

AUTOIMMUNITY: REAL AND SYMBOLIC SUICIDES

A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida

BORRADORI: September 11 (*Le 11 septembre*) gave us the impression of being a *major event*,¹ one of the most important historical events we will witness in our lifetime, especially for those of us who never lived through a world war. Do you agree?

DERRIDA: *Le 11 septembre*, as you say, or, since we have agreed to speak two languages, "September 11."² We will have to return later to this question of language. As well as to this act of naming: a date and nothing more. When you say "September 11" you are already citing, are you not? You are inviting me to speak here by recalling, as if in quotation marks, a date or a dating that has taken over our public space and our private lives for five weeks now. Something *fait date*, I would say in

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a French idiom, something marks a date, a date in history; that is always what's most striking, the very impact of what is at least *felt*, in an apparently immediate way, to be an event that truly marks, that truly makes its mark, a singular and, as they say here, "unprecedented"³ event. I say "apparently immediate" because this "feeling" is actually less spontaneous than it appears: it is to a large extent conditioned, constituted, if not actually constructed, circulated at any rate through the media by means of a prodigious techno-socio-political machine. "To mark a date in history" presupposes, in any case, that "something" comes or happens for the first and last time, "something" that we do not yet really know how to identify, determine, recognize, or analyze but that should remain from here on in unforgettable: an ineffaceable event in the shared archive of a universal calendar, that is, a *supposedly* universal calendar, for these are—and I want to insist on this at the outset—only suppositions and presuppositions. Unrefined and dogmatic, or else carefully considered, organized, calculated, strategic—or all of these at once. For the index pointing toward this date, the bare act, the minimal deictic, the minimalist aim of this dating, also marks something else. Namely, the fact that we perhaps have no concept and no meaning available to us to name in any other way this "thing" that has just happened, this supposed "event." An act of "international terrorism," for example, and we will return to this, is anything but a rigorous concept that would help us grasp the singularity of what we will be trying to discuss. "Something" took place, we have the feeling of not having seen it coming, and certain consequences undeniably follow upon the "thing." But this very thing, the place and meaning of this "event," remains ineffable, like an intuition without concept, like a unicity with no generality on the horizon or with no horizon at all, out of range for a language that admits its powerlessness and so is reduced to pronouncing mechanically a date, repeating it endlessly, as a kind of ritual incantation, a conjuring poem, a journalistic litany or rhetorical refrain that admits to not knowing what it's talking about. We do not in fact know what we are saying or naming in this way: September 11, *le 11 septembre*, September 11. The brevity of the appellation (September 11, 9/11) stems not only from an economic or rhetorical necessity. The telegram of this metonymy—a name, a number—points out the unqualifiable by recognizing that we do not recognize or even cognize, that we do not yet know how to qualify, that we do not know what we are talking about.

This is the first, indisputable effect of what occurred (whether it was calculated, well calculated, or not), precisely on September 11, not far from here: we repeat this, *we must* repeat it, and it is all the more necessary to repeat it insofar as we do not really know what is being named in this way, as if to exorcise two times at one go: on the one hand, to conjure away, as if by magic, the “thing” itself, the fear or the terror it inspires (for repetition always protects by neutralizing, deadening, distancing a traumatism, and this is true for the repetition of the televised images we will speak of later), and, on the other hand, to deny, as close as possible to this act of language and this enunciation, our powerlessness to name in an appropriate fashion, to characterize, to think the thing in question, to get beyond the mere deictic of the date: something terrible took place on September 11, and in the end we don’t know what. For however outraged we might be at the violence, however much we might genuinely deplore—as I do, along with everyone else—the number of dead, no one will really be convinced that this is, in the end, what it’s all about. I will come back to this later; for the moment we are simply preparing ourselves to say something about it.

I’ve been in New York for three weeks now. Not only is it impossible not to speak on this subject, but you feel or are made to feel that it is actually *forbidden*, that you do not have the right, to begin speaking of anything, especially in public, without ceding to this obligation, without making an always somewhat blind reference to this date (and this was already the case in China, where I was on September 11, and then in Frankfurt on September 22).⁴ I gave in regularly to this injunction, I admit; and in a certain sense I am doing so again by taking part in this friendly interview with you, though trying always, beyond the commotion and the most sincere compassion, to appeal to questions and to a “thought” (among other things, a real political thought) of what, it seems, has just taken place on September 11, just a few steps from here, in Manhattan or, not too far away, in Washington, D.C.

I believe always in the necessity of being attentive first of all to this phenomenon of language, naming, and dating, to this repetition compulsion (at once rhetorical, magical, and poetic). To what this compulsion signifies, translates, or betrays. Not in order to isolate ourselves in language, as people in too much of a rush would like us to believe, but on the contrary, in order to try to understand what is going on precisely *beyond* language and what is pushing us to repeat endlessly and with-

out knowing what we are talking about, precisely there where language and the concept come up against their limits: “September 11, September 11, *le 11 septembre*, 9/11.”

We must try to know more, to take our time and hold onto our freedom so as to begin to think this first effect of the so-called event: From where does this menacing injunction itself come to us? How is it being forced upon us? *Who* or *what* gives us this threatening order (others would already say this terrorizing if not terrorist imperative): name, repeat, rename “September 11,” “le 11 septembre,” even when you do not yet know what you are saying and are not yet thinking what you refer to in this way. I agree with you: without any doubt, this “thing,” “September 11,” “gave us the impression of being a *major event*.” But what is an impression in this case? And an event? And especially a “*major event*”? Taking your word—or words—for it, I will underscore more than one precaution. I will do so in a seemingly “empiricist” style, though aiming beyond empiricism. It cannot be denied, as an empiricist of the eighteenth century would quite literally say, that there was an “impression” there, and the impression of what you call in English—and this is not fortuitous—a “*major event*.” I insist here on the English because it is the language we speak here in New York, even though it is neither your language nor mine; but I also insist because the injunction comes first of all from a place where English predominates. I am not saying this only because the United States was targeted, hit, or violated on its own soil for the first time in almost two centuries—since 1812 to be exact⁵—but because the world order that felt itself targeted through this violence is dominated largely by the Anglo-American idiom, an idiom that is indissociably linked to the political discourse that dominates the world stage, to international law, diplomatic institutions, the media, and the greatest technoscientific, capitalist, and military power. And it is very much a question of the still enigmatic but also *critical* essence of this hegemony. By *critical*, I mean at once decisive, potentially decisionary, decision-making, and *in crisis*: today more vulnerable and threatened than ever.

Whether this “impression” is justified or not, it is in itself an event, let us never forget it, especially when it is, though in quite different ways, a properly global effect. The “impression” cannot be dissociated from all the affects, interpretations, and rhetoric that have at once reflected, communicated, and “globalized” it, from everything that also and first of all formed, produced, and made it possible. The “impres-

sion" thus resembles "the very thing" that produced it. Even if the so-called "thing" cannot be reduced to it. Even if, therefore, the *event* itself cannot be reduced to it. The event is made up of the "thing" itself (that which happens or comes) and the impression (itself at once "spontaneous" and "controlled") that is given, left, or made by the so-called "thing." We could say that the impression is "informed," in both senses of the word: a predominant system gave it form, and this form then gets run through an organized information machine (language, communication, rhetoric, image, media, and so on). This informational apparatus is from the very outset political, technical, economic. But we can and, I believe, must (and this duty is at once philosophical and political) distinguish between the supposedly brute fact, the "impression," and the interpretation. It is of course just about impossible, I realize, to distinguish the "brute" fact from the system that produces the "information" about it. But it is necessary to push the analysis as far as possible. To produce a "major event," it is, sad to say, not enough, and this has been true for some time now, to cause the deaths of some four thousand people, and especially "civilians," in just a few seconds by means of so-called advanced technology. Many examples could be given from the world wars (for you specified that this event appears even more important to those who "have never lived through a world war") but also from after these wars, examples of quasi-instantaneous mass murders that were not recorded, interpreted, felt, and presented as "major events." They did not give the "impression," at least not to everyone, of being unforgettable catastrophes.

We must thus ask why this is the case and distinguish between two "impressions." On the one hand, compassion for the victims and indignation over the killings; our sadness and condemnation should be without limits, unconditional, unimpeachable; they are responding to an undeniable "event," beyond all simulacra and all possible virtualization; they respond with what might be called the heart and they go straight to the heart of the event. On the other hand, the interpreted, interpretative, informed impression, the conditional evaluation that makes us *believe* that this is a "major event." *Belief*, the phenomenon of *credit* and of *accreditation*, constitutes an essential dimension of the evaluation, of the dating, indeed, of the compulsive inflation of which we've been speaking. By distinguishing impression from belief, I continue to make as if I were privileging this language of English empiri-

cism, which we would be wrong to resist here. All the philosophical questions remain open, unless they are opening up again in a perhaps new and original way: What is an impression? What is a belief? But especially: what is an event worthy of this name? And a “major” event, that is, one that is actually more of an “event,” more actually an “event,” than ever? An event that would bear witness, in an exemplary or hyperbolic fashion, to the very essence of an event or even to an event beyond essence? For could an event that still conforms to an essence, to a law or to a truth, indeed to a concept of the event, ever be a major event? A major event should be so unforeseeable and irruptive that it disturbs even the horizon of the concept or essence on the basis of which we believe we recognize an event *as such*. That is why all the “philosophical” questions remain open, perhaps even beyond philosophy itself, as soon as it is a matter of thinking the event.

B O R R A D O R I : You mean “event” in the Heideggerian sense?

D E R R I D A : No doubt, but, curiously, to the extent that the thought of *Ereignis* in Heidegger would be turned not only toward the *appropriation* of the proper (*eigen*) but toward a certain *expropriation* that Heidegger himself names (*Enteignis*). The undergoing of the event, that which in the undergoing or in the ordeal *at once opens itself up to and resists experience*, is, it seems to me, a certain *unappropriability* of what comes or happens. The event is what comes and, in coming, comes to surprise me, to surprise and to suspend comprehension: the event is first of all *that which* I do not first of all comprehend. Better, the event is first of all *that* I do not comprehend. It consists in *that, that* I do not comprehend: *that which* I do not comprehend and first of all *that* I do not comprehend, the fact that I do not comprehend: my incomprehension. That is the limit, at once internal and external, on which I would like to insist here: although the experience of an event, the mode according to which it affects us, calls for a movement of appropriation (comprehension, recognition, identification, description, determination, interpretation on the basis of a horizon of anticipation, knowledge, naming, and so on), although this movement of appropriation is irreducible and ineluctable, there is no event worthy of its name except insofar as this appropriation *falters* at some border or frontier. A frontier, however, with neither front nor confrontation, one that incomprehension does not run into head on since it does not take the form of a solid front: it escapes, remains evasive, open, unde-

cided, indeterminable. Whence the unappropriability, the unforeseeability, absolute surprise, incomprehension, the risk of misunderstanding, unanticipatable novelty, pure singularity, the absence of horizon. Were we to accept this minimal definition of the event, minimal but double and paradoxical, could we affirm that “September 11” constituted an event without precedent? An unforeseeable event? A singular event through and through?

Nothing is less certain. It was not impossible to foresee an attack on American soil by those called “terrorists” (we will have to return to this word, which is so equivocal and so politically charged), against a highly sensitive, spectacular, extremely symbolic building or institution. Leaving aside Oklahoma City (where, it will be said, the attacker came from the United States, even though this was the case of “September 11” as well), there had already been a bombing attack against the Twin Towers a few years back, and the fallout from this attack remains very much a current affair since the presumed authors of this act of “terrorism” are still being held and tried.⁶ And there have been so many other attacks of the same kind, outside American national territory but against American “interests.” And then there are the notable failures of the CIA and FBI, these two antennae of the American organism that were supposed to see these attacks coming, to avert just such a surprise. (Let me say in passing, since I’ve just spoken of the “American national territory” and of American “interests,” that “September 11” reveals, or actually recalls, that for countless reasons we would have real difficulty defining rigorous *limits* for these “things,” “national territory” and “American interests.” Where do they end today? Who is authorized to answer this question? Only American citizens? Only their allies? It is perhaps here that we might get to the very bottom of the problem—and to one of the reasons why we would have difficulty knowing if there is here, *stricto sensu*, where and when, an “event.”)

Let us accept nonetheless such a hypothesis and proceed slowly and patiently in speaking of this as an “event.” After all, every time something happens, even in the most banal, everyday experience, there is *something* of an event and of singular unforeseeability about it: each instant marks an event, everything that is “other” as well, and each birth, and each death, even the most gentle and most “natural.” But should we then say, to cite you, that September 11 was a “major event”?

Even though the word “major” suggests height and size, the evaluation here cannot be merely *quantitative*, a question of the size of the towers, the territory attacked, or the number of victims. You know, of course, that one does not count the dead in the same way from one corner of the globe to the other. It is our duty to recall this, without it attenuating in the least our sadness for the victims of the Twin Towers, our horror or our outrage in the face of this crime. It is our duty to recall that the shock waves produced by such murders are never purely natural and spontaneous. They depend on a complex machinery involving history, politics, the media, and so on. Whether we are talking about a psychological, political, police, or military response or reaction, we must acknowledge the obvious—at once qualitative and quantitative: for Europe, for the United States, for their media and their public opinion, quantitatively comparable killings, or even those greater in number, whether immediate or indirect, never produce such an intense upheaval when they occur outside European or American space (Cambodia, Rwanda, Palestine, Iraq, and so on). What *appears* new and “major” is not the weapon used, either: planes to destroy buildings full of civilians. There is no need, alas, to go back to the bombings during World War II, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to find countless examples of this. The least we can say about such aggressions is that, whether by quantitative or other measures, they were not inferior in scope to “September 11.” And the United States was not always, let it be said by way of a litotes, on the side of the victims.

We must thus look for other explanations—meaningful and *qualitative* explanations. First of all, whether one is or is not an ally of the United States, whether one approves or not of what has remained more or less constant and continuous in U.S. policy from one administration to the next, no one, I think, will contest an obvious fact that determines the horizon of the “world” since what is called *the end of the Cold War* (and we will have to reinterpret this thing, the so-called *end of the Cold War*, from several different perspectives, and I will do so later, but for the moment allow me to recall only that “September 11” is also, still, and in many respects, a distant effect of the Cold War itself, before its “end,” from the time when the United States provided training and weapons, and not only in Afghanistan, to the enemies of the Soviet Union, who have now become the enemies of the U.S.). The obvious fact is that since the “end of the Cold War” what can be called the

world order, in its relative and precarious stability, depends largely on the solidity and reliability, on the *credit*, of American power. On every level: economic, technical, military, in the media, even on the level of discursive logic, of the axiomatic that supports juridical and diplomatic rhetoric worldwide, and thus international law, even when the United States violates this law without ceasing to champion its cause. Hence, to destabilize this superpower, which plays at least the “role” of the guardian of the prevailing world order, is to risk destabilizing the entire world, including the declared enemies of the United States. What is therefore threatened? Not only a great number of forces, powers, or “things” that depend, even for the most determined adversaries of the United States, on the order that is more or less assured by this superpower; it is also, *more radically still* (and I would underscore this point), the system of interpretation, the axiomatic, logic, rhetoric, concepts, and evaluations that are supposed to allow one to *comprehend* and to explain precisely something like “September 11.” I am speaking here of the *discourse* that comes to be, in a pervasive and overwhelming, hegemonic fashion, *accredited* in the world’s public space. What is legitimated by the prevailing system (a combination of public opinion, the media, the rhetoric of politicians and the presumed authority of all those who, through various mechanisms, speak or are allowed to speak in the public space) are thus the norms inscribed in every apparently meaningful phrase that can be constructed with the lexicon of violence, aggression, crime, war, and terrorism, with the supposed differences between war and terrorism, national and international terrorism, state and nonstate terrorism, with the respect for sovereignty, national territory, and so on. Is, then, what was touched, wounded, or traumatized by this double *crash* only some particular thing or other, a “what” or a “who,” buildings, strategic urban structures, symbols of political, military, or capitalist power, or a considerable number of people of many different origins living on the body of a national territory that had remained untouched for so long? No, it was not *only* all that but perhaps especially, through all that, the conceptual, semantic, and one could even say hermeneutic apparatus that might have allowed one to see coming, to comprehend, interpret, describe, speak of, and name “September 11”—and in so doing to neutralize the traumatism and come to terms with it through a “work of mourning.” What I am suggesting here might appear abstract and overly reliant on what seems like a sim-

ple conceptual or discursive activity, a question of knowledge; it is as if I were in fact content to say that what is terrible about “September 11,” what remains “infinite” in this wound, is that we do not *know* what it is and so do not know how to describe, identify, or even name it. And that is, in fact, what I’m saying. But in order to show that this horizon of nonknowledge, this nonhorizon of knowledge (the powerlessness to comprehend, recognize, cognize, identify, name, describe, foresee), is anything but abstract and idealist, I will need to say more. And, precisely, in a more concrete way.

I shall do this in *three moments*, twice by reference to what has been called the “Cold War,” the “end of the Cold War,” or “the balance of terror.” These three moments or series of arguments all appeal to the same logic. The same logic that elsewhere I proposed we extend without limit in the form of an implacable law: the one that regulates every *autoimmunitary process*.⁷ As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, “itself” works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its “own” immunity.

1. *First moment, first autoimmunity. Reflex and reflection.
The Cold War in the head.*

Well beyond the United States, the whole world feels obscurely affected by a transgression that is not only presented as a transgression without precedent in history (the first violation of U.S. national territory in almost two centuries, or at least that’s the phantasm that has prevailed for so long) but as a transgression of a new *type*. But what *type*? Before answering this question, let me recall once more the obvious: this transgression violates the territory of a country that, even in the eyes of its enemies and especially since the so-called “end of the Cold War,” plays a virtually sovereign role among sovereign states. And thus the role of guarantor or guardian of the entire world order, the one that, in principle and in the last resort, is supposed to assure credit in general, credit in the sense of financial transactions but also the credit granted to languages, laws, political or diplomatic transactions. The United States holds this credit, for which everyone—including those who are trying to ruin it—feel the need, and it shows it not only

through its wealth and its technoscientific and military power but also, at the same time, through its role as arbitrator in all conflicts, through its dominant presence on the Security Council and in so many other international institutions. Even when—and with impunity—it respects neither the spirit nor the letter of these institutions and their resolutions. The United States still retains the power of accrediting before the world a certain self-presentation: it represents the ultimate presumed unity of force and law, of the greatest force and the discourse of law.

But here is the first symptom of suicidal autoimmunity: not only is the ground, that is, the literal figure of the founding or foundation of this “force of law,” *seen* to be *exposed* to aggression, but the aggression of which it is the *object* (the *object exposed*, precisely, to violence, but also, “in a loop,”⁸ to its own cameras in its own interests) comes, *as from the inside*, from forces that are apparently without any force of their own but that are able to find the means, through ruse and the implementation of *high-tech* knowledge, to get hold of an American weapon in an American city on the ground of an American airport. Immigrated, trained, prepared for their act in the United States by the United States, these *hijackers* incorporate, so to speak, two suicides in one: their own (and one will remain forever defenseless in the face of a suicidal, autoimmunitary aggression—and that is what terrorizes most) but also the suicide of those who welcomed, armed, and trained them. For let us not forget that the United States had in effect paved the way for and consolidated the forces of the “adversary” by training people like “bin Laden,” who would here be the most striking example, and by first of all creating the politico-military circumstances that would favor their emergence and their shifts in allegiance (for example, the alliance with Saudi Arabia and other Arab Muslim countries in its war against the Soviet Union or Russia in Afghanistan—though one could endlessly multiply examples of these suicidal paradoxes).

Doubly suicidal, this force will have been *adjusted* with an extraordinary *economy* (the maximum amount of security, of preparation, of technical proficiency, of destructive capability, with a minimum of borrowed means!). It will have targeted and hit the heart or, rather, the symbolic head of the prevailing world order. Right at the level of the head (*cap*, *caput*, *capital*, *Capitol*), this double suicide will have touched two places at once symbolically and operationally essential to

the American corpus: the economic place or capital “head” of world capital (the World Trade Center, the very archetype of the genre, for there are now—and under this very name—WTCs in many places of the world, for example, in China) and the strategic, military, and administrative place of the American capital, the head of American political representation, the Pentagon, not far from the Capitol, the seat of Congress.

In speaking here of the Capitol, I’m already moving on to a *second* aspect of the same “event,” of what might make it a “major event.” At issue again is an autoimmunitary terror, and again, of the “Cold War,” of what one calls a bit too quickly its “end” and of what, when seen from the Capitol, might be worse than the Cold War.

2. *Second moment, second autoimmunity.*
Reflex and reflection. Worse than the Cold War.

What is a traumatic event? First of all, any event worthy of this name, even if it is a “happy” event, has within it something that is traumatizing. An event always inflicts a wound in the everyday course of history, in the ordinary repetition and anticipation of all experience. A traumatic event is not only marked as an event by the memory, even if unconscious, of what took place. In saying this, I seem to be going against the obvious, namely, that the event is linked to presence or to the past, to the taking place of what has happened, once and for all, in an undeniable fashion, so that the repetition compulsion that might follow would but reproduce what has already happened or been produced. Yet I believe we must complicate this schema (even if it is not completely false); we must question its “chrono-logy,” that is, the thought and order of temporalization it seems to imply. We must rethink the temporalization of a traumatism if we want to comprehend in what way “September 11” *looks like* a “major event.” For the wound remains open by our terror before the *future* and not only the past. (You yourself, in fact, defined the event in relation to the future in your question; you were already anticipating by speaking of “one of the most important historical events we *will* witness in our lifetime.”) The ordeal of the event has as its tragic correlate not what is presently happening or what has happened in the past but the precursory signs of what threatens to

happen. It is the future that determines the unappropriability of the event, not the present or the past. Or at least, if it is the present or the past, it is only insofar as it bears on its body the terrible sign of what might or perhaps will take place, which will be *worse than anything that has ever taken place*.

Let me clarify. We are talking about a trauma, and thus an event, whose temporality proceeds neither from the now that is present nor from the present that is past but from an im-presentable to come (*à venir*). A weapon wounds and leaves forever open an unconscious scar; but this weapon is terrifying because it comes from the to-come, from the future, a future so radically to come that it resists even the grammar of the future anterior. Imagine that the Americans and, through them, the entire world, had been told: what has just happened, the spectacular destruction of two towers, the theatrical but invisible deaths of thousands of people in just a few second, is an awful thing, a terrible crime, a pain without measure, but it's all over, it won't happen again, there will never again be anything as awful as or more awful than that. I assume that mourning would have been possible in a relatively short period of time. Whether to our chagrin or our delight, things would have quite quickly returned to their normal course in ordinary history. One would have spoken of the work of mourning and turned the page, as is so often done, and done so much more easily when it comes to things that happen elsewhere, far from Europe and the Americas. But this is not at all what happened. There is traumatism with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes from the possibility to come of the worst, from the repetition to come—though worse. Traumatism is produced by the *future*, by the *to come*, by the threat of the worst *to come*, rather than by an aggression that is “over and done with.”⁹ What happened, even though this has not been said with the requisite clarity—and for good reason—is that, for the future and for always, the threat that was indicated through these signs might be worse than any other, worse even, and we shall explain this, than the threat that organized the so-called “Cold War.” The threat of a *chemical* attack, no doubt, or *bacteriological* attack (recall that in the weeks immediately following September 11 it was thought that this was actually taking place), but especially the threat of a *nuclear* attack. Though rather little has been said about this, those responsible in the administration and in Congress quickly took the necessary measures to ensure that a

constitutional state might survive a *nuclear* attack against Washington, the head of state, and the Congress (the Pentagon, White House, and the Capitol building). Certain representatives of Congress made this known during a televised public debate I happened to see here: from now on the *heads* of state (president, vice-president, members of the cabinet and of congress) will no longer all come together in the same place at the same time, as used to be the case, for example, with the State of the Union address. This suggests that the “major event” of “September 11” will not have consisted in a past aggression, one that is still present and effective. X will have been traumatized (X? Who or what is X? Nothing less than the “world,” well beyond the United States, or in any case, the possibility of the “world”), but traumatized not in the present or from the memory of what will have been a past present. No, traumatized from the unrepresentable future, from the open threat of an aggression capable one day of striking—for you never know—the *head* of the sovereign nation-state par excellence.

Why is this threat signaled by the “end of the Cold War”? Why is it worse than the “Cold War” itself? Like the formation of Arab Muslim terrorist networks equipped and trained during the Cold War, this threat represents the residual consequence of *both* the Cold War *and* the passage beyond the Cold War. On the one hand, because of the now uncontrollable proliferation of nuclear capability, it is difficult to measure the degrees and forms of this force, just as it is difficult to delimit the responsibility for this proliferation, a point we cannot pursue here. On the other hand, and here we touch upon what is worse than the Cold War, there can now no longer be a balance of terror, for there is no longer a duel or standoff between two powerful states (U.S.A., USSR) involved in a game theory in which both states are capable of neutralizing the other’s nuclear power through a reciprocal and organized evaluation of the respective risks. From now on, the nuclear threat, the “total” threat, no longer comes from a state but from anonymous forces that are absolutely unforeseeable and incalculable. And since this absolute threat will have been secreted by the end of the Cold War and the “victory” of the U.S. camp, since it threatens what is supposed to sustain world order, the very possibility of a world and of any worldwide effort [*mondialisation*] (international law, a world market, a universal language, and so on), what is thus put at risk by this *terrifying* autoimmunitary logic is nothing less than the existence of the world, of

the worldwide itself. There is no longer any limit to this threat that at once looks for its antecedents or its resources in the long history of the Cold War and yet appears infinitely more dangerous, frightening, terrifying than the Cold War. And there are, in fact, countless signs that this threat is accelerating and confirming the end of this Cold War, hastening the at least apparent reconciliation of two equally frightened enemies. When Bush and his associates blame “the axis of evil,” we ought both to smile at and denounce the religious connotations, the childish stratagems, the obscurantist mystifications of this inflated rhetoric. And yet there is, in fact, and from every quarter, an absolute “evil” whose threat, whose shadow, is spreading. Absolute evil, absolute threat, because what is at stake is nothing less than the *mondialisation* or the worldwide movement of the world, life on earth and elsewhere, without remainder.

But, and here’s another paradox, even if this is in fact the origin of the “terror” that “terrorisms” are playing off, even if this terror is the very worst, even if it touches the geopolitical unconscious of every living being and leaves there indelible traces, even if this is what we are trying to get at when we speak, as you just did, and as is done so often, of “September 11” as a “major event” because it is the first (conscious-unconscious) sign of this absolute terror, well, at the same time, because of the anonymous invisibility of the enemy, because of the undetermined origin of the terror, because we cannot put a face on such terror (individual or state), because we do not know what an event of the unconscious or *for* the unconscious is (though we must nonetheless take it into account), the worst can simultaneously appear insubstantial, fleeting, light, and so seem to be denied, repressed, indeed forgotten, relegated to being just one event among others, *one* of the “major events,” if you will, in a long chain of past and future events. Yet all these efforts to attenuate or neutralize the effect of the traumatism (to deny, repress, or forget it, to get over it) are but so many desperate attempts. And so many autoimmunity movements. Which produce, invent, and feed the very monstrosity they claim to overcome.

What will never let itself be forgotten is thus the perverse effect of the autoimmunity itself. For we now know that repression in both its psychoanalytical sense and its political sense—whether it be through the police, the military, or the economy—ends up producing, reproducing, and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm.

3. *Third moment, third autoimmunity.*
Reflex and reflection. The vicious circle of repression.

It cannot be said that humanity is defenseless against the threat of this evil. But we must recognize that defenses and all the forms of what is called, with two equally problematic words, the “war on terrorism”¹⁰ work to regenerate, in the short or long term, the causes of the evil they claim to eradicate. Whether we are talking about Iraq, Afghanistan, or even Palestine, the “bombs” will never be “smart” enough to prevent the victims (military and/or civilian, another distinction that has become less and less reliable) from responding, either in person or by proxy, with what it will then be easy for them to present as legitimate reprisals or as counterterrorism. And so on ad infinitum . . .

For the sake of clarity and because the analysis required it, I have distinguished three autoimmunitary terrors. But in reality these three resources of terror cannot be distinguished; they feed into and overdetermine one another. They are, at bottom, the same, in perceptual “reality” and especially in the unconscious—which is not the least real of realities.

B O R R A D O R I : Whether or not September 11 is an event of major importance, what role do you see for philosophy? Can philosophy help us to understand what has happened?

D E R R I D A : Such an “event” surely calls for a philosophical response. Better, a response that calls into question, at their most fundamental level, the most deep-seated conceptual presuppositions in philosophical discourse. The concepts with which this “event” has most often been described, named, categorized, are the products of a “dogmatic slumber” from which only a new philosophical reflection can awaken us, a reflection *on* philosophy, most notably on political philosophy and its heritage. The prevailing discourse, that of the media and of the official rhetoric, relies too readily on received concepts like “war” or “terrorism” (national or international).

A *critical* reading of Schmitt, for example, would thus prove very useful. On the one hand, so as to follow Schmitt as far as possible in distinguishing classical war (a direct and declared confrontation between two enemy states, according to the long tradition of European law) from “civil war” and “partisan war” (in its modern forms, even though it appears, Schmitt acknowledges, as early as the beginning of

the nineteenth century). But, on the other hand, we would also have to recognize, *against* Schmitt, that the violence that has now been unleashed is not the result of “war” (the expression “war on terrorism” thus being one of the most confused, and we must analyze this confusion and the interests such an abuse of rhetoric actually serve). Bush speaks of “war,” but he is in fact incapable of identifying the enemy against whom he declares that he has declared war. It is said over and over that neither the civilian population of Afghanistan nor its armies are the enemies of the United States. Assuming that “bin Laden” is here the sovereign decision-maker, everyone knows that he is not Afghan, that he has been disavowed by his own country (by every “country” and state, in fact, almost without exception), that his training owes much to the United States and that, of course, he is not alone. The states that help him indirectly do not do so as states. No state as such supports him publicly. As for states that “harbor” terrorist networks, it is difficult to identify them as such. The United States and Europe, London and Berlin, are also sanctuaries, places of training or formation and information for all the “terrorists” of the world. No geography, no “territorial” determination, is thus pertinent any longer for locating the seat of these new technologies of transmission or aggression. To say it all too quickly and in passing, to amplify and clarify just a bit what I said earlier about an absolute threat whose origin is anonymous and not related to any state, such “terrorist” attacks already no longer need planes, bombs, or kamikazes: it is enough to infiltrate a strategically important computer system and introduce a virus or some other disruptive element to paralyze the economic, military, and political resources of an entire country or continent. And this can be attempted from just about anywhere on earth, at very little expense and with minimal means. The relationship between earth, *terra*, territory, and terror has changed, and it is necessary to know that this is because of knowledge, that is, because of technoscience. It is technoscience that blurs the distinction between war and terrorism. In this regard, when compared to the possibilities for destruction and chaotic disorder that are *in reserve*, for the future, in the computerized networks of the world, “September 11” is still part of the archaic theater of violence aimed at striking the imagination. One will be able to do even worse tomorrow, invisibly, in silence, more quickly and without any bloodshed, by attacking the computer and informational networks on which the

entire life (social, economic, military, and so on) of a “great nation,” of the greatest power on earth, depends. One day it might be said: “September 11”—those were the (“good”) old days of the last war. Things were still of the order of the gigantic: visible and enormous! What size, what height! There has been worse since. Nanotechnologies of all sorts are so much more powerful and invisible, uncontrollable, capable of creeping in everywhere. They are the micrological rivals of microbes and bacteria. Yet our unconscious is already aware of this; it already knows it, and that’s what’s scary.

If this violence is not a “war” between states, it is not a “civil war” either, or a “partisan war,” in Schmitt’s sense, insofar as it does not involve, like most such wars, a national insurrection or liberation movement aimed at taking power on the ground of a nation-state (even if one of the aims, whether secondary or primary, of the “bin Laden” network is to destabilize Saudi Arabia, an ambiguous ally of the United States, and put a new state power in place). Even if one were to insist on speaking here of “terrorism,” this appellation now covers a new concept and new distinctions.

B O R R A D O R I : Do you think that these distinctions can be safely drawn?

D E R R I D A : It’s more difficult than ever. If one is not to trust blindly in the prevailing language, which remains most often subservient to the rhetoric of the media and to the banter of the political powers, we must be very careful using the term “terrorism” and especially “international terrorism.” In the first place, what is terror? What distinguishes it from fear, anxiety, and panic? When I suggested earlier that the event of September 11 was “major” only to the extent that the traumatism it inflicted upon consciousness and upon the unconscious had to do not with what happened but with the undetermined threat of a future more dangerous than the Cold War, was I speaking of terror, fear, panic, or anxiety? How does a terror that is organized, provoked, and instrumentalized differ from that *fear* that an entire tradition, from Hobbes to Schmitt and even to Benjamin, holds to be the very condition of the authority of law and of the sovereign exercise of power, the very condition of the political and of the state? In *Leviathan* Hobbes speaks not only of “fear” but of “terror.”¹¹ Benjamin speaks of how the state tends to appropriate for itself, and precisely through threat, a monopoly on violence (“Critique of Violence”).¹² It will no doubt be said

that not every experience of terror is necessarily the effect of some terrorism. To be sure, but the political history of the word "terrorism" is derived in large part from a reference to the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution, a terror that was carried out in the name of the state and that in fact presupposed a legal monopoly on violence. And what do we find in current definitions or explicitly legal definitions of terrorism? In each case, a reference to a crime against human life in violation of national or international laws entails at once the distinction between civilian and military (the victims of terrorism are assumed to be civilians) and a political end (to influence or change the politics of a country by terrorizing its civilian population). These definitions do not therefore exclude "state terrorism." Every terrorist in the world claims to be responding in self-defense to a prior terrorism on the part of the state, one that simply went by other names and covered itself with all sorts of more or less credible justifications. You know about the accusations leveled against, for example, and especially, the United States, suspected of practicing or encouraging state terrorism.¹³ In addition, even during declared wars between states, in accordance with the long tradition of European law, there were frequently terrorist excesses. Well before the massive bombing campaigns of the last two world wars, the intimidation of civilian populations was commonly resorted to. For centuries.

A word must also be said about the expression "international terrorism," which has become a staple of official political discourse the world over. It is also being used in numerous official condemnations on the part of the United Nations. After September 11, an overwhelming majority of states represented in the UN (it may have actually been unanimous, I would have to check) condemned, as has happened more than once in the past few decades, what it calls "international terrorism." During a televised session of the UN, Secretary-General Kofi Annan had to recall in passing some of their previous debates. For just as they were preparing to condemn "international terrorism," certain states expressed reservations about the clarity of the concept and the criteria used to identify it. As with so many other crucial juridical notions, what remains obscure, dogmatic, or precritical does not prevent the powers that be, the so-called legitimate powers, from making use of these notions when it seems opportune. On the contrary, the more confused the concept the more it lends itself to an opportunistic appropri-

ation. It was, thus, after a few very hasty decisions, without any philosophical debate on the subject of “international terrorism” and its condemnation, that the UN authorized the United States to use *any* means deemed necessary and appropriate by the American administration to protect itself against this so-called “international terrorism.”

Without going back too far in time, without even recalling, as is often done these days, and rightly so, that terrorists might be praised as freedom fighters in one context (for example, in the struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan) and denounced as terrorists in another (and, these days, it’s often the very same fighters, using the very same weapons), let’s not forget the trouble we would have deciding between “national” and “international” terrorism in the cases of Algeria, Northern Ireland, Corsica, Israel, or Palestine. No one can deny that there was state terrorism during the French repression in Algeria from 1954 to 1962. The terrorism carried out by the Algerian rebellion was long considered a domestic phenomenon insofar as Algeria was supposed to be an integral part of French national territory, and the French terrorism of the time (carried out by the state) was presented as a police operation for internal security. It was only in the 1990s, decades later, that the French Parliament retrospectively conferred the status of “war” (and thus the status of an *international* confrontation) upon this conflict so as to be able to pay the pensions of the “veterans” who claimed them. What did this law reveal? That it was necessary, and that we were able, to change all the names previously used to qualify what had earlier been so modestly called, in Algeria, precisely the “events” (the inability, once again, of popular public opinion to name the “thing” adequately). Armed repression, an internal police operation, and state terrorism thus all of a sudden became a “war.” On the other side, the terrorists were considered and from now on are considered in much of the world as freedom fighters and heroes of national independence. As for the terrorism of the armed groups that helped force the foundation and recognition of the state of Israel, was that national or international? And what about the different groups of Palestinian terrorists today? And the Irish? And the Afghans who fought against the Soviet Union? And the Chechnyans? At what point does one terrorism stop being denounced as such to be hailed as the only recourse left in a legitimate fight? And what about the inverse? Where does one draw the line between the national and the international, the police and

the army, a “peacekeeping” intervention and war, terrorism and war, civilian and military, in a territory and within the structures that assure the defensive or offensive capacity of a “society”? I say simply “society” here because there are cases where a more or less organic and organized political entity is neither a state nor a completely nonstate entity but virtually a state: just look at what is today called Palestine or the Palestinian Authority.

Semantic instability, irreducible trouble spots on the borders between concepts, indecision in the very concept of the border: all this must not only be analyzed as a speculative disorder, a conceptual chaos or zone of passing turbulence in public or political language. We must also recognize here strategies and relations of force. The dominant power is the one that manages to impose and, thus, to legitimate, indeed to legalize (for it is always a question of law) on a national or world stage, the terminology and thus the interpretation that best suits it in a given situation. It was thus in the course of a long and complicated history that the United States succeeded in gaining an intergovernmental consensus in South America to officially call “terrorism” any organized political resistance to the powers in place—those put in place, in truth—so that an armed coalition could then be called upon to combat the so-called “terrorism.” So that the U.S. could, without compunction, delegate responsibility to South American governments and so avoid the very legitimate accusation of violent interventionism.

But rather than continue in this direction by multiplying examples, I will settle for underscoring once more the novelty that makes so urgent both a refoundation, if we can still say this, of the juridico-political and a conceptual mutation, at once semantic, lexical, and rhetorical. Let’s look again at many of the phenomena that some are trying to identify and interpret as (national or international) “terrorist” acts, acts of war, or peacekeeping interventions. They no longer aim at conquering or liberating a territory and at founding a nation-state. No one any longer aspires to this, not the United States or the (wealthy) so-called “northern” states, which no longer exercise their hegemony through the colonial or imperial model of occupying a territory, and not the countries formerly subject to this colonialism or imperialism. The “terrorist/freedom fighter” opposition also belongs to the categories of the past. Even when there is “state terrorism” it is no longer a question of occupying a territory but of securing some technoeconomic power or

political control that has but a minimal need for territory. If oil reserves remain among the rare territories left, among the last nonvirtualizable terrestrial places, one can simply secure the rights to lay down a pipeline. Though it is also true that, for the moment, the whole technoindustrial structure of hegemonic countries depends on these resources, so that, however complex and overdetermined it may be, the possibility of everything we have just spoken about remains anchored, so to speak, in these nonreplaceable places, these nondeterritorializable territories. These territories continue to belong, by law, in the still solid tradition of international law, to sovereign nation-states.

B O R R A D O R I : What you are suggesting calls for profound changes at the level of international institutions and international law.

D E R R I D A : Such a mutation *will have* to take place. But it is impossible to predict at what pace. In all the transformations we have been discussing, what remains incalculable is first of all the pace or rhythm, the time of acceleration and the acceleration of time. And this is for essential reasons that have to do with the very speed of technoscientific advances or shifts in speed. Just like the shifts in size or scale that nanotechnologies have introduced into our evaluations and our measures. Such radical changes in international law are necessary, but they might take place in one generation or in twenty. Who can say? Though I am incapable of knowing who today deserves the name philosopher (I would not simply accept certain professional or organizational criteria), I would be tempted to call philosophers those who, in the future, reflect in a responsible fashion on these questions and demand accountability from those in charge of public discourse, those responsible for the language and institutions of international law. A “philosopher” (actually I would prefer to say “philosopher-deconstructor”) would be someone who analyzes and then draws the practical and effective consequences of the relationship between our philosophical heritage and the structure of the still dominant juridico-political system that is so clearly undergoing mutation. A “philosopher” would be one who seeks a new criteriology to distinguish between “comprehending” and “justifying.” For one can describe, comprehend, and explain a certain chain of events or series of associations that lead to “war” or to “terrorism” without justifying them in the least, while in fact condemning them and attempting to invent other associations. One can condemn unconditionally certain acts of terrorism

(whether of the state or not) without having to ignore the situation that might have brought them about or even legitimated them. To provide examples it would be necessary to conduct long analyses, in principle interminably long. One can thus condemn *unconditionally*, as I do here, the attack of September 11 without having to ignore the real or alleged conditions that made it possible. Anyone in the world who either organized or tried to justify this attack saw it as a response to the state terrorism of the United States and its allies. This was the case, for example—and I cite this only as an example—in the Middle East, even though Yasir Arafat also condemned “September 11” and refused bin Laden the right to speak in the name of the Palestinian people.

B O R R A D O R I : If the distinction between war and terrorism is problematic and we accept the notion of state terrorism, then the question still remains: who is the most terrorist?

D E R R I D A : The *most* terrorist? This question is at once necessary and destined to remain without any answer. Necessary because it takes into account an essential fact: all terrorism *presents itself* as a response in a situation that continues to escalate. It amounts to saying, “I am resorting to terrorism as a last resort, because the other is more terrorist than I am; I am defending myself, counterattacking; the real terrorist, the worst, is the one who will have deprived me of every other means of responding before presenting himself, the first aggressor, as a victim.” It is in this way that the United States, Israel, wealthy nations, and colonial or imperialist powers are accused of practicing state terrorism and thus of being “more terrorist” than the terrorists of whom they say they are the victims. The pattern is well known, so I won’t belabor it. But it is difficult to write it off purely and simply, even if it is sometimes applied in a simplistic and abusive fashion. Yet the question you are asking, that of a “more or less” in terrorism, should also not be settled through a purely and objectively *quantitative* logic. For this question can give rise to no such formal evaluation. “Terrorist” acts try to produce psychic effects (conscious or unconscious) and symbolic or symptomatic reactions that might take numerous detours, an incalculable number of them, in truth. The *quality* or *intensity* of the emotions provoked (whether conscious or unconscious) is not always proportionate to the number of victims or the amount of damage. In situations and cultures where the media do not spectacularize the event, the killing of thousands of people in a very short period of time might pro-

voke fewer psychic and political effects than the assassination of a single individual in another country, culture, or nation-state with highly developed media resources. And does terrorism have to work only through death? Can't one terrorize without killing? And does killing necessarily mean putting to death? Isn't it also "letting die"? Can't "letting die," "not wanting to know that one is letting others die"—hundreds of millions of human beings, from hunger, AIDS, lack of medical treatment, and so on—also be part of a "more or less" conscious and deliberate terrorist strategy? We are perhaps wrong to assume so quickly that all terrorism is voluntary, conscious, organized, deliberate, intentionally calculated: there are historical and political "situations" where terror operates, so to speak, as if by itself, as the simple result of some apparatus, because of the relations of force in place, without anyone, any conscious subject, any person, any "I," being really conscious of it or feeling itself responsible for it. All situations of social or national structural oppression produce a terror that is not natural (insofar as it is organized, institutional), and all these situations depend on this terror without those who benefit from them ever organizing terrorist acts or ever being treated as terrorists. The narrow, too narrow meaning commonly given today to the word "terrorism" gets circulated in various ways in the discourse that dominates the public space, and first of all through the technoeconomic power of the media. What would "September 11" have been without television? This question has already been asked and explored, so I will not insist on it here. But we must recall that maximum media coverage was in the *common* interest of the perpetrators of "September 11," the terrorists, and those who, in the name of the victims, wanted to declare "war on terrorism." Between these two parties, such media coverage was, like the good sense of which Descartes speaks, the most widely shared thing in the world. More than the destruction of the Twin Towers or the attack on the Pentagon, more than the killing of thousands of people, the real "terror" consisted of and, in fact, began by exposing and exploiting, having exposed and exploited, the image of this terror by the target itself. This target (the United States, let's say, and anyone who supports or is allied with them in the world, and this knows almost no limits today) had it in its own *interest* (the *same* interest it shares with its sworn enemies) to expose its vulnerability, to give the greatest possible coverage to the aggression against which it wishes to protect itself. This

is again the same autoimmunitary perversion. Or perhaps it would be better to say “pervertibility,” so as to name a possibility, a risk, or a threat whose virtuality does not take the form of an evil intention, an evil spirit, or a will to do harm. But this virtuality alone is enough to frighten, even terrify. It is the ineradicable root of terror and thus of a terrorism that announces itself even before organizing itself into terrorism. Implacably. Endlessly.

Let me add here a reminder: there is nothing purely “modern” in this relation between media and terror, in a terrorism that operates by propagating within the public space images or rumors aimed at terrifying the so-called civilian population. It is true, of course, that with radio and television what is called organized “propaganda” (something that is in fact relatively modern) has, in the last century, and already during World War I, played an essential role in “declared” war. It will have gone hand in hand with bombing campaigns (whether conventional or atomic) that could not differentiate between “civilian” and “military” any more than the “resistance” movements and the repressions of those movements could. It was thus *already* impossible during the two “world wars” to distinguish rigorously between war and terrorism. Look, for example, at the heroes of the French Resistance who pursued the “war” even after the armistice and often in the name of De Gaulle’s “free France.” These members of the Resistance were regularly treated as “terrorists” by the Nazis and the Vichy collaborators. The accusation ceased with the liberation of France, since it had been an instrument of Nazi propaganda, but who could deny that it was entirely untrue?

B O R R A D O R I : Where were you on September 11?

D E R R I D A : I was in Shanghai, at the end of a long trip to China. It was nighttime there, and the owner of the cafe I was in with a couple of friends came to tell us that an airplane had “crashed” into the Twin Towers. I hurried back to my hotel, and from the very first televised images, those of CNN, I note, it was easy to foresee that this was going to become, *in the eyes* of the world, what you called a “major event.” Even if what was to follow remained, to a certain extent, invisible and unforeseeable. But to feel the gravity of the event and its “worldwide” implications it was enough simply to mobilize a few already tested political hypotheses. As far as I could tell, China tried during the first few days to circumscribe the importance of the event, as if it were a more or

less local incident. But this organized interpretation, informed by the current state of U.S.-China relations (diplomatic tensions and incidents of various sorts), ended up having to yield to other exigencies: CNN and other international media outlets have penetrated Chinese space, and China too, after all, has its own “Muslim” problem. It thus became necessary to join in some way the “antiterrorist” “coalition.” It would be necessary to analyze, in the same vein, the motivations and interests behind all the different geopolitical or strategico-diplomatic shifts that have “invested,” so to speak, “September 11.” (For example, the warming in relations between Bush and Putin, who has been given a freer hand in Chechnya, and the very useful but very hasty identification of Palestinian terrorism with international terrorism, which now calls for a universal response. In both cases, certain parties have an interest in presenting their adversaries not only as terrorists—which they in fact are to a certain extent—but *only* as terrorists, indeed as “*international* terrorists” who share the same logic or are part of the same network and who must thus be opposed, it is claimed, not through counterterrorism but through a “war,” meaning, of course, a “nice clean” war. The “facts” clearly show that these distinctions are lacking in rigor, impossible to maintain, and easily manipulated for certain ends.

B O R R A D O R I : A radical deconstruction of the distinction between war and terrorism, as well as between different types of terrorism (such as national and international), makes it very difficult to conceive of politics in a strategic sense. Who are the actors on the world stage? How many of them are there? Isn't there here the risk of total anarchy?

D E R R I D A : The word “anarchy” risks making us abandon too quickly the analysis and interpretation of what indeed *looks like* pure chaos. We must do all that we can to account for this appearance. We must do everything possible to make this new “disorder” as intelligible as possible. The analysis we sketched out earlier tried to move in that direction: an end of the “Cold War” that leaves just one camp, a coalition, actually, of states claiming sovereignty, faced with anonymous and nonstate organizations, armed and virtually nuclear powers. And these powers can also, without arms and without explosions, without any attacks in person, avail themselves of incredibly destructive computer technologies, technologies capable of operations that in fact have no name (neither war nor terrorism) and that are no longer carried out in

the name of a nation-state, and whose “cause,” in all senses of this word, is difficult to define (there’s the theological cause, the ethnic cause, the socioeconomic cause, and so on). On no side is the logic of sovereignty ever put into question (political sovereignty or that of the nation-state—itsself of ontotheological origin, though more or less secularized in one place and purely theological and nonsecularized in another): not on the side of the nation-states and the great powers that sit on the Security Council, and not on the other side, or other sides, since there is precisely an indeterminate number of them. Everyone will no doubt point to existing international law (the foundations of which remain, I believe, perfectible, revisable, in need of recasting, both conceptually and institutionally). But this international law is nowhere respected. And as soon as one party does not respect it the others no longer consider it respectable and begin to betray it in their turn. The United States and Israel are not the only ones who have become accustomed to taking all the liberties they deem necessary with UN resolutions.

To answer your question more specifically, I would say that the United States is perhaps not the sole target, perhaps not even the central or ultimate target, of the operation with which the name “bin Laden” is associated, at least by metonymy. The point may be to provoke a military and diplomatic situation that destabilizes certain Arab countries torn between a powerful public opinion (which is anti-American if not anti-Western, for countless reasons stemming from a complex, centuries old history, but then also, in the aftermath of an era of colonialism or imperialism, from poverty, oppression, and ideologico-religious indoctrination) and the necessity of basing their nondemocratic authority on diplomatic, economic, and military ties with the United States. First on the list here would be Saudi Arabia, which remains the privileged enemy of everything that might be represented by a “bin Laden” (a name I use always as a synecdoche) or a Saddam Hussein. Yet Saudi Arabia (an important family and an important oil-producing power), while maintaining its ties with its American “protector,” “client,” and “boss,” fuels all the hotbeds of Arab Islamic fanaticism if not “terrorism” in the world. This is one of the paradoxical situations, once again autoimmunitary, of what you called “total anarchy”: the movements and shifts in the strategic oil alliances between the United States (self-styled champion of the democratic ideal, of

human rights, and so on) and regimes about which the least that can be said is that they do not correspond to this model. Such regimes (I used the example of Saudi Arabia, though it would be necessary to speak of the equally serious case of Pakistan) are also the enemies or targets of those who organize so-called “international terrorism” against the U.S. and, at least virtually, their allies. That makes for more than one triangle. And with all the angling going on between these triangles, it is difficult to disentangle the real from the alleged motivation, oil from religion, politics from economics or military strategy. The “bin Laden” type of diatribe against the American devil thus combines such themes as the perversion of faith and nonbelief, the violation of the sacred places of Islam, the military presence near Mecca, the support of Israel, and the oppression of Arab Muslim populations. But if this rhetoric clearly resonates with the populations and even the media of the Arab and Muslim world, the governments of Arab Muslim states (the majority of which care about as much for human rights and democracy as bin Laden does) are almost all hostile in principle, as “governments,” to the “bin Laden” network and its discourse. One thus has to conclude that “bin Laden” is also working to destabilize them . . .

B O R R A D O R I : Which would be the standard objective of terrorists, to overturn but not take over, to destabilize the current situation.

D E R R I D A : The most common strategy consists always in destabilizing not only the principal, declared enemy but also, at the same time, in a kind of quasi-domestic confrontation, those much closer. Sometimes even one’s own allies. This is another necessary consequence of the same autoimmunitary process. In all wars, all civil wars, all partisan wars or wars for liberation, the inevitable escalation leads one to go after one’s rival partners no less than one’s so-called principal adversary. During the Algerian War, between 1954 and 1962, what sometimes looked like “fratricidal” acts of violence between different insurrectional forces proved sometimes just as extreme as those between these groups and the French colonial forces.

This is yet one more reason not to consider everything that has to do with Islam or with the Arab Muslim “world” as a “world,” or at least as one homogeneous whole. And wanting to take all these divisions, differences, and differends into account does not necessarily constitute an act of war; nor does trying to do everything possible to ensure that

in this Arab Muslim “world,” which is not a *world* and not a world that is *one*, certain currents do not take over, namely, those that lead to fanaticism, to an obscurantism armed to the teeth with modern technoscience, to the violation of every juridico-political principle, to the cruel disregard for human rights and democracy, to a nonrespect for life. We must help what is called Islam and what is called “Arab” to free themselves from such violent dogmatism. We must help those who are fighting heroically in this direction *on the inside*, whether we are talking about politics in the narrow sense of the term or else about an interpretation of the Koran. When I say that we must do this for what is called Islam and what is called “Arab,” I obviously mean that we must not do any less when it comes to Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia!

B O R R A D O R I : Earlier you emphasized the essential role of international organizations and the need to cultivate a respect for international law. Do you think that the kind of terrorism linked to the al-Qaeda organization and to bin Laden harbors international political ambitions?

D E R R I D A : What appears to me unacceptable in the “strategy” (in terms of weapons, practices, ideology, rhetoric, discourse, and so on) of the “bin Laden effect” is not only the cruelty, the disregard for human life, the disrespect for law, for women, the use of what is worst in technocapitalist modernity for the purposes of religious fanaticism. No, it is, above all, the fact that such actions and such discourse *open onto no future and, in my view, have no future*. If we are to put any faith in the perfectibility of public space and of the world juridico-political scene, of the “world” itself, then there is, it seems to me, *nothing good* to be hoped for from that quarter. What is being proposed, at least implicitly, is that all capitalist and modern technoscientific forces be put in the service of an interpretation, itself dogmatic, of the Islamic revelation of the One. Nothing of what has been so laboriously secularized in the forms of the “political,” of “democracy,” of “international law,” and even in the nontheological form of sovereignty (assuming, again, that the value of sovereignty can be completely secularized or detheologized, a hypothesis about which I have my doubts), none of this seems to have any place whatsoever in the discourse “bin Laden.” That is why, in this unleashing of violence without name, if I had to take one of the two sides and choose in a binary situation, well, I would. Despite my very strong reservations about the American, indeed European, po-

litical posture, about the “international antiterrorist” coalition, despite all the de facto betrayals, all the failures to live up to democracy, international law, and the very international institutions that the states of this “coalition” themselves founded and supported up to a certain point, I would take the side of the camp that, in principle, by right of law, leaves a perspective open to perfectibility in the name of the “political,” democracy, international law, international institutions, and so on. Even if this “in the name of” is still merely an assertion and a purely verbal commitment. Even in its most cynical mode, such an assertion still lets resonate within it an invincible promise. I don’t hear any such promise coming from “bin Laden,” at least not one for *this world*.

B O R R A D O R I : It seems that you place your hopes in the authority of international law.

D E R R I D A : Yes. In the first place, as imperfect as they may be, these international institutions should be respected in their deliberations and their resolutions by the sovereign states who are members of them and who have thus subscribed to their charters. I mentioned just a moment ago the serious failings of certain “Western” states with regard to these commitments. Such failings would stem from at least two series of causes.

First, they would have to do with the very structure of the axioms and principles of these systems of law and thus of the charters and conventions that institutionalize them. Reflection (of what I would call a “deconstructive” type) should thus, it seems to me, without diminishing or destroying these axioms and principles, question and refound them, endlessly refine and universalize them, without becoming discouraged by the aporias such work must necessarily encounter.

But second, such failings, in the case of states as powerful as the United States and Israel (which is supported by the U.S.), are not subject to any dissuasive sanctions. The United Nations has neither the force nor the means for such sanctions. It is thus necessary to do everything possible (a formidable and imposing task for the very long term) to ensure that these current failings in the present state of these institutions are effectively sanctioned and, in truth, discouraged in advance by a new organization. This would mean that an institution such as the UN (once modified in its structure and charter—and I’m thinking here particularly of the Security Council) would have to have at its disposal an effective intervening force and thus no longer have to depend in

order to carry out its decisions on rich and powerful, actually or virtually hegemonic, nation-states, which bend the law in accordance with their force and according to their interests. Sometimes quite cynically.

I'm not unaware of the apparently utopic character of the horizon I'm sketching out here, that of an international institution of law and an international court of justice with their own autonomous force. Though I do not hold law to be the last word in ethics, politics, or anything else, though this unity of force and law (which is required by the very concept of law, as Kant explains so well) is not only *utopic* but *aporetic* (since it implies that beyond the sovereignty of the nation-state, indeed beyond democratic sovereignty—whose ontotheological foundations must be deconstructed—we would nonetheless be reconstituting a new figure, though not necessarily state-related, of universal sovereignty, of absolute law with an effective autonomous force at its disposal), I continue to believe that it is faith in the possibility of this impossible and, in truth, undecidable thing from the point of view of knowledge, science, and conscience that must govern all our decisions.¹⁴

B O R R A D O R I : It might be said that this terrorist attack was, in one sense, an attack against the principle of sovereignty that the United States has over its own land, yet also an attack on the sovereign role the United States plays vis-à-vis the Western world, at once politically, economically, and culturally. Have these two attacks destabilized the concept of sovereignty as it has been developed by Western modernity?

D E R R I D A : Those called “terrorists” are not, in this context, “others,” absolute others whom we, as “Westerners,” can no longer understand. We must not forget that they were often recruited, trained, and even armed, and for a long time, in various Western ways by a Western world that itself, in the course of its ancient as well as very recent history, invented the word, the techniques, and the “politics” of “terrorism.” Next, one has to divide, or at least differentiate, all the “wholes” or “groups” to which we might be tempted to attribute responsibility for this terrorism. It's not “the Arabs” in general, nor Islam, nor the Arab Islamic Middle East. Each of these groups is heterogeneous, filled with tensions, conflicts, and essential contradictions, with, in truth, what we have been calling self-destructive, quasi-suicidal, autoimmunitary processes. The same goes for the “West.” What is, to my eyes, very important for the future, and I will return to this later,

is also a difference, indeed up to a certain point and within certain limits, an opposition, between the United States (or let's say, more honestly, so as not to be too unfair to American society, what *dominates* and even *governs* in the United States) and a certain Europe. And precisely in relationship to the problems we are discussing. For the "coalition" that has just formed around the United States remains fragile and heterogeneous. It is not only Western, and the "front" without front of this "war" without war does not pit the West against the East or against the Far East (indeed China ended up joining, in its own way, the coalition), or the Middle East, where every country condemned, more or less sincerely, the terrorism and agreed to fight it. Some are doing so with rhetoric alone, others by providing military and logistical support. As for the European nations and NATO, their commitment to the so-called "coalition" remains very complex; it varies from one country to the next and public opinion is far from being won over to the American initiatives. The shifts in these alliances, the warming in relations between Putin's Russia and Bush's United States, the at least partial solidarity of China in the same struggle, are changing the geopolitical landscape and strengthening, though also complicating, the American position, which needs all these agreements in order to act.

What would give me the most hope in the wake of all these upheavals is a potential difference between a new figure of Europe and the United States. I say this without any Eurocentrism. Which is why I am speaking of a *new* figure of Europe. Without forsaking its own memory, by drawing upon it, in fact, as an indispensable resource, Europe could make an essential contribution to the future of the international law we have been discussing.¹⁵ I hope that there will be, "in Europe," "philosophers" able to measure up to the task (I use quotation marks here because these "philosophers" of European tradition will not necessarily be professional philosophers but jurists, politicians, citizens, even European noncitizens; and I use them because they might be "European," "in Europe," without living in the territory of a nation-state in Europe, finding themselves in fact very far away, distance and territory no longer having the significance they once did). But I persist in using this name "Europe," even if in quotation marks, because, in the long and patient deconstruction required for the transformation to come, the experience Europe inaugurated at the time of the Enlightenment (*Lumières*, *Aufklärung*, *Illuminismo*) in the relationship between

the political and the theological or, rather, the religious, though still uneven, unfulfilled, relative, and complex, will have left in European political space absolutely original marks with regard to religious doctrine (notice I'm not saying with regard to religion or faith but with regard to the authority of religious doctrine over the political).¹⁶ Such marks can be found neither in the Arab world nor in the Muslim world, nor in the Far East, nor even, and here's the most sensitive point, in American democracy, in what *in fact* governs not the principles but the predominant reality of American political culture. This final point is complex and tricky. For such a philosophical "deconstruction" would have to operate not against something we would call the "United States" but against what today constitutes a certain American hegemony, one that actually dominates or marginalizes something in the U.S.'s own history, something that is also related to that strange "Europe" of the more or less incomplete Enlightenment I was talking about.

B O R R A D O R I : What role do you see religion playing in this context?

D E R R I D A : We have been speaking of a strange "war" without war. It often takes the form, at least on the surface, of a confrontation between two groups with a strong religious identification. On the one side, the only great European-style "democratic" power in the world that still has at once the death penalty in its judicial system and, despite the separation in principle between church and state, a fundamental biblical (and primarily Christian) reference in its official political discourse and the discourse of its political leaders: "God Bless America," the reference to "evildoers" or to the "axis of evil," and the first rallying cry (which was later retracted) of "infinite justice," would be but a few signs among so many others. And facing them, on the other side, an "enemy" that identifies itself as Islamic, Islamic extremist or fundamentalist, even if this does not necessarily represent authentic Islam and all Muslims are far from identifying with it. No more, in fact, than all Christians in the world identify with the United States's fundamentally Christian professions of faith.

I'm oversimplifying, but such oversimplification provides, I believe, at least the general outline of the overall situation. There would thus be a confrontation between two political theologies, both, strangely enough, issuing out of the same stock or common soil of what I would call an "Abrahamic" revelation. It is highly significant that the

epicenter, at least metonymically, of all these “wars” is the confrontation between the state of Israel (another “democracy” that has not cut the umbilical cord with religious, indeed with ethnoreligious, authority and that is strongly supported, though in a complicated way, by the United States) and a virtual Palestinian state (one that, in preparing its constitution, has not yet given up on declaring Islam the official state religion and that is strongly supported, though in a complicated and often perverse way, by Arab Muslim states).

I would like to hope that there will be, in “Europe” or in a certain modern tradition of Europe, at the cost of a deconstruction that is still finding its way, the possibility of another discourse and another politics, a way out of this double theologico-political program. “September 11”—whatever is ultimately put under this title—will thus have been at once a sign and a price to pay, a very high price, to be sure, without any possible redemption or salvation for the victims, but an important stage in the process.

B O R R A D O R I : So you see an important role for Europe?

D E R R I D A : I hope for it, but I do not see it. I have not seen anything in the facts that would give rise to any certainty or knowledge. Only a few signs to interpret. If there are responsibilities to be taken and decisions to be made, responsibilities and decisions worthy of these names, they belong to the time of a risk and of an act of faith. Beyond knowledge. For if I decide because *I know*, within the limits of what *I know* and *know I must do*, then I am simply deploying a foreseeable program and there is no decision, no responsibility, no event. As for what I have just risked on the subject of “Europe,” let’s say that I’m raising a few questions, in the midst of a certain night and on the basis of a certain number of signs. I decipher, I wager, I hope. If I put so many cautionary quotation marks around these proper names, beginning with “Europe,” it is because I am not sure about anything. Especially not about Europe or the European community *such as it exists* or announces itself *de facto*. It is a matter of thinking the “perhaps” of which I spoke at such length in *Politics of Friendship* on the subject of the *democracy to come*.

B O R R A D O R I : Sticking for a moment with Europe in its current state, how do you see Europe’s political role and the possibilities for it to exercise a real influence?

D E R R I D A : Right now, the French and German governments

are trying, timidly, to slow down or temper the hastiness or overzealousness of the United States, at least with respect to certain forms this “war on terrorism” might take. But little heed is taken here to voices coming from Europe. The major television networks speak only of the unconditional and enthusiastic support of England and Tony Blair beside the United States. France should do more and do better, it seems to me, to make an original voice heard. But it’s a small country, even if it has nuclear weapons and a vote on the Security Council. As long as Europe does not have a unified military force sufficient for autonomous interventions, interventions that would be motivated, calculated, discussed, and deliberated in Europe, the fundamental premises of the current situation will not change, and we will not get any closer to the transformation I alluded to earlier (a new international law, a new international force in the service of new international institutions, a new concept and a new concrete figure of sovereignty, as well as other names, no doubt, for all these things to come).

I do not wish to grant too great a privilege to the juridical sphere, to international law and its institutions, even if I believe more than ever in their importance. Among the international institutions that matter most today, there’s not only the UN but the International Monetary Fund and the G8, to name just two. Recall what happened recently in Genoa,¹⁷ for example. Some have said, not without exaggeration but also not without some plausibility, that between the forces that are being mobilized today against globalization and those of international terrorism (in two words, “September 11”) there is a common cause, a *de facto* alliance or collusion, if not an intentional conspiracy. Enormous effort will be required to introduce here all the necessary distinctions (both conceptual and practical), which will have to take into account the contradictions, that is, the autoimmunitary overdeterminations on which I’ve been insisting. Despite their apparently biological, genetic, or zoological provenance, these contradictions all concern, as you can see, what is beyond living being pure and simple. If only because they bear death in life.

B O R R A D O R I : The question of international sovereignty appears to me extremely complicated. When the role of international organizations and of international law is pushed to its extreme, don’t we end back up with a state model: a meta-state, a meta-law?

D E R R I D A : This is an enormous problem, to be sure. The

major references to discuss here would be, for me, Kant and Hannah Arendt. Both of these thinkers called for an international law and yet excluded, indeed rejected, the hypothesis of a superstate or world government. It is not a question of going through, as is the case today, more or less temporary crises of sovereignty to end up at a world state. This absolutely new and unprecedented form of de-state-ification would allow us to think, beyond what Kant and Arendt formulated in a determined way, the new figure to come of an ultimate recourse, of a sovereignty (or rather, and more simply, since this term “sovereignty” is still too equivocal, still too theologico-political: a force or power, a *-cracy*), of a *-cracy* allied to, or even one with, not only law but justice. That is what I wished to bring out in the phrase “democracy to come (*la démocratie à venir*).” “Democracy to come” does not mean a future democracy that will one day be “present.” Democracy will never exist in the present; it is not presentable, and it is not a regulative idea in the Kantian sense. But *there is the impossible*, whose promise democracy inscribes—a promise that risks and must always risk being perverted into a threat. There is the impossible, and the impossible remains impossible because of the aporia of the demos: the demos is *at once* the incalculable singularity of anyone, before any “subject,” the possible undoing of the social bond by a secret to be respected, beyond all citizenship, beyond every “state,” indeed every “people,” indeed even beyond the current state of the definition of a living being as living “human” being, *and* the universality of rational calculation, of the equality of citizens before the law, the social bond of being together, with or without contract, and so on. And this impossible that *there is* remains ineffaceable. It is as irreducible as our exposure to what comes or happens. It is the exposure (the desire, the openness, but also the fear) that opens, that opens itself, that opens us to time, to what comes upon us, to what arrives or happens, to the event. To history, if you will, a history to be thought completely otherwise than from a teleological horizon, indeed from any horizon at all. When I say “the impossible that there is” I am pointing to this other regime of the “possible-impossible” that I try to think by questioning in all sorts of ways (for example, around questions of the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, and so on), by trying to “deconstruct,” if you will, the heritage of such concepts as “possibility,” “power,” “impossibility,” and so on. But I cannot develop this any further here.¹⁸

Of all the names grouped a bit too quickly under the category “political regimes” (and I do not believe that “democracy” ultimately designates a “political regime”), the inherited concept of democracy is the only one that welcomes the possibility of being contested, of contesting itself, of criticizing and indefinitely improving itself. If it were still the name of a regime, it would be the name of the only “regime” that presupposes its own perfectibility, and thus its own historicity—and that is responsive in as responsible a fashion as possible, I would say, to the aporia or the undecidability on the basis of which—a basis without basis—this regime gets decided. I’m quite aware that such formulations remain obscure, but if democracy is also a thing of the reason to come, this reason can present itself today, it seems to me, only in this penumbra. Yet I can already hear in it so many intractable injunctions.

B O R R A D O R I : What is your position concerning the concept of globalization and what is the relationship between globalization and cosmopolitanism?

D E R R I D A : As for globalization, or what I prefer to refer to in French, for reasons I give elsewhere, as *mondialisation*, the violence of “September 11” seems once again to attest to a series of contradictions.¹⁹ Contradictions that are, in fact, destined to remain; for they are aporias that have to do, once again, it seems to me, with that autoimmunity whose effects we are constantly registering. First, globalization does not take place in the places and at the moment it is said to take place. Second, everywhere it takes place without taking place, it is for better and for worse. Let me try to clarify these two points.

1. *It does not take place.* In an age of so-called globalization, an age where it is in the interest of some to speak about globalization and celebrate its benefits, the disparities between human societies, the social and economic inequalities, have probably never been greater and more spectacular (for the spectacle is in fact more easily “globalizable”) in the history of humanity. Though the discourse in favor of globalization insists on the transparency made possible by teletechnologies, the opening of borders and of markets, the leveling of playing fields and the equality of opportunity, there have never been in the history of humanity, in absolute numbers, so many inequalities, so many cases of malnutrition, ecological disaster, or rampant epidemic (think, for example, of AIDS in Africa and of the millions of people we allow to die

and, thus, kill!). As for technological inequalities, think of the fact that less than 5 percent of humanity has access to the Internet, though in 1999 half of all American households did, and that the majority of servers are in English. At the very moment when the “end of work” is being touted, unprecedented numbers of people are being oppressed by work conditions or, inversely, are unable to find the work they desire.²⁰ Only certain countries, and in these countries only certain classes, benefit fully from globalization. Wealthy, northern countries hold the capital and control the instruments of economic decisions (G8, IMF, World Bank, and so on). If the organized perpetrators of the “September 11” attack are themselves among those who benefit from this so-called globalization (capitalist power, telecommunication, advanced technology, the openness of borders, and so on), they nonetheless claimed (unfairly, no doubt, though to great effect) to be acting in the name of those doomed by globalization, all those who feel excluded or rejected, disenfranchised, left by the wayside, who have only the means of the poor in this age of globalization (which is, today, television, an instrument that is never neutral) to witness the spectacle of the offensive prosperity of others.

A special place would have to be reserved here for Islamic cultures and populations in this context. In the course of the last few centuries, whose history would have to be carefully reexamined (the absence of an Enlightenment age, colonialization, imperialism, and so on), several factors have contributed to the geopolitical situation whose effects we are feeling today, beginning with the paradox of a marginalization and an impoverishment whose rhythm is proportional to demographic growth. These populations are not only deprived of access to what we call democracy (because of the history I just briefly recalled) but are even dispossessed of the so-called natural riches of the land, oil in Saudi Arabia, for example, or in Iraq, or even in Algeria, gold in South Africa, and so many other natural resources elsewhere. They are dispossessed at once by the owners, that is, the sellers, and by the exploiters and clients, in truth, by the nature of the game whereby the two parties engage in these more or less peaceful alliances or transactions. These “natural” riches are in fact the only nonvirtualizable and nonde-territorializable goods left today; they are the cause of many of the phenomena we have been discussing. With all these victims of supposed globalization, dialogue (at once verbal and peaceful) is not taking place.

Recourse to the worst violence is thus often presented as the only “response” to a “deaf ear.” There are countless examples of this in recent history, well before “September 11.” This is the logic put forward by all terrorisms involved in a struggle for freedom. Mandela explains quite well how his party, after years of nonviolent struggle and faced with a complete refusal of dialogue, resigned itself to having to take up arms. The distinction between civilian, military, and police is thus no longer pertinent.

From this point of view, globalization is not taking place. It is a simulacrum, a rhetorical artifice or weapon that dissimulates a growing imbalance, a new opacity, a garrulous and hypermediatized noncommunication, a tremendous accumulation of wealth, means of production, teletechnologies, and sophisticated military weapons, and the appropriation of all these powers by a small number of states or international corporations. And control over these is becoming *at once* easier and more difficult. The power to appropriate has such a structure (most often deterritorializable, virtualizable, capitalizable) that, at the very moment when it seems controllable by a small number (of states, for example), it escapes right into the hands of international nonstate structures and so tends toward dissemination in the very movement of its concentration. Terrorism of the “September 11” sort (wealthy, hypersophisticated, telecommunicative, anonymous, and without an assignable state) stems in part from this apparent contradiction.

2. And yet wherever it is believed *globalization is taking place, it is for better and for worse*. For better: discourses, knowledge, and models are transmitted better and faster. Democratization thus has more of a chance. Recent movements toward democratization in Eastern Europe owe a great deal, almost everything perhaps, to television, to the communication of models, norms, images, informational products, and so on. Nongovernmental institutions are more numerous and better known or recognized. Look at the efforts to institute the International Criminal Tribunal.

You spoke of “cosmopolitanism”—a formidable question, to be sure. Progress of cosmopolitanism, yes. We can celebrate it, as we do any access to citizenship, in this case, to world citizenship. But citizenship is also a limit, that of the nation-state; and we have already expressed our reservations with regard to the world state. I believe we

should thus, beyond the old Greco-Christian cosmopolitical ideal (the Stoics, Saint Paul, Kant), see the coming of a universal alliance or solidarity that extends beyond the internationality of nation-states and thus beyond citizenship. This was one of the major themes of *Specters of Marx* and other texts. We are always led back to the same aporia: how to decide between, on the one hand, the positive and salutary role played by the “state” form (the sovereignty of the nation-state) and, thus, by democratic citizenship in providing protection against certain kinds of international violence (the market, the concentration of world capital, as well as “terrorist” violence and the proliferation of weapons) and, on the other hand, the negative or limiting effects of a state whose sovereignty remains a theological legacy, a state that closes its borders to noncitizens, monopolizes violence,²¹ controls its borders, excludes or represses noncitizens, and so forth? Once again the state is both self-protecting and self-destroying, at once remedy and poison. The *pharmakon* is another name, an old name, for this autoimmunitary logic.²² One can see it at work in the inevitable perversion of technoscientific advances (mastery over living beings, aviation, new informational teletechnologies, e-mail, the Internet, mobile phones, and so on) into weapons of mass destruction, into “terrorisms” of all kinds. Perversions that are all the more quick to occur when the progress in question is first of all a progress in speed and rhythm. Between the two supposed war leaders, the two metonymies, “bin Laden” and “Bush,” the war of images and of discourses proceeds at an ever quickening pace over the airwaves, dissimulating and deflecting more and more quickly the truth that it reveals, accelerating the movement that substitutes dissimulation for revelation—and vice versa. For worse *and* for better, therefore; for the worst *and* the best, the worst that, it seems, *is* also the best. That is what remains terrible, terrifying, terrorizing; that is, on earth, *in terra*, in and beyond territories, the ultimate resource of all terrorisms.

B O R R A D O R I : What is the relationship between globalization—or what you call *mondialisation*—and tolerance?

D E R R I D A : If the term and theme of tolerance have come back of late, it is perhaps to accompany what is called in a rather simplistic and confused fashion the “return of the religious.” The stakes of the violence we have been discussing are often, in fact, territorial, ethnic, and so on. Whether religion is being used as an alibi or not, it is commonly

invoked, explicitly and literally on the side of “bin Laden” and in an implicit, disguised, but profound and fundamental fashion on the side of “Bush.” Intolerance, then: how old is that concept? Can one still ask the question, “What is tolerance?” as Voltaire did in the first sentence of his article on the subject in the *Philosophical Dictionary*?²³ How would this article be written today? Who would write it, with and without Voltaire?

If we must be faithful to the memory of the Enlightenment, if we must not forget certain exemplary models in the struggle against intolerance, models that are part of our legacy, must we not today, and precisely out of fidelity, question anew without, however, contesting the very concept of tolerance? Considering everything that has marked this concept historically, would it be sufficient to inspire, enlighten, and guide our resistance to the violence being unleashed throughout the world today, in conditions that are in part unprecedented (but what part?—that is the ineluctable question), against all those who do not unconditionally respect certain orthodoxies? These dogmatic persecutions all wear the face of intolerance, to be sure, but is that enough to define them? Is tolerance, that “appurtenance of humanity” (Voltaire), the essence of what we must oppose to them?

It is once again a question of the Enlightenment, that is, of access to Reason in a certain public space, though this time in conditions that technoscience and economic or telemedia globalization have thoroughly transformed: in time and *as space*, in rhythms and proportions. If intellectuals, writers, scholars, professors, artists, and journalists do not, before all else, stand up together against such violence, their abdication will be at once irresponsible and suicidal.

Since not all figures of intolerance are new (anathema, excommunication, censorship, marginalization, distortion, control, programming, expulsion, exile, imprisonment, hostage taking, death threats, execution, and assassination, to name just a few), since they have never been separable from the very movement of culture, of tradition, of processes of legitimation, and of communities in general, and particularly ecclesiastical or state institutions, isn't one of our first responsibilities (intellectual, ethical, political, and even beyond those responsibilities attached to the citizen-subject of a particular nation-state or democracy) at once to analyze the laws of such recurrences and the emergence of what is new or unprecedented? Only by rigorously tak-

ing into account this novelty will we be able to adjust our ripostes and our acts of resistance. If we must, in order to carry this out, do a kind of historical genealogy of the concept of tolerance, if we must celebrate, study, and teach the admirable examples of all the struggles against intolerance, in Europe and elsewhere, from Voltaire to Zola to Sartre and so many others, if we must also take inspiration and draw lessons from them, a no less urgent task consists in trying to analyze that which today *no longer depends* on the same conditions or on the same axiomatic. An earthquake has completely transformed the landscape in which the ideal of tolerance took its first form a few centuries ago. We would have to analyze every mutation in the structure of public space, in the interpretation of democracy, theocracy, and their respective relations with international law (in its current state, in that which compels or calls it to transform itself and, thus, in that which remains largely to come within it), in the concepts of the nation-state and its sovereignty, in the notion of citizenship, in the transformation of public space by the media, which at once serve and threaten democracy, and so on.

Our acts of resistance must be, I believe, at once intellectual and political. We must join forces to exert pressure and organize ripostes, and we must do so on an international scale and according to new modalities, though always by analyzing and discussing the very foundations of our responsibility, its discourses, its heritage, and its axioms. The concept of tolerance would here constitute a prime example.

The article "Tolerance" in the *Philosophical Dictionary* is a tour de force, a kind of fax for the eighteenth century. It contains such a wealth of historical examples and analyses, so many axioms and principles to reflect upon, today, word by word. Yet this message calls for so many questions in return. We would have to be extremely vigilant, it seems to me, in interpreting this heritage. I would be tempted to say "yes and no" to each sentence, "yes but no," "yes, although, however," and so forth, swearing in a form that is other than that of the Christian apostles, the disciples, or the Quakers: "The apostles and disciples," writes Voltaire, "swore by yea and nay; the Quakers will not swear in any other form." The word "tolerance" is first of all marked by a religious war between Christians, or between Christians and non-Christians. Tolerance is a *Christian* virtue, or for that matter a *Catholic* virtue. The Christian must tolerate the non-Christian, but, even more so, the Catholic must let the Protestant be. Since we today feel that re-

ligious claims are at the heart of the violence (you will notice that I keep saying, in a deliberately general fashion, “violence,” so as to avoid the equivocal and confused words “war” and “terrorism”), we resort to this good old word “tolerance”: that Muslims agree to live with Jews and Christians, that Jews agree to live with Muslims, that believers agree to tolerate “infidels” or “nonbelievers” (for this is the word “bin Laden” used to denounce his enemies, and first of all the Americans). Peace would thus be tolerant cohabitation. In the United States, everything is done so as not to identify the enemy as the religious foreigner, the Muslim (and this is clearly better than the alternative, no matter the motivations). It is said over and over: “We are not fighting Islam; the three monotheistic religions have always taught tolerance.” We know, of course, that this is largely inaccurate, but little matter, it’s certainly better than the contrary. These official declarations of tolerance also obey a strategy: there are many, indeed more and more, Muslims in America and in Europe; it is thus necessary to reassure them, to gain assurance of their support, to dissociate them from “terrorism,” to divide the enemy camp. Fair enough, that’s part of fighting the good fight. Though I clearly prefer shows of tolerance to shows of intolerance, I nonetheless still have certain reservations about the word “tolerance” and the discourse it organizes. It is a discourse with religious roots; it is most often used on the side of those with power, always as a kind of condescending concession . . .

B O R R A D O R I : You seem to understand tolerance as a form of charity . . .

D E R R I D A : Indeed, tolerance is first of all a form of charity. A Christian charity, therefore, even if Jews and Muslims might seem to appropriate this language as well. Tolerance is always on the side of the “reason of the strongest,” where “might is right”; it is a supplementary mark of sovereignty, the good face of sovereignty, which says to the other from its elevated position, I am letting you be, you are not insufferable, I am leaving you a place in my home, but do not forget that this is my home . . .

B O R R A D O R I : Would you agree with the claim that tolerance is a condition of hospitality?

D E R R I D A : No. Tolerance is actually the opposite of hospitality. Or at least its limit. If I think I am being hospitable because I am tolerant, it is because I wish to limit my welcome, to retain power and main-

tain control over the limits of my “home,” my sovereignty, my “I can” (my territory, my house, my language, my culture, my religion, and so on). In addition to the religious meaning of tolerance whose origin we have just recalled, we should also mention its biological, genetic, or organicist connotations. In France, the phrase “threshold of tolerance” was used to describe the limit beyond which it is no longer decent to ask a national community to welcome any more foreigners, immigrant workers, and the like. François Mitterrand once used this unfortunate expression as a self-justifying word of caution: beyond a certain number of foreigners or immigrants who do not share our nationality, our language, our culture, and our customs, a quasi-organic and unpreventable—in short, a natural—phenomenon of rejection can be expected. I had at the time, in an article published in the newspaper *Libération*, condemned this organicist rhetoric and the “naturalist” politics it attempted to justify. It is true that Mitterrand later retracted this language, which he himself deemed unfortunate. But the word “tolerance” there ran up against its limit: we accept the foreigner, the other, the foreign body *up to a certain point*, and so not without restrictions. Tolerance is a conditional, circumspect, careful hospitality.

B O R R A D O R I : Tolerance thus amounts to granting someone permission to continue living on?

D E R R I D A : Indeed, and so a limited tolerance is clearly preferable to an absolute intolerance. But tolerance remains a scrutinized hospitality, always under surveillance, parsimonious and protective of its sovereignty. In the best of cases, it’s what I would call a conditional hospitality, the one that is most commonly practiced by individuals, families, cities, or states. We offer hospitality only on the condition that the other follow our rules, our way of life, even our language, our culture, our political system, and so on. That is hospitality as it is commonly understood and practiced, a hospitality that gives rise, with certain conditions, to regulated practices, laws, and conventions on a national and international—indeed, as Kant says in a famous text, a “cosmopolitical”—scale.²⁴ But pure or unconditional hospitality does not consist in such an *invitation* (“I invite you, I welcome you into *my home*, on the condition that you adapt to the laws and norms of my territory, according to my language, tradition, memory, and so on”). Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality *itself*, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever ar-

rives as an absolutely foreign *visitor*, as a new *arrival*, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other. I would call this a hospitality of *visitation* rather than *invitation*. The visit might actually be very dangerous, and we must not ignore this fact, but would a hospitality without risk, a hospitality backed by certain assurances, a hospitality protected by an immune system against the wholly other, be true hospitality? Though it's ultimately true that suspending or suppressing the immunity that protects me from the other might be nothing short of life-threatening.

An unconditional hospitality is, to be sure, practically impossible to live; one cannot in any case, and by definition, organize it. Whatever happens, happens, whoever comes, comes (*ce qui arrive arrive*), and that, in the end, is the only event worthy of this name. And I well recognize that this concept of pure hospitality can have no legal or political status. No state can write it into its laws. But without at least the thought of this pure and unconditional hospitality, of hospitality *itself*, we would have no concept of hospitality in general and would not even be able to determine any rules for conditional hospitality (with its rituals, its legal status, its norms, its national or international conventions). Without this thought of pure hospitality (a thought that is also, in its own way, an experience), we would not even have the idea of the other, of the alterity of the other, that is, of someone who enters into our lives without having been invited. We would not even have the idea of love or of "living together (*vivre ensemble*)" with the other in a way that is not a part of some totality or "ensemble." Unconditional hospitality, which is neither juridical nor political, is nonetheless the condition of the political and the juridical. For these very reasons, I am not even sure whether it is ethical, insofar as it does not even depend on a decision. But what would an "ethics" be without hospitality?²⁵

Paradox, aporia: these two hospitalities are at once heterogeneous and indissociable. Heterogeneous because we can move from one to the other only by means of an absolute leap, a leap beyond knowledge and power, beyond norms and rules. Unconditional hospitality is transcendent with regard to the political, the juridical, perhaps even to the ethical. But—and here is the indissociability—I cannot open the door, I cannot expose myself to the coming of the other and offer him or her anything whatsoever without making this hospitality effective, without, in some concrete way, giving *something determinate*. This determina-

tion will thus have to re-inscribe the unconditional into certain conditions. Otherwise, it gives nothing. What remains unconditional or absolute (*unbedingt*, if you will) risks being nothing at all if conditions (*Bedingungen*) do not make of it some thing (*Ding*). Political, juridical, and ethical responsibilities have their place, if they take place, only in this transaction—which is each time unique, like an event—between these two hospitalities, the unconditional and the conditional.

B O R R A D O R I : The fact that these two poles are at once heterogeneous and indissociable is, philosophically, very difficult to think. How can political discourse assimilate it? Might the modern ideal of cosmopolitanism be the solution?

D E R R I D A : The idea of cosmopolitanism emerges out of a very old tradition that goes back, as we have already noted, to Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, to the Stoics, and to Kant. In his short treatise *Perpetual Peace*, Kant explains why we should probably give up the idea of a “world republic” (*Weltrepublik*) but not the idea of a cosmopolitical law, “the idea of a law of world citizenship,” which is “no high-flown or exaggerated notion.”²⁶ It would be, on the contrary, the condition for continually approaching perpetual peace. But if we must in fact cultivate the spirit of this tradition (as I believe most international institutions have done since World War I), we must also try to adjust the limits of this tradition to our own time by questioning the ways in which they have been defined and determined by the ontotheological, philosophical, and religious discourses in which this cosmopolitical ideal was formulated. This is no small task, and we do not have time even to begin the discussion here.²⁷ What I call “democracy to come” would go beyond the limits of cosmopolitanism, that is, of a world citizenship. It would be more in line with what lets singular beings (anyone) “live together,” there where they are not yet defined by citizenship, that is, by their condition as lawful “subjects” in a state or legitimate members of a nation-state or even of a confederation or world state. It would involve, in short, an alliance that goes beyond the “political” as it has been commonly defined (a designation usually reserved for the state or citizen body in a nation linked to a territory, even if, as Schmitt reminds us, the state is not the only form of the political). This does not, however, lead to a depoliticization—quite the contrary. Yet it does require another thought and another putting into practice of the concept of the “political” and the concept “world”—which is not

the same as “cosmos.” That said, and because all of this will remain for some time out of reach, I believe that everything must be done to extend the privilege of citizenship in the world: too many men and women are deprived of citizenship in so many ways. Even when they are not outright refused the title of citizen, the “human rights and citizens’ rights” to which they might lay claim are severely limited.

B O R R A D O R I : It seems to me that this deconstruction of the concept of cosmopolitanism implies a deconstruction of the idea of the state.

D E R R I D A : Cosmopolitanism as it is classically conceived presupposes some form of state sovereignty, something like a world state, whose concept can be theologico-political or secular (that is, secular in its filiation, though secretly theologico-political). For a deconstruction to be as effective as possible, it should not, in my view, oppose the state head on and in a unilateral fashion. In many contexts, the state might be the best protection against certain forces and dangers. And it can secure the citizenship of which we have been speaking. The responsibilities to be taken with regard to the state thus differ according to the context, and there is no relativism in recognizing this. But, ultimately, these necessary transactions must not obstruct a deconstruction of the state form, which should, one day, no longer be the last word of the political. This movement of “deconstruction” did not wait for us to begin speaking about “deconstruction”; it has been underway for a long time, and it will continue for a long time. It will not take the form of a suppression of the sovereign state at one particular moment in time but will pass through a long series of still unforeseeable convulsions and transformations, through as yet unheard-of forms of shared and limited sovereignty. The idea and even the practice of shared sovereignty, that is, of a limitation of sovereignty, has been accepted for a long time now. And yet such a divisible or shared sovereignty already contradicts the pure concept of sovereignty. As Bodin, Hobbes, and others have pointed out, sovereignty has to be and must remain indivisible. The deconstruction of sovereignty has thus already begun, and it will have no end, for we neither can nor should renounce purely and simply the values of autonomy or freedom, or those of power or force, which are inseparable from the very idea of law. How are we to reconcile unconditional *auto-nomy* (the foundation of any pure ethics, of the sovereignty of the subject, of the ideal of emancipation and of freedom, and

so on) and the *hetero-nomy* that, as I recalled a moment ago, imposes itself upon all unconditional hospitality worthy of this name, upon every welcoming of the other as other? The decision, if there is one, is always a decision of the other, as I have tried to show elsewhere.²⁸ Responsibility for a decision, if there is any and if one must answer for it, amounts each time, in an irreducibly singular way, without any normative program and without any assured knowledge, to a transaction between the imperative for autonomy and the imperative for heteronomy, the two being equally imperious.

B O R R A D O R I : We have spoken about tolerance, hospitality, and cosmopolitanism. How do you see the problem of human rights? What is the relationship between the notion of right and that of hospitality? A right presupposes someone who avails him- or herself of that right in relationship to another, that is, more precisely, in a social context, in an organized community. If the concept of state, which is the concept of a juridically organized community, is no longer the last word of the political, how are you going to maintain the idea of human rights?

D E R R I D A : Actually, it is today more and more often in the name of human rights and their universality that the sovereign authority of the state is called into question, that international courts of justice are established, that heads of state or military leaders are judged after having been removed from the judicial institutions of their own state. The concept of a crime against humanity or of a war crime no longer falls under the authority of national judicial institutions and sovereign states. At least in principle. You know about the enormous problems we are now facing in this regard.

We must (*il faut*) more than ever stand on the side of human rights. *We need (il faut) human rights.* We are in need of them and they are in need, for there is always a lack, a shortfall, a falling short, an insufficiency; human rights are never sufficient. Which alone suffices to remind us that they are not natural. They have a history—one that is recent, complex, and unfinished. From the French Revolution and the first Declarations right up through the declaration following World War II, human rights have been continually enriched, refined, clarified, and defined (women's rights, children's rights, the right to work, rights to education, human rights beyond "human rights and citizens' rights," and so on). To take this historicity and this perfectibility into account

in an affirmative way we must never prohibit the most radical questioning possible of all the concepts at work here: the humanity of man (the “proper of man” or of the human, which raises the whole question of nonhuman living beings, as well as the question of the history of recent juridical concepts or performatives such as a “crime against humanity”), and then the very concept of rights or of law (*droit*), and even the concept of history.

For justice does not end with law.²⁹ Nor even with duties (*devoirs*), which, in a still wholly paradoxical way, “must,” “should” go beyond obligation and debt. I tried to show elsewhere that any pure ethics must begin beyond law, duty, and debt. Beyond law, that’s easy to understand. Beyond duty, that’s almost unthinkable. Recall what Kant says: a moral action must be accomplished not only “according to duty (*pflichtmässig*)” but “from duty (*eigentlich aus Pflicht*),” “out of pure duty (*aus reiner Pflicht*).”³⁰ Once we have followed Kant this far, as we no doubt ought to do, a leap is still required. If I act out of pure duty, *because I must do so, because I owe it*, because there is a debt I must repay, then two limits come to taint any pure ethic or pure morality. On the one hand, I subordinate my action to a knowledge (I am supposed to know what this pure duty is in the name of which I must act). Yet an action that simply obeys knowledge is but a calculable consequence, the deployment of a norm or program. It does not engage any decision or any responsibility worthy of these names. On the other hand, by acting out of pure duty, I acquit myself of a debt and thus complete the economic circle of an exchange; I do not exceed in any way the totalization or reappropriation that something like a gift, hospitality, or the event itself should exceed. We must thus be dutiful beyond duty, we must go beyond law,³¹ tolerance, conditional hospitality, economy, and so on. But to go beyond does not mean to discredit that which we exceed. Whence the difficulty of a responsible transaction between two orders or, rather, between order and its beyond. Whence all these aporias, and the inevitability of an autoimmunitary risk.

B O R R A D O R I : This sounds like a regulative idea, though I know you do not like this expression . . .

D E R R I D A : That’s true. But my reservations are not straightforward objections. They are precisely reservations. For lack of anything better, if we can say this about a regulative idea, the regulative idea remains perhaps an ultimate reservation. Though such a last recourse

risks becoming an alibi, it retains a certain dignity; I cannot swear that I will not one day give in to it.

I have, in short, *three sorts* of reservations. Some concern first of all the very loose way this notion of a regulative idea is currently used, outside its strictly Kantian context. In this case, the regulative idea remains in the order of the *possible*, an ideal possible, to be sure, one that is infinitely deferred, but one that participates in what at the end of an infinite history would still fall into the realm of the possible, the realm of what is virtual or potential, of what is within the power of someone, some “I can,” to reach, in theory, in a form that is not wholly freed from all teleological ends.

To all this I would oppose, in the first place, everything I placed earlier under the title of the im-possible, of what must remain (in a non-negative fashion) foreign to the order of my possibilities, to the order of the “I can,” to the theoretical, descriptive, constative, and performative orders (inasmuch as this latter still implies a power guaranteed for some “I” by conventions that neutralize the pure eventfulness of the event). That is what I meant earlier by heteronomy, by a law come from the other, by a responsibility and decision of the other—of the other in me, an other greater and older than I am. This im-possible is not privative. It is not the inaccessible, and it is not what I can indefinitely defer: it is announced to me, sweeps down upon me, precedes me, and seizes me *here now*, in a nonvirtualizable way, in actuality and not potentiality. It comes upon me from on high, in the form of an injunction that does not simply wait on the horizon, that never leaves me in peace and will not let me put it off until later. Such an urgency cannot be *idealized*, no more than the other as other can. This im-possible is thus not a regulative *idea* or *ideal*. It is what is most undeniably *real*. Like the other. Like the irreducible and nonappropriable difference of the other.

Then, in the second place, the responsibility of what remains to be decided or done (in actuality) cannot consist in following, applying, or realizing a norm or rule. When there is a determinable rule, I know what must be done, and as soon as such knowledge dictates the law, action follows knowledge as a calculable consequence: one *knows* what path to take, one no longer hesitates; the decision then no longer decides anything but simply gets deployed with the automatism attributed to machines. There is no longer any place for justice or responsi-

bility (whether juridical, political, or ethical).

Finally, in the third place, if we come back this time to the strict meaning Kant gave to the *regulative* use of ideas (as opposed to their *constitutive* use), we would, in order to say anything on this subject and, especially, in order to appropriate such terms, have to subscribe to the entire Kantian architectonic and critique. I cannot do this or even decide to do this with any seriousness here. We would have to begin by asking about what Kant calls “those differences in the interest of reason,”³² the *imaginary* (the *focus imaginarius*, that point toward which all the lines directing the rules of understanding—which is not reason—tend and converge, the point they thus indefinitely *approximate*), the necessary *illusion*, which need not necessarily deceive us, the figure of an approach or approximation (*zu nähern*) that tends indefinitely toward rules of universality, and especially the indispensable use of the *as if* (*als ob*).³³ We cannot treat this here, but you can imagine how circumspect I would be to appropriate in any rigorous way this idea of a regulative idea. Let us not forget, since we have been talking so much about the world and about worldwide movements, that the very idea of *world* remains a *regulative idea* for Kant,³⁴ the second one, between two others that are themselves, so to speak, two forms of sovereignty: the “myself” (*Ich selbst*), as soul or as thinking nature, and God.

These are a few of the reasons why, without ever giving up on reason and a certain “interest of reason,” I hesitate to use the expression “regulative idea” when speaking of the to come or of the democracy to come.

B O R R A D O R I : You thus follow Kierkegaard in this regard.

D E R R I D A : No doubt, as always. But a Kierkegaard who would not necessarily be Christian, and you can imagine how difficult that is to think. I tried to explain myself on this subject elsewhere.³⁵ I always make *as if* I subscribed to the *as if*'s of Kant (which I am never quite able to do), or *as if* Kierkegaard helped me to think beyond his own Christianity, *as if* in the end he did not want to know that he was not Christian or refused to admit that he did not know what being Christian means. (In the end, I cannot quite bring myself to believe this, indeed I cannot quite bring myself to believe in general, that is, what is normally called “to believe.”)

But what makes the rule of such an interview impossible, impracticable, is a law of the genre that orders us always *to make as if: as if*

everything we are speaking about in a quasi-spontaneous fashion had not already been treated elsewhere, by others or by ourselves, in already published writings and with more developed arguments. As you can see, I believe I must, at each moment, make as if I were at once honoring and breaking our contract.

PHILOSOPHY
IN A TIME OF TERROR

DIALOGUES WITH
JÜRGEN HABERMAS AND
JACQUES DERRIDA

Giovanna Borradori

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