

## Introduction

### *The Algerian Philosopher and the Burden of Over-representation*

I love this country [Algeria] more and more, love it madly, which does not contradict the aversion I have long stated for it.

—JACQUES DERRIDA, as quoted in Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*

It is a bracing opening gambit. His argument, Jacques Derrida insists in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autres: Ou la prosthèse d'origine*, is not with the Nazis. It is, rather, this existential crisis, provoked by this country, France, that, Derrida says, he had heretofore called his own—this language, French, that he not only had inhabited but also preferred over the “native tongue,” the language, Arabic, that surrounded him (or, to phrase this in colonial terms, Arabic, the language of the “other” that surrounded him). And yet, one suspects from the silence around Arabic (because of its otherness, no doubt) that it was a language that Derrida was not even, if truth be told, fully aware of but that nevertheless haunted him, even though, we might argue, he could not have begun to comprehend the power of that haunting while growing up in El Biar, a neighborhood in the hills above Algiers.

In El Biar Derrida lived at a remove from the language and culture that is Arabic. In his biography of Derrida, Benoît Peeters, in comparing Derrida to one of those other famous *pièdes-noirs*, Albert Camus, insists that this “French-Muslim Algeria, for which Camus had always striven, is what Derrida too wishes for” (*Derrida*).<sup>1</sup> Derrida was born, as it were, into French; it was the language in which he learned to speak until he recognized that this language, French, was not, despite all appearances to the contrary, his.

In *Le Monolinguisme* Derrida renders his condition in a wonderfully succinct phrasing, one full of provocation for thinking the relation of the self to language. “I have only one language,” Derrida proclaims; “it is not mine.”<sup>2</sup>

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It bears repeating: “I have only one language[;] it is not mine.” How can the language that you “have,” that is in your possession, as much, no doubt, as it possesses you (wherein may lie the rub), not be yours? It is to this conundrum, if “conundrum” is at all the proper term for what it is we are grappling with, that we return, repeatedly, in the course of this Introduction. We turn to it again and again in no small measure because bearing the burden of a “Derridean” language that is, that is not, yours, addresses directly the difficulty of the burden of over-representation. What does it mean to “present” yourself, to put yourself before the world, to have the world understand—and here the issue of translation must not, of course, be overlooked, though we do not linger over it here, important as it is—you in the “one language” that you have that is “not yours?”

As such, the Derridean condition provides the conceptual terms, broadly speaking, for thinking about the ways in which the logic (we might also name it an “il-logic” without detracting from it in the least) of the “language that is not mine” functions in relation to the other two figures in *The Burden of Over-representation*. For Jackie Robinson, where language must be understood as transgression (the expletive, the expletive as the event of race/racism), and for François Pienaar, where the (verbal) act of thanking—making of the pro forma “Thank you” a historical and historic moment—presents itself as the political displacement (and, the usurpation, in truth) of the other, the difficulty of speaking in excess of the self is raised, for each in his own particular way. But, for Robinson and Pienaar, language is nothing other—nothing less than—the articulation of record.

Distilled to its essence, the burden of over-representation turns on a relation to a sociopolitical phenomenon, in this language and/or race assumes primacy, where the self—Derrida, Robinson, Pienaar—is made to speak in such a way that makes its speech, its political intervention, at once exemplary, and, as such, excessive. (It is, as such, an excess that, leaving the self no choice, overdetermines the possibility of its responses to and in the world.) The self is at once distinct from and exceptional within its own political constituency. The overdetermined self is, precisely because of its exemplarity, required (indeed, expected) to exceed the normative expectations that are assigned its community. In the event of each of these three figures, their exceptionality is not, and never will be, in question. As such, because of their irreproachable and incontestable singularity, the burden of intervention, of speaking for, of speaking as, is intensified—making demands on them that are ceaseless and inescapable; they are always subject to the expectation of standing in for, standing as—and, because of this, each of them, in his turn, in the languages within and against which they struggle, in the language that they use in the process of making the event, makes evident the range of effects, politically in-

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consistent, linguistically unexpected, contextually incommensurate (with each other, as they should be) as they may be, that flow from the burden of over-representation, that particular burden that evokes at once, in Derrida's phrasing, "mad love" and determined "aversion." That is, inconsistency, infinite indeterminacy.

Through sport, the burden of over-representation, in the event of Robinson (baseball), Pienaar (rugby—and, it is, of course, acknowledged that Pienaar's singularity is unthinkable except in its relation to Nelson Mandela and the event of a post-apartheid South Africa), and Derrida, renders the political "visible" and thinkable in such a way as to understand over-representation as that which not only locates the exceptional individual disjunctively within his (or her) community but also, and this is a matter of some consequence, dis-locates him (or her) from that community. The effect of this dis-location, which is always subject to rearticulation, is to disrupt our—first, primary, deeply held—understanding of the figure in such a way as to make it imperative that we re-locate this exceptional individual, that we situate a Derrida or a Robinson differently, situate each, literally, in Derrida's case, "first" in an-other place, in the place of the other, that other place that is also theirs, sometimes unbeknownst to them. That is, over-representation is understood as, in different ways, "burdensome" to the figure under discussion and to the critic who undertakes the work of re-location because it demands its own specific responsibility; over-representation as such is the burden of responsibility that must be borne by the exceptional athlete (the out-of-place figure who is reaching for an-other place).

That is, having flung, say, Pienaar out (not so much into) from the world with which he is almost unflinching associated (white, rugby-playing, intensely masculinized apartheid South Africa), the burden of responsibility imposes on the critic, without the possibility of (political) relief, the demand of accounting for this thinking, demands a thinking for and accounting of the effects of over-representation, demands an understanding, it is important to note, of the costs as well as the possibilities that emanate from the critique of over-representation. What happens in the process of such re-location? Such a re-assignment? And, as Derrida would insist, such a renaming?

It is in this way that Derrida's painful grappling with relation, a response hardly unfamiliar to the foreigner made citizen or the diasporic subject,<sup>3</sup> to the immigrant or the refugee, that oscillates between "love" ("mad" though it be—is "love" ever anything else?) and "aversion," delineates the terms for thinking the burden of over-representation. Not quite as, say, a poisoned chalice (tempting as such a conception might be, it is insufficient for the demand at hand), but rather as something more akin to a relentless,

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restless (such are the effects of deracination) movement between attraction to and loyalty for (this “country I love more and more”) and a profound discomfiture with “that” place that can never be overcome. This is precisely why one cannot negate the force of “mad love.” As such, the burden of over-representation almost always turns on the inability to not love, to render the condition as a double negative, as much as it does to “consummate” (with any enduring satisfaction) this “mad love,” this self, this love, this love of self, made “mad” by love, this love that cannot sustain the self in the only language through which this “mad love” can be expressed. There is, then, always the threat inaugural to the burden of over-representation: that it will overwhelm those whom it subjects to the condition. To borrow, in this regard, a phrase from Jacques Rancière, “Excess is the essence of the promise”: The founding premise of the burden of over-representation is that it must, it will, “exceed” the capacities of the self but, in so doing, in laying bare the “limitations” of the self, it reveals the full extent (that is, its potentially massive debilitation of the self) of the hubris, so to speak, of this burden. The effect of over-representation is to at once enfold the self within it-self (the condition of over-representation) and then to almost submerge that self beneath the weight of the attendant expectations.

In this way, the paradox is that (loosely speaking) the burden of over-representation is indifferent to the fate of the self as much as it can articulate itself only through and because of that self; the very condition of over-representation begins with and can happen only because of the (exceptional) self. This is not to locate the self as helpless. It is, rather, to locate the self fully within the workings and the imbrication of the burden of over-representation, to begin a first delineation of what it means for figures such as Derrida, Pienaar, and Robinson to bear this burden. It is also to acknowledge, in advance, that even when the burden of over-representation is assumed “willingly” (though to imagine such an acceptance is to veer, deliberately and without recourse, into the Christological, to conjure up the specters of Jesus-the-Christ and the crucifixion or a St. Christopher deciding to shoulder the sins of the other, again and again, making of him a latter-day, “lesser” Jesus-the-Christ), it is impossible for the self to ever understand the sheer scope, the extent of personal vulnerability (such responsibility always includes the possibility of fatality), and the relentless demands that are constitutive of such an act. (Again, the Christological can be invoked, if only as a counterpoint this time: “Lord, let this cup pass me by,” to render the event of Gethsemane in the vernacular. An object lesson in that it illuminates and crystallizes the refusal that knows itself as a futile political gesture. The crucifixion, then, as the cup that must be drunk from, the crucifixion as the event that turns on absolute responsibility, the responsibility to sacrifice the self in

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the cause of the universal other.) As such, the burden of over-representation always operates—anything but mechanistically, which is to say it cannot be foretold or made to follow a script—on the order of the event. It is predictable (only) in its unpredictability; we anticipate it but are never truly prepared for it and it is, thus, punctual *only* on its own terms. The event adheres to its own “schedule” insofar as we can imagine the “timetable” of the event; the event arrives (only) in its own good time.

The event of dislocation, then, the relocation and rearticulation of Jacques Derrida “from” Europe, a Europe to which he has never fully committed himself and in which he could never fully immerse (or invest) himself, to Algeria (and, by extension, to the Maghreb, and, by further extension, to Africa, especially in Derrida’s affinity for South Africa, both in his anti-apartheid stance and in his support for Nelson Mandela after the end of apartheid), positions Derrida as the “paradigmatic” figure for thinking the burden of over-representation. By delineating the terms under which Derrida might be understood as a philosopher of and from “French Muslim Algeria,” from the Maghreb and Africa, I work here through *Le Monolinguisme* to suggest how the burden of over-representation might be thought in relation to Pienaar, Mandela, and Robinson, the three other figures who are the subjects of *The Burden of Over-representation*.

Thinking Derrida, first, here as the focal point of the Introduction, and then last, because he is the subject of Chapter 3, “I Think I Saw Jacques Derrida at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa,” is of consequence because *The Burden of Over-representation* runs through Jacques Derrida insofar as it is his oeuvre that serves as the philosophical lynchpin, the point of departure (and, again, in the spirit of Friedrich Nietzsche, the point of endless if not “eternal” return) for how Pienaar, Mandela, and Robinson are considered—or, as Derrida would have it, “written.” In purely chronological terms, which must not be understood as signaling a certain “terminality,” *The Burden of Over-representation* also runs to Jacques Derrida in that Derrida bookends the project—this book works with and toward the thinking of Jacques Derrida. To that end, this book opens and, as it were, “closes,” with Derrida: We are never very far from Derrida, as he haunts (in the terms of his notion of hauntology) the writing of Pienaar (who is “paired” with Mandela) and Robinson. Derrida’s “voice,” and what he enables us to give voice to, how his voice is brought into question (as a consequence of, as Chapter 3 makes evident, his own provocation), and what questions it allows *The Burden of Over-representation* to open up to, to open onto, resonates throughout this text.

However constitutive as it is of the project, Derrida’s thinking by no means overwhelms the other figures. So much so that while the central category of this book’s inquiry, the burden of over-representation, in-

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flects, informs, and gives theoretical shape to all three chapters, different modalities of thinking obtain in “Stupid Bastards” (Chapter 1, on Robinson) and “Thank You, in (a) Sense” (Chapter 2, on Pienaar and Mandela). Modalities, it should be said, that do not always coincide exactly with how the burden of over-representation is thought. The politics of the expletive, inferred easily enough from the title of the chapter, and the ways in which the expletive concatenates race, sociopolitical expectation, and political repression (so that the burden of expectation cannot but limn the chapter’s critical apparatus) are the dominant conceptual techniques in the Robinson chapter. In Chapter 2 the politics of refusal (Pienaar’s insistence that “thanks” are not Mandela’s to give but, to phrase this in Christological terms, to receive—“It is more blessed to give than to receive,”<sup>4</sup>—in its own way, of course, re-returns us to the burden of representation because both Pienaar and Mandela, at a pivotal moment in this newly democratized society, perform such important symbolic functions in and for their respective communities: rugby-mad Afrikaners and the oh-so-recently enfranchised black South African population), which, in a different context with some of the same resonances (“specters”), raises in its turn not only the issues of race, oppression, forgiveness, and the violence without which forgiveness is impossible (here again Derrida’s work is crucial) but also how these several political dynamics are brought to life through sport, is the line of critique through which the chapter proceeds.

And it does so by making a signal claim on Derrida as thinker, as a thinker who brings, contrary to Stanley Cavell’s critique, the “ordinary”—the “ordinary” language and thinking that surrounds and emanates from and through sport—into philosophical fullness. Or it is only through philosophy that we can understand the many layers of difficulty that adhere within, that constitute, sport. In his work *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*, Cavell dedicates a chapter to Derrida’s “famous encounter with Austin’s work . . . [in] Jacques Derrida’s ‘Signature Event Context.’”<sup>5</sup> Cavell’s Derrida chapter is preoccupied with “voice,” Derrida’s privileging of writing (which alone for Derrida can “authorize the seriousness or innerness of thought”), and, most importantly for Cavell, the distinction between “metaphysical and ordinary language . . . between what may be called the metaphysical and ordinary voice.”<sup>6</sup> According to Cavell, Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin argue against the preeminence of the metaphysical voice because it leads to the “suffocation of the ordinary voice.”<sup>7</sup> The “irony of Derrida’s work,” Cavell asserts, “is that it contributes to this suffocation of the ordinary; I call it a continuation of philosophy’s flight from the ordinary.”<sup>8</sup> By thinking Pienaar (and Mandela) and Robinson through *Le Monolinguisme*, *The Burden of Over-representation* arrives at a very different conclusion. The “voice” of sport (the many voices that sport,

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and only sport, articulates, can articulate), a voice that is endemically “ordinary”<sup>9</sup> if it is anything at all, is liberated from the “suffocation” of philosophical indifference to which sport is routinely (if not always) subjected. It is Derrida’s insistence on how one thinks, thinks sport, that makes his brand of philosophy—his mode of thinking about the world, in its peculiar, particular ordinariness—such a provocative, difficult (which is what the work of thinking must be), and generative fit for the event of sport, for the event in sport. After all, few other human activities apart from politics and the economy, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> turn so insistently on “the event,” and the event is nothing if it is not the first condition for thinking, for thinking from, with, and because of the “ordinary.”

The effect of Derrida’s thinking is not, as Cavell claims, to deny voice to the “ordinary,” but to liberate it into philosophy and, as such, to return philosophy, as it properly should, to the “ordinary.” The effect of thinking sport through Derrida’s philosophy is to refuse, without denying their different modes of apprehension, the distinction “between metaphysical and ordinary voice.” It is, instead, to embrace without reservation what Cavell names “unlimited difference, strangeness, distance, and so on” (*A Pitch of Philosophy*).<sup>11</sup> The lure/allure of sport is that it grounds our love for football or baseball precisely in how “strange”—the event is full of, is nothing but, a series of, surprises—it can be, how through it the miraculous unfolds before our very eyes, how poetic beauty manifests itself in the “strangest,” least-expected moments or encounters (read Eduardo Galeano’s *Football in Sun and Shadow*<sup>12</sup> as a most stylistically inventive case in point), how it can situate us as fans at once in an intense proximity to the event and yet leave us inexplicably removed. No one sporting event, in either the banal or philosophical sense of the term, is ever like any other sporting event. “Unlimited difference” proliferates; it is the very stuff of sport; it is why athletes compete; it is why spectators watch; it is why partisans dedicate their very waking hours to following the fortunes of their club, patriots swear allegiance to a national team, or besotted fans proclaim—against all scientific evidence—that they “bleed blue” or “green” or “gold and black.” No one result, whether that be defeat or victory, is ever like any other. Every sporting encounter contains within it the potential for the event *sui generis*.

*The Burden of Over-representation*, then, much as it leads through and to Derrida, does so in a way that seeks to “weave” Derrida’s thinking into the critique, invoking his work at strategic moments but remaining as true as possible to thinking these three sports events in the spirit of the Derridean “ordinary.”

Appropriately, given how much of the Derrida chapter is figured through the ghost of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, we might say that rather than being drawn on consistently, Derrida’s work is the in-consistently spectral

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presence that gives *The Burden of Over-representation* its philosophical shape—as well as providing, relentlessly, as only the ghost can, the theoretical apparatus and impetus for thinking Derrida, Robinson, Pienaar, and Mandela through, and because of, needless to say, sport.

To this end, the remainder of the Introduction is an attempt to account, in the most provocative and in-complete way, for the ghost that constitutes, that brings to life, that gives philosophical shape to, and that stands as among the most important of Derrida's addresses to a (formative, so to speak) political issue, that of "origin," that of the site of the "first thinking," we might speculate, that—on the surface of it, his oeuvre, that is—for so long lies dormant, is for so long ignored. And/or, perhaps we should say "but," at the moment—and it is for this reason that *Le Monolinguisme* is the text of record, as it were—that it "finds" articulation in this "late-Derrida" text; the extent to which it has so long haunted Derrida reveals it as long present, long since constitutive of, his thinking, so much so that it seems, I would venture, "obvious." That "issue," as I have tentatively named it, is, of course, Algeria. And, this writing of Derrida is undertaken fully aware of Derrida's deep suspicions of "origins" as such.

In this way, *The Burden of Over-representation* is a struggle with, in struggle with, Derrida; it is, because of the argument, itself grounded in a massive speculation, the ghost of Jacques Derrida at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa (a speculation of the most precarious or perilous, Derrida might prefer, order), something of a "historical" argument, to phrase the project crudely, not so much with Derrida, as how to write (think) Derrida. And, importantly, the ghost that provoked the writing of *The Burden of Over-representation* is a ghost of the "geopolitical" variety, a ghost that haunts the writer writing Derrida here, which makes of this, to begin with (again) a most precarious and tentative engagement. That is, given how Algeria haunts Derrida, and given Derrida's preoccupation with South Africa, *The Burden of Over-representation* is—in a singular fashion—a text written between the African continent's two poles, north and south. (In truth, it is written from two Mediterranean locales in Africa, El Biar and Cape Town, which have hardly ever, to my mind, been put in conversation.) And, as such, following its own logic, it is a peculiarly "African thinking" of Derrida, an "African thinking" complicated, illuminated, and made possible by the experience of the diaspora, by the experience, appropriately, of dislocation—a dislocation, a rude deracination, that is, each in its own way, violent and yet provoking out of its violence a philosophical fecundity that might otherwise not have been imaginable.

In this way, the "long silence" (if such a conditional critique might be, for a moment, permitted) about Algeria that pervades Derrida's work finds echoes, resonances, and political as well as philosophical reverbera-

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tions in Jackie Robinson's "sociopolitical" repression (the unspeakable, the mis-representation that forms Robinson's burden of over-representation; what Claude Lévesque names, in his roundtable discussion with Derrida, the unavoidable encounter with exemplarity, "exemplarization").<sup>13</sup> It is, then, the African American figure, in a quite unexpected way (such, of course, is the logic of the event), who bridges the three African figures, a concatenation, a linking among three continents (Africa, Europe, and North America), that enables this thinking to proceed from, through, and to Jacques Derrida by way of Jackie Robinson, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and U.S. racism—among the other pathways that *The Burden of Over-representation* follows, meanders along. It is ghostly enough, isn't it, that the Introduction and the opening chapter of this book feature two men, continents apart (continents triangulated), who share, one for his entire life, the other for only his youth, the name "Jacky/Jackie." "Jacky"—"Jackie"—"Jacques." (North) Africa—United States—Europe/United States. Concatenations, echoes, resonances, names repeating homonymically, without interruption, because of sport, because of figures otherwise entirely unrelated. (One hears "Jacky" as "Jackie"; there is, for the ear, no possibility of distinction. Maybe this is what it means for Derrida to hear his name, "Jacques Derrida," spoken in the "ear of the other," to borrow from Derrida's 1979 colloquium on "otobiography," "autobiography," and "translation."<sup>14</sup> How could "Jacky" not be heard as indistinguishable from "Jackie"? In the "ear of the other" fine distinctions in spelling mean nothing, nothing at all.)

It is only through sport, through the politics of sport, through the event that sport alone can make legible, that the ghosts of Vichy French anti-Semitism, the early civil rights struggle against racism, and the exchange of thanks between an iconic black and a white South African in the aftermath of apartheid (the ink on a promising nonracist democracy had barely dried), that Shakespeare's ghost can be mobilized to think the burden of over-representation.

Furthermore, in the Robinson and Derrida chapters, two of Shakespeare's major tragedies, *Othello* and *Hamlet*, are called into action, called to duty, in the explication of the burden of over-representation. The specter of the Moor haunts the writing of Robinson, not to the same extent that the ghost of King Hamlet is formative to the thinking of Derrida, the ghost of Derrida at the *Coupe du monde*, but present enough to provide the metaphorical language—"Rude art thou in speech" (*Othello*)<sup>15</sup> and "Speake to it" (*Hamlet*)<sup>16</sup>—critical to the writing of the groundbreaking baseball player and the one-time amateur footballer.

To borrow from, while simultaneously revoking, Duke Orsino's opening lines from *Twelfth Night*:

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*If music be the food of love, play on;  
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken, and so die.*<sup>17</sup>

In this spirit, *The Burden of Over-representation* can be said to function on a principle more properly or, at least more playfully, understood as “If baseball/football be the food of love [as it is for countless millions], play on.” The intent, unlike for the love-stricken duke, is to “quicken the appetite,” and to think rigorously—with the utmost pleasure—so that such a thinking of sport, that conjuncture where sport, philosophy, race, diaspora, sociopolitical repression, et al. come into glorious contact and combat, may be made “healthy” for a thinking far in “excess” of the promise and potential contained individually in each of these concepts, in each of these modes of being. It is to indulge fully in “flights of fancy” so that, to again deliberately misread the duke, such a thinking “alone is high fantastical” (*Twelfth Night*).<sup>18</sup>

And so, this “flight of philosophical fancy,” this dalliance with onerous political burdens, begins in a language, *le monolinguisme*, that, in Derrida’s terms, refuses his right to “ownership” even as, without the right to any historical recourse, it claims him. It claims him, if not fully, then so nearly fully as to be indistinguishable from laying full and unapologetic claim to Derrida, to Derrida beyond this world but still a Derrida who is entirely of and beyond Paris, entirely of and beyond France, and entirely of and beyond Euro-American philosophy. A Derrida, in short, who makes impossible any kind of representation that is restrictive, territorial, sovereign, yet a Derrida who will not cede his right to be—to be-long, to be of—these places. As much as, that is, even though, these places can no longer be understood to stand—to function in their difference—at a remove from El Biar or, for that matter, South Africa. Representation, in short, as absolute entanglement, as the desire—the deepest desire—for an impossible sovereignty. The self as nothing less than that mode of being that is, at once, by turns, all the time, haunted by every place that touches it, that it has touched. The self as simultaneously in struggle with itself and reveling in the joys of its many entanglements. Derrida, then, as belonging in un-equal parts (a difference beyond measure, a difference whose distinctness must always be thought, counted, accounted for) to “Les Bleus” (the French team) and to the “Renards du Désert” (Desert Foxes) of Algeria. Derrida, to phrase the matter lightly and awkwardly, as *le tricolor renard*—the “three-colored fox.” Chameleon-like, he can change his colors, and, like the fox, he is inveterately wily, beguiling us, bewitching us, seducing us into the most perilous certainty. That is, the unspoken promise—that promise that we would swear he made

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to us, made to us just yesterday—that he belongs, has always belonged, to only us. In short, in that presenting himself, he is, even though the promise is only an imagined one (it is, after all, the only way to inscribe our desire, to make our desire override his), representing us. It is, then, not only that Derrida is haunted by all places but also that the site of his most intense and enduring, and therefore most elusive, haunting is us. All the claims we make on him, every time we ask him to stand for something, for someone (us, of course, first, primarily), brings to life yet one more instance of his capacity to haunt us. In the spirit of *Hamlet*, we might take the liberty to paraphrase Marcellus and ask of Derrida, as Marcellus asks of Horatio, “Speake for us, Jacque, thou art,” in no particular order, “an African/a philosopher, a French philosopher, the last colonial European who has no language but his own for living in Europe.” The gift of the ghost is that, if we insist enough, we are liable to hear our own desires fulfilled, it echoes of our own mangled voice, our own voice distorted and made alien by the visor that shields the ghost from us. The gift of the ghost is that it refuses, in the final instance, to shield us from ourselves.

### Colonial Derrida

Thus as men with a vocation we may permit ourselves to be indifferent to everything else, and we have an eye only for this horizon of our world and for its own actualities and possibilities—those that exist in this “world.” (Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*)<sup>19</sup>

Edmund Husserl warns against delimitation, he argues against the vocational impulse that causes men “to be indifferent to everything” but that which their vocation designates as important. It is possible to imagine Husserl’s critique as an address between two Jewish intellectuals (or between, say, the Jewish-Lutheran Husserl<sup>20</sup> and Derrida’s occasional naming of himself as a Jewish-Catholic), two intellectuals each in his own way significantly affected by the rise and consequences of National Socialism in such a way as to bind Husserl’s post-World War I Germany (the founding and the dissolution of the Weimar Republic) to Derrida’s Algeria. Most saliently, in this regard, Husserl is cautioning against the thinker who trains his “eye only” on the “horizon of his world and for its own actualities and possibilities.” It is necessary, Husserl suggests, to always look beyond and to think in excess of the constraints of these self-same “actualities and possibilities.”

Derrida writes the “actualities” as well as the “possibilities” of colonial Algeria long after the event of wartime disenfranchisement. (One of these

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“actualities,” of course, was the desubjectivation that derived from his being Jewish—that act, emanating from Vichy Paris, that legally inscribed him as “Jew.”) Derrida writes in his new (it is of course hardly new) guise as a diasporic thinker who understands himself as having been disenfranchised—as well as desubjectivated—before he was diasporized. And, we should add, before he became a postcolonial subject as such. Derrida reminds us of his overdetermined condition in *Le Monolinguisme*:

Algeria has never been occupied. I mean that if it has ever been occupied, the German Occupation was never responsible for it. The withdrawal of French citizenship from the Jews of Algeria, with everything that followed, was the deed of the French alone. They decided that all by themselves, in their heads; they must have been dreaming about it all along; they implemented it all by themselves.<sup>21</sup>

It was not, Derrida is emphatic, the Nazis who disenfranchised him. No, it was Vichy France that enacted that law. The right of Jewish citizenship withdrawn not (if we might invoke Carl Schmitt here) by the enemy but by the “friend,” the putative friend, the occupying colonial power—and, as such, a state, France, technically also (still) at war with the Nazis. The “friend,” we should say, who is in effect not a friend because for Vichy France the Jewish schoolboy, expelled from Lycée Ben Aknoun in 1942 (at the age of twelve), for no reason other than being Jewish, is an enemy. If not an enemy, then he is certainly not a valued friend.

The blame for Jewish Algerian disenfranchisement lies, and here Derrida is unambiguous, not with Hitler. No, the blame rests squarely on the shoulders of Marshall Pétain and the anti-Semitic “dreams” that had long been resident in French “heads.” If, as Julia Kristeva argues in her critique of Paris 1968, we can only achieve “salvation through desire, i.e., without desire no salvation,”<sup>22</sup> then what Derrida confronted in Vichy France—from afar, from the periphery that rearticulated his standing as political subject, or non-subject, his monolingualism notwithstanding, of the historic Jewish diaspora—was the exclusionary violence of the “desire for salvation.”<sup>23</sup> The “desire” of the French state for “salvation” was overwhelmed, of course, by the Germans, but that “desire”—the expedient and historic (anti-Semitic) longing for “freedom”—was expressed at the expense of the colonized other. Appropriately, Vichy France’s desire was an autoimmune one, to be sure, because there can be no staving off fascism, no matter who—the other, no doubt, first of all—is sacrificed in the unjust, unjustifiable cause of saving the self. The very determination to save the self from fascism—history is clear on this point—will only implicate the self more perilously in the very project from which it is trying

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to save itself. There can, on these terms, be no “salvation” for or of the self that does not begin and end in complicity, that does not sacrifice self as well as other.

Complicity in the death of the other produces the obeisance of the self and, finally, the making vulnerable, beyond measure, beyond time, of the self. That is, through trying to save itself, in trying to secure its own (inherently perilous) future, the self guarantees its own demise. Heinous as it was (the echoes of which remain audible in our day), in striving to “save” itself from further devastation by the Nazis, Vichy France crushed the “dream” of uninterrupted Jewish (colonial) citizenship, citizenship that had been acquired in 1870 through the Decree of Crémieux (*Decree Crémieux*), which gave French citizenship to some 35,000 Algerian Jews. The Vichy state, which was resisted vigorously and courageously from within, forever marked itself in that moment when France betrayed its own founding principles—*liberté, fraternité, égalité*. Consequently, in order for the French state to once again lay claim to those principles, the Vichy state and those who threw their lot in with Pétain and, by implication, Nazi Germany, would have to be confronted, judged, and denounced. And, lived with, forever thereafter.

Pétain’s complicity with the Nazis provoked the unexpected “desire” in and for the Algerian child—of both Derrida’s and subsequent generations, what preceded 1840 and succeeded 1942—to understand the ruptures already inscribed in his *le monolinguisme*, the language he speaks that is not his. In other words, to account for his speaking, or not speaking, as the case might be, Arabic. To not speak Arabic is, then, to be inaugurated very early into the difficulty of bearing responsibility—an undue burden, the kind of burden that perhaps only colonial history can impose, but a burden, the burden, that must, nevertheless, be born—for the language that is not ours.

Moreover, *Le Monolinguisme* seeks to create, for Abdelkebir Khatibi (Moroccan philosopher, author of *Love in Two Languages*, the text that provoked and therefore haunts *Le Monolinguisme*),<sup>24</sup> Derrida’s interlocutor in *Le Monolinguisme*, a separation between self and colonial empire, to anticipate, perhaps unknowingly, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN [National Liberation Front]), antipathy, violence, and gender-reinscribing resistance toward Gaullist France that was—that could be—glimpsed in the act of the young Jewish boy’s disenfranchisement. Here, the historical Husserlian eye would insist, a thinker’s sight needed to be trained, in this instance, on a moment just beyond the “horizon’s edge,” to see what existed before it came into being. The horizon, whose only name could be, simultaneously, dialectically (the best term, but an inadequate one, admittedly, to name this conflict that Derrida instigates, endures, lives, dies

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with), an “*independent* Algeria” and a postcolonial France. As Derrida says, “Let us understand ‘relation’ in the sense of narration, the narration of the genealogical narrative, but more generally as well, in the sense that Edouard Glissant imprints upon the impression when he speaks of *Poetics of Relation* [*Poétique de la Relation*], just as one could also speak of a politics of relation” (*Monolingualism of the Other*).<sup>25</sup>

A “relation” between/among languages—“French,” “Arabic,” the Algerian French spoken in a Jewish home in El Biar, a “relation” between figures, the Jewish boy and his family, the Jewish boy and his Arab neighbors (a fair number of them Muslim, no doubt), the Jewish boy and France in its pre- and post-Vichy incarnations, the Jewish boy and the French Resistance to Nazism and the politics of Pétain, the “relations” of anti- and post-colonized thinkers Derrida, Khatibi, and Glissant to, let us say, Franco-Maghrebian, African, and Franco-Caribbean anti-colonial thinkers—is established. This is a series of “relations” that is potentially sans end, that yields not comfort as such, but it does, signally, open onto an entire range of anti-colonial and anti-*mondialisation* thought that can be gathered under the sign of *le monolinguisme*. That is, the condition of thinking that we encounter as proper to us (it is our thought; thinking conducted in this language is/is not ours) and yet beyond us (all the while, it is the only language in which the work of thinking can be done), thought that is, as such, constitutively excessive so that it leads inexorably, as all thought worthy of the name must, in the direction of “more than one.” It tends, as such, to point us toward the other.

The burden of language, *Le Monolinguisme* reminds us, if any such reminder is necessary, inscribes the burden of over-representation as a political and ethical responsibility to the other. A thinking of the self in relation to, unremittingly, wherever the imperative to think relation emanates from, it must account for the other. Thinking the relation to the other is as true of the work of Derrida and/or Glissant as it is of Michel Foucault or Jean-Luc Nancy, Kristeva, or V. Y. Mudimbe.

Conceived as such, relation in this book turns, as it properly must, on the other and responsibility, on responsibility to the other, on violence and forgiveness, on sociopolitical repression and the resistance it produces (/provokes) in (/through) the expletive, and the racially charged nature that is brought into relation through an exchange of thanks, an exchange that can be apprehended only through the politics of negation.<sup>26</sup>

Above all, however, the relation being invoked here through *Le Monolinguisme* is, of course, the act of prosopopoeia. Through this writing, Derrida is retroactively creating the presence—his own in Algeria, needless to say—of (the) one who is absent, the one who is absent in the land of his own birth. To phrase the matter more astringently, the one who is, who was,

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dead to his own “native land,” to invoke the title of Aimé Césaire’s poem “Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal Cahier” (Return to my native land). It is only through prosopopoeia, after his own departure can (now) bear the weight of his desire for reinscription back into his “abandoned” native land (no matter Derrida’s famous argument against the desire “for origins”), that Derrida can address himself, can address himself to Algeria. That he can, as importantly, address and argue with Khatibi (with the spectral presence of Khatibi, who, it might be said, “embodies” the very presence of the Derridean “absence,” itself, of course, a ghostly presence). Derrida addressing Khatibi in response to Khatibi’s “love in two languages,” Derrida writing (to) Khatibi after Khatibi had written him, written of his “un-speakable love,” which enables Derrida to write the prosopopoeia of Jacques Derrida. A writing which, in the terms of *The Burden of Over-representation*, mobilizes (installs, acts through) the ghost of “Jacques Derrida” in such a way that its/his spectral presence haunts (shapes, informs) the project in its entirety. The effect of the ghost, as such, is never singular, extending from the event of anti-Semitism in the colonized Maghreb to the event of thanks in postapartheid South Africa, from the expletive uttered in the U.S. South to the esteemed halls of the French academy. The ghost proliferates, reproduces itself, again and again, so much so that, when all is said and done, the ghost is rendered unrecognizable to itself and, in turn, is made to confront itself as far more than itself. And, as such, the ghost comes to know itself fully as itself through its proliferation; its many figurations make the ghost more, never less, itself.

All this writing, one to another, one to the other, all emerges out of the writing of one Maghrebian philosopher to another. After the “death” of disenfranchisement comes the prosopopoeial writing of the self into Maghrebian life, the reclamation of a life of the un-/under-acknowledged Algerian thinker, the Algerian-born philosopher who comes late, again, to stake his claim to being of Algeria, the thinker whose thought was born in the event of (Jewish Algerian) disenfranchisement. We can say the event of the 1995 rugby World Cup in South Africa, won by Pienaar’s Springbok team and “anointed” by the event of the “Thank you” exchange between Pienaar and Mandela, entirely “makes” of Pienaar a historic figure, a status bequeathed to him by virtue of the historic 1995 World Cup triumph. Pienaar is made a historic figure far in excess of sport, far in excess of the signal role that captaining the Springboks to victory in a World Cup assigns him; that is, the role of his “native” community, rugby-loving Afrikaners who had bristled against their exclusion, on the grounds of apartheid, from the international rugby community, is made minor—but not inconsequential—because of the event of the “Thank you.”

As such, the event enables us to make historical claims. In the case of

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Derrida, it is now, following the logic of the event (prosopopoeially understood), possible to argue that the deconstructive mind first came into its own (it was, to phrase the matter poorly, “born”) because of his expulsion from the corridors of the Lycée Ben Aknoun, fully French in its syllabus and functioning. That is, the deconstructive mind that is Jacques Derrida arises out of the anti-Semitic exclusion of that not-yet-deconstructive mind from that self-same French-Algerian institution. To pursue this line of reasoning one step further, it can be asserted that the deconstructive mind owes itself only secondarily to the postwar French university. Finally, following the argument presented in *Le Monolinguisme*, it is now possible to claim that the first iterations, the first speaking, the initial articulations of the condition of *le monolinguisme* are significantly indebted not to the language in which it is “written” as such, French, but to the political haunting of the language not spoken. That is, we might speculate, the Arabic that surrounded Derrida on the streets of Algiers, or the Berber he might have encountered by accident in El Biar (not likely, but . . .) or . . . some other language that some stranger spoke, a language Derrida might have heard in passing, and, who knows, taken to heart. What language, we might pause to wonder, would Marrano Jews (sometimes also called “crypto-Jews”) from Spain such as Derrida’s family have come to Algeria with? Ladino? How much of Ladino “survived,” mutated into . . . Algerian French? And, emerged as what, exactly? What traces did it leave over the centuries after the expulsion triggered by the Inquisition? Is this the language, one speculates, that Derrida seeks to discern in *Cinders*?<sup>27</sup> That Derrida tries to discern from the cinders, this writing of the ashes of death, the ashes that both materialize and deny death through their ethereal survival?

How different, we might reflect for a moment, is that *arche* (“prior,” “origin,” “beginning,” or, in Aristotle’s work, an “actuating principle”—an event) in the intellectual formation of the African American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois: “I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not,”<sup>28</sup> Du Bois proclaims in *The Souls of Black Folk*. It is only in, unlike Du Bois, “wincing” at his non-usage of Arabic, of his coming late—but not, thankfully, too late—to the work of Khatibi, that Derrida can, in accounting for the difficulty of living “monolingually,” imagine thought in another language. That he can “dis-own,” or “own” without ever “owning,” French, that he can begin to imagine thinking, that he can proffer thought, in what might have been, what might constitutively be, his “first” if not his “native” language, the language that will not, even now, live only prosopopoeially.

The prosopopoeia constitutes, in *Le Monolinguisme*, a means of subject formation, a means of political self-authoring. (It does so in much the same way, surely, as Pienaar’s negation of Mandela’s “Thank you,” the very articu-

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lation on which the event turns, must be understood as the “archetypal,” in Aristotle’s sense, moment in the formation of a postapartheid white South African political self. A self that refuses, no matter that it cannot fully grasp, in the moment of refusal, the effects of the event, or the political costs, immediate and medium term. In much the same way, U.S. racism and the unjust treatment of blacks is the prosopopoeial facticity of black life, no matter the event of Robinson’s historic ascension into Major League Baseball.) In this way the exchange, Derrida addressing Khatibi, between thinkers, Derrida “and” Khatibi, Derrida in relation to Khatibi, names an encounter haunted by death, enables a making of the self after the moment of “disenfranchised” death. Talking with Khatibi allows for the making of the (colonial, postcolonial: a sovereign Algeria and so a potentially “sovereign” Algerian who can only with the greatest difficulty stake his claim to such a name) self, the prosopopoeial inscription of the other who is also, if we were to think of Emmanuel Levinas’s work on the political effects and affects of the face-to-face encounter for a moment, the self—the self that could not, even in the event of extreme political violence, be acknowledged. What prosopopoeia reveals is how any narrative of the self is always borne out of the need, only occasionally articulated, to mark, however tentatively, that place, that imprecise time, named “beginning”—the *arche*. At once more categorically and more tentatively, that place that has to (/must decidedly not) be understood as “*the* beginning.”