

Rethinking the Political

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Review Article

Derrida and the Political

by Richard Beardsworth.

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The dramatic political achievements of South Africa are shadowed by the persistence of economic inequalities and a power politics based on group identities permeated with the spoils mentality of colonialism. The reinvention of the political seems a relevant topic in a post-apartheid context concerned with refounding and reinstating forms of authority and legitimacy. Rethinking the political by academics whose social function grants them a sense of detachment necessary to ponder such things is perhaps already underway here.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida has been a key figure in Euro-American efforts to rethink the political, and the debates around the subject of Derrida and the political might be of some interest. I hope that the following will contribute to the articulation of a viable South African counter-perspective on these issues.

Spectres of Derrida

The political implications of Derrida's texts, and the deconstructive 'method' that traces its lineage to those texts, have always been open to question. Derrida has stated:

I try to where I can to act politically while recognizing that such action remains incommensurate with my intellectual project of deconstruction (Derrida 1984:120).

He argues that deconstruction only appears to be opposed to politics or to be at best apolitical

because all of our political codes and terminologies still remain fundamentally metaphysical, regardless of whether they originate from the right or from the left (Derrida 1984:120).

Derrida proposes that deconstruction should acknowledge its subtextual premisses and interrogate its own unspoken interests or traditional values; 'the covert philosophical and political presuppositions of institutionalized critical methods which generally govern our reading of a text' (Derrida 1994:125). Derrida (1990) states that, like Jürgen Habermas, he remains committed to the enlightenment narrative of universal emancipation. Differences arise over how best to achieve this goal.

Apart from Derrida's public allegiances and decisions—his engagement with matters of French educational policy (G.R.E.P.H.) and his (qualified) support for U.S. intervention in Kuwait—it is the political implications of his texts that have attracted attention (see Foley 1984; Siebers 1986). McClintock's and Nixon's (1986) attack on Derrida's (1985) quietism before the violence of *realpolitik* is probably the best known South African episode in the debate around Derrida and the political. Derrida's (1986) bad-tempered correction of McClintock's and Nixon's opportunistic misreading of his text and his politics is given less attention here. Still, Derrida's texts have been generally adjudged not to escape the indictment of post-modernist quietism. When Terry Eagleton (1990:396,398) parodied post-modernist skepticism regarding 'the "metalanguages" of freedom, justice and truth' he chose South Africa as the exemplary site of political struggle that post-modernists fail to address. A general sense of the Anglo-American debates around the subject of Derrida and the political might help to contextualise some of these issues for the South African reader.

One of the most forceful English critiques of deconstruction has been Gillian Rose's *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and the Law* (1984). Writing from the University of Sussex, Rose marshalled a formidable critique of the dehistoricisation of Heidegger by post-structuralist thinkers, Derrida in particular. Rose criticised the deconstructionist's 'spurious generalization' and argued that Derrida's insistent use of 'violence' for the origin

prevents him from distinguishing between different epochs [and] results in the universal imposition of an historically-specific distinction between the archetypal, the moral and the reflective levels of society (Rose 1984:143-144).

Despite criticising Derrida's reading of Hegel without reference to Derrida's major book on Hegel, *Glas* (1974), Rose posed important questions of historicisation to the deconstructors.

In America John Carlos Rowe (1987) has persuasively critiqued the Derridean quasi-transcendental concepts of *differance*, *trace*, *pharmakon*, *hymen*, etc., from a Marxist perspective. Rowe argued that the deconstructor may be merely uncovering that 'surplus' by which the cultural hierarchy is preserved. By acknowledging 'surplus' to exceed the control of the culture, the deconstructor may be serving the basic

impulse of capitalism: the *naturalisation* of its own contradictions. Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) located post-modernism within the context of ideological struggle in which the liberal rhetoric of the market has been a fundamental and central component. Unlike Rowe, Jameson attempted to salvage the revolutionary potential of the utopian element in post-modernism.

There has been no shortage of writers pointing to the political complacency of the deconstructors. Peter Dews, *Logic of Disintegration* (1987), gave a flawed critique of the political implications of deconstruction, while Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1988), inaccurately charged Derrida with Nietzschean nihilism. Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism* (1989), delivered a traditional Marxist critique of claims for a deconstructive post-Marxism and Juliet Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida* (1989), located Derrida in the tradition of Romantic ironists who lose the referent in language play. Howard Caygill's doctoral dissertation completed in 1982 at the University of Sussex provided the substance of his *Art of Judgement* (1989) and was utilised as the historical basis of Eagleton's blustering critique of deconstruction in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990). Christopher Norris, *The Truth About Postmodernism* (1993), layed down the law of political responsibility, extending the argument of Norman Geras's *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances* (1990), and John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993), made a powerful case against the institutional blindness of the deconstructors.

The philosophical defense of Derrida accomplished by Rodolph Gasche's austere *Tain of the Mirror* (1986) (and continued in his *Inventions of Difference* 1994), and the literary appropriation of Derrida by J. Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman, has provoked impatience in the U.K. where defenders of deconstruction have reacted to the perceived depoliticisation of deconstruction by neo-liberal and pragmatist theorists in the U.S.¹ *The Oxford Literary Review* under the editorship of Anne Wordsworth, Geoffrey Bennington and Robert Young gave voice to a left-leaning post-structuralism. Terrence Hawkes intended the journal *Textual Practice* to serve as a materialist, but theoretically sophisticated, Marxian platform for work that would counter the perceived intellectualism of *The Oxford Literary Review*. The collection of essays edited by Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington, and Robert Young, *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (1987), took up the challenge of thinking deconstruction historically and rethinking history deconstructively.

The question of deconstruction and the political has intensified since the 1987

¹ Antony Easthope's contention in his *Post-Structuralism since 1968* (1988) that post-structuralism in England is an American import underestimates the resistance to U.S. theory in the U.K.

publicisation of Heidegger's allegiance to Nazism and De Man's wartime journalism in favour of Germany. Andrew Benjamin and David Wood of the University of Warwick have explored the historical and political consequences of deconstruction in the Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature series published by Routledge. Simon Critchley argued for *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992), and at Oxford Robert Young employed deconstructive methods to analyse colonial and imperial discourse. At the University of Sussex Laura Chrisman remained skeptical of deconstruction's usefulness for colonial and post-colonial theory while Homi Bhabha's deconstructive post-colonialism claimed political relevance. Also writing from Sussex, Geoffrey Bennington's *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (1994) argued for the necessity of rethinking the political in the wake of deconstruction, and astutely pointed to the various misunderstandings of Derrida by critics and epigones alike. In the Sussex institutional context the historical materialism of Alan Sinfield who is now editorial *Practice* and Jonathan Dollimore formed the main in-house antagonist for the Sussex Derrideans.

Richard Beardsworth's *Derrida and the Political* (1996) is based on his doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Sussex under the supervision of Bennington in the late 1980s. The research which forms the basis of Beardsworth's book was carried out in the ideological climate of Thatcherism that saw the smashing of organised labour, the glorification of free-market individualism, technological progress and global consumerism. In this period the role of universities shifted from state institutions to public companies. Politics within the institution shed the rhetoric of the collective struggle to make institutions, and ultimately society, more democratic. The model of academic production changed from 'contribution to learning' to the marketing of international commodities of exchange. In short, the role of the engaged English intellectual was modified in the light of the perceived failure of the left before the juggernaut of monetarism and the ineluctable laws of the market.

Salvaging Derrida²

Derrida and the Political is part of a Routledge series entitled 'Thinking the Political' under the general editorship of Keith Ansell-Pearson (University of Warwick) and Simon Critchley (University of Essex). Beardsworth, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Literature at the American University of Paris, attempts to draw out the political implications of Derrida's thought in three extensive chapters. He aims to go beyond the American liberal and communitarian debates of the 1970s and 1980s by drawing attention to the aporetic structure of modern political thought: a complete rethinking of the traditional ethico-political values of peace and violence is called for.

² Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent page numbers refer to *Derrida and the Political*.

Beardsworth returns to Derrida's remarkable 1968 reading of Aristotle and Heidegger on time ('*Ousia* and *Gramme*'), and argues that the aporia of time is the aporia of the law. This aporetic structure is repressed in 'the political' which, like any other moment of judgement and decision, of legitimation and authorisation, is grounded in a violence that is both conceptual and material. The political is *a priori* implicated in violence. Attempting the rearticulation of time in terms of the irreducibility of the law, and of law in terms of time, claims to acknowledge violence and to work for justice. This justice demands a re-evaluation of Derrida's texts.

Chapter 1, 'From Saussure to Law, an Opening onto Judgement: Saussure, Kafka, Derrida', is an exposition of Derrida's conception of the law of the law as articulated in his readings of Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Kafka. The law of the law is aporetic: the impossibility of the law ever accounting for its own lawfulness. The condition of possibility of the law is that the possibility of the law cannot be accounted for without always already presupposing the law. Thus there can be no history of the law that does not pre-empt the law, and the law of the law is that the law must always be (illegitimately) presupposed. It follows from this that the institution of the law is necessarily violent since it seeks to repress its own groundlessness. This originary violence remains as a trace in the conflict that is the law: at one and the same time the law is universalising and it creates the singular which resists the universal.

Chapter 2, 'The Political Limit of Logic and the Promise of Democracy: Kant, Hegel, Derrida', employs the Derridean conception of the law to rethink the notion of the political. The legitimacy of the political, as the legislation of inclusive and exclusive limits, and its claims to authority are shown to be unstable and aporetic. Authority is only ever instituted and maintained by the violent suppression of the contradictory grounds of its own functioning, the erasure of the play of difference and the obliteration of challenges to legitimacy.

Chapter 3, 'Aporia of Time, Aporia of Law: Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida', attempts to formulate the possibility of the political as the least violent by moving through Heidegger's conception of temporality and Levinas's ethical conception of alterity. The shortcomings of Heidegger's and Levinas's politics are traced to their attempts to justify their politics by grounding it in conceptions of ontology. The 'Conclusion' points the way towards a vision of the political for the next century that will keep alive the promise of the political which is nothing less than the promise of democracy. Beardsworth argues for the political force of deconstruction on the grounds that it is only by experiencing the aporia of time and the law via thinking through Derrida's thought that the political can survive at all.

The abused stakes of Derrida's thinking centre on the relation between deconstruction and 'the political'. Not 'politics' but rather '*the* political': 'politics' concerns 'the domain of human behaviour which normativizes the relations between a

subject and its others' while 'the political' is understood as 'the instance that gathers or founds such a practice as practice' (158). We are, then, here concerned with foundational questions, or rather with the question of foundation and institution, and not with the practice of this or that politics. Although political decisions will impinge as particulars to be accounted for the primary focus is the political itself. The cases of Heidegger's Nazism, Levinas's ethical justification of the politics of Israel, and what Beardsworth sees as 'the concrete political example of Derrida's reading of the American Declaration of Independence' (98), are to be viewed from the vantage point of Derrida's aporetic and inventive philosophy of time and law.

A sense of belatedness pervades *Derrida and the Political*. This is surprising in a book that mobilises the rhetoric of progress and apocalyptic millennialism for the purposes of 'the reinvention of political concepts to measure up to the technicization and globalization of political communities in the next century' (xi). The constant refrain is that Derrida's thought has been underestimated in its complexity: 'severely underestimated by both supporters and detractors of deconstruction. The underestimation has led to many misunderstandings concerning its political pertinence and force' (xiv). Belatedness can be traced to 'the institutional history of deconstruction in the Anglo-Saxon world' where since the late 1980s deconstruction came to be seen 'as constitutively incapable of articulating the historical making and unmaking of subjectivities' (3). The 'understanding of the relations between institutions and their history' (4) involves a rereading of Derrida's works:

The case against the institution of deconstruction is rested; but that of deconstruction's relation to its institution, and to its thinking of the institution in general, needs to be reopened A rereading of these works will show that the institutional culture of deconstruction fell into contradiction with the radical insights of this culture's beginnings. If this is the fate of all thinking that inaugurates a culture—following the iterable logic of all marks, Derrida's writings lend themselves a priori to being 'misunderstood'—the complexity and implications of Derrida's thinking have been simplified by its international reception remaining unduly in the field of textual analysis (3f).

The fate of Derrida's thought requires a corrective reiteration of its central tenets, a restitutive salvaging in the form of an intellectual exercise that aims to conserve a maligned resource of transformational thinking 'motivated by a wish to press home the precise intellectual stakes of Derrida's philosophy, stakes which have often been ignored or underestimated' (5). This combative interpretive stance is beyond any simple *apologia* and the accounting will deal with friend and foe alike. If the exegesis is successful—that is, if the reader comes to the realisation of the importance of Derrida's deconstructions for the reflection on the political—then 'it will have enjoined the reader to go back to Derrida's works with the fate of the political in mind' (157). After

the itinerary through the arguments of Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas *anagnorisis* will return the reader to the Derridean corpus. This is both the way 'to the reinvention of politics for the next century' (48) and a rebuttal of Gillian Rose's criticisms of Derrida which 'fall short since there is no dialogue in her work either between philosophy and the technosciences' (97).

Why is such an investigation necessary? Because

Metaphysical logic reduces the passage of time to presence: its articulations of justice are consequently violent to the experience of that time that constitutes the human condition. The disavowal of time in reflection upon the political has led to much injustice and violence in the field of politics. To reflect upon politics in terms of time is to endure the experience of the *aporia* of law (and) time. Political judgements which recognize difference according to the lesser violence are those that have endured this experience. This experience informs Derrida's non-horizonal understanding of justice and of democracy. The political resonance of deconstruction is to be located and discussed here (xvi-xvii).

This thesis raises some initial questions. Firstly, what connection links the 'disavowal of time in reflection on the political' to 'injustice and violence in the field of politics'? How can the avowal of the temporality of the political minimise injustice and violence in 'the field of politics'? Some evidence is required to support such a hypothesis. The conceptual foundations of the political are certainly open to philosophical articulation, and the field of politics can be interpreted on the basis of an understanding of 'the political', but 'the field of politics' requires no such understanding to function. Other forces take the field and play their part in opening up the possibility for reflecting on the question of time in the political, a reflection that is accommodated within this field as a necessary part of its functioning. Given time, reflection on time is possible. But what produces the time to reflect, gives some of us (while at the same time denying it to others) the chance to 'endure the *aporia* of law (and) time'? Secondly, why are 'Political judgements which recognize difference according to the lesser violence ... those that have endured this experience'? What evidence is there to support the genealogical affinity of political judgements according to what Beardsworth will later designate vaguely as 'democratic organizations of power' (146)? To say simply that the most democratic are those judgements that have recognised difference according to the lesser violence homogenises the various experiences of democracy, which are always multiple and conflicting. My tolerant experience of 'lesser violence' may be for another 'most violent'.

The argument of *Derrida and the Political* is constructed on Derrida's reading of Saussure, 'a reading as meticulous as it is vast', in which 'Derrida is recasting the terms in which all institutional violence is to be thought' (10). Derrida's claims 'arche-

writing' as the general possibility of inscription because 'metaphysics constitutes its oppositions by expelling into one term of the opposition the very possibility of condition of such oppositions' (8). For Derrida the 'instituted trace' is the possibility common to all systems of signification, the moment of decision in which boundaries are drawn on the basis of opposition, and it precedes the oppositions between nature and convention, allowing for their possibility. These violent exclusions institute a space that remains haunted by what it excludes. For Beardsworth '[t]he recognition of the condition of these exclusions demands re-cognition and renegotiation of their law, and this recognition is political' (10). Rethinking the political means rethinking the law of the law, the violence of the law and the law of violence. Judgement can only ever try to lessen its complicity with the metaphysical economy it might want to challenge: 'One is always within an economy of violence', 'the inescapability of violence' (91, 95).

Now, it is obvious that the very conditions that curtail freedom have also allowed us to think of ourselves as free, that struggle is inherent to human organisation, and that 'the political community is only possible through struggle and exclusion and that in this sense it is always to be made and unmade' (93). The founding of institutions is part of this violence even when they aim to ameliorate it, and legislations of the law are caught in the aporia of being unable to account for the legitimacy of the law they inaugurate. Claims to authority, to institute a subject (a people, a place, etc.), do cover over the problem of legitimacy by a sleight of hand that blurs the difference between performative and descriptive in order to institute as subject, effectively inventing that which they claim to represent. But is this sleight of hand really, as Beardsworth claims, 'only derivatively a question of ideology or power' (100)? Is it really 'firstly, a question of disavowing time' (100)?

Founding declarations do and this is a temporal difference. Contextual factors facilitate or stage the possibility of some claims for legitimacy being made while excluding others. Delineating the formal structure of instituting gestures is only part of any analysis that claims to work for justice. Factors such as social identity, economics, education—questions of ideology or power—also require examination if particular contexts are to be addressed. Moreover, don't claims by academics to have found a way beyond or through ideology and power have a history that includes the period of Heidegger's early writings and the work of Karl Mannheim and others attempting to preserve the objectivity of intellectual work?³ '[T]he law of the law is nothing but the

³ See David Frisby, *The Alienated Mind: The Sociology of Knowledge in Germany, 1918-1933* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983). For more recent attempts to dissociate the 'New Class' of intellectuals from the embeddedness of knowledge in capitalist production see the contributions to B. Bruce-Briggs (ed.), *The New Class?* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Press, 1979), and Pierre Bourdieu, "The Corporation of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World", *Telos* 81 (1989: 99-110).

irreducibility of law to a history of it' (33): perhaps, but there are also histories of when and how the aporetic structure of time and the law has been mobilised within philosophical discourse, accounts of whose interests have been served in particular contexts by this discourse. The demotion of the question of ideology or power is not simply a sign of progress in philosophical discourse, but rather a historicisable repetition that sublimates a critique of society into a philosophical problem. To reflect upon politics and philosophy in terms of time involves historical contextualisation.

I would suggest that the generalisation of violence risks underestimating the locus of centres of violence within the constellation of forces. 'Arche-writing' might well precede the Platonic institution of the opposition between the transcendental and the empirical, and the notion of 'context' might mark the institution of an inside and an outside, but there is also a risk associated with this thesis which is itself a matter of context. As Beardsworth notes

The irreducibility of a decision shows that the most innocent 'theorist' is always also a legislator and policeman. It is in this sense that any statement is a judgement which carries 'political' force (12).

Surely, then, the task is to attend to the context in which one theorises in the hope of minimising violence. The theorist's understanding of historical context is a question of decision regarding the violent returns of the status quo. Within the general economy of violence there are also historically specific economies of violence which serve specific interests, an economy that involves differences of site and differences of force. This raises the issue of

the relation between the aporia of time and material inscription (what is sometimes called, wrongly, I believe, the 'socio-historical'). The supra-national status of the present world economy makes the sovereignty of the nation state an unsophisticated principle of organization (95).

Beardsworth summarises the current historical context as follows:

We live today in a world which is increasingly violent, less and less politicized. It would be foolish not to see in this 'depoliticization' a sign of an end to political ontology, at least. It would also be foolish, however, either to bemoan the end of the modern concept of the state or to affirm its reorganization in the present supra-national status of what modernity called 'civil society', that is, today, the international economic systems. If one therefore wishes to rearticulate this depoliticization, without repeating the fates of modernity, an aporetic invention of politics is called for (95)⁴.

⁴ For a complementary vision of the supra-national global economy see Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations* (1991), and for deconstructive readings of international relations see James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations* (1988).

If Beardsworth's readings of philosophical arguments appear persuasive, then the shift to history and to politics reveals a startling tendency for generalisation which throws into question the plausibility of his philosophical rearticulations. This can be seen most clearly in his discussion of colonialism where the generalisation of violence is said

not to deny the violence of European colonialism; it is to include it within a more embracing structure of violence which refuses the logic of opposition (21).

The ghosts of philosophical predecessors haunt this crossing of philosophy, history, and politics.

Philosophical Exorcism

For Beardsworth Marx

prolongs and simplifies Hegel by making unrecognized violence into an ontological principle of class struggle. The modern period of revolutionary politics which justifies political violence in the name of a social subject ensues (95).

This is not the way to lesser violence. Marx like others '[f]rom the Enlightenment onwards' fails to escape the thinking of humanity as 'present', a thinking that is a feature of 'modernity': "Modernity" serves as a discursive term of reflection upon a period of history from the beginning of the modern epoch onwards' (49). The sententious legislation of broad historical patterns is a striking feature of *Derrida and the Political*.

What, then, of the material inscription designated by the term 'colonialism'? Beardsworth cites Hegel's description from *The Philosophy of Right* (1821) which he interprets 'as an interesting if evasive comment' (93). Hegel is arguing that poverty is not some dysfunction of the system that might be rectified by technical innovation, rather it is integral to the functioning of civil society and modernisation within the context of a market economy. He points out that the pressures of civil society, the unequal opportunities and the ever expanding market economy, also lead to the establishment of overseas markets and colonisation. The full passage from Hegel reads as follows:

This inner dialectic of civil society thus drives it—or at any rate drives a specific civil society—to push beyond its own limits and seek markets, and so its necessary means of subsistence, in other lands which are either deficient in the goods it has over produced, or else generally backward in industry, &c. (Hegel 1945:151).

For Beardsworth Hegel's observation that colonialism and war are dialectical developments of the inner dialectic of civil society misses the point because he fails to see that the rebellious rabble within civil society are an essential contingency of all states. Hegel shifts the violence of dispossession to the colonial frontier and envisages an internal peace bought at the price of perpetual violence on the outskirts, missing the fact that that exported violence is present at the civil centre too and is produced by the irrational economy at home. Beardsworth argues that

to think of violence as occurring *at the limits* of a state's 'own lands' leads to the misrecognition of violence. For violence is repressed precisely by being *placed* in a site. *Visibility ends up being blind* (94).

Hegel's locating of violence at the colonial margins overlooks the fact that

Colonialism is based on the unrecognized naturalness of empirical need. This need engenders the 'infinity' of injustice, territorial expansion and conquest (94).

Yet Beardsworth's own recognition of the violence of the irrational economy at home gets lost behind 'the unrecognized naturalness of empirical need'⁵, and escapes analysis. Violence is repressed precisely by not being placed in a site.

The levelling-out of violence does not lead to any analysis of the distribution of violence, its haunting presence at the centre, because, as we have been told, any siting of violence amounts to its repression. However, the intellectual pay-off is that in a world of generalised violence the centre suffers as much as the periphery. So to write from the centre is to write from essentially the same conditions as pertain at the neo-colonial periphery, and any delimitation of context risks misrecognising the generality of this violence. This argument culminates in the following 'Conclusion' which is worth quoting at length:

The essential lack of identity to all human organization is more and more 'apparent' in contemporary relations between humanity and the world. Internationalization and the increasing 'spectralization' of human identity which accompanies it are, for example, the political 'givens' of today and tomorrow. Whether one thrives off them (the international Mafia), muddles through them (present democratic organizations), opposes them (today's forms of nationalism, racism and fundamentalist politics) or attempts to articulate them (the task present and future political invention), we all live

⁵ Although Beardsworth's demotion of Marx and Hegel follows the lead of Robert Young's *White Mythologies* (1990), the positing of the 'naturalness of empirical need' recalls the anti-Marxist argument of historian Ronald Hyam's *Britain's Imperial Century* (1976) and *Empire and Sexuality* (1990): Hyam sees European expansion in terms of the export of surplus energy.

within this process of spectralization. Spectralization is not just a monopoly of the richer industrialized countries. Any country, any locality determines its understanding of time, place and community *in relation to* this process of 'global' spectralization. This process originates with that of hominization so it would be wrong to see present spectralization as heralding an unprecedented era. That said, it is taking place today at a historically unprecedented speed, one which will become all the more acute, at the level of human reception and negotiation of the 'inhuman', with the exponentially accelerating developments in machine intelligence and in the biotechnical recombination of 'non-human' and 'human' DNA (147).

Where does the author of these imperious sentences position himself in order to observe 'contemporary relations between humanity and the world'? Apparently not within an institutional context that is both inside and outside the overlapping fields of politics, ideology, economics and power that position judgement. Rather he constructs the best of all possible worlds for an academic:

Thus thinking through the aporia of law amounts to a defence of the institutional inscription 'at the same time' as it defends the infinity of singular resistances to this inscription (95).

The deconstructor's favoured '*middle ground*' (17) between transcendental and empirical that is supposed to explain 'why all political projects fail' (19) here leads to a familiar socio-historical shelter.

Conclusion

Derrida and the Political contains efficient expository readings of Derrida's readings of Aristotle, Saussure, and Levi-Strauss, and this book will probably attract those in search of yet more useable summaries of Derrida's arguments. Arguments are served up stripped of their historical contexts and well designed to service the needs of an impatient intellectual commodity market.

It seems to me that Beardsworth is wrong to simplify the shortcomings of deconstruction as the 'problem of its institutional *reception* remaining unduly in the field of textual analysis'. His examination of 'deconstruction's relation to its institution' evidences a misrecognition of the institutional site of *production* within the spectralising field of dynamic global technological consumption. Just as there are degrees of violence so too are there degrees of complicity with a universalising discourse that levels out the violence of the non-discursive forces that shape the various contexts of academic production and consumption. This is a question of, among other things, ideology or power and material conditions.

One of the effects of *Derrida and the Political's* levelling-out of violence is the aporetic consolidation of centrality *at the same time* as that centre recognises-declares its own dispersion. A condition of possibility of any violent (de)centring that is also contextualisable as a ruse functioning to minimise sitings of that same (de)centralising and violent economy. *Visibility ends up being blind.* This is a socio-historical phenomenon associated with capitalism.

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