be clear, what I say is *always* going to run the risk of being taken in an unfavorable light, it cannot fail to lead to misunderstandings, according to the very same law of contamination. There is no way out. As to the criticisms of deconstruction brought up earlier, one has indeed to assume the risk of being misunderstood, continuing to think in modest terms what is after all exceedingly ambitious, in order to prepare for these responsibilities—if they exist.

In the passage you quote, I call these responsibilities *unprecedented* [inédites]. What does this term mean? In your terms, what is *their* time? Rather than implying a heroic pathos of originality, the term testifies to the fact that we find ourselves in an unprecedented situation. After recent events—whether one gives them the name of Nietzsche, of Heidegger, of
the Second World War, of the Holocaust, of the destructibility of humanity by its own technical resources—it is clear that we find ourselves in an absolutely unprecedented space. For this space one needs equally unprecedented reflections on responsibility, on the problematics of decision and action. To say this is not a piece of speculative hubris. It simply acknowledges where we are. We need the unprecedented; otherwise there will be nothing, pure repetition. . . . The unprecedented is, of course, highly dangerous. Once on these paths of thought, one is liable to get shot at by people who are in a hurry to interpret texts, who call you a neo-Nazi, a nihilist, a relativist, a mysticist, or whatever. But if one does not take such risks, then one does nothing, and nothing happens. What I am saying is very modest: without risk, there is nothing.

R.B.: Why did you write “absolutely unprecedented”? 

J.D.: It was just a form of emphasis. Of course, the unprecedented is never possible without repetition, there is never something absolutely unprecedented, totally original or new; or rather, the new can only be new, radically new, to the extent that something new is produced, that is, where there is memory and repetition. The new cannot be invented without memory or repetition. So, two things: first, there can be no break, no experience of the break that does not presuppose a non-break, that does not presuppose memory. Second, contamination follows from this iterability that is constitutive of the unprecedented. Contamination happens because iterability inherits from the very first what is not yet thought. One has to confront this paradoxical logic to be able to think the unthought.

R.B.: Let me take an example related to what you have just been saying about repetition. You have mentioned Specters of Marx several times in what you have been saying, so an example taken from this work is more than appropriate. In this combative, ironically “timely” text, you speak about our responsibility before the unprecedented. One particularly interesting aspect of the book concerns what you call a new International. I will not gather together all the threads that determine the conceptual strategy of this term in the book. Suffice it to say that Specters of Marx remains faithful to a notion of internationality in Marx that, you argue, Marx himself betrayed by ontologizing, among other things, the temporally indefinite structure of revolution and the “supplementary” relationship between humanity and its productions. This new International is a configuration of bonds [liens] that are in the process of being formed, which go beyond citizenship, the nation-state, and national sovereignty, but which are neither working towards nor anticipating a cosmopolitan superstate. This notion of a new International forms part of the book’s strategy to prepare the ground for a new socio-political critique of contemporary political discourses. . . . With Specters of Marx in mind, how would you respond to the following?

Before the inadequate structures of international law, we are at present witnessing two repetitions. The first is that of the nation-states of Europe, which find themselves confronted once more by regional and ethnic determinations of a people’s identity. Like all repetitions, however, there is a difference: today’s nationalisms and fascisms are produced in, and constitute themselves within, a world that is technologically different from that of the 1920s and 1930s, a world that is much smaller and more “international” due to the accelerated processes of technicization. The difference has ambivalent implications for any form of nationalism: the repetition of nationalisms is certainly dated, and yet it is all the more dangerous and singular for being dated. The other repetition is that of the nation-states that, as nation-states, are constitutively unable to think, and practice, a notion of international law. For international law remains determined by the concept of national sovereignty, a principle that is stopping, for example, the United Nations from acting effectively beyond the wishes of one or other of its permanent members. These two repetitions, although of a different nature, are tending to paralyze inventive moves. How, then, do you conceive the relation between this emerging new International and the present sluggishness of institutions of international law?

J.D.: The “International” I am interested in would indeed exceed the concepts of nation, of state, and of nation-state that determine the concept of international. I believe that we are at present involved in a process that demands an accelerated transformation of international law. Every event in the contemporary world shows international institutions to be powerless, dependent, as they are, for their means of enforcement on the decisions of particular, powerful nation-states that curtail the general will of such institutions. The reason for this is clear: the very concepts upon which the missions of international institutions are
built—I especially have in mind the United Nations—need to be rethought, deconstructed. All these concepts belong to a Western tradition of the political that implies the police, the sovereignty of the state, the modern concept of the nation-state. The notion of the political is being completely undermined—technically, economically, and politically. International law, international institutions need to be rethought and thereby improved. The process is infinite and interminable, but it is absolutely necessary.

In this respect I have nothing against international institutions. I believe one must accept their history, agree to their perfectibility, and so on. That said, we are at the same time witnessing something like an aspiration toward—I do not dare to use the word solidarity or community because these words have too much of a particular resonance—a bond [lien] (the term is only suitable given its high level of abstraction), a bond between—here, again, I do not want to use a term like citizens of the world since it is a concept excessively marked by a tradition of the cosmopolitan, not political subjects, nor even human beings—let us say, then, singularities, a bond between singularities. There is today an aspiration toward a bond between singularities all over the world. This bond not only extends beyond nations and states, such as they are composed today or such as they are in the process of decomposition, but extends beyond the very concepts of nation or state. For example, if I feel in solidarity today with this particular Algerian who is caught between the F.I.S. and the Algerian state, or this particular Croat, Serbian, or Bosnian, or this particular South African, this particular Russian or Ukrainian, or whoever—it is not a feeling of one citizen toward another, it is not a feeling peculiar to a citizen of the world, as if we are all potential or imaginary citizens of a great state. No, what binds me to these people is something different than membership in a world nation-state or in an international community extending indefinitely the limits of what one still calls today the nation-state. What binds me to them—and this is the point; there is a bond, but this bond cannot be contained within the traditional concepts of community, obligation, or responsibility—is a protest against citizenship, a protest against membership in a political configuration as such. The bond is, for example, a form of political solidarity opposed to the political qua a politics tied to the nation-state. “The democracy to come” is a democracy whose bonds are no longer those that can be deduced from the concept of democracy, such as this concept has emerged and developed in the history of the West. The concept of democracy has always been tied to the city, to the state, to the polis as topos, and in modern times to the nation-state; democracies have always been conceived and conceptualized as a phenomenon of the “nation-state,” and this is where the problem lies. Where democracy is necessarily related to the old concept of politèia, to the topos of the polis, it is challenged by the de-localizing resources of present and future technics and media.

What I am calling a new International both signals the need to radicalize the critique of law, of the state and the nation, and bears witness to an international which carries the promise of itself, which is hearing the promise of a “democracy to come,” linking singularities beyond the structures of the nation-state. This democracy is not an abstract utopia. I believe this solidarity, this bond to be what is provoking the gradual and necessary transformation of international law; it renders account of the sense of dissatisfaction we all have toward present events in the world. If no one is happy with the present state of the world, it is because nothing is satisfactory: neither the state, nor the nation-state, nor international law, nor the world “order”; and because this dissatisfaction derives in the last instance from a “bond” that demands thought and negotiation. Since this bond between singularities, as well as the promise it carries, is what I call spectral, it cannot be made into a community; the promise of the bond forms neither a national, linguistic, or cultural community, nor does it anticipate a cosmopolitan constitution. It exceeds all cultures, all languages, it even exceeds the concept of humanity. A final point: our dissatisfaction requires, at the same time, in the same gesture of thought, rethinking the limits between the human and the animal, the human and the natural, the human and the technical. For the question of animality, that of the earth, of what we may mean by “life” in general also makes up the promise of this bond.

R.B.: What you are saying is extremely dense and complicated. I wonder whether we could not progressively untangle some of these thoughts through the last questions. Let us start by the temporal modality of this “democracy to come.” It is not an Idea in the Kantian sense—a temporal horizon that guides ethical or political thinking in principle. We know that the idea of this Idea is very vulnerable to the Hegelian critique of Kant’s distinction between reason and understanding. What
Hegel basically says to Kant is: "Your Idea of freedom is a 'bad infinity' and ends up destroying the very possibility of freedom that it promises." Now, your notion of difference has often been equated with this bad infinity, and presumably your notion of the promise of democracy awaits similar misunderstandings. However, you are, in fact, saying something beyond this opposition between Kant and Hegel, since this democracy, while neither a norm nor a fact, is taking place now, is it not?

J.D.: Yes, it is now, it is not an Idea in the Kantian sense. I am always a little worried, however, when I argue against the Idea in the Kantian sense, for this idea should also be retained. For example, one must retain the idea of an unending development of international institutions toward universal peace. This horizon must not be destroyed. Nevertheless, there is as it were a horizon to this horizon that has no horizon. Where the Idea in the Kantian sense leaves me dissatisfied is precisely around its principle of infinity: first, it refers to an infinite in the very place where what I call difference implies the here and now, implies urgency and imminence—we return in a sense to our earlier discussion on decision; second, the Kantian Idea refers to an infinity that constitutes a horizon. This horizon is, as the Greek word says, a limit forming a backdrop against which one can know, against which one can see what is coming. The idea has already anticipated the future before it arrives. So, the Idea is both too futural, in the sense that it is unable to think the deferral of difference in terms of "now," and it is not "futural" enough, in the sense that it already knows what tomorrow should be.

The relation to the other—which in turn guides everything that I am saying regarding the democracy to come—is without horizon. It is what I call the messianic; the messianic can arrive at any moment, no one can see it coming, can see how it should come, or have forewarning of it. The relation to the other is the absence of horizon, of anticipation, it is the relation to the future that is paradoxically without anticipation, there where the alterity of the other is an absolute surprise. If one can be prepared for an absolute surprise, then one must be prepared for the coming of the other as an absolute surprise—that is what I understand by the messianic. If the relation to the other is that anything can happen at any moment, if being prepared for this absolute surprise is being ready for the "anything can happen," then the very structure of horizon informing, among other horizons, the Idea in the Kantian sense has been punctured.

In saying this, I am more than aware that the stakes here are very high. The structure of horizon commands all modern thought: phenomenology, ontology, hermeneutics, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, etc. The notion of horizon is indispensable to the movement of phenomenology, to that of interpretation of the meaning of Being, indeed it is indispensable to any critical enterprise (in the sense of Kritik). But let me be clear—the experience of an absence of horizon is not one that has no horizon at all; it is where the horizon is, in a sense, "punctured" by the other. With the coming of the other there is a non-horizon.

R.B.: It could indeed be argued that your deconstruction of the Idea in the Kantian sense constitutes at the same time a deconstruction of the whole of what one calls in political philosophy modernity. You have rarely put it in these terms, preferring to speak more widely of the closure of metaphysics. But I think your criticism of the Idea in the Kantian sense—in terms of the relation to the other—is just that: a deconstruction of modernity that calls for a reinvention of the modern. This is a good point to go back to Nietzsche and Heidegger. Question eight?

QUESTION EIGHT: This takes me to my next two questions. From the later Nietzsche lectures onward, Heidegger argues that will to power not only forms the end of metaphysics but constitutes its accomplishment as the technicist calculation of Being as value. Will to power is the realization of reason in the form of a willful, technological "schematization" of the word, which forgets Being. Following this interpretation, Heidegger begins to conceive of the relation between Being and man in terms of a non-willful encounter between thinking and the withdrawal of Being. The supreme danger becomes that of the destiny of the essence of technology, a destiny through which man's essence in its openness to Being risks falling from memory. Resistance to this danger and to calculative thinking in particular is thought more and more in terms of a composed "releaseam" [Gelassenheit] "toward beings and of the listening to the "call" of Being. The earlier "Nietzschean" moment of decision in resoluteness is thus reappraised as particular to a metaphysics of the will. At this point Heidegger has theorized a certain renunciation of political agency. There are, of course, many questions here. I will remain initially with Heidegger's above interpretation of Nietzsche. Is not Heidegger's interpretation of will to power in the early 1940s as consummate subjectivity even more violent than his earlier spiritualization of Nietzsche's
physiology? For could one not argue that the problematic of will to power exceeds the axiomatic of subjectivity and that "life," in the differences of its forces, precedes both Being and humanity? If this interpretation is to a point legitimate, does it not suggest that Nietzsche's text allows one to think the "inhumanity" of technology more interestingly than the text of Heidegger, who, despite everything, remains himself metaphysical given his belief that "the essence of technology is nothing technological" ("The Question of Technology")?

J.D.: In response to your two questions, I would first focus on what Heidegger says about the concept of life, since any living being, in fact, undoes the opposition between physis and technè. As a self-relation, as activity and reactivity, as differential force, and repetition, life is always already inhabited by technicization. The relation between physis and technics is not an opposition; from the very first there is instrumentalization [dès l'origine il y a de l'instrumentalisation]. The term instrument is inappropriate in the context of originary technicity. Whatever, a prosthetic strategy of repetition inhabits the very moment of life: life is a process of self-replacement, the handing-down of life is a mechanike, a form of technics. Not only, then, is technics not in opposition to life, it also haunts it from the very beginning. Now, in Nietzsche there is indeed no opposition between technics and life, and this undoubtedly means that one can reconsider technics through Nietzsche. He leaves the field open for one to do so.

R.B.: Heidegger's reflections on technics are ambivalent. As you have yourself shown, he is one of the first philosophers to confront technics in philosophical terms, and yet he wishes to purify thinking of originary technicity. Technics remains a question, and as a question asked by thinking, thinking is not "technical." In other words, thinking for Heidegger, while no longer philosophy in his sense, is still metaphysical, given its difference from technics. Thinking is indeed constituted through this very difference. A classic philosophical move, despite everything else in Heidegger that works against this move. Where would you situate Nietzsche here, given what you have said about the resistance of Nietzsche's philosophy to Heideggerian "thinking"?

J.D.: Heidegger's move is not a Nietzschean gesture, that's true. I would want to reinforce the point, however, that there is no simple evaluation of technics in Heidegger. Nor is there any simple evaluation of technics in Nietzsche. One could argue that in Nietzsche's work there is something like a process of technicization that corresponds to an affirmative moment of life, a sign of strength, just as one could argue that there is a reactive instance of technics as well. There are statements in Nietzsche where he denounces technics and technicization; for example, his trial of democracy is also a trial of urban technicization. And so, there is not the good and the bad in Nietzsche, either: technics is both good and bad. This is, of course, the case for everything in Nietzsche; it is the reason why, as a protocol to all discourses on Nietzsche, all interrogations of him—Heidegger, for example—one must remember that each philosopheme, each concept in Nietzsche's does not harbor any identity, each time it must be evaluated for both its active and its reactive sides. Nietzsche never writes that x is exclusively good or bad. Each entity is submitted to interpretation, this interpretation is an evaluation of what is active or reactive. As a result, there is, for Nietzsche, no entity that is not interpretable as both an active and a reactive form of life. It is this that distinguishes Nietzsche from Heidegger: everything is, for Nietzsche, interpretation.

I have always admired this aspect of Nietzsche's thinking. In specific relation to your question, it implies that technics is an interpretation, an interpretation submitted in turn to other interpretations. Technics is both active and reactive. So, if one can think technics through Nietzsche, this does not mean that Nietzsche is going to give us a particular determination of the technical that is more interesting than the reflection of, for example, Heidegger. No—indeed, this is precisely the lesson that can be drawn for today. Rather than being either fought against or defended, technics is to be interpreted each time. Each time one must interpret what one is doing and what one wants to do with technics, which is sometimes affirmative and sometimes reactive. Technics lends itself to interpretation, there are also technics of interpretation that also lend themselves to interpretation, and so on. It is in this sense, then, that Nietzsche allows us to think technics technically.

R.B.: We are going to have to accelerate to get through the last questions within the allotted time. Perhaps this is an occasion to move from question eight to nine, since what you have just said cuts right across Heidegger's later reading of will to power as the technicist calculation of
Being. From this reading onward, Heidegger elaborates a notion of radical passivity, *Gelassenheit*, which you compare in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* to his work on the originary promise of language in *On the Way to Language*. These are complicated waters; much is at stake. Despite the complexity of what is going on, can I ask you in what sense your notions of the promise and of double affirmation distinguish your thought here from those of both Heidegger and Nietzsche?

**QUESTION NINE:** Although you have voiced clear disagreements with Heidegger’s thinking of technology, there is a side to your work, more insistent since the 1980s, which is partly in accord with Heidegger’s rejection of a philosophy of the will. This is your analysis of the radical structure of the promise. As you argue in *Of Spirit* and *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, the promise prohibits the (metaphysical) gathering of Being in presence, which Heidegger’s thinking on language also troubles. The promise is the remainder of the necessary undecidability of thinking and action upon which any act of thought (or) language (philosophical, political, juridical, literary) will fall upon and fail to untie. We are back here in the contaminating machine of *Of Spirit*. This remainder is an absolute past (it cannot be recalled in any act) that gives the chance of the future. In what sense is this promise, which, as you say, is always already the memory of this promise, nevertheless an affirmation of the future? What is the relation between this “double” affirmation and the single Yes-saying of Zarathustra, who affirms an innocent creating of the future? Does this double affirmation trouble, in turn, Nietzsche’s willful forgetting in *Ecce Homo*; namely, the affirmation that he is “the anti-ass par excellence” (“Why I write such excellent books”)? My questions are partly provoked by what you say of affirmation in “Nombre de oui” in *Psyche: Inventions de l’autre*.

**QUESTION TEN:** I will now link the question of temporality alluded to earlier concerning your phrase absolutely unprecedented responsibilities with the previous two questions on technology, affirmation, and the future. In your essay “Psyche: Inventions of the Other,” deconstruction’s future is intimately related to the promoting of chance. Deconstructive inventions serve this furthering of chance not by opposing the technorational programmation of the aleatory but by letting the radical other of calculation “arrive.” As you remark in that essay: “[D]econstructive inventiveness consists in opening up, unclosing and destabilizing foreclosed structures, in order to leave a passage for the other.” This radical alterity is the “promise” of invention and is, again, a reformulation of your deconstructive argument that there is no beyond the undecidable, the aporetic event; for example, there is no politics of invention to oppose to modern politics of invention. Such an invention would, following your undecidable logic of the “machine,” fall back into the tendency of modern politics to integrate the aleatory within their programmatic calculations. Hence your stress in this essay on the impossible experience of the other as the invention of the impossible. Could you elaborate in this context the temporal relation between the responsibilities of which you spoke in the passage I quoted from *Of Spirit* and the absolute futurity of this absolute other of invention?

**J.D.:** I believe all the problems we have been discussing in this interview are to be found in the very reduced and highly schematized form of what I call double affirmation. To consider the problem in a slightly simple, pedagogical way: the “yes” is neither a descriptive observation nor a theoretical judgment; it is precisely an affirmation, with the performative characteristics that any affirmation entails. The “yes” must also be a reply, a reply in the form of a promise. From the moment that the “yes” is a reply, it must be addressed to the other, from the moment that it is a promise, it pledges to confirm what has been said. If I say “yes” to you, I have already repeated it the first time, since the first “yes” is also a promise of this “yes” being repeated. To say “yes” is to acquiesce, to pledge, and therefore to repeat. To say “yes” is an obligation to repeat. This pledge to repeat is implied in the structure of the most simple “yes.” There is a time and a spacing of the “yes” as “yes-yes”: it takes time to say “yes.” A single “yes” is, therefore, immediately double, it immediately announces a “yes” to come and already recalls that the “yes” implies another “yes.” So, the “yes” is immediately double, immediately “yes-yes.”

This immediate duplication is the source of all possible contamination—that of the movement of freedom, of decision, of declaration, of inauguration—by its technical or technical double. Repetition is never pure. Hence the second “yes” can eventually be one of laughter or derision at the first “yes,” it can be the forgetting of the first “yes,” it can equally be a recording of it. Fidelity, parody, forgetting, or recording—whatever, it is always a form of
repetition. Each time it is originary iterability that is at play. Iterability is the very condition of a pledge, of responsibility, of promising. Iterability can only open the door to these forms of affirmation at the same time as opening the door to the threat of this affirmation failing. One cannot distinguish the opening from the threat. This is precisely why technics is present from the beginning. What duplicity means is this: at the origin there is technics.

All this is true before we even get to the word yes. As I argue in “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce,” the “yes” does not necessarily take on the form of the word yes in a particular language; the affirmation can be pre-verbal or pre-discursive. For example, the affirmation of life in the movement toward self-repetition, toward assistance, may well be pre-verbal. Both movements can also be ones of degeneration, they can be an act of mockery, a copy, an archive, and so forth. With this duplicity we are at the heart of the “logic” of contamination. One should not simply consider contamination as a threat, however. To do so continues to ignore this very logic. Possible contamination must be assumed, because it is also opening or chance, our chance. Without contamination we would have no opening or chance. Contamination is not only to be assumed or affirmed: it is the very possibility of affirmation in the first place. For affirmation to be possible, there must always be at least two “yes’s.” If the contamination of the first “yes” by the second is refused—for whatever reasons—one is denying the very possibility of the first “yes.” Hence all the contradictions and confusion that this denial can fall into. Threat is chance, chance is threat—this law is absolutely undeniable and irreducible. If one does not accept it, there is no risk, and, if there is no risk, there is only death. If one refuses to take a risk, one is left with nothing but death.

R.B.: You have already answered question ten by maintaining that différance is a movement of deferral and difference that allows for the temporality of now and is immediately concerned with this moment now. As you have just made clear as well, your understanding of invention is to be located in this structure of temporality as well as in the logic of contamination that works through it. There can be no invention that is absolutely new and no invention either unless the promise of invention is subject to possible contamination. It is this law that thinking has to confront to be inventive. Shall we turn, then, to question eleven?

QUESTION ELEVEN: How does a certain affirmation of technology relate to what you have called in The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe the promise of democracy? I recall that, for Nietzsche, democracy is the modern reactive fate of calculative reason and that, for Heidegger (both “early” and “late” Heidegger), democracy is “inadequate to confront the challenges of our technological age” (Spiegel interview of 1966). In distinction and differently to both Nietzsche and Heidegger, your work can be seen to affirm both technology and democracy. Although the promise of democracy is not the same as either the fact of democracy or the regulative Idea (in the Kantian sense) of democracy, deconstruction does “hear” différance more in a democratic organization of government than in any other political model; and there are no new models to be invented. If I understand you correctly, your affirmation of democracy is, in this respect, a demand for the sophistication of democracy, such a refinement taking advantage, in turn, of the increasingly sophisticated effects of technology. I pose the above question, then, with the following points in mind. First of all, democratic institutions are becoming more and more unrepresentative in our increasingly technicized world—hence, in part, recent rejections of “la classe politique,” not only in France and the United States; the anxieties that the question of a centralized European government raise form part of the same rejection. Then, in the second place, the media are swallowing up the constitutional machinery of democratic institutions, furthering thereby the de-politicization of society and the possibility of populist demagogy. Third, resistance to this process of technicization is at the same time leading to virulent forms of nationalism and demagogy in the former Soviet empire, forms that are exploiting technology in the domains of the media, telecommunications, and arms, while denying the de-localizing effects of technology, culturally, in the domain of ideology. And, finally, the rights of man would seem an increasingly ineffective set of criteria to resist this process of technicization (together with its possible fascistic effects) given this process’s gradual effacement of the normative and metaphysical limit between the human and the inorganic.

J.D.: Your question concerns the contemporary acceleration of technicization, the relation between technical acceleration (acceleration through, and of, technics) and political-economic processes. It concerns,
in fact, the very concept of acceleration. First, it is more than clear that the idea of the acceleration of history is no longer a _topos_ today. If it is often said that history is going quicker than in the past, that it is now going too quickly, at the same time it is well-known today that acceleration—a question of rhythm and of changes of rhythm—does not simply affect an objective speed that is continuous and that gets progressively faster. On the contrary, acceleration is made up of _differences_ of rhythm, heterogeneous accelerations that are closely related to the technical and technological developments to which you are alluding. So, it makes no sense to "fetishize" the concept of acceleration: there is not a single acceleration. There are, in fact two laws of acceleration: one derives from the technosciences, it concerns speed, the prodigious increase in speed, the unprecedented rhythms that speed is assuming and of which we are daily feeling the effect. The political issues that you evoke bear the stamp of this form of acceleration. The second kind is of a quite different order and belongs to the structure of decision. Everything that I was saying earlier can now be said in these terms: a decision is taken in the process of infinite acceleration.

Second, taking into account these two laws of acceleration that are heterogeneous and that capitalize on each other, what is the situation of democracy today? "Progress" in arms-technologies and in media-technologies is incontestably causing the disappearance of the site on which the democratic used to be situated. The site of representation and the stability of the location that make up parliament or assembly, the territorialization of power, the rooting of power to a particular place, if not to the ground as such—all this is over. The notion of politics dependent on this relation between power and space is over as well, although its end _must_ be negotiated with. I am not just thinking here of the present forms of nationalism and fundamentalism. Technoscientific acceleration poses an absolute threat to Western-style democracy as well, following its radical undermining of locality. Since there can be no question of interrupting science or the technosciences, it is a matter of knowing how a democratic response can be made to what is happening. This response must not, for obvious reasons, try to maintain at all costs the life of a democratic model of government, which is rapidly being made redundant. If technics now exceed democratic forms of government, it is not only because assembly or parlia-

ment is being swallowed up by the media. This was already the case after the First World War. It was already being argued then that the media (then the radio) was forming public opinion so much that public deliberation and parliamentary discussion no longer determined the life of democracy. And so, we need a historical perspective. Today, the acceleration of technicization concerns the borders of the nation-state, the traffic of arms and drugs, everything that has to do with internationality. It is these issues that need to be completely reconsidered, not in order to sound the death-knell of democracy, but to rethink democracy _from within these conditions_. This rethinking, as you rightly suggested earlier, must not be postponed, it is immediate and urgent. For what is specific to these threats, what constitutes the specificity of their time or temporality, is that they are not going to _wait_. Let us take one example from a thousand.

It is quite possible that what is happening at present in the former Yugoslavia is going to take place in the Ukraine: a part of the Ukrainian Russians is going to be re-attached to Russia, the other part refusing. As a consequence, everything decided up to now as to the site and control of the former Soviet Empire's nuclear arms will be cast in doubt. The relative peace of the world could be severely endangered. As to a response, one that is so urgently needed, that is obviously what we have been talking about all along. And yet, it is hardly in an interview that one can say what needs to be done. Despite what I have just said—even if it is true that the former polarity of power is over with the end of the Cold War, and that its end has made the world a much more endangered place—the powers of decision in today's world are still highly structured; there are still important nations and superpowers, there are still powerful economies, and so forth.

Given this and given the fact that, as I have said, a statement specific to an interview cannot measure up to the complexity of the situation, I would venture somewhat abstractly the following points.

Note first that I was referring with the example of the Ukraine to _world_ peace, I was not talking in local terms. Since no locality remains, democracy must be thought _globally_ today, if it is to have a future. In the past, one could always say that democracy was to be saved in this or that country. Today, however, if one claims to be a democrat, one cannot be a democrat "at home" and wait to see what happens "abroad."
Everything that is happening today—whether it be about Europe, the GATT, the Mafia, drugs, arms—engages the future of democracy in the world in general. If this seems an obvious thing to say, one must nevertheless say it.

Second, in the determination or behavior of each citizen or singularity, there should be present, in some form or other, the call to a world democracy to come, each singularity should determine itself with a sense of the stakes of a democracy that can no longer be contained within frontiers, that can no longer be localized, that can no longer depend on the decisions of a specific group of citizens, a nation, or even of a continent. This determination means that one must both think, and think democracy, globally. This may be something completely new, something that has never been done, for we are talking here of something much more complex, much more modest, and yet much more ambitious than any notion of the universal, cosmopolitan, or human. I realize that there is so much rhetoric today—obvious, conventional, reassuring, determined in the sense of without risk—that resembles what I am saying. When, for example, one speaks in the name of the United Nations, when one speaks in the name of a politics that transcends national borders, one always does so in the name of democracy. One has to make the difference clear, then, between democracy in this rhetorical sense and what I am calling a democracy to come. The difference shows, for example, that all the decisions made in the name of the rights of man are at the same time alibis for the continued inequality between singularities, and that we need to invent other concepts than state, superstate, citizen, and so forth for this new International. The democracy to come obliges one to challenge instituted law in the name of an indefinitely unsatisfied justice, thereby revealing the injustice of calculating justice whether this be in the name of a particular form of democracy or of the concept of humanity. This democracy to come is marked in the movement that always carried a present beyond itself, makes it inadequate to itself, “out of joint” (Hamlet); as I argue in Specters of Marx, it obliges us to work with the spectrality in any moment of apparent presence. This spectrality is very weak; it is the weakness of the powerless, who, being powerless, resist the greatest strength.

R.B.: What you have just said concerning time and spectral weakness takes us to question twelve, if not also to question thirteen.

QUESTION TWELVE: Penultimate question: how would you react to the following proposition? The time of technology and the time of philosophy (in particular that of deconstruction, which can only go slowly) are becoming more and more disarticulated, disjointed, out of joint. The law of our time to read is at the risk of being “overpowered” by the law of the time of technology, a law whose end appears to be the “overcoming” of time. Here, the worst side of Nietzsche’s prognostications for the future could come true, although it would not be the reign of democracy that would have brought about this monstrous future of indifferentiation. Either there will be another suicidal attempt to harness technology to the ends of man (fascism in alliance with biogenetics is perhaps our worst future) and/or technology, an inhuman will to power, will overpower humanity. Is this proposition too oppositional, too human, too pious? Too apocalyptic? Or, conversely, is today another “noon tide” for decision? This decision would not, however, be in the “grand style” of politics. It would undoubtedly do violence to the memory of the promise of the other; but the violence would be committed so that the future does not risk forgetting this promise in the greatest violence.

QUESTION THIRTEEN: Finally, In the preamble to this interview I suggested that the name of Nietzsche could serve as an “index” to a series of questions that have become all the more pressing since the end of the Cold War. My final questions, following from those to do with justice, pushed relentlessly the question of the relations between his name and the futures of this end. I am aware that you are publishing a text on Marx. Is another text with which these futures are to be thought and acted upon those of Marx—a new Marx (with Hegel, perhaps), one “after” Nietzsche and Heidegger, and at the end of Marxism?

R.B.: Given the time left, let us end with question twelve. I am situating the problem of acceleration in Nietzschean terms of the will. Just as we need to invent new concepts to deal with today’s political complexity, so, I am suggesting, we need to develop a notion of the will to respond to the imminent dangers facing the post—Cold War world. This would be a will that would learn how to put the brakes on the accelerating processes of technicization so that there would be time to face this acceleration in the spirit not of the greatest simplicity (that is the threat),
but of the greatest complexity. Is this recourse to the notion of will too apocalyptic for you, despite its taking into account of the non-horizontal promise?

J.D.: As I said in response to question seven, I have always thought that thinking is acting provided that one considers thought otherwise than as theoretical speculation. So, your question, if I understand it rightly, is slightly misplaced for me. Thought is tied to language, tied to statements, and statements are acts, they are primarily performative; thinking always concerns the will, even if it enacts an experience of “radical passivity.” There is no thought of the future that is not at the same time an engagement with the question, “What should I do?” In a sense, Heidegger is saying the same thing when he argues that there is no difference between denken and handeln. To think is to do. This can be said differently by recalling that there is no thinking without speaking, that there is no speaking without performative utterances, without events, without promises, and that such promises are not promises if they are not inscribed in conditions that are real. As is clear to all today, the most conventional theoretical logic of speech acts tells us that a performative works only if it is inscribed in a specific context, if it takes account of particular conventions, and so forth. A true thought cannot fail to be a performative language that produces events, that is inscribed therefore in what ordinary language calls the practical or historical reality of things. Thought is that which has an impact [fait événement] in the world. This conception of what constitutes thought is extremely ambitious today. Contemporary thought can think nothing but the present process of globalization to which we have constantly referred, whether the question be that of technics, the nation-state, democracy, the media, and so on. This kind of thinking is hyperbolically ambitious, although it must be extremely modest as well. Under the pretext that our discussion of the actual state of affairs in the world is taking place within the confines of an interview, recorded by a tape-recorder, in an office, and that it is to appear in an academic journal that will be read by a handful of people, under the pretext, then, that this is all too modest, one must not renounce giving a very modest form to these hyperbolically ambitious thoughts. To do the contrary would be to give up the responsibility of thought. And so, one must accept that the hyperbolic could well end up as a grain of sand. This is, of course, the fate of all actions. Since thought is also an action, since it is not in opposition to action, it must undergo the same fate.

R.B.: You are alluding here action, the law of contamination, and in calculability?

J.D.: In a sense, yes. I have no right to abandon my responsibility under the pretext that this responsibility is modest, under the pretext that its effects are incalculable; one cannot calculate one’s responsibility, so its effects may well be nothing, almost nothing. In response to an emergency, I do what I can. I may well be able to do a lot, I may well be able to do very little, even nothing—whatever, I have no right to withdraw from doing something, under the pretext that it will be done in vain. This is irresponsibility itself. Imagine a fire emergency and a fireman who under the pretext that he is unlikely to douse the fire with ten buckets of water, may think of giving up. Does he? No, of course not. Responsibility implies a question of measure within the measureless [la démesure] and a question of the measureless within measure. We are dealing always with measurelessness [la démesure].

R.B.: Do you consider that the threat (of simplification) could be so great that one could run the risk of forgetting the promise or the messianic?

J.D.: No, it is a priori impossible because the threat is not something that comes from the outside to place itself next to the promise. The threat is the promise, in the sense that the threat threatens the promise. There would be no experience of threat, of danger, unless there was the promise. One could not feel the waiting for justice as a threat, unless there was the promise. The threat is the promise itself, or better, threat and promise always come together as the promise. This does not mean just that the promise is always already threatened; it also means that the promise is threatening. The messianic is threatening; there are people who are very frightened of the messianic, as we are going to see in the years to come. People are not just frightened of messianism, they are also frightened of the messianic, quite simply because it is frightening. One must accept that the promise is both threatened and threatening.

R.B.: You are saying here what you said earlier regarding duplicity and iterability of affirmation. The promise affirms the threat in this sense.
J.D.: Yes. To put it much more simply—when I promise or when I give something to someone, it is both good and bad. Bad, because the promise or gift is felt as a threat. Even when I say “yes” to somebody, the “yes” can be felt naively as gratifying, but the “yes” is also worrying. Any gift, any promise is worrying at the same time as being desired. And it is a good thing that it is both good and bad. So you see, in fact, nothing can be simple, and contamination is a good thing!

R.B.: It’s time.

Translated by Richard Beardsworth

“Dead Man Running”: Salut, Salut
NOTES FOR A LETTER TO ‘LES TEMPS MODERNES’

22 March 1996

Dear Claude Lanzmann,

The deadline arrives, I am not ready. Will I ever have been?

On the telephone, when you generously invited me, I nonetheless promised to “try.” Tempted, I wanted to try to write something that would not be too unworthy of an anniversary—my God, already fifty years!—yes, of an anniversary that you have good reason to celebrate and that I would be happy to attend among the crowd. To myself as well, if I can say this, at least to what I confess to liking of my memory, I had promised to give some sign that would testify to my grateful, admiring, and faithful attachment to this enigmatic thing that is still called Les Temps Modernes. The thing carries and deserves its name so well, what a fine name, finally, today more than ever—I would like to return to this.

Giving in to an intractable necessity, but which for that very reason often ends up dictating the cliché, I first wrote: “This enigmatic thing that will have been called Les Temps Modernes.” And then, no; no future anterior is called for here, the adventure continues, and it is your future that must be hailed [saluer]: Long live Les Temps Modernes! Greetings [salut] to you! Yes, I would like to salute [saluer] your future. But your future as our future.

Our future, he says: this appropriation will perhaps be judged indecent to those who know, supposing of course they should ever have been interested in this, that in a thousand ways I have never been, as they say,