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History and Politics in the Work of Jacques Derrida

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HISTORY AND POLITICS IN THE WORK OF JACQUES DERRIDA

by

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This thesis will address three of Jacques Derrida's later works, which are also some of his more explicitly political texts, in order to delineate what type of political thought or engagement Derrida's work both takes on, and promotes. The three texts are: "Force of Law", *Specters of Marx*, and *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Discussions of history are significant in all three of these works and foreground the politics Derrida is concerned with. Derrida's discussion of history seeks to respond to a dominant/traditional understanding of history as teleological or linear. This understanding of history also determines much traditional political thought and theory. Expounding the theory of history which guides Derrida's discussion will serve to differentiate it from teleological trappings, and will foreground a discussion of what type of political thought or engagement is appropriate to such an understanding of history.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Discussions of time and history have a central position throughout much of Jacques Derrida's work. These discussions respond to an approach to history which understands history as progressing linearly through radical breaks; an understanding of history which is referred to by some theorists as the modern approach to history[1]. Derrida resists this understanding and seeks to approach history differently which demands a varied understanding of historical change. Derrida theorizes this difficulty and varied understanding as early as *Of Grammatology* (published in French in 1967) in which he discusses historical closure, as differentiated from an understanding which assumes that the end of a historical era ushers in the beginning of a new one. The notion of historical eras upholds an understanding of the past and the future as totalizable or knowable and therefore as potentially distinct from one another. Derrida complicates these possibilities and in later works, such as *Specters of Marx* published in 1993, he addresses the uncertainty of the past through concepts such as spectrality and hauntology which further theorize his understanding of time and history.

These later works explicitly engage with the relationship which his understanding of historical movement has to futurity. This occurs through discussions of the "to-come", a phrase which garners more and more attention to the point where in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* published in 2003 Derrida writes that "the *to-come* turns out to be the most insistent theme of this book" (RE, xii). This focalization on theorizing futurity parallels Derrida's more explicit engagements with discussions related to politics or the political; a correlation which speaks to an imperative to consider the relationship between certain forms of deconstruction and historical

change. As Derrida writes in "Force of Law", some of "the most fertile and most necessary" conversations which align with this imperative respond "to the most radical programs of a deconstruction that would like, in order to be consistent with itself...to aspire to something more consequential, to *change* things and to intervene...in what one calls the *cité*, the polis and more generally the world" (FL, 931, 933).

By tracing these discussions—particularly as they appear in "Force of Law", *Specters of Marx*, and *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*—I will isolate the concepts which become essential to theorizing Derrida's relationship to history and futurity such as responsibility, undecidability, spectrality, "messianicity without messianism", and the "democracy-to-come". The notion of "messianicity without messianism" will open a discussion of how Derrida's use of the seemingly paradoxical "concept without its concept" in his later writings becomes the tool by which he inscribes a necessary hesitancy into his work, and I will discuss how, though this phrasing had yet to emerge, it can be read back into "Force of Law" as the essential feature which he uses to differentiate his work from Benjamin's. This differentiation is contingent upon maintaining an unknowable and unpredictable future yet a future that must still be decided upon and will come to demand a decision; we cannot simply sit idly by and wait for the future to arrive. The necessity to engage with the future speaks once again to an imperative that asks what the relationship between deconstruction and historical change is. I will track how this imperative arises and is adjusted across the three works mentioned above and in so doing will delineate what approach to thinking and to politics these works point toward.

CHAPTER 1

LAW, JUSTICE, AND RESPONSIBILITY

Derrida's only engagement with Walter Benjamin's[2] work comes in his essay titled "Force of Law". This is one of the few texts in which Derrida explicitly engages with political questions such as justice, law, and responsibility, and in which he directly theorizes deconstruction's relationship to futurity and what he calls "l'avenir" or the to-come. These latter concepts dealing with time and futurity underlie his conceptions of justice and responsibility and also serve to differentiate Derrida's work from Benjamin's. This differentiation occurs in regard to how each approaches the question of indecipherabillity which Benjamin introduces under the name of divine violence. Benjamin's theorization of the relationship to divine violence differs from what Derrida refers to as a deconstructive affirmation in the post-script and leads Derrida to conclude that Benjamin's text is *too* messianico-marxist. In the post-script Derrida also reads the potential consequences of this messianico-marxism in response to the final solution. This reading creates a demand for a deconstructive affirmation rather than a Benjaminian 'destruction', and speaks to the necessity of a responsibility to the future which Derrida does not read in Benjamin.

In "Critique of Violence" Benjamin analyzes and discusses various types of political violence and how they function. One of the key examples Benjamin refers to in his discussion is the right to strike which Derrida argues introduces a thematization of history that is self-legitimating and ignorant of an indecipherability. Benjamin writes that the right to strike is "probably the only" instance of the law sanctioning the use of violence, and therefore it can become an internal resistance to the system of law because it leads the law into a contradiction.

This occurs in the 'revolutionary general strike' where "the law meets the strikers, as perpetrators of violence, with violence" (CV 240). Benjamin writes that this comes about due to a difference of interpretation in which the strikers "will always appeal to [their] right to strike, and the state will call this appeal an abuse (since the right was not 'so intended')" (CV 239). This abuse occurs because the state grants the right to strike as a form of non-violent escape from violence committed by an employer, but the strike is more than mere escape and it expresses certain demands. As Benjamin writes, "the moment of violence, however, is necessarily introduced, in the form of extortion...if it takes place in the context of a conscious readiness to resume the suspended action under certain circumstances" (CV 239). Shortly thereafter he adds, "understood in this way, the right to strike constitutes in the view of labor...the right to use force in attaining certain ends" (CV 239). The strike is therefore a tool meant to change the current circumstances by force or violence. The state interprets this as an abuse once the strike becomes a general strike. Not only is the strike not non-violent or escapist once understood in this way, but in becoming a general strike it directs that force toward the state rather than toward a specific employer and therefore seeks to use force through extortion against the state; which the state refuses to accept. The state therefore comes into contradiction with itself in responding with violence because it is attempting to resist the force which it has declared to be a right and is therefore resisting its own laws. This brings about an internal contradiction in the law.

Derrida writes that it is only an internal contradiction which makes a critique[3] of violence possible; what he refers to as "an interpretative and meaningful evaluation of it" (FL 989). The violence of the state and the violence of the strike would not be comprehensible or interpretable if they did not occur within the limits of the law and thus the limits of understanding (decipherability); the terms of decipherability grant interpretation and evaluation. Derrida

continues that, since it is internal to law, "this violence thus belongs in advance to the order of a *droit* (law) that remains to be transformed or founded" (FL 989). The general strike seeks to change the current circumstances of the state and its laws and is thus a part of a revolutionary discourse which seeks to change (or abolish) the state. It disrupts the law in order to found a new law[4].

Derrida argues that the newfound law which will be founded will absolve the initial strike of its violence. He writes that "this law to come will in return legitimate, retrospectively, the violence that may offend the sense of justice, its future anterior already justifies it" (FL 991). The law which the revolution founds will serve to justify and legitimate the revolutionary act. The discourse of revolution therefore functions upon a system of retroactive justification which creates a hermeneutic circle (Derrida's term) between the present moment (the strike) and the future it will bring about; the new law which the strike will create will legitimize and justify the initial violent activity of the strike. Since it is internal to the law the strike is generally interpretable, and as revolutionary it partakes in a circular system of interpretation and legitimation.

The coherency of the revolutionary general strike entails an interpretability of the strike and the revolutionary moment. However Derrida argues that the revolutionary moment is unintelligible and indecipherable. Even though it occurs from within the existing system it is a moment which suspends that system thereby disrupting the interpretable system. As Derrida writes, "This moment of suspense, this *épokhè*, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law" (FL 991). The revolutionary moment is thus a gap between the event of the general strike and what comes after it. It is a suspended moment and what follows (either the founding of a new law or its dismantling) has not yet arrived. Derrida writes that the

suspended revolutionary moment is a pure performative and "the supposed subject of this pure performative would no longer be before the law, or rather he would be before a law not yet determined, before the law as before a law not yet existing, a law yet to come" (FL 993). This subject differs from the subject of Benjamin's general strike in that it does not find legitimation in its future anterior, in the changed reality it will bring about; its future has not yet arrived and therefore has no significatory influence over the present. The future—once it arrives—will produce intelligibility or interpretability but this interpretability does not exist within the revolutionary moment (in fact, there is no within of the revolutionary moment; for Derrida it has always already passed).

The interpretation yet to arrive exposes an "extraordinary paradox" of law which further complicates the coherent narrative of revolution read in Benjamin. The future interpretation must arrive in order to establish law, and yet, according to Derrida, the law will always exceed that future interpretation. This excess occurs because the law only exists if it is established by a performative act and it must therefore always be established in every moment[5]. As Derrida writes, "The law is transcendent and theological, and so always to come, always promised, because it is immanent, finite and so already past" (FL 993). The law is produced by human creation yet the instance of that creation does not last and the law must be re-created in the future. Under legal systems this re-creation entails a confirmation of what is precedent, however this necessity of continual establishment also makes it so that the law can always be contested. Hence the significance of the revolutionary moment. The revolutionary moment suspends and contests the current system of law and authority, or said differently, the/an indecipherable moment disrupts or contests the current system, which opens the current law toward its future to-come.

In configuring certain types of strikes in his text which are interpreted or judged to bring about certain results—such as the general political strike which replaces the state in favor of another state or the general proletarian strike which abolishes the state in favor of a "wholly transformed" set of relations—Benjamin inserts the indecipherable revolutionary moment into the order of intelligibility. Not only that, but according to Derrida's reading, Benjamin contends that these two types of strikes can be known-in-advance; they are destined (Derrida's term) to bring about the results they desire. Hence, in accord with the hermeneutic circle of revolutionary discourse, the 'general political strike' or the 'general proletarian strike' would claim justification by the future they are destined to create. But, again, this occurs *after* the unreadable revolutionary moment. Derrida thus writes that Benjamin 'argues' with the unreadable. "One has the right to suspend legitimating authority and all its norms of reading...which of course will sometimes argue with the unreadable in order to found another reading, another State, sometimes not; for we shall see that Benjamin distinguishes between two sorts of general strikes" (FL 995). For Benjamin, the two sorts of revolutionary strikes are readable. This is where Derrida differentiates deconstruction from Benjamin's critique. Rather than reading—judging or interpreting—the revolutionary moment in advance, deconstruction resists a readability or interpretability which is assured in advance, understands the revolutionary moment as suspending the norms of reading, and then is faced (after the interruption has passed) with the two temptations which Benjamin takes to be original.

Due to the paradox of law this suspension cannot last and one of the temptations must take hold, a norm of reading must be instituted or reinstituted. The performative act by which the law is instituted will come to pass, a decision will be made, and an interpretation will be given. In taking note of this paradox, deconstruction has a very different relationship and response to

indecipherability than Benjamin's critique. For Benjamin, the response is already determined in the/an indecipherable revolutionary moment whereas for Derrida indecipherability demands a response yet also points to the impossibility of adequately responding. The law must be established in response to the revolutionary moment yet the law exceeds what that response will establish. Deconstruction deals with this paradox and impossibility that Benjamin occludes. Deconstruction must consider the decision/interpretation/response and its impossibility or limit. These considerations will provide the basis by which Derrida articulates a deconstructive responsibility.

However Benjamin's final example, divine violence, complicates this simplistic distinction between his form of critique and deconstruction. In divine violence Benjamin acknowledges and considers indecipherability. For Benjamin this occurs through his attempt to think away from the means/ends relationship he attributes to law. In the opening pages of the essay Benjamin asserts that law traditionally functions through two registers; either natural law or positive law. What links these two registers is that they both operate upon the order of means and ends. Natural law dictates just ends and therefore the means which accord with those ends are just. Positive law constructs ends which are confirmed and made just by the means. In natural law the authority rests with the ends; in positive law with the means.

This conversation has a linguistic parallel which sheds light on where Benjamin is heading. The means/ends understanding of law parallels a means/ends understanding of language understood as communicative. If language is communicative it functions through signs which represent. The signs function as means and the representations function as ends. The signs can either be accurate to the preexisting representations (natural law), or the representations can be derived/confirmed from the signs (positive law). To exceed this register language must not be

necessarily communicative just as the discussion of violence cannot be necessarily tied to means/ends if it is to exceed ignoble violence. Benjamin asks, "How would it be...if...a different kind of violence arose that certainly could be either the justified or the unjustified means to those ends but was not related to them as means at all but in some different way?" (CV, 247). Derrida writes that the response to this question "summons up decisions of thought that concern nothing less than the origin of language in its relation to the truth, destinal violence that puts itself above reason, then, above this violence itself, God: another, a wholly other 'mystical foundation of authority'" (FL 1021-1023).

For Benjamin this points to the order of manifestation[6]. Manifestation precedes mediation; the linguistic event occurs as event before it enters into a relation of means and representations. Reflecting back into the register of violence, a violent manifestation would be a violence that appears without looking toward an end and in this regard would become a pure means (though shifting the language to a pure manifestation may be more clear) and for Benjamin this is a manifestation of the gods: mythic violence. As Benjamin writes, "Mythic violence in its archetypal form is a mere manifestation of the gods. Not a means to their ends, scarcely a manifestation of their will, but primarily a manifestation of their existence" (CV 248). It does not assume interpretability nor comprehensibility rather it is an unmediated and unmediating expression. In this sense manifestation is how Benjamin allows for and thinks indecipherability because the manifested expression is indecipherable.

Yet Benjamin does not retain the total indecipherability of manifestation within the mythic and writes that the manifestation which occurs through the mythic is an objective manifestation and therefore "can be subjected to criticism" or interpretation (CV 248). Benjamin distinguishes between two forms of divine manifestation—what he calls mythic and divine—in

order to bring out this potential for criticism. These two forms are distinguishable according to whether they are founding or abolishing acts of violence. According to Benjamin, mythic violence (which is Greek) founds a law but does so according to a fate which cannot be known; it is uncertain and ambiguous as it does not appeal to any precedence or refer to any result. Once violence occurs a new law is founded. Divine violence (which is Jewish) on the other hand is entirely opposed to this; as he writes, "If mythic violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes" (CV 249). The manifestation of mythic violence, though indecipherable in its expression, inevitably becomes decipherable in that it creates laws, boundaries, and passes judgment; it could be said that these results are intended in its expression. Conversely, divine violence is indecipherable in its expression and it does not directly produce decipherable consequences such as laws or judgments; divine violence expiates and annihilates but intends nothing in its expression to be deciphered or comprehended.

Derrida speaks to this distinction in terms of the possibility of making a decision, and in doing so further clarifies the paradox of law and notes the necessity of that paradox to any decision or interpretation. He writes that by the above understanding of mythical and divine violence all undecidability is "situated, blocked in, accumulated on the side of droit, of mythological violence" whereas all decidability "stands on the side of the divine violence that destroys le droit" (FL 1031). The mythic violence which creates laws, limits, and boundaries sets the standard in-advance so the decision is predetermined and already made once the law is known; there is no decision to make as long as one knows the law. Divine violence on the other hand is an indecipherable annihilation and therefore the possibility to decide is not reduced.

There is no standard to have knowledge of and appeal to so the ability to decide is left open. Referring back to the discussion of the paradox of law above this possibility to decide would parallel the 'man' standing before the law yet-to-come. The indecipherable moment—here divine violence—brings about the impossible paradox yet it is only through this paradox that a decision unbound to predetermined standards is made possible. This leads to a distinction between the ability to make a decision and the knowledge associated with making that decision[7]. As Derrida states schematically: "on one side, [there is] decision (just, historical, political and so on), justice beyond droit and the state, but without decidable knowledge; on the other, decidable knowledge and certainty in a realm that structurally remains that of the undecidable, of the mythic droit of the state" (FL 1035). Decision-making and knowledge are disassociated and inversely related in this context. Mythic violence is decipherable and provides decidable/certain knowledge but this limits the ability to decide; divine violence is indecipherable and provides no decidable knowledge but allows for decision. At this point, Benjamin's engagement with the indecipherability introduced by divine violence is coherent with Derrida's engagement with indecipherability.

The distinguishing feature between the two rests in how each relates to and discusses indecipherability in regard to its recognition in time. Though an indecipherable event Benjamin maintains that "on the suspension of law [brought about by divine violence] with all the forces on which it depends as they depend on it, finally therefore on the abolition of state power, a new historical epoch is founded" (CV 251-252). Divine violence, as expiatory, is understood to bring about a radical change in human history. This also entails that, though wholly indecipherable, divine violence must be somehow recognizable if it is to be recognized as having had such an influence. But Benjamin writes that "only mythic violence, not divine, will be recognizable *as*

such with certainty, unless it be in *incomparable effects*, because the expiatory power of violence is invisible to men" (CV 252, my emphasis). Expiation entails a radical break from the past and therefore the past terms of comprehension or decipherability can no longer be upheld; to do so would be to maintain the past rather than expiate it. As an expiatory force then, divine violence cannot be understood or deciphered; it can only be glimpsed after it has passed in its effects. It can only be traced or recognized after it has disappeared[8] which casts divine violence into the past and demands a certain type of recognition.

The form of recognition proper to divine violence which does not provide comprehension is presented in the final sentence of Benjamin's essay in which he names the indecipherable, divine violence. Benjamin writes that "Divine violence, which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred execution, may be called 'sovereign' violence" (CV, 252). In this final sentence Benjamin enacts a language that is manifestation (or is reflective of manifestation): becoming name or becoming sign. A name is a sign which does not (yet) enter into a network of knowledge or comprehensibility. It is a sign with a singular reference; it could be called a nonmediate sign rather than a mediating sign which operates through generalized structures of understanding. A name is an index which makes reference to a singular moment or a singular pointing, but this only occurs retroactively.

And yet Benjamin's final sentence speaks in the conditional which is directed toward a future condition in which this calling is appropriate: "divine violence...*may* be called". Thus divine violence is positioned along a similar hermeneutic circle to the one discussed above; the recognition or naming of the expiatory divine moment will be possible, therefore the coherency between the future and the past will come about. The present (or a future present) judges the effects of divine violence as expiatory and therefore recognizes the expression of divine violence

from a future moment which comes after its manifestation, just as is the case with the revolutionary general strikes which will legitimate their pasts based on the futures they bring about. The future interprets and legitimizes the past, and for Benjamin it is assured to do so. Divine violence *may* be called; its being named and recognized will be possible. Divine violence thus remains indecipherable yet is (or rather *will be*) definitively recognizable for Benjamin; the indecipherable will have become recognized as divine violence.

If the/an indecipherable event is assured to become recognizable, then the future decision about how to recognize the indecipherable event is already determined, which points out a limit of Benjamin's understanding of indecipherability. As definitively recognizable in the future, divine violence can and *will* be known to some degree; it cannot be known *as such* but its effects will be known or recognized with confidence. This reduces the possibility of decision because the certainty of knowledge and recognition predetermines the decision, and more specifically, this reduces the decision which Derrida refers to throughout "Force of Law" as just, historical, political and so on. But this does not entail that deconstruction is merely the opposite of Benjamin's future anterior knowledge; deconstruction is not a discourse dedicated to the infinite possibility of decision. Derrida writes: "I think that deconstructive discourses as they present themselves in their irreducible plurality participate in an impure, contaminating, negotiated, bastard and violent way in all these filiations of decision and the undecidable" (FL 1035). Deconstruction is not merely the affirmation of the decidable in contrast to what has been shown in Benjamin to be on the side of the undecidable. Deconstruction participates in the contamination and negotiation of these two terms; in the paradox of law which forces a decision while resisting that very decision. For Derrida this entails a hesitant decision, a decision which he qualifies with a 'perhaps' several times throughout his essay, and a decision which must be

responsible to its own limit and insufficiency. For this reason Derrida's relationship to indecipherability looks to the undecidability of the future rather than holding onto the certainty of a future which will recognize its past; the responsibility Derrida is concerned with is to a future without certainty.

This necessity to remain responsible toward what could arrive is articulated through the concept of justice. Justice, functioning similarly to law[9], must be appealed to and expressed yet these appeals and expressions will always fall short of justice, "justice exceeds law and calculation...[though] incalculable justice requires us to calculate" (FL 971). The utterance which calls on/for justice is always exceeded by the justice which it appeals to and because of this excess there can be no knowledge or expectation of what justice will become; there is only a to-come, a futurity put-off and unknowable, an *avenir*. As Derrida writes, "There is an *avenir* for justice and there is no justice except to the degree that some event is possible which, as event, exceeds calculation, rules, programs, anticipations and so forth. Justice as the experience of absolute alterity is unpresentable, but it is the chance of the event and the condition of history" (FL 971). Justice is the possibility of the arrival of an event or alterity (an indecipherable moment), but this event or alterity is unpresentable and therefore any articulation of this arrival does not correspond to justice and limits that alterity. Any articulation, law, program, or prediction reduces the possibility of the arrival of *an* event. This leads Derrida to write that "one must always say perhaps for justice" (FL 971). There is no certainty with justice, no decidable knowledge or legitimizing future anterior; justice is the possibility of what could arrive[10]. This discourse is differentiated from Benjamin's in that it doesn't assume a future recognizability or decidability, rather it acknowledges the possibility of a future interruption which will disrupt recognizability and decidability.

In spite of this disruption the interruption which occurs demands a response or decision. Justice is not something which can be established and its possibility is not necessitated by an articulation, but it can only appear or be referenced through a calculation or law. This creates a danger in that, "left to itself, the incalculable and giving (*donatrice*) idea of justice is always very close to the bad, even to the worst for it can always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation" (FL 971). As uncertain and resistant to firm interpretation justice could always be understood or calculated to be the worst[11]. Justice does not declare knowledge or set terms and thus there is always a possibility that it will be 'mis'-interpreted (and it will always be 'mis'-interpreted because it is unpresentable and therefore it will exceed any calculation or interpretation). Because of this inevitable possibility one must (and here enters the concept of responsibility) continually negotiate and renegotiate the relationship between the calculable and the incalculable—or an indecipherability which exceeds calculation—and this entails the reevaluation of any previous calculation. "Each advance in politicization obliges one to reconsider, and so to reinterpret the very foundations of law such as they had previously been calculated or delimited" (FL 971). There is a constant responsibility to reevaluate and reconsider (deconstruct) previous calculation in the name of a justice-to-come because any interpretation or decision will be a mis-interpretation or insufficient decision.

There are two interrelated responsibilities which arise from these considerations. There is a responsibility to continually renegotiate on behalf of a possible arrival of a future indecipherability, but also, because that renegotiation entails an utterance or calculation, there is a responsibility to inscribe a certain hesitancy[12] in the utterance (hence Derrida's use of 'perhaps') which will resist a complicity with the worst and a reduction of the possibility of the/an indecipherable event. In Part One of the essay this is referred to as a necessary structure of any

call for justice: "A will, a desire, a demand for justice whose structure wouldn't be an experience of aporia [indecipherability] would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice" (FL 947). The necessity of this structure returns once again to the suspended revolutionary moment referred to above once we consider an/the act(s) of deconstruction.

In questioning and reevaluating a previous calculation's credibility deconstruction suspends the authority of that calculation[13]. In this suspended moment the undecidable emerges because the previous knowledge upon which one would have based a decision is brought into question. As a consequence the assuredness of an expiatory revolutionary moment is also suspended. Derrida states that the undecidability which arises brings about a moment of anxiety and writes that "this anxiety-ridden moment of suspense cannot be motivated, cannot find its movement and its impulse except in the demand for an increase in or supplement to justice, and so in the experience of an inadequation or an incalculable disproportion" (FL 955-957). To put this another way, the only motivation appropriate to the decision made in the suspended moment is a motivation directed toward the preservation of an undecideable and unexpected future moment, and therefore it is a motivation which resists closing the potential arrival of the/an incalculable or the/an indecipherable. Derrida therefore resists the interpretation Benjamin gives of the indecipherable moment as expiatory, and instead acknowledges that there is a necessity to respond to the/an indecipherable with a decision but that such a decision can never be determined or known in advance, as expiatory or otherwise. The/an indecipherable cannot have predetermined significance, it therefore demands a decision or response which must not be predetermined otherwise the indecipherable would have already been decided.

The decision must be remade in every instance which also necessitates that the decision must be vulnerable or fragile; it must accommodate its future remaking which constitutes a

responsibility to the future. This is because "once the ordeal of the undecidable is past (if that is possible), the decision has again followed a rule or given itself a rule, invented or reinvented it, reaffirmed it, it is no longer *presently* just, fully just"; it becomes calculation which limits justice and the possible arrival of the incalculable (FL 963). The decision is therefore never final and therefore also never fully just. Because of this "for a decision to be just and responsible, it must, in its proper moment if there is one, be both regulated and without regulation: it must conserve the law and also destroy it or suspend it enough to have to reinvent it in each case, rejustify it" (FL 961). The decision must both calculate (either confirm or produce calculation, rules, norms) and suspend that very calculation enough so that the decision guards the possibility of being remade or reinvented in each instance, in response to each arrival that is to-come.

This second element of responsibility—the responsibility to maintain an openness to what the future could become—is what is not present in Benjamin's text. In reading the revolutionary moment as expiatory and legitimated by its future anterior Benjamin has closed off the possibility of the arrival of the to-come; for Benjamin what is to come has already been decided as a moment which will read the past and legitimate the revolutionary moment. Derrida refers to this confident knowledge as messianic and associated with horizons which are "both the opening and the limit that defines an infinite progress or a period of waiting" (FL 967). Benjamin's text defines a future moment in which the effects of an indecipherable moment will be interpreted, therefore the text limits the future to a preestablished trajectory. Benjamin's text is therefore not responsible toward a future which could arrive; it has predetermined what future *will* arrive.

Derrida draws out this consequence and critique of Benjamin's text (and any text or mode of thinking which operates irresponsibly in accord with similar terms) in his post-scriptum in which he asks how Benjamin's "discourse on the final solution might have been inscribed" (FL

1041). He does this by reading the history of the event within the logic of Benjamin's discourse. Derrida writes that Benjamin "would probably have taken the final solution to be the extreme consequence of a logic of Nazism that...would have corresponded to [among other things]...the totalitarian radicalization of a logic of the State...[and] a radicalization and total extension of the mythical, of mythical violence, both in its sacrificial founding moment and its most conservative moment" (FL 1041). The final solution can be read as the fullest culmination of mythic violence therefore "one can only think, that is, also remember the uniqueness of the final solution from a place other than this space of the mythological violence of right" (FL 1042). Thinking the final solution within the language of representation or law would be to confirm the logic of the mythic and therefore of the final solution. Hence one would have to resist the interpretation or representation of the final solution, and thus the final solution would be an indecipherable event, or in Benjamin's terms a manifestation of divine violence. If this is the case, the final solution is indecipherable, unknowable and uninterpretable *as such* and it is only recognizable in its effects. This entails that at best the final solution will be understood as an indecipherable expression of divine violence which therefore cannot be judged and interpreted, or, at worst, the final solution will be understood as expiatory because it brings an end to mythic violence and thus a new historical epoch.

However in Benjamin's thinking these options are not disassociated. For Benjamin expiation does not occur within decipherability because decipherability entails a continuation of the past; as Derrida discusses, to understand, represent, or interpret the final solution would be to confirm the order of the mythic past. An expiation of the past therefore involves an indecipherability and it is only an indecipherability which can expiate. According to this pairing, it is therefore logically necessary that, unless we are to confirm the logic of the final solution

through interpretation or deciphering, we must think the final solution in terms of an indecipherability and therefore as expiatory.

In reading the potential consequences of Benjamin's text Derrida exposes the problem with a logic that does not respond appropriately to indecipherability. In spite of this Derrida does not outright condemn Benjamin. He writes that Benjamin's text exhibits an "exemplary instability" and "a thinking that knows there is no *justesse*, no justice, no responsibility except in exposing oneself to all risks, beyond certitude and good conscience" and for this he commends Benjamin (FL 1025). Through his discussion of divine violence Benjamin does engage with indecipherability and he is very close to responsibly maintaining that indecipherability. Yet, "despite all its polysemic mobility and all its resources for reversal...this text, like many others by Benjamin, is still too Heideggerian, too messianico-marxist or archeo-eschatological" (FL 1045). Benjamin holds onto expiation and the logic of his text brings expiation and indecipherability inextricably together. This linkage does not leave the future open to an undecidability and instead presumes a specific (messianic) trajectory. The possible arrival of the future-to-come, the necessary hesitancy and fragility associated with the just decision, is not inscribed within Benjamin's text and the text therefore predetermines the future and is complicit with the worst, in Derrida's example the final solution[14].

In reading Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" Derrida is able to delineate how deconstruction's relationship to the future and to undecidability is differentiated from Benjamin's, even if that difference is slight. Benjamin holds onto an expiatory moment that is too determinative of the future and the/an indecipherable, therefore predetermining the possible future decision which will be made in response to the/an indecipherable. By contrast, for Derrida it is necessary to be responsible to the potentiality of the future decision and to maintain the

impossibility of knowing what that decision will be. A decision will always be made but that decision must always be made anew in response to the/an indecipherable if it is to be just to indecipherability. This requires a certain hesitancy to be written into a text which will guard against preemptively reading the future and allow for the necessary decision to be made which an indecipherable will provoke.

CHAPTER 2

SPECTRALITY AND HAUNTOLOGY

In *Specters of Marx* Derrida directly theorizes and elaborates his theory of history. If in "Force of Law" we were introduced to the necessity of a particular relationship to the future in regard to justice and responsibility, it is in *Specters of Marx* that the understanding of history which guides this necessity is explicitly detailed. This explication is prompted by the historical and political context out of which the text develops. The text is based on an address Derrida delivered at a conference titled "Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective" which took place in 1993. The conference sought to deal with the legacy and significance of Marxism immediately following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As the editors of Derrida's text write, some of the questions guiding the conference were: "Has the collapse of communism also spelled the death of Marxism, and of Marx as an important philosopher and political thinker? Have we indeed reached 'the end of history' as Fukuyama has argued, where pluralistic democracies and capitalistic economies reign supreme? [Essentially], does the 'end of history' also portend the end of Marxist theory?" (SM ix). These questions parallel the discourse of history referenced in the introduction which takes history to occur through radical breaks and epochal shifts, and leads Derrida to write that "the media parade of current discourse on the end of history and the last man looks most often like a tiresome anachronism" when considered alongside the same discourses which proliferated during the time of deconstruction's development in the '50s (SM 16). There is thus an important parallel between the historical context of deconstruction's development and the historical context in which

Specters of Marx was first delivered. In both historical instances what Derrida calls an "apocalyptic tone" had a central role in philosophical and political discourses, and it is this parallel which prompts Derrida's theorizing of history in *Specters of Marx*.

The question of history is opened by the question of the/an event. Is an event something which occurs as part of a linear narrative of history; i.e., the fall of communism marks the end of one era and the beginning of an era of neoliberal markets and democracies as argued by Francis Fukuyama? Or, does an event precede narratization and therefore disrupt a linear history? As Derrida remarks we must insist on "a thinking of the event that necessarily exceeds a binary or dialectical logic, the logic that distinguishes or opposes *effectivity or actuality* (either present, empirical, living—or not) and *ideality* (regulating or absolute non-presence) (SM 78). This oppositional logic is what guides the linear thinking of history because this thinking operates through an understanding of events as continually succeeding one another; in Derrida's words, this "relies on a general temporality or an historical temporality made up of the *successive* linking of presents identical to themselves and contemporary with themselves" (SM 87). According to the oppositional logic that distinguishes actuality and ideality these events or presents are then guided, reflected, contradicted, or confirmed by an ideal which is beyond these events; the ideal narrativizes the events based on how/if they accord with that ideal[15]. However, as Derrida contends, the successive presents on which this logic relies are not contemporaneous with themselves and cannot be linked successively, instead there is a "disjointure in the very presence of the present, [a] sort of non-contemporaneity of present time with itself" (SM 29).

Derrida's discussion of the moment of the revolutionary strike in "Force of Law" serves to illustrate this non-contemporaneity. Derrida takes issue with Benjamin's reading of the revolutionary moment as legitimized by the future it brings about. Reframed in accordance with

the terms used above, the event of the revolutionary strike will be justified by its having brought about an ideal condition which will arrive in the future. But, as was noted, this revolutionary moment is not an intelligible event, rather it is a moment of suspense, an *épokhè*, an interruption or a gap. There is no presence of the revolutionary moment unless it is read onto the strike after the fact. The non-presence of the revolutionary moment in this example is reflective of any event for Derrida, and therefore he concludes that eschatology or teleology—linear or progressive narratives of history—come after the event but are not intrinsic to the event. Such an understanding of the event demands a varied understanding of temporality and leads Derrida to write in *Specters of Marx* that time is out-of-joint, disadjusted, or off its hinges. Because of the disjointedness of time and the non-presence of the event, Derrida argues that we must turn to a hauntology rather than an ontology, and a theory of specters and ghosts rather than of presence.

The discussion of specters entails a different logic and knowledge than a thinking which holds onto presence and ontology[16]. A specter cannot be addressed as such or discussed as it is; it does not exist to be known or understood. As Derrida writes in the opening pages of the text:

> It *is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence...this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge...Here is—or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything, some thing, 'this thing', but this thing and not any other, this thing that looks at us, concerns us (SM 5).

A specter is not there, it is not something that can be found or known or addressed, yet it garners our attention; hence it looks at us and concerns us. A specter is there even if we can't know that it is there; hence it is a non-object, a non-presence, a ghost which haunts a space but does not

inhabit that space. A specter is also always singular and specters must be discussed in the singular, though there can be multiple specters at once (and as Derrida notes it will always be a matter of being addressed by multiple specters at once); hence a specter is *this* thing, here—or rather there—which addresses us.

Due to the non-identity of a specter our relationship to it also functions differently. An encounter with a specter cannot be expected nor comprehended; it is an encounter with a non-object that is both there and not there. "The perspective [therefore] has to be revised...the specter first of all sees *us*...it looks at us even before we see it or even before we see period...Especially—and this is the event, for the specter is *of* the event—it sees us during a *visit*" (SM 125). A specter encounters us, we are visited by a specter before we anticipate that visit. Because of this we respond to the arrival of the specter rather than predicating our relationship to it.

Derrida speaks of three types of responses one can have to this arrival or visit. The first is related to mourning. A specter is a trace of what does not exist in an empirical sense; either it no longer exists or is yet to exist. In its traditional sense the work of mourning is the attempt to put this trace in its place. As Derrida writes, "It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains...one *has to know* who is buried where—and *it is necessary* (to know—to make certain) that, in what remains of him, *he remain there*" (SM 9). The work of mourning must not allow a specter to remain a specter; a specter must be grasped and understood, it must be made sense of in order to be mourned[17]. This is the tendency Derrida seeks to work against throughout his text.

The second two responses point to the difficulty of resisting the response of mourning. The second states that a specter can only be responded to within the conditions of language. The communication of, or reference to, a specter can only occur through language, but by using

language a specter is marked or replaced by a linguistic referent; later in the text Derrida will refer to this as "a paradoxical *incorporation*" of the specter (SM 157). In speaking of specters one is never speaking of the specter in-itself, firstly because such a thing does not exist, and secondly because that attempt to communicate it occurs through language. There is therefore an unavoidable difficulty associated with communicating or thinking a specter. This difficulty is further explicated by Derrida's third remark on specters. He writes that "the thing *works*, whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself" (SM 9). A specter is continually undergoing transformation and therefore as it demands a response it is also undergoing transformation—whomever is giving it attention is being transformed as well. A specter thus cannot be caught in a point of reference and made present; a specter is always at work and putting to work. Yet this is what language does by marking or replacing a specter with a linguistic referent. The difficulty is how to avoid the work of mourning which does presence the specter in a particular frame of reference, while still necessarily communicating or responding to that specter through language.

The necessary difficulty of the specter returns once again to the question of a responsibility discussed in "Force of Law" in which Derrida discusses the necessary responsibility one must have to the arrival of future possibilities. In *Specters of Marx* that discussion is updated in accordance with the hauntology or spectrality Derrida is theorizing. In this text Derrida refers to a specter as a *revenant* rather than as a *fantôme* or *spectre*. This usage bears a sense of returning and hence arrival or encounter. The specter returns or is felt in its return. As Derrida writes, "a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*" (SM, 11). In its arrival—its comings and goings—a specter is always a trace of what has been and/or what could be. In this sense the notion of return

doesn't necessarily assume that a specter comes from the past. Derrida writes that "there are several times of the specter. It is a proper characteristic of the specter, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being" (SM, 123). As mark or trace a specter can refer to the past and/or to the future, and therefore the responsibility developed in accordance with hauntology demands a responsibility which is directed both to the past and the future, or more specifically, the responsibility is directed toward spectrality which has multiple times and no time and does not participate in a clean divide between past and future.

Later, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida refers to this responsibility as a welcoming or hospitality. In a relatively long passage, which I will quote in its entirety in order to gather all of the key elements, he writes:

> To welcome, we were saying then, but even while apprehending, with anxiety and the desire to exclude the stranger, to invite the stranger without accepting him or her, domestic hospitality that welcomes without welcoming the stranger, but a stranger who is already found within, more intimate with one than one is oneself, the absolute proximity of a stranger whose power is singular *and* anonymous, an unnameable and neutral power, that is, undecidable, neither active nor passive, an an-identity that, *without doing anything*, invisibly occupies places belonging finally neither to us nor to it (SM 217).

Here Derrida writes 'stranger' but we are still speaking of specters. We must invite a stranger without completely bringing the stranger in. Doing so, fully incorporating the stranger—or put more strongly absorbing a stranger—is the goal of mourning, to make sense of and comprehend a specter, but this full incorporation must be resisted. The specter is also not merely an outsider, some*one* or some*thing* to be brought in. The specter is already internal; a specter comes from

within and/or without, from the past and/or the future. Another adjustment: the specter already occupies these spaces with a neutral power that is both singular and anonymous; we come to encounter the specter and/but the specter comes to visit us. The responsibility to a certain hospitality emerges from this space of engagement. We must be welcome to the potential visit of a specter from anywhere—past, future, outside, inside—and we must welcome a specter in/as this illogical and paradoxical—as Derrida says undecidable—manner outlined. We must be welcome to the arrival of a specter and resist making a decision about that specter in advance[18].

The paradoxical incorporation referred to above is where both the necessity and difficulty of this responsibility enters. Attention must be brought to the specter; it must be noted in order to be welcomed, or to appear, but that attention places or marks a specter as present. Derrida refers to this process as a conjuration and writes, "the height of the conjuring trick here consists in causing to disappear while producing 'apparitions', which is only contradictory in appearance, precisely, since one causes to disappear by provoking hallucinations or by inducing visions" (SM 159). The specter must disappear *and* appear in being conjured, and Derrida writes that this only seems to be a contradiction, that "provoking hallucinations" or "inducing visions" causes to disappear at the same time, in the same breath.

The apparent contradiction between appearing and disappearing is present in the definition of conjuration. Derrida provides three definitions of conjuration throughout the text, the latter two of which interest us here. The first of these is conjuration as an incantation which is meant to evoke or bring forth a spirit; it is "the appeal that causes to come forth *with the voice* and thus it makes come, by definition, what *is not there* at the present moment of the appeal, [but] this voice does not describe, what it says certifies nothing; its words cause something to happen" (SM 50). A conjuration is an evocation which brings about without identifying. But,

more strongly, a conjuration is also an attempt to make disappear. "To conjure means *also* to exorcise: to attempt both to destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force, most often an evil-doing spirit, a specter" (SM 59). The term conjuration therefore holds both an appeal to an evocation of a specter which does not identify, and an appeal to an exorcism which gets rid of a specter. As Derrida writes, the attempt to get rid of a specter is an attempt to put that specter to death and cast it to the past: "effective exorcism pretends to declare the death only in order to put to death...It is in fact a matter of a performative that seeks to reassure...that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead...what used to be living is no longer alive" (SM 59).

Derrida's discussion of exorcism is not far from his discussion of expiation in "Force of Law" and he responds to both in the same way. We can therefore begin to trace a consistent theme in these two works which will develop a conceptual framework and network of terms that are central to his engagement with history. Both exorcism and expiation wish for the dead (the past) to be dead, completely, to never return. As discussed in "Force of Law", for Benjamin this is what the expiatory power of divine violence ensures, and in this case, in *Specters of Marx*, it is what the work of mourning hopes to accomplish. Derrida wants to resist both of these efforts to seal off the past as past in order to maintain a possible return.

The third definition of conjuration Derrida provides becomes essential. A conjuration is an evocation and an expulsion as well as an "act that consists in swearing, taking an oath, therefore promising, deciding, taking *a responsibility*, in short, committing oneself in a performative fashion" (SM 62-63). A conjuration is an evocation, an exorcism, and an act which is directed toward the future as a promise or an oath. It is therefore involved with a responsibility directed toward the future. But how are we to navigate, or choose between, these three different functions of conjuration? Can they be cleanly separated as their definitions imply? Derrida

answers that they can't which leads him once again to an anxiety and undecidability, just as in "Force of Law" there is an anxiety associated with the decision. The anxiety of a conjuration rests on the undecidability between calling on a specter and exorcising that specter; the latter is always possible and one can't make a decision about which of the two the conjuration will bring about. This anxiety and undecidability thus demand a responsibility which acknowledges that the anxiety can never be absolved, "[the conjuration] is destined to the anxiety *that it is*" (SM 135).

The conjuration—or the decision—can never decide-in-advance whether or not the performative act which it takes will result in precisely what it had hoped to avoid: the ontologizing of the specter and therefore its expiation and exorcism. This inevitability and impossibility of the conjuration or decision creates an anxiety that we must not and cannot overcome. It is only by acting through/with this anxiety that a decision or conjuration does not decide the specter in advance. As Derrida notes, "without the opening of this possibility, there remains, perhaps, beyond good and evil, only the necessity of the worst" (SM 34). Overcoming the anxiety by eradicating the possibility of evil (the ontologizing of the specter) decides-in-advance, eliminates a possibility, and therefore irresponsibly performs the very evil it had wished to resist. The conjuration or decision must therefore maintain the very possibility of evil if it hopes to have any chance of avoiding that evil. In "Force of Law" Derrida states that this guarding of future possibilities is what defines a responsible decision.

By maintaining the possibility of evil the conjuration is responsible to the arrival of the to-come which grants the possibility of a different future. Derrida points to the potential that the conjuration can create when he writes that it "calls upon death to invent the quick and to enliven the new, to summon the presence of what is not yet there" (SM 135). The conjuration, if it is responsible, creates the possibility of a return or arrival of what was thought to be dead and/or

"what is not yet there"; it opens the possibility of an arrival of a future that is different from the here-and-now in which the conjuration occurs. There would be a potential for something new, something invented, or something which is not-yet. But it is always possible that the conjuration which believes it is acting responsibly will bring about the worst, will extinguish the potential arrival of a future-to-come, and it is therefore always anxious. In spite of—or rather because of—this possibility, a responsible conjuration does not predetermine the future and allows for a future which could be different to arrive, but it can never anticipate or expect that future. Derrida calls this anxiety-ridden decision or conjuration a just decision in "Force of Law", and he will refer to it as "properly revolutionary" in Specters of Marx (SM 135).

Derrida's use of the term 'revolutionary' must be differentiated from an understanding of a revolutionary event as destroying the past for a new future, and instead understood as a demand which invokes a decision that is directed toward the possible arrival of an unknowable future. Hence he writes, "[A revolutionary demand] can never be always present, it *can be, only, if there is any*, it can be only possible, it must even remain a *can-be* or *maybe* in order to remain a demand" (SM 39). A revolution does not and cannot *exist* for this would uphold the notion of radical breaks in history[19]. It therefore can only be a demand which solicits an anxious decision that opens the possibility of a future which could be different. Derrida is therefore speaking of decisions which respond to a revolutionary demand but never of revolutions.

If the decision made is concerned with a justice directed to the future as described in "Force of Law", then it deals with undecidability and the possibility of a future-to-come. If it is also responsible, then it admits the possibility of its own insufficiency and the future necessity to renegotiate and decide again. Derrida states that we must therefore think in terms of a "permanent revolution" or an "infinite critique". Justice is always to-come and therefore there is

always the possibility of a revolutionary demand; responsibility and a concern for justice require that we respond to this demand as often as we can. As Derrida writes, "such a thinking cannot operate without justifying the principle of a radical and interminable, infinite critique" (SM 112). The revolutionary demand never fades because justice is always to-come and the possibility of a future-to-come which is more just never dissipates; a revolutionary critique must be made again and again. This critique does not expiate or achieve a revolutionary event, rather it reconfirms the very revolutionary demand which had inspired it and in doing so opens the possibility of the arrival of the future-to-come.

The notion of a demand rather than an achievement opens onto Derrida's discussion of messianicity without messianism specifically, but more generally introduces the significance of the "conceptual without its concept" to Derrida's thinking. Immediately after the passage referenced above Derrida notes that "In [the revolutionary demand's] pure formality, in the indetermination that it requires, one may find yet another essential affinity between it and a certain messianic spirit" (SM 112). Derrida use of the term "spirit" is important to note in regard to what has already been said about specters (spirits) and conjuration. A messianic spirit would be an apparition of the messianic, but an apparition without a presence, that can never be present, and that can only be made to appear as it disappears[20]. Otherwise that apparition is unjust and irresponsible to the specter of the messianic and instead comprehends it in the register of the ontological. Derrida must therefore distinguish the function of the messianic in his work from ontological understandings of messianism. He writes: "what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism" (SM 74). Derrida does not wish to uphold the content of traditional

messianisms—he states that these messianisms can't deal with the *epokhé* which is essential to his understanding of time, the thinking of the other and the event to-come—but the promissory structure of these messianisms is maintained.

The structure of the messianic accommodates the necessary emancipatory promise he notes in the quote above while also resisting the ontological logic of the messianic content. It makes a promise to a possible future without ensuring that future and therefore can be responsible and just. The messianic also promises a redemption or emancipation, and Derrida writes it is a promise which "must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain "spiritual" or "abstract", but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth" (SM 111-112). The messianic thus promises to bring about a change in the future, to emancipate or liberate the current circumstances and usher in a new reality. However, lacking the content of a messianism—or rather holding the *epokhé* as the essential anessential element of the content—the emancipation is not guaranteed[21] to arrive and the messiah may never arrive either. The structure of the messianic promises a different and better future, but it does not project the arrival of that future.

Derrida inscribes the structure of the messianic without its content in the term "messianicity without messianism". This framing takes the adjectival form of messianism— messianic—and turns it into a noun, but that newly produced noun—messianicity—is *without* the original noun it corresponds to. There is thus reference to the original noun, but not the presence of that noun; it points to the qualities of the noun without naming or asserting the content of that noun. Derrida writes that this promises the possibility of the noun in the future without guaranteeing its fulfillment: "This indifference to the content has perhaps the value of giving one to think the necessarily pure and purely necessary form of the future as such, in its

being-necessarily-promised...whether the promise promises this or that, whether it be fulfilled or not, or whether it be unfulfillable, there is necessarily some promise and therefore some historicity as future-to-come" (SM 92). The form "messianicity without messianism" points to the content of a messianism, but it does not uphold that content, instead maintaining the structure of the noun without what the noun entails and thus inscribing a hesitancy toward the future the noun promises. There is a gap between the pointing and the content pointed at and this gap is directed to the future-to-come of the noun; the future-to-come could be the fulfillment of the content, but it is not guaranteed by the pointing. It is a conjuration which makes appear without making present and thus does justice to spectrality.

Derrida introduces this formulation in regard to the messianic, but its structure is relevant for the thinking of hauntology more generally. Oftentimes Derrida's discussion does not seem far away from the irresponsible, expiatory, and ontologizing language he hopes to resist, but if the formulation used with the messianic is read onto these moments then the distinguishing element becomes clear. Derrida's proximity to the logic of ontology is evidenced in a passage where he uses nearly the same language he had taken issue with in "Force of Law": "In the same place, on the same limit, where history is finished, there where a certain determined concept of history comes to an end, precisely there the historicity of history begins, there finally it has the chance of heralding itself—of promising itself" (SM 93). Benjamin spoke of divine violence bringing an end to the mythic and welcoming in a new era of historicity which Derrida called "too messianico-marxist", and yet Derrida says the same thing, until the hyphen. The phrase after the hyphen, "of promising itself", is the distinguishing element. The end of history does not arrive and it is not guaranteed; it is promised. A promise refers to the structure of "a conceptual without its concept" as it is used in regard to the messianic[22]. This structure points to the content of a

concept but does not determine the arrival of that content just as a promise points to a future without ensuring that future. One could refer to the theme of the quote above as "the ending of history without the end of history", or "the expiatory without expiation".

The sentence immediately following the one quoted above further confirms the centrality of this structure of conceptuality in Derrida's work. "There where man, a certain determined concept of man, is finished, there the pure humanity of man, of the *other man* and of man *as other* begins or has finally the chance of heralding itself—of promising itself" (SM 93). There is a *chance* of heralding, a chance which is still underscored by the promise: "the ending of man without the end of man". This structure can also be read onto revolution and justice as both are nouns which point to a content without achieving that content; one could say "the revolutionary without revolution" or "justicity without justice". The promissory structure of the "conceptual without its concept" upholds the necessary responsibility to the/a future, and makes a decision about a future that still maintains the undecidable; it is a promise but a promise which could or could not arrive and isn't foretold. This structure also accords with the three definitions of conjuration. To take the example used by Derrida most often, "the messianic without messianism" conjures the messianic into appearance, but it also conjures away the messianic (as messianism) into disappearance, and it makes a promise of the messianic which remains indeterminate.

Isolating some of the central themes which arise in *Specters of Marx,* such as conjuration and the "conceptual without its concept", and bringing those themes together with the themes of justice and responsibility from "Force of Law" helps to determine Derrida's relationship to history and futurity and what that entails for his understanding of historical change. In "Force of Law" Derrida differentiates his approach from Walter Benjamin's and then in *Specters of Marx*

he clarifies and puts forward his own theory of history that reiterates those differentiating features. Spectrality and hauntology become the guiding themes by which Derrida develops his theory, and these themes introduce a new conceptual framework which confirms his discussions of justice and responsibility from "Force of Law". Spectrality or hauntology entail a varied understanding of the movement of history which is most clearly evidenced by a reframing of revolution as an infinite demand rather than as an event which divides the past from the future. This entails that a decision or critique which takes the revolutionary demand into account acts as an injunction or interruption in history which does not seek to silence the past or predict the future, and instead promises a change in history—one could say hopes for and demands that change—but does not and cannot guarantee or expect that change. An act which is revolutionary or which seeks to bring about a historical change is therefore only a promise, and if it is just and responsible it promises the possibility of change and the possibility of a future which demands more or different change but not the achievement of any specific future which can be known to have brought about that change.

CHAPTER 3

THE "DEMOCRACY-TO-COME"

Rogues is a collection of two essays which are based on two lectures Derrida delivered in 2002. The first is called "The Reason of the Strongest (Are there Rogue States?)", and the title of the second is "The 'World' of the Enlightenment to Come (Exception, Calculation, and Sovereignty)". As was noted in the introduction to this thesis, the insistent theme in both of these essays is the to-come. The first essay engages with this theme most directly through the notion of a "democracy-to-come", the second a reason-to-come. In this sense they are both relevant, however, since the first more explicitly deals with political themes—and the theme of the political—than the second, it will be given more attention here. Throughout "The Reason of the Strongest" Derrida engages with current events such as September 11th and the invocation of "rogue states" by the United States and other nations, as well as what he calls "The Other of Democracy": theocratic Muslim governments. In doing so he explicitly directs his discourse toward—and against, as critique—political institutions and frameworks. For the purposes of examining his approach to political engagement I will only be addressing his discussion of theocratic governments, but the presence of multiple engagements with current events speaks to the more explicitly political bent of this text. Alongside these critiques he discusses democracy and the "democracy-to-come" which further develop the notions of responsibility, justice, and the revolutionary demand that have been addressed until this point. "The Reason of the Strongest" therefore continues the theoretical discussions already advanced in this thesis while also providing a case-study for examining how these theoretical discussions of history and

politics enter into the political and seek to affect it. This chapter is divided into two sections in order to reflect these two discussions. The first section will address the new terminology and ideas which emerge in this text, as well as the continuities that exist between this text, *Specters of Marx*, and "Force of Law". The second section will examine how Derrida connects these theoretical discussions to the current political events that he discusses which will shed light on what sort of politics he is engaged in.

1

Derrida begins by addressing a paradox implicit within the inherited concept of democracy which will later open up a space for his discussion of the "democracy-to-come". This paradox is formulated in a few different ways throughout the essay but it centers on an incompatibility or undecidability between an internal whole and an openness to what is external. Three examples in the text illustrate this incompatibility or undecidability. First, the process of democratization or the movement of democracy occurs through an interplay between an internal system and external exceptions. Derrida writes that a democracy creates and sets laws yet "the passage to democracy, *democratization*, will have always been associated with license, with taking too many liberties...indeed perversion and delinquency" (*Rogues* 21). Second, this undecidability is evidenced in that their always exists the possibility of a democratic decision getting rid of democracy; the voters in a democracy could always vote to get rid of that democracy and thus "the *alternative to* democracy can always be *represented* as a democratic *alternation*" (*Rogues* 31). The third example occurs in the establishment or determination of a democratic community; a democracy depends on an electorate however that electorate can only exist through the establishment of limits and therefore exclusion "which means that democracy

protects itself and maintains itself precisely by limiting and threatening itself" (*Rogues* 36). This final example points to an unavoidable contradiction which Derrida refers to by the notion of autoimmunity. In order to establish and confirm itself a democracy must draw boundaries by which it limits itself. Because of this there never is a democracy-in-itself; it is always plagued *and* made possible by this autoimmune contradiction. As Derrida writes, "democracy is defined, as is the very ideal of democracy, by this lack of the proper and the selfsame", and therefore "we could multiply ad infinitum these examples [of aporias or contradictions] (*Rogues* 37).

The implicit paradox or contradiction is caused by a pairing of concepts inseparable from democracy. Derrida writes that this pairing or antinomy "is classical and canonical; it is the one between freedom and equality—that constitutive and diabolical couple of democracy" (*Rogues* 48). The couple is diabolical because equality entails a generalizable and universal sameness or evenness whereas "freedom is essentially the faculty or power to do as one pleases...to be master, and first of all master of oneself" (*Rogues* 22). One grants power and authority to the individual, whereas the other subsumes the individual into the demands of the general. Derrida writes that they are therefore only reconcilable in an alternating fashion (*Rogues* 24). There cannot be freedom or equality in the same space, at the same time, since their concepts contradict each other; yet this is what democracy demands.

The contradiction between freedom and equality Derrida points out marks a different sort of freedom within the concept of democracy; a freedom which opens onto the possibility of a discussion of the "democracy-to-come". Freedom denotes the possibility to decide and to choose and therefore one could say to play with different options. According to Derrida this freedom to/of play notes "an opening of indetermination and indecidability *in the very concept* of democracy, in the interpretation of the democratic" (*Rogues* 25). The freedom central to the

concept of democracy entails a freedom to change that very concept and thus assumes the concept's indeterminacy. This free-play and indeterminacy of the concept "takes into account...an *essential historicity of democracy*" (*Rogues* 25). Democracy cannot be made present and therefore is bound to the historical conditions in which it is expressed or evoked; it is a historical concept. There is no stable or transcendental aspect of democracy which can be removed from its historical conditions and expressions[23]. The historicity of democracy leads Derrida to evoke the structure of the "to-come" and the term "democracy-to-come".

In spite of the free-play implicit within its concept, democracy has historically taken on stable forms which have reduced its possibility for transformation. Derrida writes that "there have been, in addition to the monarchic, plutocratic, and tyrannical democracies of antiquity, so many so-called modern democratic regimes, regimes that at least *present themselves as* democratic" (*Rogues* 27). Historically, democracies have not been indeterminate; they are and have been regimented and stable forms of government. This stability reduces their potential to change and transform, yet they could only exist in this way. The establishing of a democratic regime—the making present of democracy—is an inevitable process if democracy is to exist at all. This necessity refers back to the earlier discussion of law and justice; justice must be established in law in order to exist, but this law will always be lacking. Derrida therefore refers again to a to-come and does not say that democracy *is* indeterminable or that it necessarily takes its own transformation into account, rather that its concept points to the possibility of a "democracy-to-come" because of the aporia implicit within its concept.

Derrida's discussion of the "democracy-to-come" brings further clarity to his discussion of the to-come introduced in "Force of Law" and introduces the resonances of this theme in an explicitly political context. This discussion occurs throughout the entire essay but it is most

direct where Derrida discusses the "five foci" around which the "democracy-to-come" can be formulated. The first of these five notes that the expression "democracy-to-come" calls for "a militant and interminable political critique" (*Rogues* 86). The interminable critique (what was referred to as an infinite critique in the *Specters of Marx* chapter) is to be directed at any and every "rhetoric that would present as a present or existing democracy, as a de facto democracy, what remains inadequate to the democratic demand" (*Rogues* 86)[24]. The democratic demand evokes a promise of a different future and demands that the promise is sustained and kept possible, that a transformation will always be possible[25]. This entails that the demand will always exist and that the critique will always be necessary since any establishment of a democracy will resist the possibility of transformation in order to maintain itself. The expression "democracy-to-come" therefore takes into account and maintains this future necessity because it does not establish a democracy and instead upholds the possibility of a/any future-to-come.

The second and third foci speak to implications which are associated with an understanding of "democracy-to-come". The second focal point is that the "democracy-to-come" necessitates a different thinking of the event. An alternate understanding of the event has been discussed throughout this thesis, however Derrida is very explicit in this instance: "[the event should be understood as] unique, unforeseeable, without horizon, un-masterable by any ipseity or any conventional and thus consensual performativity...[it] names the coming of *who* comes or *what* comes to pass, namely, the newly arrived whose irruption should not and cannot be limited" (*Rogues* 87). The third focal point states that this thinking of the to-come and the event entails that the democratic must be extended beyond nation-state sovereignty and citizenship. Derrida writes that "this would come about through the creation of an international juridico-political space that, without doing away with every reference to sovereignty, never stops

innovating and inventing new distributions and forms of sharing, new divisions of sovereignty" (*Rogues* 87). Derrida discusses several abuses committed by nation-state sovereignty throughout *Rogues* and thus contends that there must be an alternative sovereignty—which is international— which can limit and be set against the sovereignty of nation-states.

The fourth focal point brings "democracy-to-come" together with some of the previous concepts developed in this thesis. Derrida writes that "the expression "democracy-to-come" is inextricably linked to justice...[to] the axiomatic of the messianicity without messianism, the spectrality or hauntology...[and] the singular distinction between law and justice" (*Rogues* 88). All of these expressions have been discussed in detail, but at this point a linkage or network can be drawn between all of these ideas. In "Force of Law" justice was understood as always being to-come and the law was its insufficient institution, just as democracy is always to-come yet it has been (and will continue to be) invoked in regimes and governments. In "Force of Law" Derrida also discusses the concept of justice and its to-come as being concerned with the event and the arrival of otherness; just as he discussed in terms of the "democracy-to-come" in the second focal point above. Spectrality or hauntology are the terms by which Derrida refers to the understanding of history which acknowledges this understanding of the event and the necessity of a justice which is directed toward the future, and messianicity without messianism speaks to the position one takes in looking toward the future-to-come. Derrida does not mention these terms specifically in this passage but we could also add responsibility, a revolutionary demand, and the promise as being concepts which all participate in this network. Responsibility is associated with the infinite critique that the "democracy-to-come" demands, and the plasticity and openness to self-transformation of the concept of democracy assumes the necessary responsibility Derrida brought up in "Force of Law". The infinite critique necessitated by the

"democracy-to-come" corresponds with a revolutionary demand, and the acknowledgement in "democracy-to-come" of never arriving or being present maintains the promissory structure necessitated by a concern with justice.

The fifth focal point discusses the possibilities which "democracy-to-come" invokes; Derrida asks "what are these three words *doing*? What is the modal status of this syntagma?" (*Rogues* 90, my emphasis). Derrida writes that the "democracy-to-come" hesitates undecidably between two possibilities: "it can, on the one hand, correspond to the neutral, constative analysis of a concept...but, on the other hand...'democracy-to-come' can also inscribe a performative and attempt to win conviction by suggesting support or adherence" (*Rogues* 91). Put slightly differently Derrida writes that "the *to* of the 'to come' wavers between imperative injunction (call or performative) and the patient *perhaps* of messianicity (nonperformative exposure to what comes, to what can always not come or has already come)" (*Rogues* 91). The activities the invocation of a "democracy-to-come" provokes or makes possible are either an analysis of a current conceptualization of democracy in order to point out its limits and contradictions and open it to the event-to-come which will force a renegotiation of these limits, or—and this accords more closely with the revolutionary demand previously discussed—the "democracy-to-come" can invoke a future-to-come which points out the limits of a current iteration of democracy and demands that the iteration is changed for the sake of the future it prevents[26]. These two possibilities are not so distant from one another and Derrida writes that "at the same time or by turns, the two *to's* [can] be heard...they can haunt one another, parasite one another in the same instant" (*Rogues* 91). The difference between the two possibilities is slight and they are co-implicated with one another whenever the "democracy-to-come" is invoked.

In spite of their closeness these two possibilities point to the two strands which this

chapter is addressing. The first possibility is reflected in the theoretical discussions that have been addressed up until this point. In the next section we will turn to the second possibility—the performative injunction or revolutionary demand—which is reflected in Derrida's directed critique of political institutions in the text.

<p style="text-align:center">2</p>

The first explicit engagement with contemporary political issues in the text occurs in the third chapter. This chapter opens with the following statement: "Let me put forward here in a furtive, cursive, or rather cursory—although surely not frivolous—fashion, what might be called the hypothesis or the hypothec by turns Arabic and Islamic" (*Rogues* 28). This phrasing is incredibly hesitant; it is a *hypothesis* put forward. One would be hard-pressed to expect a politics or political agenda to follow a statement such as this which already hints at what sort of approach to the political Derrida is presenting. Derrida then notes that the worldwide concept of the political is currently dominated by the European tradition "where the democratic becomes coextensive with the political" (*Rogues* 28). This situation entails that there are very few governmental regimes that, at the very least, do not make any claims to be democratic, and Derrida writes that all of these regimes which resist democracy are associated with a theocratic Muslim government (*Rogues* 28)[27].

One of the paradoxes of democracy noted above—that democracy can be open to a democratically decided upon rejection of democracy—makes it so that the resistance to the democratic, expressed by a certain form of Islam which founds and supports theocratic governments, can become a problem for democracy. Derrida remarks that:

If one thus takes into account the link between the democratic and the demographic...and

if one takes into account the fact that this Islam today accounts for a large number of people in the world, then this is perhaps, in the end, the greatest, if not the only, political issue of the future, the most urgent question of what remains to come for what is still called the political (*Rogues* 29)

Again there is a hesitancy inscribed in the statement; the statement is conditional and qualified with a 'perhaps', but we can also see the motivation (or lack thereof) which guides Derrida's analysis in this statement. Derrida argues that the dominating political framework in the world—democracy—is challenged by Muslim theocratic governments which are the form of government for many people, and because of democracy's concern for majority rule or representation this fact could entail future questions for democracy[28]. Derrida notes a political situation, decides upon what the situation could become, and determines what the consequences of that future possibility could be for a future democracy.

Until this point in the chapter Derrida's analysis is fairly neutral; he notes a contemporary reality and speculates on what that reality could become in the future, forming a hypothesis. However, as he states in the opening lines of the chapter, this hypothesis is also a hypothec. Derrida writes that this term is used "in order to borrow from the code of borrowing, credit, lending, and transfer but also in order to evoke obstacles, difficulties, and impediments" (*Rogues* 28). The question of Muslim theocracies in future politics is not merely a hypothesis, but also a potential future we are indebted to, we owe something to, and that could entail difficulties and challenges. Derrida has made a promise of/to a potential future and our indebtedness to that future creates certain demands and responsibilities.

With these demands and responsibilities in mind Derrida states that this hypothec "might assign" a double task. The first task would be to take on a rigorous and thorough study "of the

references to democracy, of the democratic *legacy* and claim or *allegation*, whether under this name or under another assumed to be its equivalent, in the ancient, and especially recent, history of Arab nation-states, and more generally in societies of Islamic culture" (*Rogues* 32). Such a study or task would analyze as rigorously as possible the history of the relationship between concepts of democracy and Arab nation-states and Islamic culture. Doing so would reveal past encounters and the strategies which emerged in responding to those encounters. The second task would be much more directed and would put those strategies to use; Derrida states that it would be "explicitly political" (*Rogues* 32). This task would be for whoever "considers him- or herself a friend of democracy in the world and not only in his or her own country" to align, "first of all", with those in the Islamic world who fight for democratic ideas, whether those ideas emerge from a push for the secularization of society or the interpretation of the Koranic heritage which privileges democratic concepts and ideas (*Rogues* 33).

Derrida maintains a degree of hesitancy throughout this hypothesis and hypothec; however, the neutrality of his analysis dissipates with the second task. He does write that this would be a task for whoever is a friend of democracy, but in considering what has been discussed thus far it seems pretty clear that he is such a friend. Yes and no. At the end of the chapter he writes that "one should no longer be afraid to speak without or against democracy" (*Rogues* 41). Derrida is not committed to democracy—against Muslim theocracy—for the sake of democracy (such a thing does not exist). He is committed to a "democracy-to-come"; a futurity which democracy, in particular expressions and never completely, could uphold. Derrida is concerned with the free-play internal to democracy discussed above. The task then, the performative injunction, would be to embolden those strategies and groups of people which argue for the free-play of the political. In this potential future, in this instance, the task would be

most directed against Muslim theocracies, but the critique is infinite and the task is unending and could, in fact should, eventually be directed against regimes that present themselves as democracies as well[29].

From the example of Muslim theocracies we can develop the sort of politics Derrida is engaged in and committed to. Derrida begins with an analysis of the current historical conditions and then speculates/hypothesizes what those conditions could become in the future. His engagement is therefore responsive to a historical situation[30]; it does not begin with an ideal and then ask whether or not the historical situation corresponds to that ideal, as he accuses Fukuyama of doing in *Specters of Marx*. This historically embedded response then hypothesizes what possible futures could arise from this situation. As was noted above, this hypothesis is not mere speculation; there is also a promissory relationship to that/those potential future(s), and there is therefore a responsibility associated with that speculation. We are responsible to a potential future and we must engage with that potential responsibly. As was discussed in the "Force of Law" chapter this responsibility is associated with a justice-to-come and a justice of/toward the to-come of the future. The possible effects or conditions of this historical analysis and future speculation must be dealt with and considered responsibly and with justice in mind. In other words, we must be responsible to the potential free-play of the future toward which we are speculating and we must consider and seek to maintain the potential free-play of the future of that future which we are speculating. Hence, we must be concerned with a "democracy-to-come" which maintains the possibility of future transformation and renegotiation. We must critique current historical conditions or the potential conditions of a future for the sake of justice or the free-play of the "democracy-to-come"—in accord with the revolutionary demand discussed in the *Specters of Marx* chapter.

The critique, in order to be responsible, must follow two requirements. First, it must be hesitant—furtive or cursive—so as to not close off other possibilities of the future. In the example discussed above Derrida states that the question of Muslim theocracies *could* become the greatest political issue of the future, but it is not guaranteed to do so; other futures are possible and the hesitancy of his hypothesis or speculation guards these other possibilities. This hesitancy is also necessary for the possibility of a future critique: if this situation were to come about, and if one was in a specific position (as a friend of democracy for example), then this is what that person should do. The proposal is in the conditional and maintains the possibility that it could be irrelevant or irreflective of the future conditions. The second requirement of a critique has to do with how its project is framed. Not only is the proposal in the conditional, but it also is framed as a task rather than a specific program which is to be followed. If this future situation comes about, and if a person has these concerns (such as justice, responsibility, and the "democracy-to-come"), then there will be a set of tasks to be performed. In Derrida's usage a task prepares a decision or critique but does not make that decision or critique; it maintains the possibility of responding to future demands. In this potential situation, with these concerns, consider these things so as to prepare yourself to respond (i.e., study the relationship between formulations of democracy and Arab nation-states and Islamic culture), and align yourself with those responses which are sympathetic to your concerns (i.e., those who fight for democratization in the Islamic world)[31].

This outline for critical engagement—hesitant, contingent, understood as a task and in response to a demand, responsive, etc.—assumes a varied understanding of critique and philosophical questioning. Derrida addresses these variations in the second essay in *Rogues*, "The 'World' of the Enlightenment to Come". In this essay he explicitly defines what

reason/rationality should be if it is to be engaged responsibly. Tracing this definition will clarify how notions of critique, task, demand, etc. function in the preceding paragraphs, and what type of thinking, or approach to thinking, Derrida's political engagement entails.

Derrida marks the differentiating point between traditional understandings of reason/rationality and an understanding of reason/rationality of "the Enlightenment to come" in a difference between two definitions of unconditionality: on the one hand, unconditionality understood as sovereign power, and on the other, unconditionality understood as incalulability. He writes that both have existed in the history of Western philosophy though reason/rationality has often overlooked one for the sake of the other. Derrida notes how in "the canonical text of Plato's *Republic*" the preference of reason as related to sovereign power first emerges and has yet to fade, "we have not yet left Plato" (*Rogues* 136, 137). Derrida writes that the question which emerges in Plato "is the question of or demand for knowledge as power, for truth and for capacity, namely, for the power to know, for power-knowledge, for the power *of* knowledge, for knowledge *as* power" (*Rogues* 137). Knowledge (reason) since Plato is concerned with what it can know, with what is possible, with what it can decide upon, calculate, and decipher; reason is concerned with its ability (or its power) to know and to calculate.

Derrida does not argue that we must get rid of this tendency—or that it is even *possible* to get rid of this tendency—but rather that we must rethink and reconsider the position and function of possibility and impossibility[32]; as he writes, "what is at issue is precisely another thought of the possible and of an im-possible that would not be simply negative" (*Rogues* 143). This rethinking of impossibility is precisely what has been at stake throughout this thesis. In the "Force of Law" chapter, the question of indecipherability was the differentiating factor between Derrida and Benjamin. In the *Specters of Marx* chapter, spectrality or hauntology sits on the

border between living and non-living, or possible and impossible. In all of these instances—and in this chapter as well—it was a question of rethinking the event and its arrival as an indecipherable and/or undecidable moment/encounter that disrupts or interrupts and demands a response. According to this thinking of an event, impossibility or unknowability does not mark a limit of reason, it is rather what reason must wait for responsibly; the unknowable/impossible arrival of the event is what makes reason possible.

The revaluation of impossibility as the opening of the possibility of reason problematizes Plato's[33] framing of knowledge as power. It does not get rid of this framing, but it forces a reevaluation of priorities. Derrida writes that the question or demand of philosophy would be a "questioning, critiquing, deconstructing, if you will, [of] one in the name of the other, sovereignty in the name of unconditionality" (*Rogues* 143). Knowledge/reason as sovereignty and power will not disappear, but the relationship between the two unconditionalities should be shifted so that the sovereignty and power of knowledge is always brought into question and exposed to the possibility of impossibility or not knowing. In this sense, Derrida's sense of critique is not far from how it is understood by Kant. Critique—or deconstruction—questions the limits of what it is possible to know. As Derrida writes, thinking demands "a rational deconstruction that will endlessly question [its] limits and presuppositions, the interests and calculations that order [its] deployment, and [the] concepts [which it holds essential]" (*Rogues* 151). What differentiates Derrida's form of critique from Kant's is that this endless questioning is not for the sake of a better or more complete knowledge which aspires toward a transcendent and perfect reason. Derrida's critiques points out the limit, impossibility, and insufficiency of knowledge as constitutive of knowledge; for Derrida, knowledge is not insufficient compared to a pure reason, but rather constitutively insufficient. The event which could arrive and disrupt

knowledge guarantees this limit of knowledge for Derrida, whereas for Kant, the arrival of pure reason would confirm and affirm knowledge[34]. Critique or deconstruction exposes knowledge, makes it vulnerable, and brings its power into question. As Derrida writes: "Deconstruction, if something of the sort exists, would remain above all, in my view, an unconditional rationalism that never renounces the possibility of suspending in an argued, deliberated, rational fashion, all conditions, hypotheses, conventions, and presuppositions, and of criticizing unconditionally all conditionalities" (*Rogues* 142).

Critique suspends and seeks to keep open the possibility of suspension in order to allow for the arrival of the unknowable event[35], but the closure of suspension is also always necessary. Thinking cannot be suspended indefinitely; decisions are made, judgments are passed, conditions, hypotheses, and presuppositions are established. There is therefore always in interplay between these two possibilities or tendencies, between unconditionality and conditions. This is where notions such as task and demand become important. A decision will always follow critique, but that decision must operate in consideration of certain demands and tasks if it is to be responsible to a future possibility of suspension. As Derrida writes, "if an event worthy of this name is to arrive or happen, it must, beyond all mastery, affect a passivity. It must touch an exposed vulnerability, one without absolute immunity, without indemnity" (*Rogues* 152). Critique suspends or exposes, opens toward the possible arrival of the event, but the decision which follows must also remain open to a future event to-come. The decision must meet or sustain the demand (we could also say promise) of the future-to-come, and it can do so through a decision which is vulnerable, "something like a passive decision"[36] (*Rogues* 152).

The task of the decision, or the task associated with the decision, therefore cannot be achieved; it is not a task to accomplish. As was noted in the example above, the task is to prepare

oneself for the possibility of the arrival of an event. Not to determine how or when that arrival will occur, but to make ready for an unforeseeable arrival that will demand a response. This task, or making ready, involves an acquiring of knowledge that will make possible a responsible decision. In the example above, this involved the gathering of information pertaining to the historical relationship between democracy and Islamic culture in its various forms. The knowledge gathered must not predict the decision "for otherwise the engagement of a responsibility would be reducible to the application and deployment of a program", but it can prepare a decision that responds responsibly to an interruption or suspension (*Rogues* 145).

To reiterate what was said above, it would be difficult to draw out *a* politics or *a* political agenda from such a thinking which is hesitant, defined by tasks, and concerned with an openness to the unknowability of a future-to-come. Derrida echoes this when he writes that "it would be necessary to rethink rationally a hyperethics or hyperpolitics that does not settle for acting simply 'according to duty'...Such a hyperethics or hyperpolitics would carry us unconditionally beyond the economic circle of duty or of the task, of the debt to be reappropriated or annulled, of what one *knows* must be done" (*Rogues* 152). We could speak of a hyperethics or hyperpolitics as an *approach*, or a certain type of engagement which operates in response to demands and interruptions, but a hyperethics or hyperpolitics is never assured enough to instantiate a system or program[37]. As Derrida writes in the preface to *Rogues*: "No politics, no ethics, and no law can be, as it were, *deduced* from this thought. To be sure, nothing can be *done* with it"; instead of deducing a politics, "on it, perhaps...a call might be taken up and take hold: the call for a thinking of the event *to come*, of the democracy *to come*, of the reason *to come*" (*Rogues* xv). A call is something which must be responded to, but cannot be determined in advance. It demands a response *now*, immediately once it calls or as it is calling. A call therefore differs from a

demand in that it cannot be expected, known, or appealed to; a call is the appellation which

happens/arrives and catches one's attention. A politics concerned with a call and the possibility

of a call—and therefore one which would also be concerned with responsibility, justice, and the

to-come—is one which is constantly preparing to respond to a call in its singular calling. In this

sense one could say that it is a politics which is open (susceptible or vulnerable) to a call and to a

call-to-come, and which strives to open the possibility of this call. One could therefore say that

this politics is an ethic (or as Derrida says "hyperethic"), not understood as a rule-giving system

but as a guiding theory or way of life which opens and is open to a call, to the "first to happen

by" (*Rogues* 86).

CONCLUSION

In the three texts discussed in this thesis Derrida addresses prevalent conceptions of time and history which uphold a linear understanding of the movement of history. In the essay "Force of Law", in which he discusses Walter Benjamin's essay "Critique of Violence", Derrida points out the potential consequences of such a teleological understanding of history, and differentiates a deconstructive approach to history from Benjamin's, which he argues leaves open a potential problematic response to the Nazi Final Solution. The differentiation occurs in how each responds to the/an indecipherable. For Benjamin, the indecipherable is expressed by divine violence which can (will) be recognized as an expiating force in history, founding a new historical epoch. For Derrida, this conclusion reduces the indecipherability of the/an indecipherable and takes it to be a part of teleological history, which accommodates a reading of the Final Solution as an expiatory act of divine violence. Instead Derrida maintains the indecipherability and undecidability of the/an indecipherable and refers to it as a suspended (revolutionary) moment. This framing, as an unreadable and undecidable moment of suspension, creates the possibility of an anxiety-ridden decision (for the suspension cannot last and must be decided upon) which opens Derrida's discussion of responsibility and justice. Decisions must be made, and if they are responsible and concerned with a justice-to-come then they will/could be conscientious of indecipherability.

Derrida more explicitly theorizes an understanding of history which follows from this differentiation in *Specters of Marx*. His response to a teleological understanding of history is a spectrality or hauntology. Rather than time and history being understood as a potentially

progressive succession of events, Derrida writes that time is "out-of-joint" or "off its hinges".

There is a non-contemporaneity of time and events, and therefore there is not the/a present; it is

always haunted by a/many past(s) and future(s). The language of haunting or specters points to

the notion of a visit or arrival which leads to a framing of responsibility as a responsibility (or

hospitality) to the possibility of an arrival. The various discussions of conjuration note this

responsibility and lead to the centrality of the promissory structure of a messianic without

messianism and a revolutionary demand, which both point to the/a future but do not ensure that

future; the future of a promise remains to-come.

The varied theory of history associated with spectrality and hauntology entails a varied

understanding of historical change. Rather than taking history to change through radical breaks

or epochs, there can be adjustments or shifts in history which make possible a different future but

do not leave the/a past behind[38]. This varied understanding of historical change demands a

consideration of how to engage in that historical change, which in turn fosters a theorization of

political engagement and thinking. Derrida addresses this question of engagement in *Rogues* in

which he discusses democracy and the "democracy-to-come". He notes that there is a free-play

in the concept of democracy which opens it to historical differentiation. The possibility of

historical differentiation exposes the possibility of (a) different future(s); What Derrida refers to

as the/a future-to-come. The future-to-come is first addressed in "Force of Law" as justice-to-

come and is then subsequently introduced in *Specters of Marx* as democracy-to-come which is

most clearly developed in *Rogue*. In *Rogues*, Derrida also introduces a reason-to-come, which

speaks to the connection between politics and a particular way of thinking. The politics that can

be drawn from these three texts does not align with a specific system or agenda, rather it is a

politics understood as what Derrida calls hyperpolitics, that is, a politics understood as a way of

engaging with history and the political, and thus politics understood as an approach and a way of thinking.

For Derrida, the mode of thinking which guides political engagement functions through a relationship to indecipherability, suspension, and impossibility which is not negative. These terms arise from a relationship to the event as unknowable and impossible to predict or understand, i.e., it is wholly singular. Thought in this way, the event marks/is an interruption in history and thinking. The responsibility of thinking and of politics is therefore to respond to and think this/an event. Throughout the three texts discussed here Derrida notes several improper responses to the event which can all be generally grouped as teleological. In "Force of Law" Derrida discusses how Benjamin seeks to decipher the indecipherable event as expiatory, therefore disappearing the past and creating a linear and progressive sense of history. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida discusses the act of mourning as a response to spectrality which seeks to comprehend a specter and cast it to the past. These responses can be thought of as closing or locking history into a specific trajectory[39].

Derrida wishes instead to maintain the possibility of an event and its resistance to understanding or teleology. The occurrence, or arrival, of an event interrupts and suspends the comprehensibility of history and the systems of knowledge which confirm that comprehension. The possibility of this occurrence can be encouraged through critique, which makes vulnerable, or exposes, the comprehensibility of history and systems of knowledge. This suspension or interruption requires a response—the suspended moment does not and cannot last—which Derrida refers to as a decision, but the decision must always be disassociated from knowledge and is therefore tenuous and anxiety-ridden. The anxiety stems from the possibility of responding improperly, as in the examples given above. Derrida introduces the notions of responsibility and

justice in "Force of Law" in order to theorize how to deal with the possibility of responding improperly. In the later texts addressed this is supplemented by notions of hesitancy and the passive/vulnerable decision. The possibility of responding improperly always exists, yet the decision must be made, thus the decision must be hesitant, responsible, and vulnerable in order to do justice to the possibility of a future event.

The possibility of an event is inscribed in Derrida's notion of the to-come and the "conceptual without its concept". Both of these terms operate according to a promissory structure; an oath which is directed toward a future but does not guarantee that future. Derrida's use of this structure/these ideas—as well as his discussion of the revolutionary demand—points toward the future; not in order to predict that future, but in order to note and maintain its potential. These terms, and Derrida's thinking throughout these texts, is concerned with the potentiality of the future, with what the future could-be, and the consequences of a relationship to that future in the present. In *Rogues* Derrida aligns this potentiality or 'could-be' with a freedom or free-play. The free-play or negotiation within the concept of democracy reflects the free-play Derrida wishes to maintain in history and the political. Derrida is led to the "democracy-to-come" in *Rogues* as the term by which he theorizes this free-play, but he writes that he is not necessarily committed to democracy. He is committed to the freedom of the political and history, or, said differently, to the possibility of the political and of history to be different, to change, and to become other.

Derrida's politics is therefore invested in the possibility (and necessity) of preserving (or at times encouraging) the possibility of historical and political change, which is reflected in his discussion of a permanent revolution or infinite critique. This investment entails a commitment to a certain way of thinking. One must strive for an openness, and encourage an openness

through critique, to the possibility of an event or future-to-come. On the one hand this necessitates recurring critique and renegotiation, on the other it requires that the decision which is made in response to a suspension is vulnerable and exposed to the possibility of its own limit or failure. One must therefore be endlessly committed to critique and the possibility of critique, and also passive and hesitant in the decisions (and critiques) one makes. In every instance though, a critique or decision must be concerned with the possibility of the future-to-come, hence with the possibility of the free-play of the future. The politics which can be drawn out of Derrida's text is one which is invested in the possibility of political/historical change. This political thinking, or political approach, must be constantly active, prepared on the one hand to encourage the possibility of political/historical change through critique and on the other hand, to guard the possibility of future change by remaining vulnerable, exposed, and hesitant.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1] See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age.* Trans. Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1983. See especially pp. 457-482. See also Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture.* Trans. John R. Snyder. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988. See especially pp. 1-13

CHAPTER 1

[2] Derrida mentions Benjamin in a footnote in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994, but does little more than acknowledge a consonance between his own work and Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History", and that there is more work to be done in regard to this essay

[3] Beatrice Hanssen discusses Benjamin's understanding of critique in her book, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory*. London: Routledge, 2000. See p. 18. In the third chapter of this thesis, this understanding of critique as judgment or interpretation will be differentiated from an understanding of critique which is responsible and just.

[4] This language of destruction, disruption, and breaking is confirmed in Beatrice Hanssen's text *Critique of Violence*. See pp. 18-22

[5] François Raffoul discusses the performativity of law in his book, *The Origins of Responsibility*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010. See p. 294

[6] Werner Hamacher addresses the significance of language in "Critique of Violence" in his essay, "Afformative, Strike", trans. Dana Hollander. *Cardozo Law Review* 13.1 (1991): 1133-157. See especially pp. 1132-1143. Rather than speaking of manifestation Hamacher discusses 'depositive' language and 'afformative' language. These terms resist the performativity of language and therefore the performative (instituting) aspect of law. He writes that "language is 'teleology without end'" (p. 1043).

[7] Raffoul addresses the disassociation of decision and knowledge in *Origins of Responsibility*. He writes, "A leap in the incalculable is necessary and it is a matter of deciding without knowing, as it were without seeing (*voir*) or foreseeing (*prévoir*), and thus from a certain invisible or unforeseeable, without being able to calculate all the consequences of that decision" (297). See pp. 296-298

[8] Or for later Benjamin, in its disappearing

[9] Both of which could be grouped under the notion of 'quasitranscendentals' as discussed by Rodolphe Gasche in *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986. See pp. 316-318

[10] Thomas Keenan discusses the concept of justice and its impossibility in his book *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997. In the introduction (pp. 1-6) he gives a summary of the concept in Derrida's work, and then in the first chapter (pp. 7-42) he discusses the contradictions, difficulties, and impossibilities associated with Derrida's concept of justice.

[11] Leonard Lawlor gives a concise definition of 'the worst' in his text, *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. He writes that when an address reaches *only* its proper destination it excludes many more, and "it is this complete exclusion or this extermination of the most that makes this violence the worst violence. The worst is a relation that makes of more than one simply one, that makes, out of a division, an indivisible sovereignty" (p. 23). Justice made full or present (in law) runs the risk of excluding the many other possibilities of justice, therefore committing exclusionary violence against those possibilities.

[12] Simon Critchley discusses the centrality of hesitancy in Derrida's work in his book, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999. Critchley goes so far as to say that "*deconstruction*

is a 'philosophy' of hesitation, although it must be understood that such hesitation is not arbitrary, contingent, or indeterminate, but rather, a rigorous, strictly determinate hesitation: the 'experience' of undecidability" (42). Look specifically to pp. 88-97

[13] Raffoul refers to this process as the revealing of aporias inherent in philosophical systems in *The Origins of Responsibility*. He writes, "Deconstruction reveals the aporias within philosophical systems (a repressed outside of the system within the system), aporias that make those systems both impossible and...possible *as* impossible" (p. 285).

[14] Tom McCall's essay "Momentary Violence", published in, *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*. Ed. David S. Ferris. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996. 185-206, presents what could be a counter-reading to Derrida's. McCall discusses Benjamin's acknowledgment of the difficulty of writing and representation in the "Critique of Violence", and therefore reads an undecidability in Benjamin's text which resists Derrida's reading.

CHAPTER 2
[15] See pp. 76-81 in *Specters of Marx* for a discussion of how this logic appears in *The End of History and the Last Man* by Francis Fukuyama. Frederic Jameson also discusses the progressive ideal-based understanding of history in his essay "Marx's Purloined Letter", published in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*. Ed. Michael Sprinker. London: Verso, 1999. 26-67, which is a response to *Specters of Marx.* (see pp. 41-43).

[16] Ernesto Laclau gives a concise explanation of the logic of the specter in "The Time is Out of Joint" published in, *Emancipation(s)*. New York: Verso, 1996. 66-83. See especially pp. 68-70. Jameson also provides a clear explanation in "Marx's Purloined Letter", referring to spectrality as a mixing in contrast to purity or presence (44-46).

[17] Nicole Pepperell refers to this grasping as an exorcism in her essay "Impure Inheritances: Spectral Materiality in Derrida and Marx", published in, *Messianic Thought outside Theology*. Ed. Anna Glazova and Paul North. New York: Fordham UP, 2014. 43-72. She writes that "this attempt to locate—to ontologize—the specter allows Marx to open up the possibility for its exorcism: for the abolition of the fetish" (p. 48). Jameson discusses the act of mourning as a cleansing of spectrality. See "Marx's Purloined Letter" pp. 56-59.

[18] Leonard Lawlor discusses this address in regard to animals in, *This is Not Sufficient*, but his discussion also applies here. He discusses a receiving which is differentiated from an invitation. "To receive without receiving means that they *must* come in without any invitation...if we invited them, we would make them suffer the conditions that we determine, in other words, we would make them completely the same as ourselves" (pp. 107-108). See especially pp. 106-110.

[19] Ernesto Laclau discusses a revolution understood in this way in, "'The Time is Out of Joint'", in terms of a lack of fullness in the/a revolution. "If the fullness of the revolution is unachievable, we cannot but have a dissociation between the revolutionary content and the fullness of a pure revolutionary foundation" (p. 72).

[20] David Ferris discusses this in terms of "not having come" in his essay, "Agamben and the Messianic: The Slightest of Differences", published in, *Messianic Thought outside Theology*. Ed. Anna Glazova and Paul North. New York: Fordham UP, 2014. 73-92. A messianic spirit does not arrive and therefore "carries the force of an openness that history, politics, religion, and philosophy are unable to close but that is nevertheless disclosed in the failed claim of each to achieve the absolute event of the messiah" (p. 76).

[21] Ernesto Laclau discusses the nuances of this understanding of emancipation in "'The Time is Out of Joint'". He discusses how emancipation here must be differentiated from classical understandings of emancipation which Derrida may overlook. Laclau writes that "the classic notion of emancipation was something more than the formal structure of the promise" (p. 75). He agrees with this structure but thinks that we must renounce its content. (pp. 75-76).

[22] For a discussion of the structure of the without see "The Crisis of the Messianic Claim: Scholem, Benjamin,

Baudelaire" by Oleg Gelikman, published in, *Messianic Thought outside Theology*. Ed. Anna Glazova and Paul North. New York: Fordham UP, 2014. 171-194. See especially pp. 171-174

CHAPTER 3

[23] David Ferris writes that this is also true of messianicity in "Agamben and the Messianic": "Messianicity cannot, in this case, possess significance beyond a reference that remains historical" (p. 78). The significance of historicity, the here-and-now, will be addressed later in this chapter.

[24] The democratic regimes noted in the preceding paragraph would be examples of rhetorical presentations in need of critique

[25] See revolutionary demand in last chapter

[26] This second element or activity provides a potential response to a critique Antonio Negri makes in "The Specter's Smile", published in, *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*. Ed. Michael Sprinker. London: Verso, 1999. 5-16. Negri writes that Derrida criticizes "in an inconsequential manner, refusing to change the ontology itself or to reconstruct it according to the standard set by the phenomenological change" (p. 13). Disregarding the incongruities between Negri's desire for a reconstruction or a new ontology and Derrida's hesitancy and openness to the to-come (which are essential to Derrida's project as it has been outlined in this thesis and reject Negri's criticism outright), in this second result or activity Derrida is more direct about changing circumstances (being consequential) than he perhaps was in *Specters of Marx* which Negri is responding to.

[27] There are two important disclaimers in the text which should not be overlooked. 1) Derrida writes Arabic *and* Islamic so as to not conflate the two. 2) He writes that he could be mistaken about this claim that all governments which do not claim to be democratic are theocratic Muslim governments.

[28] Derrida notes an example of this tension arising in his discussion of post-colonial Algeria on pages 30-31 of *Rogues. Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005.

[29] As Derrida does in other sections in *Rogues* where he takes issue with the United States. Laclau anticipates this conclusion in his response to *Specters of Marx* in "'The Time is Out of Joint'". He writes that (at least until through *Specters of* Marx) the main stumbling block in Derrida's thinking is that an ambiguity—or even temptation—to understand "undecidability as the source of an ethical injunction is still hovering in Derrida's texts" (pp. 81-82). Laclau writes that "from the fact that there is the impossibility of ultimate closure and presence, it does not follow that there is an ethical imperative to 'cultivate' that openness or even less to be necessarily committed to a democratic society" (p. 77). Yet many make this logical jump and reach this conclusion. According to Laclau, this logical jump can still be drawn out from *Specters of Marx*; however, according to my reading, this is not the case in *Rogues*.

[30] Throughout the text Derrida notes the *here and now* of the democracy-to-come

[31] This response is evidenced in the chapter "(No) More Rogue States", in *Rogues*, in which Derrida notes the historical collapse of the viability of the term "rogue states" and its use to uphold the authority of nations like the United States. Derrida notes a historical situation, takes these types of tasks upon himself, and then critiques the institutions and ideologies which uphold this term and use it for a justification of the infliction of suffering on 'rogue states'. Look particularly to pp. 103.

[32] Raffoul discusses this changed relationship between possibility and impossibility in *Origins of Responsibility*. He writes, "Aporias are constitutive of what they interrupt, and to that extent are positive phenomena" (p. 286) See also pp. 285-288.

[33] In the preface to *Rogues* Derrida notes the *khora* (which he reinterprets from Plato) as the figure which "would give rise or allow to take place" therefore his relationship with Plato is not merely critical. Lawlor provides a thorough discussion of the role of the *khora* in Derrida's work in *This is Not Sufficient*. See pp. 41-46.

[34] The existence of a perfect reason—even if it is beyond human capacity—is evidenced from the opening lines of the preface to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Kant writes, "Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself...they transcend every capacity of human reason" (p. 99). Pure reason and human reason are distinct in these opening lines, and Kant affirms the content of pure reason even if it cannot be known. Also see pp. 101-102 and p. 104 for discussions of pure versus human reason.

[35] Including an exposure to the limits of Derrida's own work. An example of such a limit is presented by Catherine Malabou in *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*. Trans. Carolyn P. T. Shread. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011. See especially the chapter titled "Grammatology and Plasticity" in which she addresses the limits of Derrida's notions of plasticity and writing (pp. 41-89).

[36] Raffoul discusses the passive decision as a decision of/for the other in *The Origins of Responsibility*. He writes, "It is a matter of designating an alterity at the heart of responsible decision, an alterity or heteronomy from which and in which alone a decision can be made" (p. 299). See pp. 298-299

[37] Lawlor frames this as a weak experiment or recipe in his text *This is Not Sufficient*. He writes a 7 step recipe which is reflective of the double-tasks Derrida assigns (pp. 110-113).

CONCLUSION
[38] Critchley refers to this as the problem of closure in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* and takes it to be central to Derrida's work. In fact, much of Critchley's text is dedicated to outlining the notion of closure and its function for Derrida. See pp. 20-21 and Chapter 2 pp. 59-88.

[39] The notion of locking or closing parallels the regimentation of democracy in various governments or regimes

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