Legacies of Derrida: ~~Anthropology~~

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Abstract

This article considers the legacies of Jacques Derrida in and for Anglo-American sociocultural anthropology. It begins with a survey of Derrida's own engagement with themes that have historically been foundational to the field: (*a*) the critique of sign theory and, with it, the questions of language and law in Lévi-Straussian structuralism; (*b*) the question of the unconscious; (*c*) the critique of the performative and its consequences for the idea of ritual; (*d*) the rereading of Marcel Mauss's concept of the gift, and of economy more generally; and (*e*) the analysis of the metaphysical basis of law, in both religious and ostensibly secular formations. It then considers the state of the field at the time when it was being infused with different forms of poststructuralism and explores the competing claims made by these discourses in relation to deconstruction. Finally, after tracing the convergences and divergences between Derridean deconstruction and theory in sociocultural anthropology, it treats two main examples of works produced against and under the influence of Derrida's thought, respectively.

INTRODUCTION

The first essay Jacques Derrida delivered in the United States, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," offered a critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of language and undertook a radical rethinking of the opposition between nature and culture in structuralist ethnology (Macksey & Donato 1970, Powell 2006). Derrida had already published "Force and Signification" (1978b [1963]), which denounced, by way of a footnote, Alfred Kroeber's (1948) denigration of "structure" as a merely fashionable term in social theory (Derrida 1978b, p. 301). He had invoked both Marcel Mauss and Maurice Leinhardt as well. From the start, then, Derrida's work solicited anthropology, despite being articulated from within philosophy. What are the legacies of that solicitation? And what shall they yet become?

BEGINNING WITH WRITING AND THE ENDS OF MAN

Of Grammatology was published in 1967, although an essay by that name had appeared in 1965. It commenced by remarking the "*ethnocentrism* which, everywhere and always, ha[s] controlled the concept of writing" and by promising an analysis of "the declared Rousseauism of a modern anthropologist," namely Lévi-Strauss. *Of Grammatology* traversed hallowed ground for anthropology, taking on the topics that have been constitutive of the discipline since its inception: the relationship between nature and culture, the origin of language, the relationship between language and law, the incest taboo, the emergence of script, the question of history and memory in societies with and without script, and the problem of ethnocentrism.

Initially, however, the call to anthropology went largely ignored. This was in no small part because the critique proffered by Derrida was concerned less with the question of how to reform the discipline (about which he had nothing to say) than with whether it could ever be extricated from the metaphysics on which its residual humanism was founded. His 1972 (1982b) essay, "The Ends of Man," was particularly important in this regard. In the attempts by Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger to break with the Western tradition of metaphysics—through the displacement of the concept of man by that of consciousness (Hegel); by supplanting the idea of rational humanity with that of transcendental humanity (Husserl); or by rejecting the "metaphysical we-men" in favor of the proximity to essential being (Heidegger)—Derrida finds the repeated sublation of an old concept (Zaner 1972, p. 385). This concept, Man, is an a priori one, neither empirically observable nor logically deducible. Hence, its continued invocation in and by philosophy and anthropology needs explanation. Almost as much as his general disavowal of metaphysics (and his infamously difficult style), it was Derrida's rejection of Husserl's attempt to replace an "empirical anthropology" with a phenomenological interrogation of the world as consciously intended that seemed to foreclose a broader disciplinary engagement of his thought in and by anthropology. These two epistemological commitments, empiricism and phenomenology, have been central if not foundational to the methodology of fieldwork, even when not theorized as such.

If anthropologists are now comfortable with the idea that their object of study is not unitary, if they increasingly conceive of the discipline as an investigation of particular social formations at particular historical junctures, in relation to both their own anteriority and the extralocal processes by which they are brought into relation with others, the discipline has not yet done and perhaps cannot ever do without the idea of the human as the basis of its comparitavism. For this reason, one may have to admit that there is no properly Derridean anthropology, and even that Derrida disavowed anthropology per se (although this would have to be tempered by the recognition that he not only read and affirmed some

of the insights of anthropologists, but also engaged with them in his seminars in Paris and in conferences (see, for example, de Vries & Weber 2001). However, this statement does not mean that no anthropologists exist whose work has not been shaped by their reading of Derrida or that Derrida's scholarship has not made any significant impact on the field. The purpose of this article is to trace the trajectory of Derrida's influence and to understand how, when, and against what resistances his thought provoked new kinds of questions and new kinds of analyses within the discipline. My focus here is on the North American, English-speaking academy. Different stories could be told of Derrida's impact in England or Germany, where, in fact, he has had far less influence, or in Quebec, where the relationship to French philosophy is not dependent on the market decisions affecting translation. The relative lack of reference to Derrida in French anthropological circles has already been remarked, if not deeply analyzed (Marcus 1999, p. 421). However, those stories await another narrator and a different set of references. And given these parameters, it should be clear that the present reading of Derrida's legacies for anthropology is a reading of his thought's movement into English, and hence one must consider it against the backdrop of the problem of translation, a problem at once linguistic, economic, and temporal, insofar as translation and more specifically publications of translations take time.

Tedlock (1980) undertook one of the first significant assessments of Derrida's thought for a major American anthropological venue in a multi-book review covering, in addition to *Of Grammatology*, works by Culler (1977), Hawkes (1977), Sebeok (1977), and Sperber (1975). Tedlock understands Derrida, whom he describes "as a sort of theological counterpart to Marx" (Tedlock 1980, p. 827), to be proposing a reversal of the received conception of language in which speech occupies a temporally and metaphysically prior status vis-à-vis writing. It is a flawed but not uncommon misreading of Derrida's argument.

Derrida does not simply reverse the order of the speech/writing binary; he describes the process by which that very differentiation emerges, and he gives to the more encompassing category within which the opposition between script and speech arises the name of "arche-writing."

Like many, Tedlock finds confusing the distinction between writing in the narrow sense (of script) and writing in the broader sense adumbrated by Derrida, where it includes all processes of trace-formation, deferral, and delay, the crossing of presence with absence, etc. This confusion leads him to an ironic affirmation of Derrida's relevance for anthropology in the battling of what he perceives to be the linguists' error, namely the reduction of spoken language to notation (Tedlock 1980, p. 828). In the end, Tedlock concludes by rejecting Derrida's concept of writing in favor of a vocality to which he attributes the capacities and qualities of naturalness, spontaneity, and plenitude. He thereby affirms everything that Derrida questions.

Cultural anthropology in the Anglo-American context has since undergone enormous transformations, becoming both more accommodating, in some areas, and more hostile, in others, to Derrida's writings. This split is itself the mark of an irrevocable change, one which may be construed, in both of its dimensions, as being part of Derrida's legacy in and for what may well be the last of the "human" sciences (Bruner 1986). To understand this legacy requires both an account of his major theoretical interventions and a survey of the discursive space within which they were made. The latter requires that one consider the competing forms of poststructuralism, as well as the critiques to which they were subject, and the anthropological work that was ultimately inspired by deconstructionism. Space limitations demand brevity. Therefore, what follows here is a provisional schematization of those strands of deconstructionist thought that have been particularly significant for the field of anthropology. They are (*a*) the critique of sign theory and, with it, the questions of language

and law in Lévi-Straussian structuralism; (*b*) the question of the unconscious; (*c*) the critique of the performative and its consequences for the idea of ritual; (*d*) the rereading of Marcel Mauss's concept of the gift, and of economy more generally; and (*e*) the analysis of the metaphysical basis of law, in both religious and ostensibly secular formations. I begin with the analysis of anthropological structuralism.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, LANGUAGE, AND THE LAW OF CULTURE

Like his predecessor, Lévy-Bruhl (1923 [1922]), Lévi-Strauss posits a categorical opposition between cultures with and without "writing," and hence, with and without history. Writing is, for him, associated with violence, forgetting, and political hierarchy. It is the instrument of colonization and the means for disseminating an economic logic whose most salient characteristics are its abstraction of value, its simultaneous devaluation of utility, and its tendency to waste. The moral appeal of such an ostensibly antiethnocentric model masks, says Derrida, a profound ethnocentrism built on metaphysical presuppositions (1976, p. 114). Although acknowledging the violence of writing, Derrida nonetheless questions the conceptual basis on which the structuralist bifurcation of the world rests (p. 106). This leads him to interrogate the Saussurian model on which Lévi-Strauss draws.

Saussure refers to writing as a secondary development, a reproduction of speech. In this analysis, writing is alienated from an originally spontaneous and immediate communication, but it compensates for this loss with permanence and a capacity for abstraction. Saussure understands writing to be a historical development; thus, language for him is independent of writing. However, as Derrida notes, writing provides the model for his analysis of language. Derrida (1976, p. 43) then claims to reveal what Saussure "saw without seeing": that speech implies writing. In what sense? Saus-

sure defines the sign as a unity of two dimensions: the sensible sound-image (signifier) and the intelligible concept (signified). It is unmotivated and acquires its meaning only through differential relations with all other signs. But, Derrida reminds us, this is not because there is a substantive difference between them; the signs themselves are comprised of two elements, signifiers and signifieds, both of which are produced through differential relations. In other words, claims Derrida, language is riven by absence or alterity (Spivak 1976, p. xxxix). It is comprised not of figures or reproductions of an absent presence, but of traces—a notion he derives largely from Freud (see below). There is no original presence from which other signs have been differentiated. Or, at least, one cannot posit such an originary presence without making a metaphysical move—something that the human sciences (however qualitatively oriented) had claimed to have disavowed.

Derrida's notion of writing as that which conditions the possibility of speech is linked to a recognition that the discernment of signs, especially words, presumes the perception of spaces or intervals, such that one word can be separated out from another upon hearing and reading (Derrida 1976, p. 39). The foreignness of a language, one recalls, is experienced as the incapacity to differentiate words from the stream of sound that greets the ear. Insofar as the discernment of the interval is a "spacing," there is a graphic or graphematic element even in spoken language. To recognize these graphic elements, however, they must be conceptualized through opposition to other such elements, and hence through gestures that entail abstraction as well as iteration. Both of these gestures converge in the practice of citation, by which a word or mark is quoted, and thereby taken out of context. In *Limited Inc.* (Derrida 1995c) such "decontextualization" is read as the possibility that haunts every performative utterance, and indeed every illocutionary act. As such, it forms the basis of Derrida's critique of both Austin's and Searle's language theories. Austin's (1975 [1962])

understanding of the performative (that statement which calls into being what it names) excludes citation as something abnormal and threatening to the ideal situation in which the performative would otherwise exercise its force; it is this exclusion and redesignation of a structuring possibility as mere exception that Derrida interrogates and that he reads in ethico-political terms as the secret ground of normativization in speech act theory, and much political ritual as well.

Derrida designates the spacing and necessary amenability to (de)contextualization in language with the neologism "*différance*." The term is intended to invoke the senses of deferral and differing, as well as that of detour (Derrida 1982a, Spivak 1976). It is a process without end. As he repeatedly insists, the totality that the structuralists hypothesize to provisionally fix the meaning of terms (whether myths or signs) can never be actualized except by imagining oneself to have arrived on the other side of time and history (Derrida 1978d, pp. 289–91; 1982b). But the processes of differing and deferral extend infinitely. The spacing is also a "temporization."

This argument about the *différance* of language is at best tangential to a consideration of the empirical development of (narrowly conceived) writing forms, whether hieroglyphic, ideographic, or alphabetic, to say nothing of their possible relationship to different kinds of social organization. Indeed, Derrida (1976, p. 78) himself acknowledges that his analysis may have to be repressed for positive science to develop, and he cites, approvingly, the anthropological research on prealphabetic scripts. Some anthropologists have arrived, quite independently and without any reference to Derrida, at the conclusion that, contra Walter Ong (1958, 1982) and Jack Goody (1977), there is no necessary relationship between the development of forms of script and conceptual abstraction (Swearingen 1986, p. 153). If one rejects the categorical opposition between speech and writing as an opposition between immediacy and abstraction, however, one must also reject

the bifurcation of humanity into the literate and the unlettered, the historical and the ahistorical. Again, Derrida's logico-philosophical approach finds support in the research of historical linguistic anthropologists such as Swearingen, who, on very different, empirical grounds, notes the extremely heterogeneous distribution of knowledge of scripts even within supposedly literate societies and who, on this basis, rejects the efforts to classify societies as literate or oral (1986). This kind of historicism nonetheless stops short of the more radical claim made by Derrida, especially in relation to Lévi-Strauss, namely that nonscriptural forms of social phenomena also partake of the structure of writing.

What, then, does it mean to say that a seemingly oral culture "has" writing? This question seems newly relevant, as a popular audience emerges to embrace Everett's (2005) claim that the Pirahã of northwestern Brazil speak a language (of the Muran language family) defined by near total immediacy: a language that lacks numbers, abstract terms of quantity, colors, and the perfect tense—as well as the capacity for writing. Everett believes that the grammar of the Pirahã not only lacks but is incapable of supporting long-term memory and historical consciousness, or any imaginative aesthetic (Colapinto 2007, Everett 2005, Stranlaw 2006). His claims are uncannily reminiscent of those made by Lévi-Strauss about the Nambikwara and will be addressed further below. Here, I want to consider Derrida's analysis of Lévi-Strauss's account of the Nabikwara in the "Writing Lesson" of *Tristes Tropiques* to make clear what is at stake in Derrida's claim that orality does not lack the qualities generally reserved for conventionally understood writing systems.

Reading Lévi-Strauss to excavate what has been repressed within his discourse, Derrida notes that the Nambikwara prohibit the use of proper names, thereby inscribing the idea of the proper name within classificatory language (one cannot prohibit anything except through the application of a general rule). They express much concern over genealogy

and possess an elaborate mneumotechnics by which to recall their pasts. Insofar as an anxiety over genealogy (and thus property) has typically been associated with the historical development of writing in the narrow sense (Derrida 1976, p. 124), Derrida wonders in what sense Lévi-Strauss can claim that the Nambikwara have no writing. They even have a name for writing, and they recognize the power that accrues to one who possesses it. Within their own world, they mark out their landscape with paths and signs, which they can refer to (or quote) in narratives of daily activity.

These contradictions to the idea of writing's absence lead Derrida to argue that we must think of the development of writing in the colloquial sense (of script) not as a departure from a prior orality, but in relation to other forms of iterability within the history of writing, understood now in its most capacious sense. The incest taboo, which Lévi-Strauss and so many anthropologists correlate with human existence, demonstrates this logic; it works by prohibition (which is to say the application of a general rule), and hence by classification, and by both conceiving and demanding substitution (of one object of desire for another). Indeed, the incest taboo becomes one among many names for language here. And as with all law, it is inseparable from violence. So Derrida refuses the romanticism that would efface the violence of the Nambikwara's world, especially violence between men and women.

Derrida is unconcerned about how one might retell the story of the Nambikwara more adequately, but anthropologists might, and indeed must, ask what such a critique demands. Many anthropologists have, of course, attempted to describe the mute texts of putatively oral cultures, in the diverse idioms of symbolic landscape (Munn 1973, Stewart & Strathern 2003), the "hidden transcripts" of everyday practice (Scott 1990), the "structuring structures" of domestic architecture (Bourdieu 1977), etc. But these acknowledgments of a "literacy" that exceeds the question of alphabetic or scriptural competence are often still saturated with the belief that those populations without writing possess an authenticity and a proximity to nature (an immediacy) that mark their historical priority and their vulnerability to corruption. If exceptions exist to this implicit teleology, such as Pierre Clastres's *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians* (1998 [1972]), which argues that the Guayaki are not primordially innocent of civilization but have lost agriculture (and sedentary life), they are rare—and Clastres himself ultimately returned to the romanticism of a certain primitivist anarchism (Clastres 1987 [1974], 1994 [1980]; Lefort 2000 [1987]).

TRACE AND ITERATION: A CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPTS OF CULTURE AND RITUAL AS REPRODUCTION

Having considered in such detail the particular readings to which Derrida submitted Lévi-Strauss's work, it is now possible to move more briskly to other strands of his thought. These remain continuous with the analyses of the early works, although they add new terms and objects, deepening or clarifying aspects of the argument about writing. Among the most significant for anthropology is Derrida's development of Freud's concept of the unconscious. Given the ill repute in which Freudian thought is generally held in anthropology—usually on the grounds that the Oedipal formation is a historicizable and culturally relative structure for conceiving filiation and sexual difference—this aspect of Derrida's thought was perhaps doomed to resistance.

Ortner (2006) sums up the anxiety about the unconscious as an anxiety about the political. She calls, instead, for a recognition of the intentionality, subjectivity, and agency of individual actors, lest one efface the political capacities of individuals, who "[try to] act on the world even as they are acted upon" (p. 110). This is not the place to examine the concepts of subjectivity and agency posited

by Ortner, or these concepts' affinity with the discourses of possessive individualism. But we cannot overlook the degree to which this neohumanism functions as an alibi under which to conflate very different concepts of the unconscious: that of Lévi-Strauss, for whom the unconscious is composed of universal forms of thought, and that of Freud, for whom the unconscious provides the structure in which individuation can occur, but which ensures that the individual psyche is always split and overflowing of its boundaries.

Freud treats the psyche as an always particular structure of mediation within which exposures to the phenomenal world precisely escape immediate reflection (and hence "experience"), passing both by and through consciousness to a domain where they constitute a reserve. The detour and the delay that afflict the psyche is, in Freud's analysis, a mechanism for deferring what would otherwise endanger it (Freud 1955 [1920]; Derrida 1982a, p. 18l; 1978c, p. 201). The "resurfacing" of the traces produced in this process, often in response to other stimuli and trace formations, is that on which consciousness reflects. Memory is thus the effect of a resistance, but it is also an opening to those events or stimulations that might otherwise harm the psyche. Derrida speaks of this process in the idiom of the trace, which is the function of a "breaching," stating that it is the differential between the various breachings that produces memory (1978c, p. 203). Here, Derrida emphasizes the quality of deferral and reserve in a manner that forecloses the possibility of simple or transparent recall. It is an analysis that demands a rethinking of all those discourses and institutions ostensibly dedicated to memory: the museum, the archive, and indeed, any movement devoted to the reclamation of genealogical relation (Derrida 1995a).

An understanding of memory as *différance* and as trace constitutes a major challenge to any concept of culture that presumes it is either a repository of collective memory or the unconscious structure that determines or enables—on the analogy of script and en-

actment, score and performance—individual or even collective actions and possibilities. Anthropologists who have worked on questions of recovered memory as a collective phenomenon associated with accusations of child abuse or with alien abduction, for example, have had to confront the question of memory's lack of transparency to an original event, and it is not incidental that a certain Derridean reading of Freud makes its appearance in those texts as much as in any others (e.g., Battaglia 2005; Lepselter 1997, 2005). But the vast cottage industry on collective memory, particularly in periods of political normalization or transitions out of totalitarianism—many influenced by Maurice Halbwachs's *Collective Memory* (1950)—might well benefit from Derrida's insights. Too often the problem of analysis in these works is imagined as that of recovery: of lost artifacts, deceased witnesses, or corrupted testimonies. When faced with incoherence or discontinuity in the record or the recall of otherwise interrupted histories, this kind of approach often leads one to hypothesize either dissimulation or ignorance (whether as trauma or as ideological mystification), both of which may be sustained within social constructivist accounts of "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1982). Ironically, given their subject matter, these models share an implicit concept of at least collective intentionality. What is represented as a disturbance of historical consciousness produced by economic hardship or political violence, for example, is then conceived as a blockage of what would otherwise have been the continuous production and reproduction of meaningful worlds.

However, if culture cannot be construed as a repository of collective memory, it cannot be conceived as that which is merely reproduced through the performative logic of ritual either. At least this is the implication of Derrida's discourse on the performative, from "Signature Event Context" (1995d [1972]) forward. In this essay, Derrida asserts the simultaneous iterability of all cultural marks and the irreducibility of such iterations to a question of

reproduction (of repetition without difference). This much has already been noted, but the implications of this analysis for the question of intentionality, and hence for those kinds of culturalism oriented by the idea of agency, have not yet been plumbed. They emerge most clearly in Derrida's debate with the Austinian theorists of illocution, and especially Searle (1977; also Felman 1983; Norris 1987, pp. 172–93; Spivak 1980).

Derrida begins by questioning the concept of written communication as that which transmits meaning between senders and receivers. If we begin with the assumption, which Austin and Searle both acknowledge and Derrida emphasizes, that such communication can take place in the absence of the receiver (who may be physically distant, or not even yet born) but also the sender, we are left with the impression that writing takes place only when it is assumed that such an absence is not only possible but likely or even inevitable. Otherwise, why write? Of course, one writes to oneself as well—and Searle adduces the grocery list as an example of such writing to oneself, using it to claim that writing is not determined by absence, and indeed that it is contained in and by the self-presence of the sender, whose intentions determine the fact of communication. Although he gives up the idea that proximity obviates the need for writing, Searle overlooks the conditioning possibilities for communicating at all. Derrida remarks that the very fact of communication between persons, even those seated next to each other, implies a distance and difference between them. They are not fully self-present. The same can be said in the situation hypothesized by Searle, namely of writing a grocery list for oneself. To speak to oneself, in whatever form, is to express the fact that the individual psyche is itself internally divided. Lest this be thought of as a mode of psychosis, one should note, as Spivak does (1980, p. 32), that Derrida treats this fact not as the grounds for nihilism but as a recognition that lack of self-presence is what enables communication and hence sociality.

It is a positive fact, a necessary condition of being-with-others.

As for intention, Derrida holds onto the concept while rethinking it as the expression of a desire (a structural fact realized in individuals) for a communicative relationship in which meanings would indeed be received and interpreted as their senders intended them to be (Spivak 1980, p. 30). This notion seems, initially, to bear some similarity to Habermas's (1981) concept of the ideal speech situation, but a conscious ideal (of shared meanings) is not the same as an unconscious desire, and in the difference between these concepts a very different kind of analytic emerges. If intentionality is the expression of a desire for that which cannot be assumed, then we have the basis of an anthropology of "positive" or "productive" misunderstanding as much as an anthropology of shared meanings. One particularly potent example of this comes in Siegel's *The Rope of God* (2000), where he describes the conflicting and simultaneous intentions of female and male speakers in a situation (Atjeh after the collapse of the pepper economy) where domestic relations are sustained by mistranslation: Women offer men what they understand as indulgence, whereas men believe themselves to be receiving deferral.

This is a different kind of "failure" than that which Derrida asserts is the universal susceptibility of all speech acts conceived in their illocutionary dimension (as acts conceived in terms of their effect on the world rather than their semantic content), but it is not unrelated to it. Siegel's point is that the effectivity of the communication is partly independent of meaning, and it may rely precisely on the existence of a gap between intended and received meaning. The concept of the performative comes apart under such scrutiny, and the implications are nowhere more profound than in the analysis of that anthropological fetish, ritual—and especially that category of ritual that accords a central place to spells and speech acts aimed at the transformation of the world through processes of authorized naming. The examples

of the performative most familiar to anthropologists are undoubtedly those associated with life-cycle rituals: events in which the identity or status of a person is publicly redesignated (birth, initiation, marriage, and death). Insofar as these rituals were conceived, in classical anthropology, as the instrumentation for the production and reproduction of social structure, and insofar as they work by dissociating individual persons from more perduring structures (permitting both individual transformation and social continuity), Derrida's analysis bears serious consideration.

This is especially true when we extend the category of ritual beyond *rites de passage*, as van Gennep (1960 [1909]) termed them and Turner (1969) analyzed them, to include all those gestures treated under the heading of "the everyday": habitual forms that "encumber" subjects and rise to consciousness only in the moment that they are neglected, violated, or formally altered (Bourdieu 1977). This kind of reiteration or habit is often presumed to constitute the ground of cultural continuity. Turner, of course, saw the space of ritual as the possible locus for generating new combinatory logics and thus unprecedented meanings within the symbolic field, but such invention was itself exceptional in his analysis and was most likely to emerge from the staged space of ritual death. Moreover, the innovation is often rendered, in his reading, like the failure of the quotation in Austin's analysis: as the exception whose exclusion from the normative ideal of the ritual, or the performative, is necessary for the ritual (as social reproduction) to operate "felicitously." At best, we can perhaps say that there is an intuition in Turner's work that, despite its containment within a structural-functional paradigm, is available for a rereading such as Derrida performs on Lévi-Strauss. It is the intuition that ritual, like all language, overflows itself and is subject to that most absolute of events, death, from which it attempts to derive its power and over which it attempts, with even greater effort, to exercise a containing mastery—the mastery of metaphor (Derrida 2005, p. 152).

Turner's sense of ritual's exceptionality, broadly shared in anthropology, contains within itself the contradiction that Derrida discerns in Austin's theory. It rests on an act of decontextualization, which also, and simultaneously, provides the context within which the event can be read as ritual per se. If the boundary between event and context is understood as an undecidable one, however, then the boundedness of ritual must also be questioned. This does not mean that people do not perceive these events as exceptional—they certainly do. But instead of assuming that this exceptionality is an internal attribute of ritual, one can then pose the question of how and by which operations the appearance of a boundary is produced, as well as how and under which circumstances the event rises to the level of "ritual." This is not merely a question of delineating the gestures that separate off one day or act from the others, but of asking how the thematization of such gestures as ritual makes them available to legitimate local power, or to subject them to colonial repression, for example. An anthropological investigation of this process, understood via Derrida, would ask how a variety of different acts can be classified as being of the type, "ritual," when, at other times and in other circumstances, they would be innocuous or differently named. Pemberton (1994) has, for example, deftly read the history of ritual discourse in Indonesian and especially Javanese politics as a process of classifying a wide variety of practices that, when signified as ritual, can become the basis for mystifying power and sublating it in the idea of culture. He shows that the designation of particular events as rites and of rites as ritual is not an innocent terminological practice but one redolent with the interests of dominant classes, and he makes clear that the linking of ritual with culture works to efface such interests in the idea of order.

The second corollary of this erasure of the boundary between event and context is that the intended effects of the ritual can never be understood as achieving completion.

The ritual, always dependent on the context from which it is separated out, is in fact insufficient to produce what it names. Such a reading of ritual has, perhaps, been most effectively extended into the domain of gender studies, where it has led to a recognition that the effect of rites of gender assignment or marriage, for example, is less the accomplishment of a new categorical status than the demand that individuals continually reiterate the forms within which that status would be socially legible (Butler 1993; Morris 1995, 2006). What Butler terms "stylized repetitions" (she does not use the Derridean lexicon in her earlier work, but relies mainly on Foucault and Althusser) can be understood in terms of the always deferred nature of writing (in its broader sense). On this basis, some authors have seen in such rites an opportunity for liberation from social norms. However, it is not enough to say that failure is as much a possibility as is felicitous performance, and hence that ritual is an occasion from which to disavow the ideal (Kulik 2000). Every iteration must, by definition, fail to achieve the fictive ideal of the performative.

In the end, the question of iterability—rather than reproduction without difference—entails an absolutely radical challenge for anthropology. The culture concept has never not been tied, at least provisionally, to the idea of social reproduction—through child-rearing practices, formal institutions of education, life-cycle rituals, architectural form, mythologization, political ritual, etc. As Derrida himself remarks, in one of his last books, *Rogues* (2005 [2003]), the rhetoric of reproduction is acquiring new force in the age of genetic engineering and cloning. These technologies often express the fantasy of absolute repetition. Derrida's call for an interrogation of every desire for reproduction without difference seems especially salutary, given that this logic is not confined to the realm of biotechnology but extends into the political as well—as, for example, when the mimicry of Western political forms is demanded as the condition of receiving foreign aid. The implications of this double technology—of both biological and cultural (as well as national-cultural) self-extension—ultimately entail the exclusion of difference. And it is not surprising that much of the impetus for developing genomic technologies comes from social, religious, and political projects that aim to map racial identities in time, in terms of descent from a putatively pure origin that they seek to preserve or restore (see Abu El-Haj 2007).

But the drive to reproduction has enormous force in the lives of individuals and communities. What is this force that drives the drive to reproduction, even if mere reproduction would mean death? With Derrida, we can hold on to Freud's observation that it is the failure of pure reproduction that ensures cultural life. To think the structure of this strange death-dealing but also life-giving circle is to think the gift.

THE GIFT AND THE GHOSTWRITING OF CAPITAL

Nowhere is Derrida's work more dependent on the contributions of anthropology than in his theorization of the gift. In its most distilled form, the gift is the figure of the impossible for Derrida (1992, p. 7), an impossibility associated with the tautological nature of economy in general. Drawing on Greek etymology, Derrida asserts that the word "economy" implies both the value of home and the obligation to distribute, circulate, and exchange (1992, p. 6). These are attributes of economy in its most general sense, including the ostensible (and seemingly oxymoronic) gift economies described by Mauss. For Mauss, of course, the gift is a figure of totality (Mauss 1969 [1925], pp. 1, 3). Moreover, this totality transcends the division of society into the spheres of economy, polity, and religion (see also Sahlins 1976). Gifts are that which must be given and circulated, but whose movement does not constitute an alienation for the giver (something of the person remains in and of the gift, says Mauss). They must also be returned,

but in a manner that prohibits the appearance of their simply being rejected. Hence, the "return" must also make visible a difference; instantaneity and perfect commensuration are prohibited by it. Time, as Derrida remarks in all his writings on the topic, is an irreducible element of the gift.

Mauss himself speculates that the gift is the origin of contractual relations and the means by which communities terminate warfare (Mauss 1969 [1925], p. 80). His argument has been applied to capitalism as well, and indeed it expresses something of the ideology of liberalism. Whether this explains the return to Mauss and the proliferation of studies of the gift (of which Derrida's reading must be counted as one) during the 1980s and afterward (e.g., Appadurai 1986; Godelier 1999 [1996]; Humphrey & Hugh-Jones 1992; Munn 1986; Strathern 1988; Weiner 1976, 1992), as Janet Roitman (2003, pp. 212–13) remarks, remains to be analyzed. In most of these writings, "the productivity of debt [is] . . . understood in terms of a primary relation that puts debtor-creditor relations at the very base of social relations" (Roitman 2003, p. 212). They take off from Mauss's observation that sovereignty exists only when the gift (and debt) is refused (Mauss 1969, p. 71). Mauss's own analysis leads him to posit sovereignty as an interruption of sociality, then, not that from which the gift extracts people by substituting exchange relations for warfare. In other words, one is always already in debt—which is to say, in need of the social.

Derrida takes Mauss at his word and goes further to emphasize the contradictions inherent in "the gift," as a figure, and not merely in gift-giving as a sociological fact at odds with its own ideology. Rereading Lévi-Strauss's analysis of Mauss, he observes how the resolution of these contradictions is invariably achieved in structuralist anthropology by invoking indigenous terms and concepts for a mysterious force within the thing (Derrida 1992 [1991], p. 77), most famously the *hau* of the Maori. These lexical units supplement (in Derrida's sense) the ambivalence of the Indo-European words for the gift, which often imply both giving and receiving (Derrida 1992, p. 79; Mauss 1969). In place of this transcendental signifier, which always remains untranslated, Derrida speaks of the impossible and, in the related work, *The Gift of Death* (1995b [1992]), defines the gift as that which cannot be recognized without being annulled. It is the secret rather than the metaphysical origin of sociality (1995b, pp. 29–30). The secret, it must be noted, is not the secreted thing but the fabricated discourse of a withholding, behind which there may be absence or presence.

Undoubtedly, the analysis of the gift has been the most congenial of all Derrida's writings for anthropologists, appearing, in so many ways, as an exculpation rather than a critique of Mauss, especially in relation to Lévi-Strauss's reading. Maurer attributes the appeal of Derrida in economic anthropology to the fact that the problem of money is, invariably, a problem of representation, "revolv[ing] around questions of identity, trust, and faith in the stability of that which is evident to the senses, . . . [but] backed by nothing at all (Maurer 2006, p. 28; also 2005, pp. 157–58). The Platonic problem of sensibility versus intelligibility returns here, and it is largely in these terms that Derrida's revision of Marx has also been read. In *Specters of Marx* (1994 [1993]), Derrida brings to the fore Marx's analysis of the value form as a spectralized and spectralizing entity, one based on abstraction and the temporary effacement or suspension of the sensuously perceptible difference in material actuality. This abstraction is premised on an anticipation of use and a simultaneous deferral of consumption—consumption being the end point of the exchange relation and of abstraction itself (Derrida 1994, pp. 148–63). Exchange both presumes a social relation and seems indispensable for the production of that relation. Thus, in an analysis that is as Kantian (or even Aristotelian) as it is Marxian, he emphasizes the logical priority of the category of value, vis-à-vis the empirical determination of either use or exchange value (see also Keenan 1997).

The object of the analysis in *Specters* is, first, money, and second, financial capital—understood as self-(re)producing money. The specter he identifies is thus that by which money seems to generate its own excess—its surplus. As Spivak has observed, this argument is dangerously close to reproducing the bourgeois economics that Marx himself eschewed, and she takes Derrida to task for not considering either the place of industrial capital in general or the fact that, in the extraction of surplus value from laborers under the current economic dispensation [in which, some scholars say, circulation has supplanted production as the locus of value-production (Baudrillard 1981, Goux 1973)], the disenfranchised poor and especially women become increasingly and specifically subject to the operations of transnational capital. These are the particular bodies being spectralized that disappear in the abstractions of "reproductive rights," "population control," and "post-Fordist homeworking," among others (Cheah 2007; Ong 1999; Rofel 1999; Wright 1999, 2001). Such processes, Spivak reminds us, are enabled not merely by law but by the specific collusions of international treaty organizations, transnational capital, and the aspirants of national capital in the global south (Spivak 1995).

One cannot help but observe that it is in the relative effacement of labor in the analysis of capital that Derrida's limitations as a thinker of gender become most transparent. There is a great deal in Derrida's writings about matters of sexual difference—from the erotic play of the *The Post Card* (1987a), to the question of heritability within the Abrahamic tradition in *Circumfession* (1993a), to the problematizing of the fraternal in *The Politics of Friendship* (1997), and the rethinking of the feminine "chora" as a dimension of writing in *Khôra* (1993b). But the concern with sexual difference never generates an analysis of the labor of women, as opposed to the (conceptual or structural) labor of the feminine. A full assessment of Derrida's thought would have to account for this, just as it would have

to account for the fact that, despite the enormous conceptual investment made by Derrida in the idea of auto-immunity, he almost never mentions AIDS or pharmaceutical capital (another significant factor in the realignment of state sovereignty under neoliberalism)—even as a figure of catastrophe. This spectralizing, of women and those afflicted with HIV, must necessarily haunt anthropologists who are otherwise moved by Derrida's effort to reclaim from Marx's ghost, as from religion, the aspiration to justice.

Perhaps, one could say, it is less capital and certainly not capitalism, than Marx's commitment to the messianic that concerns Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, and in this way it remains a book about the gift, and thus about economy writ large. What Derrida holds on to from Marx is the "messianic affirmation" that nonetheless resists "metaphysico-religious determination" (1994, p. 89). This demands a relentless auto-critique and willingness to break with the party and "produce events." The orientation and receptivity to the event need not actually posit an event or "reveal" it, in the Christian idiom; it must simply think the possibility of the event (1995b, p. 49). Under the influence of Levinas, Derrida construes this openness to the event as a form of radical responsibility to the Other, and it is for this reason that his meditation on Marx and Marxism leads him to insist on the necessity of thinking the political and the religious together. His effort to redeem from Marx a messianicity without messianism is at one with his effort to redeem from religion (and also from Hegel) a religion without determinate content (Derrida 2002b [1996]; Smith 1998).

It is nonetheless significant that one of the most popular of Derrida's texts, even and perhaps especially among anthropology students, is the one that comes closest to being a metaphysical text—and it is questionable whether the invocation of a messianicity without metaphysics is sufficient to escape the charges of theological mystification, or at least determinate religiosity. Caputo (1997),

for example, reads Derrida's response to Marxism as a fifth messianism, one that locates Marxism in the tradition of the historically determined monotheistic messianisms, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (p.140). In his attempt to purge Marxist messianism of its inherently violent tendencies, however, Derrida largely passes over Marx's sociologically significant questions. Anthropologists can and should lament the fact that *Specters of Marx* fails to address the historical organization of productive relations or the fact that financialization does not do away with the industrial system, especially given Derrida's interest in the mechanical and the automatic as principles within language that are differently mobilized by religious and technological developments. And this omission may confirm some skeptics' sense that Derrida is, in the end, not merely Eurocentric in his references but ethnocentric in outlook (Caputo 1997, Rorty 1995); there is precious little about the global south in this book, and although questions of migrants, especially in France, occasionally surface, they are secondary. The category of the messianic, metaphysical or not, is thought entirely within the Abrahamic tradition; there is no mention, for example, of the alternative messianisms offered by an at least ostensibly antimetaphysical Buddhism—and nothing about those traditions that lack the messianic altogether. Moreover, the ghost of Soviet socialism, whose demise is the original incitement for the book, inspires as much melancholy as horror; neither the grotesqueries of the gulag nor the criminal usurpation of the social dividend aided and abetted by U.S.-backed financial institutions after 1989 receives much careful analysis, although these might also have been thought in terms of a negative messianism.

NO JUSTICE: ECONOMY AND LAW, OR THE QUESTION OF THE POLITICAL

One of the most significant shifts in contemporary thought attributable to Derrida's interventions is the turn from normative analyses of the political to considerations of ethics. Again, because Derrida believes that all determinate political regimes rest on forms of exclusion, and tend inevitably to violence, his critical project seeks to adumbrate an ethics of openness, or nonexclusion. In his reading of the violence in the Middle East, for example, he questions those efforts to "appropriate" Jerusalem that rest on the exclusion of the Palestinians (Derrida 2002b). In his analysis of the discourse on "rogue" states, he observes the predicament of the North African immigrants in France and questions the hypocrisy of hospitality when it is construed as a relation of reciprocity bound by law, and hence as a demand for mirroring (Derrida 2005 [2003]).

In these readings, law is inhabited by the logic of the double bind. It is both that which contains and reduces or even inhibits justice, and that through which human beings must nonetheless attempt to pursue justice. Economy is the domain of law, the name of a demand for commensuration and normativization. The relationship between law and language, law and force, particularly as it is analyzed in Derrida's reading of Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, has been extremely productive for many anthropologists, particularly those working in contexts afflicted by state violence and its "phantomatic other," criminality, and terrorism (Aretxaga 2003, 2005a; Sanchez 2001; Siegel 1998).

In many cases, however, the invocation of Derrida's reading of Benjamin does not remark the difference between Benjamin's (1979 [1921]) original argument, that law is severed from justice in the moment that the police take on themselves the work of decision, administering violence to annul violence, and Derrida's. And it must be noted that Derrida (1991) rejects the metaphysical fantasy of divine violence at the end of Benjamin's essay, while also respecting the insight that justice and law must always be heterogeneous to each other. It is thus ironic that it is the question of justice on which Derrida is so often accused of lacking political realism and relevance.

Eagleton (2003) recoils before a hallucinated court case in which Derrida is on the jury, unable to decide anything because ethical decisions are, in Eagleton's representation of Derrida's thought, "utterly 'impossible,' . . . outside norms, forms of knowledge and modes of conceptualization." Similarly, Das (2007, p. 9) worries that the critique of presence by which Derrida unsettles the notion of signature can be deployed by the institutions of power, and specifically the state, to negate the authenticity of testimony from those whose injuries it refuses to acknowledge (especially when it has caused them). Perhaps we can acknowledge the improbability that any state would deploy a critique of presence as a means of evading the testimony of complainants against state violence—although Clifford (1988) has given us a sobering account of what can happen in a court of law operating on positivist presumptions when "expert witnesses" deploy a crude form of social constructionism to argue the case of indigenous complainants while also repudiating the ideas of tradition and cultural authenticity. Povinelli (2002), although certainly not a Derridean, has nonetheless defended the possibility that one can undertake a critique of the archive and its ideology of authenticity, as well as the politics of recognition, while also intervening in the field of law in the interest of minoritized communities. There is no need to point the stick of political exigency to stave off the demands of Derridean reading (Beardsworth 1996).

CONTEXTS OF RECEPTION AND DISSEMINATION

How, then, has this form of reading been engaged within anthropology? Derrida's "deconstructionism" entered a disciplinary space that was coming under pressure from different schools of criticism, many of which took, as their point of departure, the premises of structuralism. Its changing fortunes in and for the discipline must thus be understood against this backdrop of more general foment.

Lamont (1987) attempts to explain the "dominance" of Derrida's thought within the American academy as a function of its "fit" within a "highly structured cultural system," achieved partly through the targeting of his work to the French intelligentsia and the American "market" through journals and research groups comprised of his students, as well as a strategic affiliation with members of the "private elite universities that had been the centers of literary criticism." She further suggests that Derrida's style garnered him cultural capital, simply because its inaccessibility signified philosophical erudition and therefore generated "prestige," or what Bourdieu (1984) would call "distinction." Whether Derrida ever assumed "dominance" is a matter open to dispute, and certainly this is not the case in the human sciences. However, in addition to her erroneous descriptions of Derrida's conceptual interventions, and her improbable identification of his thought with that of other Marxist dialecticians (Lamont 1987, pp. 591–95), Lamont's analysis remains incapable of grasping the tensions with and resistances to his writing, or the complex and often antagonistic relationship it had with other forms of poststructuralism. In this respect, however, she is not alone. Derrida has even been described as participating with Foucault in a single "line of attack" on those conceptions of the public sphere based on the presumption of a transparently communicating, metaphysically grounded individual self (Reddy 1992). The matter deserves more careful scrutiny.

In the same year that Derrida delivered "Structure, Sign, and Play," Foucault, one of Derrida's teachers, published *Les Mots et les Choses* (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*). There, Foucault (1994 [1966]) attributed to anthropology a "constituent role in modern thought" but one in which the Kantian question, "What is man?" produced a confusion of the transcendental and the empirical (1994, pp. 340–43). Anthropology was, for Foucault, the "sleep" of philosophy, a redoubled dogmatism [Derrida (1978b) would also use this rhetoric

of somnolence when describing structuralism (p. 4)]. Like Derrida, he questioned the anthropological desire to find in empirical actuality the basis for a metaphysical pursuit of the foundation of all knowledge. And, like Derrida, he too observed the emergent domination of the human sciences by models derived from language and linguistics. [When Schildkraut (2004, p. 319) observes the preponderant concern with inscription in the anthropology of the body, citing Foucault and Derrida as examples, she both corroborates their observations and misrecognizes them as the objects of those observations.]

According to Foucault, the human sciences have historically been organized in binary pairs: conflict and rule, function and norm, and finally, sign and signification. As language-based models assumed a dominant place in social theory, these pairs came to be dominated by their second terms (rule, norm, signification) (Foucault 1994, p. 357). As this occurred, the sciences of man became complicit with the positing of alterity as criminal, nonnormative, or insignificant (Foucault 1994, p. 350). Moreover, it became the task of the human sciences to understand the relationship between the two terms in each set. The dominance of psychoanalysis and ethnology in the twentieth century can be explained, Foucault asserts, because they construed this relationship in terms of the unconscious (1994, p. 373).

In an argument over their respective readings of Descartes and the history of madness, Derrida accused Foucault of complicity with the same metaphysics he derided (1978a). And Foucault retorted by accusing Derrida of reducing discourse to traces and of eliding events, but also of consolidating the sovereignty of the pedagogue, whose mastery consists merely in reading (Foucault 1979 [1972]; Spivak 1976, pp. lxi–lxii). It was a criticism that appealed to anthropologists, and thus, although there were detractors, and ambivalence even among his creditors, Foucault came to dominate the American anthropological scene as the bearer of a self-consciously politicized poststructuralism (see, for example, Comaroff 1985, Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982, Stoler 1995). Derrida himself rejected the term poststructuralism (2005, p. 174), but his work was often classed as part of the same phenomenon.

What was Foucault's appeal, and why did it lead to a relative resistance to Derrida? To begin, his privileged metaphors of genealogy and archaeology had an obvious resonance for practitioners whose work often entailed the diagrammatic study of kinship and the excavation of ruins. But it was perhaps the affinity between Foucault's concept of episteme and American anthropology's concept of culture, tempered under the influence of structuralism, that conditioned the discipline's relative receptivity to his thought. And even if, as Marcus & Cushman (1982) argue, Foucault's concepts of "episteme" and "discourse" seem remote from the kind of empirical minutiae that anthropologists usually investigate, the sweep of his conclusions has proved no deterrent to many.

Foucault's lure was enhanced by his focus on the body as the ground of both normativity and transgression. The analytic of the body emerged from a reading of modern governmentality as a form of (bio)power operating through the microscopic management of life (Foucault 1984 [1975]). These ideas found fertile ground in a field already confronting the legacies of colonialism but still methodologically oriented toward the description of everyday life. Moreover, it addressed itself relatively overtly to the forms of liberationism that dominated the United States at the time. It was less the memory of Bandung or "Afro-Asian People's Solidarity" and the idea of nonalignment that swayed radical politics in the United States in the 1970s, than civil rights, antistatism, and the various agendas of feminism and queer liberation (in which the politics of pleasure were often as salient as those of social justice). Within anthropology, of course, there was more concern about the plight of the Third World, albeit as much as a space of loss as a locus of future-building. Still,

Clifford Geertz was espousing an anthropological analysis of the new nations (1963, 1971), and Dell Hymes was gathering those who wanted to rethink the discipline's imperial roots (1972; see also Asad 1973, Gough 1968; Fabian 1983, and Stocking 1991).

By the 1980s, popular culture and anthropological theory seemed to converge around a desire for a discursive foundation within which to conceive a corporealized politics of emancipation. Derrida's passing reference to Vietnam in "The Ends of Man" (1982b, p. 114) and his argument that ethnology is one of the compromised efforts to produce auto-critique through the "false exit" of an encounter with the West's outside (1982b, pp. 134–35) undoubtedly appeared inadequate or even contrary to this task. Meanwhile, leftist critics, such as Terry Eagleton, accused him of defeatism after the failure of the student uprisings in May 1968 (Eagleton 1983, p. 143; 1986).

And, if not Foucault, then Bourdieu. Without the Nietzschean element of transgression central to Foucault's thought, Bourdieu's concept of practice (1977) offered anthropologists both the lure of structure and the temptation of corporeality, conceived as part of a dialectic in which experience (bedrock of phenomenology and the idea of participant observation) is the essence of historicity (Ortner 1984). All this was cast within a rather conventional discourse of class, but with the recognition that the conspicuous display of cultural knowledge (and not merely consumption) now functions as the basis of recognition. Like Foucault and many of the other left poststructuralists, Bourdieu (1984) takes issue with Derrida and the Derridean critique of his own work, also on the grounds that Derrida effaces the exigencies of political actuality.

ENEMIES AND FAUX AMIS

For many anthropologists, Derrida was simply one of many taking a stab at an antiquated science. Marcus & Cushman (1982, pp. 56–57) place him alongside not only Foucault, but also Roland Barthes, Edward Said, and Raymond Williams. Geertz (2002) later categorizes Derrida as part of an "elusive and equivocal" movement (among other movements, including feminism, anti-imperialism, indigenous rights, and gay liberation), whose members included Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari. Marshall Sahlins (1999), eschewing the idea of "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1982) denounces "afterological" anthropologists for being the only people without culture and without a desire for it (p. 404). He borrows the witticism from Jacqueline Mraz and uses it as an umbrella term for all forms of "postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism and the like"—including those influenced by Derrida (but see Derrida 2005, p. 174).

In those parts of the discipline still under the sway of structuralism, the critiques of Lévi-Strauss made little impact. Thus, for example, in the more than 1400 pages of the two-volume *Échanges et Communications* (Pouillon & Maranda 1970), featuring 88 different authors including French, English, and American writers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Dumont, Luc de Heusch, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, Jack Goody, Edmund Leach, Julian Pitt-Rivers, Marshall Sahlins, Evon Vogt, James Peacock, David Schneider, and Thomas Sebeok, only one mention is made of Derrida. Hugo Nutini (1970) briefly acknowledges Derrida's importance in situating Lévi-Strauss within the French intellectual tradition—but only after remarking the likely resistance, among Anglo-Americans, to his difficult language and the "quasi-metaphysical tone of the argument" (p. 544).

The accusation of obscurantism has achieved the status of a cliché (Hicks 1981, p. 964; also Doja 2006). Derrida's (2005, p. 113) response to such criticisms, that his work is no more difficult than that of his philosophical predecessors—Plato, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Husserl—is hard to dispute, but perhaps inadequately consoling for the defenders of transparency.

One could, perhaps, have imagined a more sympathetic reading of Derrida in the space opened by Geertz, to the extent that Geertz rejected any idea of a humanity prior to language, symbolization, and culture. More importantly, Geertz seems to have acknowledged an originary but also unlocatable lack, on which basis the human/linguistic being of humans could be understood only as an endless becoming: "We are . . . incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture" (Geertz 1973a [1966], p. 49). However, it was not toward deconstruction that Geertz's interpretive anthropology would move but toward the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein. Geertz never thought of the originary lack as an aporia. It was precisely that which could be satisfied in and by culture. His notion of the supplement, if one may use that term here, was one of quasi-theological satisfaction and completion. Indeed, and for this very reason, he would come under attack by many who found in the concept of culture as a "web of meanings," public and shared (Geertz 1973c), a strategy for effacing the questions of power and difference within society.

Moreover, linguistically oriented anthropologists who were, like Derrida, concerned with questioning the fantasy of transparent representation were as likely to turn to Peircean semiotics as they were to deconstruction (Daniel 1984; Gell 1998; Keane 1997a,b, 2003; Maurer 2005, 2006; Munn 1986; Silverstein 1976). Derrida (1976) himself acknowledged that Peirce, and especially his concept of secondness, "goes very far in the direction that I have called . . . deconstruction" (p. 49). But for many Peirceans, Derrida's notions of undecideability and play seem too limitless. They insist on an analysis of the meta-conditions within which such play is contained—the religious debates, cultural discourses, and political contexts in which, to use Foucault's language, the interested opposition between normativity and alterity is implemented (Keane 1997a). This concern

is compelling, and anthropologists cannot evade it, but it would be unfair not to acknowledge that the particular movements, philosophical arguments, and textual expressions of these containments are also the object of Derrida's critical readings—albeit rarely in their institutional manifestations.

Perhaps, the deeper if ironic condition of possible receptivity for Derrida lies not in the work of the culturalists, or the "linguistic turn," but in Malinowski's disciplinarily foundational conception of fieldwork. Often read as a naïve discourse premised on the fantasy of immediacy, Malinowski's advocacy of fieldwork was nonetheless attuned to the problem of meaning in a radical way. In his astonishingly perceptive essay, "Baloma, the spirits of the dead in a Trobriand society" (1954 [1916]), he describes the problem of definition in a cross-cultural encounter where the European terms of "substance," "nature," "cause," and "origin" have no counterparts. The Kiriniwinians with whom he speaks nonetheless answer to the anthropologist's skeptical questions about the nature of the spirits. Malinowski remarks that these answers are as much similes as definitions (1954, p. 167). That is to say, they refer elsewhere and announce themselves as part of a chain of signs, none of which can ultimately be anchored in the metaphysical touch-stones of "cause" or "origin." Although he does not emphasize this point, Malinowski's intuition, that the anthropological project is inherently a confrontation with this endlessly divisible quality of language and the impossibility of eliciting a metaphysical mirror for the West, can perhaps return us to a consideration of how and what a deconstructionist anthropology might be—an antipositivism that does not lead to the abandonment of empiricism [far from eschewing empiricism, Derrida confesses to it in *Of Grammatology* (1976, p. 162)].

The aspiration to find such an opening has been made before, and other anticipations of Derrida have been discovered in anthropology's archive. The most obvious

of these is Bateson, whose definition of information as "any difference that makes a difference" (Bateson 2000c [1970], p. 459) and whose use of the concepts of both "schismogenesis" and "double bind" (Bateson 2000b [1969], 2000d [1956]) are widely remarked for their idiomatic proximity to Derrida's translated concepts. Indeed, Sahlins (1993a) accuses contemporary anthropologists of forgetting these early interventions in favor of poststructuralist reinventions and displaying a "lapse of anthropological connection and knowledge" (p. 851). One does not need Derrida to observe that apparent resemblances may also mask deeper divergences, however.

Derrida's (1986, 1998 [1996]) concept of the double bind has a Freudian genealogy. It refers not only to a problem afflicting conscious decision-making, but to the internal dynamics of analysis, and of language as *différance* (Derrida 1998, p. 33). Derrida derives the notion from Freud, and especially the Freud of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1955 [1920]), for whom binding and unbinding provide the idiom in which to understand the psychic relationships to external stimuli. Borrowing and departing from this understanding, deconstruction radicalizes two seemingly contrary impulses: that which seeks the originary and that which engages in the "decomposition-recomposition of an active or passive synthesis" (Derrida 1998, p. 28). This structure underpins all deconstructive analysis, which aims to disclose the inextricability of terms which otherwise appear to be opposed. It can perhaps be seen most clearly in the logic of the *pharmakon*, in which cure and poison are mutually entailed, but it applies more generally and in some ways constitutes a disavowal of analytic closure (Derrida 1998, p. 34). The undecidability of analysis entailed by this logic does not disable the capacity to decide, practically, between alternatives in everyday life, although Derrida is often accused of as much. Rather, it describes the encumbrance of decision, the provisionality, and hence the ethical burden of decision,

which must be made in the absence of absolute determinations.

Bateson's concept of the double bind is significantly different. It describes a pathological sequence of circumstances, usually within a familial setting, whereby a maternal figure (or other family member) gives contactory messages to a child, but also fails to give the metacommunicative signals that would allow the child to distinguish and prioritize demands. As a result, the child does not develop an ability to differentiate between orders of meaning and may develop schizophrenia. In Bateson's (2000d [1956]) earliest theorization of this development, he emphasizes the schizophrenic's confusion of metaphoric and literal meaning, and the forms of defensive or paranoid behavior that result from such confusion (pp. 209–11). In his later consideration of the phenomenon, he acknowledges that "there is an experiential component in the determination or etiology of schizophrenic symptoms and related behavoral patterns, such as humor, art, poetry, etc." (2000b [1969], p. 272). The schizophrenic is thus one who cannot redeem or transform the collapse of distinctions between the literal and the metaphoric. In any case, the important point for a consideration of the difference between Bateson and Derrida is that for Bateson the indeterminacy of the boundary between metaphoricity and literalism is exceptional, whereas, for Derrida, it is intrinsic to all analytic gestures and indeed to all decision-making in the political sphere.

As for schismogenesis, in Bateson's (2000a [1935]) conception, it refers to the internal differentiation of societies into groups—sometimes becoming extreme enough to fracture the societies—which may be either symmetrical, as when rivalry produces a mutually inciting set of oppositions between subsets of the culture, or complementary, as when hierarchies marked by domination and submission develop between groups (p. 68). The groups nonetheless remain relatively internally homogeneous. This is a very long way from Derrida's concept of *différance*.

But Sahlins (1983, p. 4) persists: "If culture must be conceived as always and only changing . . . then there can be no such thing as identity, or even sanity, let alone continuity." *Différance* is not change, of course. It is divisibility and deferral. And we would do well to remember that it was Sahlins who demanded of anthropology that it take account of the "event" and not merely the persistent structures (1983, p. 534). Although his concept of the "structure of the conjuncture" (Sahlins 1985) ultimately annuls the eventfulness of the event, Sahlins's call liberated anthropology for an entirely new kind of historicism. And Derrida renews the gift.

LESSONS, NOT LEGENDS

Beyond the misreadings, the dismissals, and the disavowals, there is nonetheless a significant and increasingly compelling body of anthropological literature that has taken within itself some of the "reading lessons" (not only the "writing lesson") of Derrida. One cannot survey all this work or provide an institutional accounting of its emergence, although one can briefly identify some of the dominant concerns in these works. It is not insignificant, however, that much of it has been produced by those who were students of Siegel at Cornell University and who studied at Cornell during the period when deconstructionism was being more widely discussed in humanities circles. Siegel remains the most thoroughly and rigorously Derridean anthropologist in the field today, as is discussed below. Others have, of course, embraced some of the arguments and implications of Derrida's readings of anthropological texts, and these have been appropriated and incorporated in a variety of ways. We can note a certain thematic convergence in these works, however, and this exceeds the question of areal focus. All of them share a commitment to reading and rereading local discourse to find the sources of internal difference and indeed critical possibility. Thus, for example, Rafael (2005) and Rutherford (2002) emphasize the idea and the work of the for-

eign, as an object of both desire and disavowal, which is simultaneously internal and external to local identity in various parts of Indonesia and the Philippines.

Ivy (1995) writes of the complex retrojection of a past on which basis the present unity of Japan could be fantasized, while examining how Japanese ethnology and culturalism worked by allying the past with an orality that it had overcome. Similarly, Willford (2006) considers the emergence of an ethnic fetish in Malaysia and the uncanny dynamic that casts the past as something simultaneously "surmounted" and "familiar." Spyer's (2008) reading of the parergonal structure, within which the cassowary was excluded from representation but ultimately rendered available for photographic inscription as Aru came into modernity, relies on Derrida's *Truth in Painting* (1987b [1978]). And Sanchez's (2001) account of spirit possession and cultic politics in Venezuela treats them as forms of inscription in Derrida's sense and notes that the value of substitution is elevated to fetish status in times of political crisis. His sense of the phantomaticity of law in this context owes much to Derrida and echoes Aretxaga's (2005b) readings of Basque and northern Irish insurgencies vis-à-vis a state experienced mainly in the form of police violence, a state that produces its phantomatic others even as it produces itself by bringing violence to bear on them (Aretxaga 2003).

In studies of the archive (e.g., Bracken 1997, Kelly & Morton 2004), and in the analyses of religion and media, Derrida's interventions are increasingly seen to offer anthropologists a new means of comprehending the production of normativity (and not merely power, even in its dispersed Foucaultian sense). This is partly because it questions a certain post-Weberian tendency in the discipline to posit religion and media in opposition to each other and to invoke the mass media, in the sense of mechanical reproduction, as a causal factor in the phenomenon designated as religious revival. Derrida's argument, that technicity is internal

to the idea of religion, and that mass mediation can be seen only as a development within a history of mediation more generally, has helped prompt a revision in the ways that religion is problematized by anthropologists. Thus, for example, Morris (2000) reads the response of Thai spirit mediums to new forms of technologized mediation not as that which revives a ruptured tradition, but as that which redoubles a tendency already within that form of mediation which is possession, while also generating the fantasy and felt loss of a premediatic tradition (see also Mazzarella 2004, p. 357). Much has yet to be done, beyond repeating it, with Derrida's observation (2002a, 2005) that religion, conceived from within the discourses of the European philosophy, is already a latinization and that globalization is also a "globalatinization." But this project is now being undertaken, beginning with a reflection on the false opposition between secularity and the theological (Asad 2003, Csordas 2004, Mahmood 2005).

If these references give the impression of a veritable "school of thought" within anthropology, the impression is exaggerated. Lamont's vision of the dominant philosopher notwithstanding, few anthropologists not already predisposed to philosophical rumination have been affected by Derrida's insights. To understand more fully what might be gained from reading Derrida, and hence what his legacy could be, one can consider both the work done under his influence and that which would have been very different had it taken on board the deconstructionist critique. I begin with the latter, by considering the current debate about the Pirahã. This debate has entered the mainstream of popular intellectual culture in the United States, and I review it here because it reproduces in so many ways the problems that Derrida discerned in Lévi-Strauss's account of the Nambikwara, but also because it indulges and even promotes the ethnocentric and primitivist sentiments of a public that continues to desire the authentic other as the means to legitimate its own claims to superiority.

THE WRITING LESSON, ONCE MORE

In April 2007, the *New Yorker* magazine published a lengthy article on Everett's (2005) controversial claims about the Pirahã, a community in the Amazon who he has described as having a language constrained by the "*restriction of communication to the immediate experience of the interlocutors*" (p. 622, emphasis in original). By this he means that "[g]rammar and other ways of living are restricted to concrete, immediate experience (where an experience is immediate in Pirahã if it has been seen or recounted as seen by a person alive at the time of telling), and immediacy of experience is reflected in immediacy of information—encoding—one event per utterance" (p. 622). Everett defines an utterance as a sentence. He then provides a series of transliterations, diagrams, and translations to argue that the Pirahã lack numbers, numerals, or a concept of counting; terms for quantification or color; and embedding. He asserts that they have the "simplest pronoun inventory known" and even that the "entire pronominal inventory may have been borrowed." The language has no perfect tense and no "individual or collective memory of more than two generations past." Moreover, the Pirahã people are said to lack fiction, creation myths, and the capacity to draw—except "crude stick figures representing the spirit world." They not only do not but they cannot write, he says (2005, p. 626).

In a lengthy footnote to his *Current Anthropology* article (incorrectly referenced in the *New Yorker* as *Cultural Anthropology*), Everett claims that he does not consider the Pirahã to be primitive, and moreover, that they have both a complex prosodic system and elaborate forms of joking and mendacity (Everett 2005, p. 621). The same ethnocentrism, which "everywhere and always, ha[s] controlled the concept of writing" (Derrida 1976, p. 3), is to be found here controlling the concept of language per se. The first sign of this ethnocentrism is to be found in Everett's description

of Pirahã in terms of "gaps" or absences—of the grammatical forms present in other languages (Surralés 2005, p. 639; Tomasello 2005, p. 640). This lack is not, however, seen to be a function of loss or trauma. In Everett's account, this community of people has remained unchanged since the time of their first "recording" by European colonialists in 1784, an improbable timelessness that he links to their resolute monolingualism. In the face of this claim, we are surprised to discover, from Everett's own account, that some of the Pirahã speak Portuguese when negotiating with Brazilian traders (2005, p. 626; also Surralés 2005, p. 639) and that "Their pronouns were borrowed from a Tupi-Guarani language, either Lingua Geral or Kawahiv" (Everett 2005, p. 628). Both of these facts indicate contact with others, and linguistic transformation, including bilingualism, born of such contact. Nonetheless, by the time Everett's story has been printed in the *New Yorker*, the myth of a willful and exclusive authenticity has been secured: "Unlike other hunter-gatherer tribes of the Amazon, the Pirahã have resisted efforts by missionaries and government agencies to teach them farming," and even that they have "ignored lessons in preserving meats by salting or smoking" (Colapinto 2007, p. 122).

It is not insignificant in this context that Everett describes Pirahã communicative practice as taking place as much through singing and whistling as through speaking [a form of communication among the Guarani already remarked by Father Pedro Lozano (1768) in the mid-eighteenth century]—although he himself does not analyze the song-forms of speech. This is an important observation because it is related to one made by Pierre Clastres, in his account of the Guayaki Indians, a group he describes as having been "Guaranized" in the process of being pushed out of their original territories of agricultural production and into the forest (1998 [1972], p. 114). The Pirahã appear to have shared with other groups in the area the experience of being Guaranized, to use Clastres's term, and this is not surprising, given the degree of coerced mobility at the slave frontier. Euclides da Cunha (1992), an early Brazilian nationalist, believed that the Mura (who are not extinct, contrary to the *New Yorker*'s claim) had been forced into the Brazilian Amazon from Bolivia. Manuela Caneira da Cunha (1992) also speculates that the lowlander Mura and Pirahã may have originally been dislocated from a more mountainous region, although she suggests that they have resided in the area for much longer (p. 980). In any case, the Mura, at least, were much remarked by the Portuguese colonialists for their emphatic militarism, their command of the riverine trade, and then, their apparently sudden capitulation to colonial authority. Hecht (unpublished observations, 2007) attributes this latter fact to the combined effects of disease, warfare, enslavement, and, subsequently, the Mura's loss of their missionary interlocutors (from whom they had sought protection and assistance in conflicts with other local tribes). The latter, Hecht relates (personal communication, 2007), were forced to withdraw from the area when the ardently secular Marquis of Pombal exiled all religious orders (also Hemming 1987, pp. 21–23, 217–18).

Just how the ancestors of today's Pirahã experienced these violent transformations is unclear, and Everett claims that they do not narrate them. But it is not unreasonable to imagine that such depredations, as were endured by the Mura and the Pirahã, would encourage some suspicion of the Portuguese-speaking foreigners in the area, and perhaps too the secreting of knowledge. However, Everett attributes antipathy to the Portuguese to a cultural disavowal of the knowledge embedded in Portuguese, which is, he says, "incommensurate with Pirahã . . . and culturally incompatible" because, "like all Western languages, it violates the immediacy-of-experience constraint" (2005, p. 634). This domination by the value of immediacy is also adduced to explain the Pirahã's "musical" language (2005, p. 626).

Clastres notes that the whistling language of the Guayakai was spoken in contexts demanding secrecy (including ones in which his overhearing was not wanted) and hypothesizes that, as a form, this whistled-whispering developed within ordinarily spoken language as a means to evade enemies, including not only the spirits of the dead but also other, hostile Indians and, most especially, whites (Clastres 1998 [1972], pp. 137–38). Keren Everett (née Graham), Daniel Everett's former wife, and also a linguist, who worked with him for 25 years (during most of which time the two were employed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics missionary organization), is described by Colapinto as one of few foreigners to have learned an Amazonian "singing language." She apparently believes its tonal and prosodic elaboration is not only highly complex but that it is a primary mode of intimate communication, used to teach children to speak and also to convey dreams (Colapinto 2007, p. 137). Conceiving Pirahã language less as a strategic defense than as the medium of interpersonal relation with insiders, Keren Everett's thesis supports the extrapolation of Clastres's sense that these Guaranized people operate in (at least) two linguistic registers, according to the degree of intimacy and trust that structures the communication. As Derrida would surely observe, this division and doubling within the language take place within an already elaborate structure of differentiation and deferral (*différance*) and render untenable the claims about Pirahã monolingualism. Moreover, it demands a reconsideration of Everett's claim that the Pirahã do not engage the Portuguese because their grammar ensures that they cannot permit translation or the incorporation of culturally foreign linguistic structures. The question is between an ontologized incapacity, which Everett calls Pirahã culture, and a historicized account of an ongoing encounter on capitalism's frontier. Everett has chosen to reproduce the binarity that divides the world into the literate and the congenitally illiterate.

He reports his failed efforts to teach the Pirahã to count and describes their "incapacity" to learn a general value form in which to negotiate their trade with Brazilians—although the Pirahã themselves requested instruction in counting so that they could "tell whether they were being cheated" (Everett 2005, p. 626). Clearly, the Pirahã were engaged in some form of commensuration if they perceived the possibility of being cheated, of getting less than what was appropriate for their goods, although Everett insists that this ability is absent. Finally, Everett tells us of a failed "writing lesson." The Pirahã "write" stories for Everett, making marks on paper, apparently in imitation of his note-taking. They "read" back these same "stories," producing what Everett describes as "random" accounts of their daily activities, again miming the form of reading without repeating the marks. The same story is not told twice. "They do not understand that all [. . .] such symbols should be precise," explains Everett, and "the concept of a 'correct' way to draw was profoundly foreign to them" (2005, p. 626). The writing lessons, he adds, were attended mainly for entertainment, and the Pirahã do not believe that their own language can (or should?) be transliterated.

The scene is uncannily reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss's account of the Nambikwara. Lévi-Strauss interprets the chief's mimicry of writing as an attempt to "amaze his companions and persuade them that *his* intermediacy was responsible for the exchanges, that he had allied himself with the white man, and that he could share their secrets" (Lévi-Strauss 1997 [1955], p. 289). Like the Nambikwara thus described, Everett shows the Pirahã acquire writing instantaneously, which is to say by virtue of a foreign intervention, and the consequences are sociological rather than intellectual (Derrida 1976, p. 127). Because writing remains exterior and unassimilated to the Pirahã culture, according to Everett, it does not lead to a transformation in thought. It is merely one act among many that seek recognition from the anthropologist, who, in

this case, is conducting a relentless battery of tests and who invites others to conduct similarly relentless batteries of (sometimes computer-assisted) tests, occasionally relieved by viewings of Hollywood blockbuster videos. The Pirahã do not learn to write because they cannot, says Everett. They cannot write because their language is beholden to the value of immediacy.

Many linguists have criticized Everett's hypotheses. Some argue that Pirahã is not as exceptional as he claims, noting that other languages also lack numerals and color words (Levinson 2005, p. 637; Wierzbicka 2005, p. 641) or embedding (Berlin 2005, p. 635). Others reject his claims that the language is absent of color terms (Kay 2005, p. 636). Wierzbicka questions Everett's concern with a paucity of pronouns and the tendency to use them to refer to only deceased or absent objects (proper names being used in other circumstances) and emphasizes the more important fact that Pirahã has pronominal capacities by which to differentiate "I" and "you," and she doubts the possibility of these having been "borrowed" from Tupi-Guarani. Gonçalves (2005, p. 636), who also works with the Pirahã, claims that Everett misunderstands the value of immediacy by reading it as a constraint. Instead, he reads Pirahã as a language and a culture that privilege the constant constitution of the world through human action: "Within this conception, to gain the status of an organized discourse the cosmos depends upon someone who lives it, who experiences it" (p. 636).

Yet, Everett's story travels, and it travels because it restates, in the guise of a scientific demonstration, the ethnocentric fantasy of a people who live in presence and plenitude, without abstraction, without deferral: a living origin. What Derrida means when he says that all cultures are inscribed within the structured possibility of deferral (writing), is that "from the origin of life in general, when, at the very heterogeneous levels of organization and complexity, it is possible to *defer presence*, that is to say *expense* and consumption,

and to organize production, that is to say *reserve* in general" (Derrida 1976, pp. 130–31). Everett's claims notwithstanding, this organization of life is not absent among the Pirahã, even though they store manioc flour for only a few days, whereas their neighbors, the Kawahiv, store it for longer periods (Colapinto 2007, pp. 123–24). Manioc production is a complex process, entailing several stages before it can be turned into flour. It is certainly not the kind of plant that "grows when you spit the seed out," which is how Everett explains the existence of other domesticated plant life in the Pirahã village (S. Hecht, personal communication, 2007). His only other alternative for explaining the presence of such vegetation is that they were "planted by somebody else." If the latter were the case, of course, any claim that the Pirahã are resolutely monolingual and evasive of relations with others would have to be relinquished. But the more important issue, first raised by Derrida (1976, p. 129) in his reading of Lévi-Strauss, is the quantitative conception of knowledge that undergirds the entire oppositional structure within which the Pirahã are opposed to the West. How does the storage of manioc flour for a few days rather than a few months provide evidence of a categorical difference? What legitimates the translation of a short horizon into immediacy? The same question could be asked of the discussion of generational memory, which is said to be restricted to two generations, although Everett tells of some informants who can recall four generations (a feat unlikely to be reproduced by most American youth). There is, simply, no logical grounds for construing this brevity of generational memory as an incapacity to express anything but immediacy. The only grounds for such a claim are metaphysical, the a priori bifurcation of the world.

The question of reserve and the deferral of presence are, however, not only matters of literal storage. The same lack of self-presence that Derrida theorizes is the necessary condition for communication—even in the example of the grocery list described by Searle—is visible among the Pirahã. It is why they

can speak to each other, whether in song or in some other form. Are not the singing of dreams and the ongoing relationships with the dead testimony to the fact that the divisions within the social world, which produce and are produced by language, persist across time and that they are the condition of a community's survival in time? The scales normativized by capitalism have been granted the status of a canon against which all else must be considered lacking, deficient, or incapable. What grounds this canon? Why can we not consider a model plane built on the arrival of a real plane (and no doubt for the pleasure of the foreigners) but not preserved as the cultures of anticipatory loss in the West would preserve it, as an aesthetic achievement? Equally importantly, why are irony and lying not to be read as fiction (which is not to be confused with the institution of literature), as the exercise of an imaginative faculty that can contradict actuality, and hence depart from immediacy? And is not a pronoun, however few there may be, always an abstraction? Everett's commitment, so widely embraced by the popular media, is to an ancient opposition in which writing is the mark of mediation, orality the condition of its absence. The lesson of the writing lesson, which Derrida wrote under the heading "The Violence of the Letter," has still to be learned, it seems. It has not been entirely lost, however, as the work of Siegel attests.

LEGACY

Today, the most significant bearer of Derrida's legacy in anthropology is Siegel. A deconstructionist tendency has been evident in Siegel's work since his earliest published book, *The Rope of God* (2000 [1969]), although it was not until his second work, *Shadow and Sound* (1979), that this tendency identified itself with Derrida's thought. *The Rope of God* departed from most of the anthropological thought on Sumatra, which preceded it (and much that followed it) by rejecting the model of coherent cultural integration for one in which the learned religious leaders (*ulamas*), as well as the sultans, were seen as foreign forces and were only occasionally engaged by local political authorities, namely *uleebalangs*, who alone sustained constant and reciprocally structured relations with the peasants. His task, in this work, is therefore to explain how the society operated in the absence of unicity or integration, and to do so he develops a notion of translation or even mistranslation—rather than shared meanings, as Geertz would argue—at the heart of the social. Siegel also reads the growing authority of the *ulamas* over the course of the twentieth century in terms of an increasing dissonance between consciousness and society, one that the proponents of reform Islam were able to mobilize. Precisely because they moved from village to *pesantran*, the *ulamas* turned foreignness into a claim on universality, argues Siegel, and this action created enormously powerful forces, ones that would both sustain and threaten the development of nationalism.

From the beginning, Siegel's work offered a radical alternative to hermeneutic models, which aimed to discover an ultimate, hidden meaning. However, it is important to recognize that the concepts of discontinuity and mistranslation do not imply that people live in a state of chaos; they mean rather that different individuals can operate with different understandings precisely because their signifying gestures are polysemous (as when men and women perceive women's relations to men in terms of deference or indulgence). The latter situation is described by Siegel as a consequence of the demise of pepper cultivation and the loss of economic resources among men. In early reviews, both Bruner (1970, p. 741) and Kessler (1970, p. 344) questioned the evidence for this historical development, but they nonetheless validated the general argument for social discontinuity as the ground of Islamic modernism's rise in Atjeh.

The expanded edition of *The Rope of God*, issued in 2000, contains two additional chapters which both remedy the relative dearth

of attention to women in the earlier work (George 2003, p. 351) and make visible Siegel's long engagement with the problematics of language and the relationship between speech and writing. The first systematic engagement with these issues, conceived in explicitly Derridean terms, appears in *Shadow and Sound*, where Siegel (1979) describes Atjehnese history as an effort to "bring language under control" (p. 17). Here, perhaps for the first time, the anthropological implications of Derrida's argument about writing (and his refutation of the metaphysical tradition that has interpreted it as the transparent disclosure of speech) are worked out.

Siegel presents translations of the *Hikayat Potjeot Moehamat* and describes its recitation in performances that he observed. These recitations were undertaken by heart for largely illiterate audiences, who reveled in the aural pleasures of performance but attended little, says Siegel, to the "meaning" of the texts, a meaning which was, in fact, evacuated by the prosodic practice of the orator. Nonetheless, Siegel notes the authority of the written text under whose aegis performance was undertaken, and which was referred to as the origin of the speech despite the fact that it remained opaque to those who were illiterate. For them, he explains, the text functions as a graphic sign, which discloses the possibility that writing may always harbor secrets. This opacity, which may harbor secrets is, Siegel argues, the reason for a fear of writing or, more importantly, a fear of what he calls "unread writing" (1979, p. 229). In this analysis, not only is writing not the mere transcription of speech, but it is discontinuous with it. Moreover, the constant invocation of the text makes audiences feel that the source of their pleasure in narrative is simultaneously present and illegible, and this is the structure of the historical thought that Siegel then discerns recurring in political life. He identifies a "surplus of meaning" (p. 263) being generated within this structure, one that manifests itself in a constant suspicion of that which is illegible (the faces of communists, for example) and in

the periodic efforts at containment through elimination.

Some admirers of *The Rope of God* found *Shadow and Sound* unpalatable, and even sympathetic readers criticized Siegel's reading of the moment in "Si Meuseukin's Wedding," when a character hurls excrement on the wedding guests—a gesture that Siegel interprets as one of graphic signification (along with other graphic forms like royal insignias) through which a "fear of unread writing" is discharged (Siegel 1979, p. 227; Fox 1980, p. 557; Reid 1980, p. 669). Some found the argument for internal difference to be belied by his discernment of an overly consistent unconscious aspiration: to bring language under control (Smail 1981, p. 764). Others recoiled before the deployment of "foreign" theory, either in the hope that a pure description could be obtained of the "order of things" or in the belief that some theories—those of perhaps Marx, Durkheim, or Weber—are less foreign than others (e.g., Reid 1980). No doubt, *Shadow and Sound* is a demanding text, and neither it nor any of Siegel's other works will satisfy the critics who want more consistent diagrams of speech levels; statistical documentation of economic transformations and demographic change; or, for example, causal arguments linking media texts to other kinds of discourses and practices associated with policing (Hefner 2000). But in its opening of the question of how the relationship between speech and writing is organized outside of the West, and in its recognition that communication is never complete, and also that it is always in excess, Siegel inaugurated a new, radically nonfunctionalist approach to questions of profound significance: of recurrent mass violence, of revolution and its failures, of nationalism and the limits of representative politics.

The second edition of *The Rope of God* made visible the concept of the supplement as it might be thought beyond the literary or even the philosophical text. The book includes the entire first edition (published in 1969), complete with its index and its

bibliography, followed by a literal supplement: two additional chapters. These supplementary texts suggest that there was something there, in the original story which was not previously articulated but which, when seen in retrospect, seems to belong there, to be determined at the beginning. We read the supplements as though their absence in the first edition was a lack, but of course they refer to later moments in the history of Atjehnese and Indonesian life, moments which can only appear, later yet, as being marked by the trace of their antecedent histories. This is the (il)logic of the supplement described by Derrida. Siegel uses the revision of his book to perform this structure and to make it visible as a property not merely of textual organization but of Atjehnese language itself. The revised text is not merely expanded; it bears the traces of *Shadow and Sound* and *Solo in the New Order* (1986, about hierarchy in Javanese society), in which Siegel develops the notion of a force in language that exceeds the possibility of its articulation.

In its new form, *The Rope of God* concludes with a radical conception of revolution as a phenomenon in which something beyond the voice (the voice of the people but also voice as utterance and legibility) demands to be heard but, lacking a mode of expression, nonetheless leaves traces—"in the fear of the people and in the attempt of the army to recoup that power for itself . . . [as well as] the silence of the people today, in their willingness to wait for authorization before unleashing a possibly blind violence" (2000, p. 422). These same themes are taken up by Siegel in two related works, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (1997) and *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter-Revolution Today* (1998), written simultaneously to the "supplement" of *The Rope of God*. They are also related to each other in the mode of supplementarity, and *A New Criminal Type* demands a rereading of *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* to understand what that text and the history it narrates would seem to make necessary in retrospect (but see Morris 1999).

Fetish, Recognition, Revolution analyzes the development of the "lingua franca," Melayu, in the context of colonial trade. As a lingua franca, says Siegel, Melayu functions as a mother tongue for no one (citizens generally claim a more local language as their natal language). Subjectivity is, accordingly, never fully available within it. This new lingua franca offered greater mobility for Javanese or other proto-Indonesians subjects, vis-à-vis both the elaborate local hierarchies of ritualized power and the world of Dutch colonialism. But it also limited the degree to which the speaking subject would be granted authority because Dutch was the language of rights. In this context, says Siegel, the stage was set for a politics of connection rather than communication and identification (1997, p. 44). Proximity to power and recognition by authority, rather than reciprocity or abstract equality, became the axes of political life in the new nation.

At least two developments arise as a result of this development, and Seigel traces them across the period of both revolutionary and postrevolutionary Indonesia. First, a generalized fetishism emerges by which the appearance of Indonesians is policed—precisely because there is doubt about the degree to which appearance reveals identity (this is the fear of unread writing in another form). This fetishism, buttressed by the new technologies of photography and cinema, is ultimately linked to a certain quiescence, in which a desire to be recognized by authority, and especially by the state, renders Indonesians vulnerable to authoritarianism—in a manner that cannot prohibit violence. Second, the linguistic conditions of the lingua franca, which made "overhearing" the risk that afflicted all speakers, developed and were intensified during the revolution, where immediacy was valued above all but where suspicion afflicted everyone. This suspicion was the condition of terror, says Siegel, in a reading of several extraordinary testimonies by former revolutionaries. In the end, he shows how revolution disseminated suspicion and, by virtue of its demand

for immediacy (demonstrated in, for example, its impatience with anything but purely instrumental language), annulled the possibility of any economy, even that of vengeance, by which the death that characterized the revolution could be cancelled or mastered (1997, p. 225).

This analysis is not, by any means, proposed as a general description of Indonesian culture, but it permits Siegel to understand the extravagant violence of the anticommunist purges in 1965, the waves of extrajudicial execution by which "criminals" are constantly eliminated but still feared in Jakarta (1998), and finally, the witch killings of Banyuwangi, East Java, in 1998 and 1999. What would be needed to interrupt this cycle, says Siegel, is an institution in which the value of deferral is embraced. Like Derrida, he gives to that institution the name of literature, and more than one anthropologist has balked at this suggestion that literature would be an end to the violence of both revolution and counterrevolution. After all, such violence is present in societies with literature. Perhaps, however, we can recognize that states and societies in which the state is most consumed with controlling the power of language are those in which the writer is most persecuted. It is a difficult claim to prove, but Siegel certainly points to the life of incarceration to which Indonesia's most prominent writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, was subject, and he is joined by others, such as Maier (2004), who insist that Malay (but not only Malay) institutions of literary production are characterized by didacticism and by a conception of the writer as culpable not only for his own speech but for that of the characters in his or her fiction. This is not literature in Derrida's or Siegel's sense. Literature in their sense is an institution that acknowledges that writing is contrary to reality and it permits the writer as author the freedom to fabricate truths as well as lies. There is literature, then, but no developed institution of literature in Indonesia, according to Siegel.

When, in his most recent work, *Naming the Witch*, Siegel returns to the question of what remains when death is the foreign that one attempts to evict from the social, he offers an irresistable challenge to all that has been thought under the category of culture, as well as witchcraft. Considering both the archive of anthropology's discourse on witchcraft accusation and the testimonies of those who participated in witch killings in East Java, Siegel argues that witchcraft is the name of a "strange institution," which leads one to expect the "contrary of normality" (2006, p. 101). The efforts to institutionalize and contain witchcraft, through accusation and naming, are doomed to fail because witchcraft operates both by metonymy and on the basis of a magical language whose characteristic form is the copula (Mauss 1972 [1950], p. 51). However, the copula that defines witchcraft is not just any copula; it is that which can generate the statements "You are dead" or, more startlingly, "I am dead" (Siegel 2006, p. 69). Rereading (again, in Lévi-Strauss's wake) the account of a Zuni witch trial, the story of magical death among the Murngin, and Evans-Pritchard's famous explanation of Zande sorcery, Siegel demonstrates that anthropologists' efforts to render witchcraft as a discourse that would otherwise exceed reason, or as an alternative rationality, are only partly correct, insofar as the efforts to institutionalize witchcraft in any society are themselves doomed projects aimed at the mastery of that which cannot be mastered—the death that is internal to society itself. These readings reproduce an anthropological fallacy and mirror the deathly error that the strange institution of witchcraft implies for all who suffer its violence.

Siegel will not turn away from this violence, and he confronts without hesitation the eroticized investment in narrating and renarrating the stories of witchcraft and sorcery—which survives the texts even of those who would explain it as an instrument of social order (albeit one that is acknowledged for its relatively frequent deployment against women and the aged). To say that the accusers are attracted to the force in language, which they

believe they can convert into their own power, and to observe that naming the witch can never finally assuage the fear of death is not to abandon the social real, as many critics of deconstruction seem to fear. On the contrary, it is to demonstrate that the lessons of deconstruction, Derrida's legacy, are to be found in a willingness to put the fantasy of social reproduction under erasure.

BEYOND LEGACIES

Anthropology has been solicited, in the Derridean sense; it must henceforth tremble a little at the prospect that its object is under erasure but that the task of listening and understanding human predicaments is more demanding than ever. This is the conclusion we must draw from Derrida's later works. And this is why Derrida himself closes his analysis of democracy in the post-9/11 world by stating that new democracies, as they are being cultivated or coerced through various American and European foreign policy initiatives, cannot be asked to merely mimic or reproduce that which is imagined as their originary form: namely, the United States, at least as seen from the proponents of democracy's export. Nor can the "democracy to come" be permitted to be constrained by either cultural relativism or nationalism (2005, p. 204). It must inhabit the double bind and consist in the rational relationship between the singular and the universalizable, the calculable and the incalculable, the conditional and the unconditional. Derrida offers several figures for the kind of radical democratic impulse that he envisages. It must be acknowledged that he does not advocate an end to either culture or the nation-state; these are terms and forms without which we cannot do, just as metaphysics cannot simply be relegated to the trash heap of intellectual history. But within these histories he claims that it is possible to figure an unconditionality that exceeds the question of sovereignty (as autonomy and self-willing) and a democracy that is not reducible to the calculative logic of elections and proxy representation. These figures are (*a*) hospitality, an openness to the other that does not demand recognition as its own precondition; (*b*) the gift, a generosity that does not demand self-recognition and hence return or repayment; (*c*) forgiveness, a relinquishment of the economy that would demand a return of and for violence; and (*d*) justice, which recognizes the incommensurability between law and singularity.

Each of these figures may also function as a figure for the others, the gift perhaps most productively of all, because in each case there is an escape from economy, understood as commensuration and the cancellation of difference as debt. In a way, then, Derrida returns us to anthropology, indeed to an older anthropology than that which has arisen to resist his thought. That anthropology construed the gift as the figure of figures for all that we, in the so-called lettered West or north, are not. However, that same anthropology misconstrued the gift as that from which we came, that which preceded debt, economy, and social hierarchy, but especially the monetized and then capitalized economies of industrial Europe. For Derrida, the gift is not simply a heuristic model for an institution never observed in its empirical innocence. It is the name of an ethical futurity to which we must direct ourselves now (as it was for Mauss), but without the alibis to which anthropology generally turns: both nature and culture.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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