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PAPER MACHINE

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Fichus

Frankfurt Address

On September 22, 2001, Jacques Derrida was given the Theodor W. Adorno Prize by the city of Frankfurt. This prize was inaugurated in 1977 and is awarded every three years; previous winners include Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Boulez, and Jean-Luc Godard. The prize rewards work which, in the spirit of the Frankfurt School, cuts across the domains of philosophy, the social sciences, and the arts (music, literature, painting, architecture, theatre, cinema, and so on).

The first and last paragraphs of Derrida's address were read in German. It had been written and translated in August. So the references to September 11 were added on the day of the ceremony.

Madame le maire, monsieur le consul général, cher professeur Waldenfels, chers collègues, chers amis: [Mayor, Consul, Professor Waldenfels, colleagues, and friends:]

I apologize. I am getting ready to greet you and thank you in my language. And language will be my subject: the language of the other, the visitor's language, the foreigner's language, even the immigrant's, the emigré's, or the exile's. What will a responsible politics make of the plural and the singular, starting with the differences between languages in the Europe of the future, and, as with Europe, in the ongoing process of globalization? In what we call, ever more questionably, globalization, we in fact find ourselves on the verge of wars that, since September 11, are less sure than ever of their language, their meaning, and their name.

As an epigraph to this modest and simple expression of my gratitude, I would like to begin by reading a sentence that Walter Benjamin, one day, one night, himself dreamed *in French*. He told it *in French* to Gretel Adorno, in a letter he wrote her on October 12, 1939, from Nevers, where he was in an internment camp. In France at the time this was called a *camp de travailleurs volontaires* ("voluntary workers' camp"). In his dream, which, if we are to believe him, was euphoric, Benjamin says this to himself, in French: *Il s'agissait de changer en fichu une poésie* [It was about changing a poem into a *fichu*]. And he translates: "*Es handelte sich darum, aus einem Gedicht ein Halstuch zu machen* [It was about making a scarf out of a poem]."¹ In a moment, we will stroke this *fichu*, this scarf or shawl. We will spot in it a particular letter of the alphabet which Benjamin thought he recognized in his dream. And we'll also come back to *fichu*, which is not just any old French word for a woman's scarf or shawl.

Do we still dream in our beds? and at night? Are we responsible for our dreams? Can we answer for them? Suppose I am dreaming. My dream would be happy, like Benjamin's.

At this moment, speaking to you, standing up, eyes open, starting to thank you from the bottom of my heart, with the ghostly or *unheimlich*, uncanny gestures of a sleepwalker or even a bandit come to get his hands on a prize that wasn't meant for him—it's all *as if* I were dreaming. Admitting it, even: in truth, I am telling you that in gratefully greeting you, I think I'm dreaming. Even if the bandit or smuggler doesn't deserve what he gets, as in a Kafka narrative—the bad pupil who thinks he has been called, like Abraham, to be top of the class—his dream seems happy. Like me.

What's the difference between dreaming and thinking you're dreaming? And first of all who has the right to ask that question? The dreamer deep in the experience of his night or the dreamer when he wakes up? And could a dreamer speak of his dream without waking himself up? Could he name the dream in general? Could he analyze the dream properly and even use the word *dream* deliberately without interrupting and betraying, yes, *betraying* sleep.

I can imagine the two responses. The philosopher's would be a firm "no": you can't have a serious and responsible line on dreams, no one could even recount a dream without waking up. One could give hundreds of examples of this *negative* response, from Plato to Husserl, and I think it perhaps defines the essence of philosophy. This "no" links the responsibility of the philosopher to the rational imperative of wakefulness, the sovereign ego, and the vigilant consciousness. What is philosophy, for philosophers?

Being awake and awakening. Perhaps there would be a quite different, but no less responsible, response from poets, writers, or essayists, from musicians, painters, playwrights, or scriptwriters. Or even from psychoanalysts. They wouldn't say "no," but "yes, perhaps sometimes." They would acquiesce in the event, in its exceptional singularity: yes, perhaps you can believe and admit that you are dreaming without waking yourself up; yes, it is not impossible, sometimes, while you are asleep, your eyes tight shut or wide open, to utter something like a truth of the dream, a meaning and a reason of the dream that deserves not to sink down into the night of nothingness.

When it comes to this lucidity, this light, this *Aufklärung* of a discourse dreaming about dreams, it is none other than Adorno I like to think of. I admire and love in Adorno someone who never stopped hesitating between the philosopher's "no" and the "yes, perhaps, sometimes that does happen" of the poet, the writer or the essayist, the musician, the painter, the playwright, or scriptwriter, or even the psychoanalyst. In hesitating between the "no" and the "yes, sometimes, perhaps," Adorno was heir to both. He took account of what the concept, even the dialectic, could not conceptualize in the singular event, and he did everything he could to take on the responsibility of this double legacy.

What *does* Adorno suggest to us? The difference between the dream and reality, this truth to which the philosopher recalls us with an inflexible severity, would be that which injures, hurts, or damages (*beschädigt*) the most beautiful dreams and deposits the signature of a stain, a dirtying (*Makel*). The *no*, what one might call in another sense the *negativity* that philosophy sets against the dream, would be a wound of which the most beautiful dreams forever bear the scar.

A passage in *Minima Moralia* recalls this, and I single it out for two reasons. First of all, because in it Adorno talks about how the most beautiful dreams are spoiled, injured, mutilated, damaged (*beschädigt*), and hurt by a waking consciousness that lets us know that they are mere appearance (*Schein*) with regard to actual reality (*Wirklichkeit*). Now the word that Adorno uses for this wound, *beschädigt*, is the very one that appears in the subtitle to *Minima Moralia: Reflexionem aus dem beschädigten Leben* [*Reflections from Damaged Life*]. Not "reflections on" a wounded, injured, damaged, mutilated life, but "reflections from or starting from" such a life, *aus dem beschädigten Leben*: reflections marked by pain, signed by a wounding. The dedication of the book to Horkheimer explains what the form of this book owes to private life and the painful condition of "the in-

tellectual in emigration" (*ausgegangen vom engsten privaten Bereich, dem des Intellektuellen in der Emigration*).

My other reason for choosing this passage from *Minima Moralia* is to mark my gratitude today to those who established the Adorno Prize and who respect his characteristic wit. As always with Adorno, this is his finest legacy, this theatrical fragment makes philosophy stand in the dock before the authority of all its others in a single act, on the same stage. Philosophy has to respond before the dream, before music—represented by Schubert—before poetry, before the theater and before literature, here represented by Kafka:

Waking in the middle of a dream, even the worst, one feels disappointed, cheated of the best in life. But pleasant, fulfilled dreams are actually as rare, to use Schubert's words, as happy music. Even the loveliest dream bears like a blemish its difference from reality, the awareness that what it grants is mere illusion. This is why precisely the loveliest dreams are as if blighted. Such an impression is captured superlatively in the description of the nature theatre of Oklahoma in Kafka's *America*.²

Adorno was haunted by this Oklahoma theater in Kafka's *Amerika*, especially when he recalls his experimental research in the United States, his work on jazz, on something fetishistic about music, on the problems raised by the industrial production of cultural objects—where, as he says himself, his critique is meant as a response to Benjamin's "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" [The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction].³ Whether or not this critique, like so many others, is justified in relation to Benjamin, we have more need than ever to ponder it today. In its analysis of a kind of commodification of culture, it is also the harbinger of a structural mutation in capital, in the cyberspace market, in human reproduction, in global concentration, and in property.

The "worst" nightmare (we can produce numerous historical examples from the start of the twentieth century up to last week): so we would be disappointed to be awoken from it, for it will have shown us how to think the irreplaceable, a truth or a meaning that consciousness might hide from us on waking, even put back to sleep. As though dreaming were a more vigilant state than being awake, the unconscious more thoughtful than consciousness, literature or the arts more philosophical, more critical, at any rate, than philosophy.

So I am speaking to you in the night, *as if* in the beginning was the

dream. What is a dream? And dream-thought? And dream language? Could there be an ethics or politics of dreaming that did not yield to the imaginary or to the utopian, and was not an abandonment, irresponsible, and evasive? Once again my excuse for beginning like this comes from Adorno, and in particular from another of his remarks that moves me all the more because—as I do myself more and more often, too often perhaps—Adorno speaks literally of the possibility of the impossible, of the paradox of the possibility of the impossible (*vom Paradoxon der Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen*). In *Prismen* [Prisms], at the end of his 1955 “Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” Adorno writes the following passage; I would like to make it a motto, at least for all the “last times” of my life: “In the form of the paradox of the impossible possibility, mysticism and enlightenment are joined for *the last time* in him [Benjamin]. He *overcame* the dream without *betraying* it [*ohne ihn zu verraten*] and making himself the accomplice in that on which the philosophers have always agreed: that it shall not be.”⁴

The impossible possibility, the possibility of the impossible this is what Adorno says: *die Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen*. We shouldn’t let ourselves be affected by “that on which the philosophers have always agreed,” namely the first complicity to break up and the one you have to start by worrying about if you want to do a little thinking. *Overcoming* the dream without *betraying* it (*ohne ihn zu verraten*)—that’s the way, says Benjamin, the author of a *Traumkitsch* [Dream Kitsch]:⁵ to wake up, to cultivate awakeness and vigilance, while remaining attentive to meaning, faithful to the lessons and the lucidity of a dream, caring for what the dream lets us think about, especially when what it lets us think about is the *possibility of the impossible*. The possibility of the impossible can only be dreamed, but thinking, a quite different thinking of the relation between the possible and the impossible, this other thinking I have been panting after for so long, sometimes getting out of breath over it, running my courses and rushing about—this perhaps has more affinity than philosophy itself with this dream. Even as you wake up, you would have to go on watching out for the dream, watching over it. It is from this possibility of the impossible, and from what would have to be done so as to try to think it differently, to think thinking differently, through an unconditionality without indivisible sovereignty, outside what has dominated our metaphysical tradition, that I try in my own way to draw some ethical, juridical, and political consequences, whether it’s to do with the idea of time, or the gift, or hospitality, or forgiveness, or the decision—or the democracy to come.

I have not yet begun to tell you how honored I am, but to justify myself I have just heard Adorno speaking of Benjamin, those two expatriates; one of them never returned and it’s not certain whether the other one ever did. In a moment, I will again speak of a Benjamin turned toward Adorno. As I will often have occasion to quote like this—well, it’s another instance of Adorno quoting Benjamin that encourages me to think that my use of quotations here ought to be anything but academic, rule-bound, and conventional, but rather, once again, disturbing, disconcerting, even *unheimlich*. Two pages before that, in the same text, Adorno recalls that Benjamin “meant . . . literally (*wortlich*)” the sentence in *One-Way Street* which said that citations from his works were like highwaymen (*wie Räuber am Wege*), who suddenly descend on the reader to rob him of his convictions.”⁶ You can be sure of this, the person you are honoring today with a major prize that he is not sure he deserves is also someone who always runs the risk, especially when he is quoting, of being more like the “highwaymen” than a lot of worthy professors of philosophy, even friends of his.

I’m dreaming. I’m sleepwalking. I think I have been dreaming, so as to enable you to hear my gratitude in relation to the great privilege I am being granted today, and probably I am also dreaming of knowing how to speak to you not just as a robber but poetically, as a poet. I certainly won’t be capable of the poem I dream of. And then in what language could I have written it or sung it? or dreamed it? I would be divided between, on one side, the laws of hospitality, meaning the desire of the grateful guest who ought to be addressing you in your language, and, on the other, my unshakeable attachment to a French idiom, without which I would be lost, more than ever an exile. For what I most understand and share with Adorno, to the point of compassion, is perhaps his love of language, and even a sort of nostalgia for what will still have been his *own* language. An originary nostalgia, a nostalgia that has not waited for the real loss of language as a historical event, a congenital nostalgia as old as our bodily closeness to what is called maternal—or paternal—language. As if this language had been lost since childhood, since the first word. As if this catastrophe were doomed to be repeated. As if it threatened to come back at every historical turning point, and for Adorno even with his American exile. In his response to the traditional question “What is German?” in 1965, Adorno revealed that his desire to come back to Germany from the United States in 1949 was primarily because of language. “The decision to return to Germany was hardly motivated simply by a subjective need, by home-sickness

[*von Heimweh motiviert*]. There was also an objective factor. It is the language (*Auch ein Objektives machte sich geltend. Das ist die Sprache*).⁷

Why is it that there is something more than nostalgia in this, and something other than a subjective affect? Why does Adorno attempt to justify his return to Germany by a language argument meant here as an "objective" reason? The case he makes should be exemplary nowadays for all those, throughout the world but particularly in the Europe that is presently being constructed, who seek to define another ethics or another politics, another economy, even another ecology of language: how to cultivate the poeticity of idiom in general, your home, your *oikos*; how to save linguistic difference, whether regional or national; how to resist both the international hegemony of a language of communication (and for Adorno this was already Anglo-American); how to oppose the instrumental utilitarianism of a purely functional language of communication but *without* however yielding to nationalism, state nationalism, or the nation-state's insistence on sovereignty; *without* giving those rusty old weapons to the revival of identities and to all the old ideology—pro-sovereignty, separatist, and differentialist?

Adorno engages, sometimes dangerously, in a complex argument to which, almost twenty years ago, I devoted a long, tormented discussion as part of a course of seminars I was giving on "nationalism," on "Kant, the Jew, the German," on Wagner's "*Was ist deutsch?*" [What is German?] and on what I then called—to give a name to an enigmatic specularly, a large and terrible historical mirror—the "Judeo-German psyche." Let me hold onto just two features of this.

1. The first would be the stress—classically and some might say disturbingly—on the privileges of the German language. A double privilege, in regard to philosophy and in regard to what unites philosophy with literature: Adorno notes that "the German language seems to have a special elective affinity for philosophy (*eine besondere Wahlverwandschaft zur Philosophie*) and especially for its speculative element which is so easily distrusted in the West as dangerously unclear—and not entirely without justification."⁸ If it is difficult to translate advanced philosophical texts, like Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* or *The Science of Logic*, Adorno thinks this is because German embeds its philosophical concepts in a natural language that you have to have known from childhood. Hence a *radical* alliance between philosophy and literature—radical because nourished from the same *roots*, those of childhood. "There has never been a great philosopher," says

Adorno, citing Ulrich Sonnemann, "who was not also a great writer."⁹ And how right he is! On the subject of childhood, which was one of his insistent themes—on the subject of one's childhood language, is it by chance that Adorno returns to this right after two famous short aphorisms on the Jews and language: *Der Antisemitismus ist das Gerücht über die Juden* and *Fremdwörter sind die Juden der Sprache* ("Anti-Semitism is the rumour about the Jews" and "German words of foreign derivation are the Jews of language")?¹⁰ Is it then by chance that immediately after his "helpless sadness" (*fassungslose Traurigkeit*), Adorno reveals to us his melancholy (*Schwerermut*) in realizing he has spontaneously let the language of his childhood "awaken," as he puts it—or, to be more exact, in realizing that, as if he were pursuing a waking dream, a daydream, a dialectal shape from his childhood, from his mother language, he has let awaken the language he had spoken in the town he came from originally, which he therefore calls *Vaterstadt* [native or "father" town]. *Muttersprache* and *Vaterstadt*?

One evening, in a mood of helpless sadness [*An einem Abend der fassungslosen Traurigkeit*], I caught myself using a ridiculously wrong subjunctive form of a verb that was itself not entirely correct German, being part of the dialect of my native town. I had not heard, let alone used, the endearing misconception since my first years at school. Melancholy [*Schwerermut*], drawing me irresistibly into the abyss of childhood [*in den Abgrund der Kindheit*], awakened this old, impotently yearning sound in its depths [*weckte auf dem Grunde den alten, ohnmächtig verlangenden Laut*]. Language sent back to me like an echo the humiliation which unhappiness had inflicted on me in forgetting what I am.¹¹

Dream, poetic idiom, melancholy, abyss of childhood—*Abgrund der Kindheit*—that is nothing other, as you have heard, than the depth of a musical base (*Grund*), the secret resonance of the voice or words that are waiting in us, as at the bottom of Adorno's first proper name, but *impotent* (*auf dem Grunde den alten, ohnmächtig verlangenden Laut*). I stress *ohnmächtig*: impotent, vulnerable. If I had had time, I would have liked to do more than sketch out a reconstruction of the argument; I would have explored a logic of Adorno's thought which attempts, in a quasi-systematic way, to shield from violence all these weaknesses, these vulnerabilities, and these victims *with no defense*, and even to shield them from the cruelty of traditional interpretation, in other words from philosophical, metaphysical, idealist—even dialectical—and capitalist forms of inspection exercise. The specimen exhibit for this defenseless being, this power-deprivation, this vulnerable *Ohnmächtigkeit*, can be the dream, or language, or the un-

conscious, just as well as the animal, the child, the Jew, the foreigner, or the woman. Adorno was less "undefended" than Benjamin, but he was that too himself, so Jürgen Habermas says in a book in memory of Adorno: "Adorno was defenseless. . . . In the presence of "Teddy" one could play out in an uncircumspect way the role of "proper" adult because he was never in a position to appropriate for himself that role's strategies of immunization and adaptation. In every institutional setting he was 'out of place,' and not as if he intended to be."¹²

2. Another feature of *Was ist Deutsch* counts for more in my view. A critical warning follows this eulogy for "the specific and objective quality of the German language" (*eine spezifische, objektive Eigenschaft der deutschen Sprache*).¹³ We recognize in this an indispensable safeguard for the political future of Europe or of globalization: while continuing to contest linguistic hegemonies and what they determine, we should begin by "deconstructing" both the onto-theologico-political fantasies of an indivisible sovereignty and pro-nation-state metaphysics. Adorno does definitely, and how well I understand him, want to go on loving the German language, to go on cultivating that originary intimacy with his idiom—but without nationalism, without the collective narcissism (*kollektiven Narzissismus*) of a "metaphysics" of language.¹⁴ We know the tradition and the temptation, in this country and others, of this metaphysics of the national language, and "vigilance" against it, he says, the watchfulness of the lookout, must be "untiring":

The returning exile, having lost the naive relation to what is his own, must unite the most intimate relation to his own language with untiring vigilance [*mit unermüdlicher Wachsamkeit*] regarding any swindle which it promotes, a vigilance regarding the belief that what I would like to designate the metaphysical surplus of the German language [*den metaphysischen Überschuss der deutschen Sprache*] is itself sufficient to guarantee the truth of the metaphysics it suggests, or of metaphysics in general. In this context I might perhaps admit that this is why I wrote *The Jargon of Authenticity*. . . . The metaphysical character of language is no privilege. One must not borrow from it the idea of depth which becomes suspicious the moment it engages in self-glorification. This is similar to the concept of the German soul. . . . No one who writes in German and knows how much his thoughts are saturated by the German language should forget Nietzsche's critique of this sphere.¹⁵

This reference to *Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* would take us too far afield. I prefer to hear in this profession of faith an appeal to a new *Auf-*

klärung. A little further on, Adorno declares that it is this metaphysical cult of language, depth, and the German soul that has caused the Enlightenment century to be accused of the heresy of being "superficial."¹⁶

Lady Mayor, colleagues, and friends: When I asked how much time I had to speak, I received three different replies from three different people. These were motivated, I imagine, by legitimate anxiety as much as by desire: the first was fifteen to twenty minutes, then there was thirty minutes, then finally thirty to forty-five minutes. Well, that's the painful economy of a speech of this kind, and I haven't yet begun to touch on my debt to you, to the city and the university of Frankfurt, to so many friends and colleagues (especially Professor Habermas and Professor Honneth)—to all those, both in Frankfurt and elsewhere in Germany, who must forgive me for not mentioning them by name other than in a summary note.¹⁷ There are so many of them: the translators (beginning with Stefan Lorenzer who is here today), the students, and the publishers who have made me so welcome on previous occasions, going back to 1968—at the universities of Berlin, Freiburg im Breisgau, Heidelberg, Kassel, Bochum, Siegen, and above all Frankfurt, three times, last year as well: for a lecture series on the University, for a joint seminar with Jürgen Habermas and, as long ago as 1984, for a big symposium on Joyce.

Before hastening to my conclusion, I don't want to forget either the *fichu* in Benjamin's dream or the contents page of a virtual book on this Adorno Prize, a book and a prize that I no longer hope I may one day achieve or deserve. I spoke to you about language and dreaming, then about a dreamed-of language, then about a dream language, that language you dream of speaking—here now is the dream's language, as we would say since Freud.

I won't inflict on you a lesson in philology, semantics, or pragmatics. I won't pursue the derivations and uses of this extraordinary word, *fichu*. It means different things according to whether it is being used as a noun or an adjective. The *fichu*—and this is the most obvious meaning in Benjamin's sentence—designates a shawl, the piece of material that a woman may put on in a hurry, around her head or neck. But the adjective *fichu* denotes evil: that which is bad, lost, condemned. One day in September 1970, seeing his death approaching, my sick father said to me, "I'm *fichu*." My speech to you today is very oneirophilic, and the reason is that dreaming is the element most receptive to mourning, to haunting, to the spec-

trality of all spirits and the return of the ghosts (such as those adoptive fathers Adorno and Benjamin—that's what they were for us and others too, in their disagreements as well, and that's what Adorno perhaps was for Benjamin). The dream is also a place that is hospitable to the demand for justice and to the most invincible of messianic hopes. In French we sometimes say *foutu* instead of *fichu*. *Foutu* suggests the eschatological register of death or the end, and also the scatological register of sexual violence. Sometimes irony creeps in. *Il s'est fichu de quelqu'un* means he laughed at someone, he didn't take them seriously or didn't act responsibly in relation to them.

This is how Benjamin begins the long letter he wrote Gretel Adorno, in French, on October 12, 1939, from an internment camp in the Nièvre region: "Last night on the straw bed I had a dream so beautiful that I can't resist the desire to tell you it. . . . It's the sort of dream I have maybe once in five years and which are embroidered around the theme of 'reading.' Teddie will remember the role this theme played in my reflections on knowledge."¹⁸

So a message meant for Teddy, for Adorno, Gretel's husband. Why does Benjamin tell this dream to the wife, not the husband? Why, four years before, was it also in a letter to Gretel Adorno that Benjamin responded to some slightly authoritarian and paternal criticisms that Adorno had sent him, as he often did, in a letter, and on the subject of dreams—the relationships between "dream figures" and the "dialectical image"?¹⁹ I leave this hive of questions dormant.

The long narrative that follows [in the letter to Gretel Adorno of 1939] brings back into the picture (this is my own selective interpretation) an "old straw hat," a "panama" that Benjamin had inherited from his father. In his dream it had a large crack on its upper part, with "traces of the color red" at the edges of the crack. Then there are women, one of whom is a graphologist and is holding in her hand something that Benjamin had written. He comes up to her and he says:

What I saw was a material covered with images. The only graphical elements in it that I could make out were the upper parts of the letter *d*, whose slender lengths concealed an intense aspiration toward spirituality. This part of the letter moreover had a little sail with a blue border, and the sail billowed out on the design as if a breeze was blowing it. It was the only thing I could "read." . . . The conversation turned for a moment on this writing. . . . At one point I was saying this, *verbatim*: "It was about changing a poem into a *fichu*." [*Es handelte sich darum, aus einem*

Gedicht ein Halstuch zu machen.] . . . Among the women there was one who was very beautiful and was in bed. Hearing my explanation she made a quick movement like a flash. She moved a tiny little bit of the cover that was keeping her safe in bed. . . . And this was not to let me see her body, but the design on her sheet which must have offered an imagery comparable to the one I must have "written," many years ago, as a present for Dausse. . . . After having this dream, I couldn't get to sleep for hours. It was happiness. And it is so that you can share these hours that I am writing to you.²⁰

"Do we always dream in our beds?" I asked at the beginning. And so we have Benjamin writing to Gretel Adorno from his internment camp, that he had had the experience of dreaming, in his own bed, of a woman "in bed," a "very beautiful" woman displaying for him the "design on her sheet." Like a signature or initialing, this design bore Benjamin's own writing. We can always speculate about the *d* that Benjamin discovers on the *fichu*. Perhaps it is Dr. Dausse's initial—it was he who had treated him for malaria and who, in the dream, had given one of his women something that Benjamin says he wrote. In his letter Benjamin puts the words "read" and "write" in quotation marks. But the *d* may also be, among other hypotheses, among other initials, like the first letter of Detlef. Benjamin sometimes familiarly signed his letters "Detlef." This was also the first name he used in some of his pseudonyms, like Detlev Holz, which was the political pseudonym he adopted for *Deutsche Menschen* [German Men], another epistolary book, when he was an emigrant in Switzerland in 1936.²¹ This was how he always signed his letters to Gretel Adorno, sometimes adding *Dein alter Detlef* [your older Detlef]. As it is both read and written by Benjamin, the letter *d* would then indicate the initial of his own signature, as if Detlef was to be understood as "I am the *fichu* one," and even from his voluntary workers' camp, less than a year before his suicide, and like every mortal who says me, in his dream language: "Me, *d*, I'm *fichu*." Less than a year before his suicide, a few months before thanking Adorno for having sent him greetings from New York for his last birthday, which was also on July 15, as is mine, Benjamin dreamed, knowing it without knowing it, a sort of poetic and premonitory hieroglyphic: "Me, *d*, from now on I'm what is called *fichu*." Now the signatory knows it, he says so to Gretel, none of it can be said, written, and read, it can't be signed like that, in a dream, and decoded, other than in French: "The sentence I pronounced [*sic*] distinctly toward the end of this dream also happened to be in French. A double reason for giving you this narrative in the same lan-

guage." No translation, in the conventional sense of the word, will ever give an account of it, a transparently communicable account. In French, the same person can be, without contradiction and at the same moment, *fichu*, *bien fichu*, and *mal fichu*.²² And yet a certain didactic movement respectful of idioms is possible—is even called for, needed, or universally desirable—*starting from* the untranslatable. For instance in a university or in a church on a prize-giving day. Especially if you don't rule out the possibility that the dream also played a part in this throw of the dice—this is what Werner Hamacher has whispered to me—playing the first name of Walter Benjamin's first wife but also that of his sister who was very ill at the time. That name is Dora, which in Greek can mean skin that has been scorched, scratched, or worked over.²³

In that it leaves Benjamin sleepless afterward, this dream seems to resist the law declared by Freud: "throughout our whole sleeping state we know just as certainly that we are dreaming as we know that we are sleeping [*wir den ganzen Schlafzustand über ebenso sicher wissen, das wir träumen, wie wir es wissen, das wir schlafen*]." ²⁴ The ultimate wish of the system that holds sovereign sway over the unconscious is the *wish to sleep*, the wish to withdraw into sleeping [*während sich das herrschende System auf den Wunsch zu schlafen zurückgezogen hat*].²⁵

For decades I have been hearing voices, as they say, in my dreams. They are sometimes friendly voices, sometimes not. They are voices in me. All of them seem to be saying to me: why not recognize, clearly and publicly, once and for all, the affinities between your work and Adorno's, in truth your debt to Adorno? Aren't you an heir of the Frankfurt School?

Within me and outside me the response to this will always remain complicated, of course, and partly virtual. But from now on, and for this I say "thank you" once again, I can no longer act as if I weren't hearing these voices. While the landscape of influences, filiations, or legacies, of resistances too, will always remain craggy, labyrinthine, or abyssal, and in this case perhaps more contradictory and overdetermined than ever, today I am happy that thanks to you I can and must say "yes" to my debt to Adorno, and on more than one count, even if I am not yet capable of responding adequately to it or taking up its responsibilities.

If I had been going to make my gratitude decently measure up to the noble heights of what is given me by you, namely a sign of confidence and the assignation of a responsibility, to respond to it and correspond to it, I

would have had to conquer two temptations. In asking you to forgive me a double failure, I will tell you, in the mode of denial, what *I would have liked not* to do or what I *ought not* to do.

It would have been necessary *on the one hand* to avoid any narcissistic complacency, and *on the other* to avoid overestimation or overinterpretation, whether philosophical, historical, or political, of the event with which you are so generously associating me today—me, my work, even the country, the culture, and the language in which my modest history is rooted or from which it takes its nourishment, however disloyal and marginal it remains there. If one day I were to write the book I dream of to interpret the history, the possibility, and the honor of this prize, it would include at least seven chapters. These, in the style of a TV guide, are the provisional titles:

1. A comparative history of the French and German legacies of Hegel and Marx; their joint but so very different rejections of idealism and especially speculative dialectics, before and after the war. This chapter, round about ten thousand pages, would be devoted to the difference between *critique* and *deconstruction*, in particular through the concepts of "determined negativity," sovereignty, totality and divisibility, autonomy, fetishism (including what Adorno is right to call the fetishism, in some *Kulturkritik*, of the "concept of culture"²⁶) through the different concepts of *Aufklärung* and *Lumières*,²⁷ as with the debates and frontiers inside the German field but also inside the French field (these two groupings are sometimes more heterogeneous than one thinks within the national borders, which leads to many errors of perspective). To keep narcissism quiet, I would say nothing about all the differences involved in my not belonging to so-called French culture and especially French academic culture, which I do also know I am part of: this makes things too complicated for the present short speech.

2. A comparative history in the political tragedy of the two countries, in relation to the reception and legacy of Heidegger. Here too, in ten thousand pages or so on this crucial issue, I would go over the similarities and differences between the strategies. And I would be trying to indicate in what way my own strategy, which is at least as hesitant as Adorno's, and at any rate radically deconstructive, goes in a quite different direction and responds to quite different demands. By the same token, we would have to undertake a complete reinterpretation of the legacies of Nietzsche and Freud, and even, if I may go this far, of Husserl, and even, if I may go even further, of Benjamin. (If Gretel Adorno were still alive, I would write her a

confidential letter about the relationship between Teddie and Detlef. I would ask her why Benjamin doesn't have a prize, and I would share my hypotheses on this subject with her.)

3. The interest in psychoanalysis. Generally foreign to German university philosophers, but practically all French philosophers of my generation or the one right before shared this interest with Adorno. Among other things, it would be necessary to insist on the *political* vigilance that must be exercised, without overreaction or injustice, in the reading of Freud. I would have liked to cross a passage in *Minima Moralia*, entitled "This side of the pleasure principle," with what I recently dubbed "beyond beyond the pleasure principle."²⁸

4. After *Auschwitz*, whatever this name means, whatever the debates opened up by Adorno's prescriptions on the subject (I can't analyze them here—there are too many of them and they are too diverse and complex), whether or not one agrees with him (and you won't expect me now to present a thoroughly argued position on this in a few sentences)—in each case, Adorno's *undeniable* merit, the unique event which will come to bear his signature, is to have woken up so many thinkers, writers, teachers, or artists to their responsibility in the face of everything of which Auschwitz must remain *both* the irreplaceable proper name *and* a metonymy.

5. A differential history of the resistances and misunderstandings between on the one hand those German thinkers who are also my respected friends, I mean Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas, and on the other the French philosophers of my generation; for a little while this history has been largely over, but perhaps not yet over with. In this chapter, I would try to show that despite the differences between these two great debates (direct or indirect, explicit or implicit), the *misunderstandings* always occur around interpretation and the very possibility of *misunderstanding*—they turn around the *concept of misunderstanding*, of dissensus as well, of the other and the singularity of the event; but then, as a result, they turn around the essence of idiom, the essence of language, beyond its undeniable and necessary *functioning*, beyond its communicative intelligibility. The misunderstandings on this subject may be past, but they sometimes still pass via effects of idiom that are not only linguistic but also traditional, national, or institutional—sometimes also idiosyncratic and personal, conscious or unconscious. If these misunderstandings about misunderstanding seem to be calming down these days, if not totally melting away, in an atmosphere of amicable reconciliation, we should not only pay tribute to the

work, the reading, the good faith, and the friendship of various people, often the youngest philosophers in this country. We should also take into account the growing awareness of political responsibilities *to be shared* in relation to the future, and not only that of Europe: discussions, deliberations, and decisions that are political, but also about *the essence of the political*, about the new strategies to be invented, about joint positions to take up, about a logic of sovereignty and even the impasses of sovereignty (state sovereignty or otherwise) that can no longer be either endorsed or simply discredited with regard to the new forms of capitalism and the global market, with regard to a new figure, even a new constitution of Europe, which, by faithful infidelity, should be something other than what the various "crises" of the European spirit diagnosed in this past century have represented it—but also something other than a superstate, just an economic or military competitor to the United States or China.

Never before have the responsibilities in this regard been more singular, more acute, and more necessary: being Adorno's birthday, the date of September 11 ought to remind us of this rather than announcing it, as it did in New York or Washington.²⁹ Never before will it have been more urgent to find another way of thinking of Europe. This different thinking of Europe involves a deconstructive critique that is sober, wide awake, vigilant, and attentive to everything that solders the political to the metaphysical, to capitalist speculating, to the perversions of religious or nationalist feeling, or to the fantasy of sovereignty—through the best accredited of strategies, and the most accepted of political rhetorics, and media and tele-technological authorities, and spontaneous or organized movements of opinion. Outside Europe but in Europe as well. On all sides. I have to say it too swiftly but I venture to maintain this firmly: on all sides. My absolute compassion for all the victims of September 11 will not prevent me from saying: I do not believe in the political innocence of anyone in this crime. And if my compassion for all the innocent victims is limitless, it is because it does not stop with those who died on September 11 in the United States. That is my interpretation of what should be meant by what we have been calling since yesterday, in the White House's words, "infinite justice": not to exonerate ourselves from our own wrongdoings and the mistakes of our own politics, even at the point of paying the most terrible price, out of all proportion.

6. The question of literature, at the point where it is indissociable from the question of language and its institutions, would play a crucial role

in this history. What I shared most easily with Adorno, even took from him, as did other French philosophers—although again in different ways—is his interest in literature and in what, like the other arts, it can critically decenter in the field of university philosophy. Here too one would have to take into account the community of interests on both sides of the Rhine, and the difference between the two literatures but also the difference in the music and the painting and even the cinema, while remaining attentive to the spirit of what Kandinsky, cited by Adorno, called, without hierarchizing, *Klangfarbe*, or “tone color.”³⁰

This would lead me to a history of mutual reading, before and after the war, inside and outside the academy; and to a politology of translation, of the relations between the cultural market of publishing and the academy, and so on. All this in a style that would sometimes remain very close to Adorno’s.

7. Finally I get to the chapter that I would most enjoy writing, because it would take the least trodden but in my view one of the most crucial paths in the future reading of Adorno. It is about what we call, in the singular—which has always shocked me—the *Animal*. As if there were only one of them. By referring to a number of little noticed outlines or suggestions of Adorno’s in the book he wrote in the United States with Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, or in *Beethoven: Philosophie der Musik*, I would try to show (I have already tried to do this elsewhere), that here there are premises that need to be deployed with great prudence, the gleams at least of a revolution in thought and action that we need, a revolution in our dwelling together with these other living things that we call the animals. Adorno understood that this new critical—I would rather say “deconstructive”—ecology had to set itself against two formidable forces, often opposed to one another, sometimes allied.³¹

On one side, that of the most powerful idealist and humanist tradition of philosophy. The sovereignty or mastery (*Herrschaft*) of man over nature is in truth “directed against animals” (*sie richtet sich gegen die Tiere*), Adorno specifies here. He particularly blames Kant, whom he respects too much from another point of view, for not giving any place in his concept of dignity (*Würde*) and the “autonomy” of man to any compassion (*Mitleid*) between man and the animal. Nothing is more odious (*verhasster*) to Kantian man, says Adorno, than remembering a resemblance or affinity between man and animality (*die Erinnerung an die Tierähnlichkeit des Menschen*). The Kantian feels only hate for human animality. This is

even his taboo. Adorno speaks of *Tabuierung* and goes a very long way straight off: for an idealist system, animals play a role virtually the same as the Jews in a fascist system (*die Tiere spielen fürs idealistische System virtuell die gleiche Rolle wie die Juden fürs faschistische*). Animals are the Jews of idealists, who are thus just virtual fascists. Fascism begins when you insult an animal, including the animal in man. Authentic idealism (*echter Idealismus*) consists in *insulting* the animal in man or in treating a man like an animal. Adorno twice uses the word *insult* (*schimpfen*).

But on the other side, on the other front, one of the themes of the fragment called “Man and Animal” in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is that one should fight against the ideology concealed in the troubled interest in animals, that the fascists, the Nazis, and the Führer did in fact seem to show, sometimes to the point of vegetarianism.

The seven chapters of this history I dream of are already being written, I’m sure. What we are sharing today certainly testifies to that. These wars and this peace will have their new historians, and even their “historians’ wars” (*Historikerstreit*). But we don’t yet know how and in what medium, under what veils for which Schleiermacher of a future hermeneutics, on what canvas and on what internet *fichu* the artist of this weaving will be hard at work (the Plato of the *Statesman* would call him or her a *hyphantès* [weaver]). We will never know, not us, on what Web *fichu* some Weber to come will plan to author or teach our history.

No historical metalanguage to bear witness to it in the transparent element of some absolute knowledge.

Celan:

Niemand
zeugt für den
Zeugen.³²

Thank you again for your patience.

CHAPTER 14: FICHUS

1. Walter Benjamin, letter no. 1320, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 6 (1938–40), ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 343. This letter has twice been published in France (so in French, in its original language: in Benjamin's *Correspondance*, 1929–40, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Guy Petitdemange [Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1979], 2: 307–9; and in Benjamin's *Écrits français* [Writings in French], ed. and trans. J. M. Monnoyer [Paris: Gallimard, 1991], pp. 316–18). Benjamin appears to have noted down this dream for himself, in a version that is essentially identical to the one in the letter to Gretel Adorno, but with the grammar or actual words slightly different in some of its phrasing. This version is published in the *Autobiographische Schriften* (Autobiographical Writings) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 6: 540–42.

2. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (1951; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 143; *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 111. The phrase in the dedication about “the intellectual in emigration” is on p. 18.

3. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217–51.

4. Adorno, “A Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p. 241.

5. Adorno mentions this article in the same text. It was published in the *Neue Rundschau* and was about surrealism, among other things.

6. Adorno, “A Portrait,” p. 239.

7. Adorno, “On the Question: ‘What is German?’” trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 36 (1985): 129.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

10. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 141–42; English trans., p. 110.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11; emphasis added.

12. Jürgen Habermas, “Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity—Self-Affirmation Gone Wild” (1969), in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 102.

13. Adorno, “On the Question,” p. 130.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–31.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

17. G. Ahrens, W. S. Bau, H. Beese, M. Bechgeister, U. O. Dünkelsbühler, A. G. Dütman, P. Engelmann, M. Fischer, Th. Frey, Rodolphe Gasché, Werner Hamacher, A. Haverkamp, F. Kittler, H. G. Gondel, H. U. Gumbrecht, R. Hentschel, D. Hornig, J. Hörisch, K. Karabaczek-Schreiner, A. Knop, U. Keen, B. Lindner, S. Lorenzer, S. Lüdemann, H. J. Metzger, K. Murr, D. Otto, K. J. Pazzini, E. Pfaffenberger-Brückner, R. Puffert, H. J. Rheinberger, D. Schmidt, H. W.

Schmidt, K. Schreiner, R. Schwaderer, G. Sigl, Bernard Stiegler, Peter Szondi, J. Taubes, Ch. Tholen, D. Trauner, D. W. Tuckwiller, B. Waldenfels, Elisabeth Weber, Samuel Weber, D. Weissmann, R. Werner, M. Wetzel, A. Wintersberger, A. Witte, H. Zischler.

I apologize to those whose names I have omitted here.

18. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 6: 341.

19. Adorno, letter no. 39, August 2–4, 1935, in Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 104–14; Benjamin, letter no. 40, August 16, 1935, pp. 116–19.

20. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 6: 342–43.

21. Benjamin, *Deutsche Menschen* (German Men) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962).

22. To be *fichu* is to be nasty; to be *bien fichu* (“well *fichu*”) is to have a good body; to be *mal fichu* (“badly *fichu*”) is to feel lousy.—Trans.

23. The more usual etymology is from *doron*, gift; Adorno's own name *Theodor*, from the same root, means “gift of the gods.”—Trans.

24. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 5: 571; *Die Traumdeutung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1977), p. 465.

25. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 464; cf. *Standard Edition*, 5: 570.

26. Cf. the opening of Adorno's “Cultural Criticism and Society,” at the start of *Prisms*, p. 19: “To anyone in the habit of thinking with his ears, the words ‘cultural criticism’ (*Kulturkritik*) must have an offensive ring.”

27. The German and French versions of Enlightenment.—Trans.

28. See Derrida, “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul: The Impossible Beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty” (2000), in Derrida, *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 238–80. The passage from *Minima Moralia* is section 37, pp. 60–61.

29. By an odd coincidence, it happens that Adorno was born on a September 11 (1903). Everyone who was in the audience knew this, and according to what had been the usual ritual since the prize was founded, it ought to have been presented on September 11, not September 22. But because of a visit to China (I was in Shanghai on September 11), I had had to ask for the ceremony to be put back.

30. Adorno, “Über einige Relationem zwischen Musik und Malerei” (1965), in *Musikalische Schriften, I–III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), pp. 628–42; 636–37; trans. Susan Gillespie, “On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting,” *Musical Quarterly* 79 (1995): 66–79; 73.

31. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* (1993), trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

32. “No one/bears witness for the/witness” (Paul Celan, “*Aschenglorie*” (Ashaureole), in *Selected Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 260–61.