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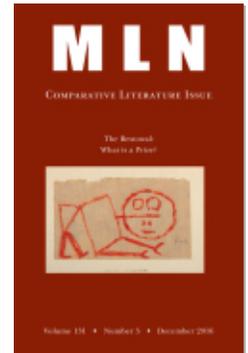
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of Frankfurt

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Hent de Vries

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (*I Corinthians* 9:24–27)

Just as the inaugural lecture and its overall genre of praise—one thinks of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Éloge de la philosophie* and, in its footsteps, Pierre Hadot's *Éloge de la philosophie antique*, but other examples abound—the lecture format of the *laudatio* and *oratio* that frames and stages the awarding and receiving of major scholarly and literary prizes, often sponsored and under the auspices of national committees and cities, might rightfully be seen as a public spiritual exercise. It exemplifies and raises the very stakes and tasks of critical thinking and the discerning judgment with which it must come. That

this judgment is, in the end, not guided by strict or demonstrable intellectual criteria and, hence, has a certain ineliminable touch of arbitrariness in everyone's eye does not diminish the passionate interest that prizes generate or the deeper and wider impact on the larger culture that they will have. As an at once deeply personal and often overtly political affair, it has all the necessary and sufficient features, if not of an excruciating academic or artistic test, then at the very least of a near-spiritual examination. Prize lectures fit the bill of this age-old and far from obsolete genre and should be seen and analyzed, indeed, tolerated and appreciated in that very light. They aim to capture the spirit and signs of the times and do so with an apodicticity that, henceforth, serves as a certain axiomatic dictating what will count and be read or seen, sold and enter the archive or canon. One should not underestimate the importance of such election of certain authors and works as the standard bearers of our age, nor the shaky premises upon which such selection is inevitably based. But there is more.

Premised as they are on a respectable metaphysical principle, namely that of the *coincidentia oppositorum*—a dialectical principle known from Nicholas of Cusa's 1440 *De docta ignorantia*—literary and cultural prizes as expressed by the conflicting injunctions that govern the *laudatio* and *oratio* that accompany them, affirm both tradition and innovation, continuity and revolution. They do so with one and the same paradoxical or, rather, aporetic gesture that they share not just with the Neoplatonic strands of theological thinking or with latter forms of positive, speculative, and negative dialectics but, in fact, with all genuine speech, literal and general (i.e., virtual) writing, whether good or bad, serious and sincere or not. Not even logic, whether material or formal, escapes this regime, which is that of intellectual and other experience *in toto*, just as it animates the very life of the mind, the spiritual condition of all ages.

Living and experimenting with its predicament, which, come to think of it, is that off all predication, is what Theodor W. Adorno calls "spiritual experience" ("*geistige Erfahrung*") and what the tradition and some of its most rigorous recent interpreters, most notably Pierre Hadot, have coined "spiritual exercise." Walter Benjamin would have spoken of "practice" ("*Übung*"), which, in this respect, is not so different from his conception and practice of true inquiry, in his words, of *Studium*.

Again, the contradiction of opposites in question is that in the granting and accepting of prizes it is implied that thinkers and artists,

public servants and activists, both contingently and necessarily stand upon the shoulders of giants, while they, at the same time, offer to see and reach much further and higher from there. Add to this the logical implication that what comes after not merely fills in some blanks or supplements unknowns, but, on the contrary, quite literally dwarfs what came before—namely, the intellectual and cultural accomplishments of past generations which now come to be seen and evaluated in a radically new light—and the picture I am seeking to paint here is almost complete. Without such undoing, call it a determinate rather than abstract negation, as Adorno claims, nothing new could be arrived at, no idea, concept or practice, could ever be actualized. Past thinkers have coined an extensive and complicated philosophical terminology for this simple insight, invoking sublation, reduction, destruction, overcoming or convalescing, and, last but not least, deconstruction as catch-all concepts that would capture this contradictory movement and, perhaps, progress of genuine thought. But what such concepts merely reveal is that the new cannot be anticipated, understood, much less explained, in terms of the old. We praise true accomplishments in ways that are no mere summation but that must be excessive, the fulfillment of wishes and that are, hence, almost dreamlike. True prizes are prizeless.

In the fateful month of September 2001, 11 days after the event of “9/11” that would turn into a “concept”—in any case, into much more than a date, even as it separated a before and an after in temporal terms (as dates tend to do)—Jacques Derrida was awarded the prestigious Theodor W. Adorno prize of the city of Frankfurt am Main. The prize, which was worth the sum of 50.000 Euros at the time (and more recently doubled in amount), was first announced in 1977 and is awarded every three years on the very day that was Adorno’s birthday, namely September 11, with the aforementioned delay of 11 days observed in Derrida’s case, due to the massive, indeed, global event that preceded it and the shocking “impression” it had left, not least across the Atlantic. “*Nous sommes tous Américains,*” the prestigious French daily newspaper *Le Monde* had quipped in a lead editorial penned by its then-director, Jean-Marie Colombani, the day after.

Norbert Elias, Jürgen Habermas, Günther Anders, Michael Gielen, Leo Löwenthal, Pierre Boulez, Jean-Luc Godard, and Zygmunt Bauman had been awarded the Adorno prize in previous years, while others,

namely György Ligetti, Albrecht Wellmer, Alexander Kluge, Judith Butler, and Georges Didi-Huberman, to date, would eventually follow. At the time of Derrida's selection, the committee had consisted of CDU *Bürgermeister* Petra Roth, the critic Silvia Bovenschen, the poet Durs Grünbein, and the sociologist Dirk Baeker. For all we know, the decision had not been controversial, but it easily could have been and would soon be, notably when Judith Butler was the recipient of the same prize in 2012 and was vehemently attacked by some in the press and during street protests for not being *preiswürdig*, presumably due to her political views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and her support of the BDS movement, which advocates boycott, divestment, and sanctions of the Zionist state and the role it plays in the occupied territories. Irrespective of their merits and the fact that these were caricatured in the brawl that ensued, these were political and institutional views that Adorno may or, rather, may not have shared, which is impossible to know for a thinking that had historical indexes written all over it. And, lest we forget, it also seems a somewhat irrelevant question where prizes in someone's name are principally awarded not on the basis of strict criteria and checklists but "in the spirit" of the towering figure in whose shadow, the prize reminds us, we continue to stand even though we cannot but move forward. After all, we do move beyond the city—here, the city of Frankfurt am Main and by metonymy, the whole Frankfurt School of Critical Theory—under whose auspices the prize is yearly administered. Critical Theory, Judith Butler had already demonstrated and would soon document even further, has gone global and questions of propriety, as to who owns it and who succeeds or fails in continuing its tradition and intellectual legacy, are not only fruitless, but surely not in the spirit of a theory that understood itself as *Flaschenpost*, a message in a bottle, tossed out in the ocean to be found and read or deciphered by whoever is willing and able to be so addressed and impressed.

The festive ceremony that accompanies the award, complete with a *laudatio* and *oratio* or *Preisrede*, always takes place in the famous Paulskirche, the site of numerous consequential debates and speeches, John F. Kennedy's (in 1963) among them, the annual awarding of the *Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels* (in that same year, 2001, to Jürgen Habermas). It was and is the monument often portrayed as *Symbol demokratischer Freiheit und nationaler Einheit* (as the title of a recent exhibition and catalogue aptly summarized things).

Honoring prominent thinkers who had demonstrably worked "in the spirit of the Frankfurt School," crossing the boundaries between

philosophy and social criticism, but also between literature and the arts, the Theodor W. Adorno Prize by the City of Frankfurt, and each address pronounced in accepting it, required no small—and, in some cases, somewhat tortuous—reckoning of often unacknowledged, unintended, unconscious, and, perhaps, even subterranean or undesired influences, but also of unlikely resonances, strategic compromises, and tactical pacts. And Derrida's Adorno-*Preisrede*, whose first and last words were pronounced in German, in a courteous gesture towards his hosts, was no exception and set out to do exactly that.

We have a pretty good idea as to what Derrida might have understood by thinking and writing “in the spirit of X.” The fundamental essay on Martin Heidegger and the question of “the question,” entitled *De l'esprit (Of Spirit)* but also—and, perhaps more relevantly—the conference and then book *Spectres de Marx (Specters of Marx)* on the “spirit,” here meaning the *formal outlook* and *impetus* or *aspiration* (not the theses, more precisely, neither the ontics or ontology!), of Karl Marx's legacy, after Marxism and “actually existing” socialism and communism had “withered away,” both had already offered us detailed sketches as to what working in someone's or something's “spirit” must entail. For one thing, it was being “inspired,” in spite of all false or falsified empirical claims as well as every deconstructible premise or *telos* of a more metaphysical nature; for another, it was a being “haunted by,” as if by a not so happy or, in any case, unfulfilled “dream.”

But what, exactly, might this belonging without forming quite part of, which, at the same time, was a “being at once infinitely close to and at an infinite distance from” the preceding and indirectly honored body of thought, writing, and critical practice, have meant, for Derrida, in this particular case (i.e., Adorno's or, for that matter, the “Frankfurt School's”)? Derrida had used the aforementioned characterizations (“belonging without belonging,” “being infinitely close and distant”) to summarize the simultaneous engagement and disengagement he (and, before him, Maurice Blanchot) had experienced with regard to Martin Heidegger (the thinker, the work, the politics). But did these designations and the deep ambivalence they professed apply here, where Derrida was being anointed, if not Adorno's “heir,” then at least as someone who had worked in Adorno's, perhaps even his

school's, very "spirit"? How could he speak, in the case of this author, of "admiration" and even of—and with—"love"?

As if summoned before a post-Hegelian, Kantian tribunal of reason, Derrida revealed that he had often felt himself invited, no compelled, to address his intellectual indebtedness to Adorno and the Frankfurt School more—indeed, all too—directly:

For decades I have been hearing voices, as they say, in my dreams . . . All of them seem to be saying to me: why not recognize, clearly and publicly, once and for all, the affinities between your work and Adorno's, in truth your debt to Adorno? Aren't you an heir of the Frankfurt School? (43/176)¹

These inquisitive voices resembled or echoed others, previously heard with respect to other presumed legacies and commitments, both real and imagined, that Derrida seemed, likewise, unable to "avoid" addressing, even though there seemed good reasons not to affirm or deny things too quickly, without preliminary and painstaking qualifications, which would leave everyone guessing, skeptical, including Derrida himself, as to what had been "recognized, clearly and publicly."

For example, according to his 1986 Jerusalem address, entitled "Comment ne pas parler. Dénégations" ("How To Avoid Speaking. Denials"), similar accounts had been demanded, insisting that deconstruction, that Derrida should finally come clear as to his intellectual and spiritual debts towards and affinities with the diverse historical projects of negative theology, that is to say, with Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mysticisms, not to mention apophatics, messianism, and Abrahamic religions, more widely. What, then, he now seemed to allow being asked, about so-called negative dialectics, the very title that best captured Adorno's most methodic and, via this, his more material work?

In order to answer this, we must analyze the decisive ways in which in accepting the prize and in giving the address that it called for, Derrida was nonetheless able to mark a subtle distance in the no less considerable closeness that had been rightly, if all too abstractly and far too quickly, observed by sympathetic interpreters and unsympathetic detractors alike.

It is noteworthy that the announcement and reception of the Adorno-Preis in Derrida's case created much less of an uproar than the honorary doctorate that was offered to him at the University of Cambridge, in 1992. That event did make the headlines and revealed

¹In the following pages, I reference page numbers of the French original first and the English translation next.

a level of intensity and no small amount of bad faith that, it seems, especially academic philosophers—mistaking empty polemics for genuine debate—tend to relish in, harming their souls and much else in the process. Was it because the stakes of a doctorate *honoris causa* were much higher than that of a prize, the authority of Cambridge more elevated—and, hence, more in need of defense—than that of the City of Frankfurt am Main and the prize it had named after one of its most prominent thinkers?

One possible explanation for the unproblematic announcement of the laureate in 2001 may be that, for Derrida, this was round two or three or four, if not five, coming not only after the Cambridge affair, but also after the events in 1987, 1988, 1996 tied to the names of Heidegger, Paul de Man, and Alan Sokal, events that played themselves out very publicly—in the *New York Review of Books*, the *New York Times*, and *Social Text*—and that must have gradually taught informed audiences to distinguish between all the hype and guilt-by-association rhetoric, on the one hand, and, on the other, the intellectual merits of a thinker whose oeuvre had formulated all necessary precautions—indeed, all reservations and hesitations, provisos and disclaimers—in reading these authors or in discussing science and math, and this well before the bad news broke in each case.

A more decisive reason was, no doubt, the intellectual and institutional support—in the best “spirit of the Frankfurt School”—that some of its most influential representatives, notably Jürgen Habermas, Albrecht Wellmer, and Christoph Menke had been slowly preparing for Derrida and what he stood for in truth, beyond the laughable caricatures. Indeed, as has been noted, in his “Frankfurt Address,”

Derrida clearly presents deconstruction sharing the spirit of Adorno’s negative dialectic, and Benjamin’s mystical enlightenment. He seems to imply that his own way of doing philosophy is a viable Adornian alternative to the other Adornian heritage, the rationalistic, academic style of Critical Theory as it is now conducted in Frankfurt. (Deranty 432)

But it would be more exact to say that Derrida treats Adorno’s view of Benjamin as one that is somewhat qualified, namely as one that can, perhaps, be thought only “as if” in a dream? Quoting Adorno’s essay on Benjamin in *Prismen* he picks up on a passage as if on a “motto” that he would be willing to subscribe to “at least for ‘all the last times’” of his own life: “In the form of the paradox of the impossible possibility, mysticism and enlightenment are joined *for the last time* in him [Benjamin]. He *overcame* the dream without *betraying* it (*ohne ihn zu*

verraten) and making himself the accomplice in that on which the philosophers have always agreed: that it shall not be" (Fichus 19/168).² As the robber and brigand who are invoked throughout, genuine thinking risks illegality in challenging the jurisdiction of modern critique and the powers it lets be. Countering a certain articulation and distinct strata in the historical archive, espousing the potential nonsense with which thinking an impossible possibility or possible impossibility must surely come, it experiments and experiences beyond the well-known bounds of sense of which transcendental philosophy and modern criticism, including its linguistic and formal pragmatic transformations, makes all too much. Derrida leaves no doubt then as to where "a little thinking" would eventually lead us:

We shouldn't be affected by "that on which the philosophers have always agreed," namely the first complicity to break up and the one you have to start by worrying about if you want to do a little thinking. *Overcoming* the dream without *betraying* it (*ohne ihn zu verraten*)—that's the way, says Benjamin, the author of a *Traumkitsch* [Dream Kitsch]: to wake up, to cultivate awakesness and vigilance, while remaining attentive to meaning, faithful to the lessons and the lucidity of a dream, caring for what the dream lets us think about, especially when what it lets us think about is the *possibility of the impossible*. (19–20/168)

This, nothing else, would be the exercise of thinking, of caring for thought, at and beyond the limits of the possible: a thought, "a little thinking," that Derrida sees himself as having adopted, faithful to the Benjaminian and Adornian impulse, but also passing beyond and betraying their self-interpretation and, at times, other legacy wherever necessary. Refusing any Romantic way out of the predicament of all predication, eschewing all too triumphalist overcomings of the metaphysics that the latter, indeed, implies, Derrida's alternative model is that of incessant reflection, of a different type of "meditation" on metaphysics, yet a further "spiritual experience" ("*geistige Erfahrung*"), if one could say so:

The possibility of the impossible can only be dreamed, but thinking, a quite different thinking of the relation between the possible and the impossible, this other thinking I have been panting after for so long, sometimes getting out of breath over it, running my courses and rushing about—this perhaps has more affinity than philosophy itself with this dream. Even as you wake up, you would have to go on watching out for the dream, watching over it. It is from this possibility of the impossible, and from what would have to be done so as to try to think it differently, to think thinking differently,

²The quote is from Theodor W. Adorno's "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin" (241).

through an unconditionality without indivisible sovereignty, outside what has dominated our metaphysical tradition, that I try in my own way to draw some ethical, juridical, and political consequences . . . (20–21/168)

One such consequence is the public and cultural role of major prizes and the debts they express and incur.

One receives a prize, it seems, when the moment is ready, when one can be singled out, named and praised for what is, in the meantime, if not common, accepted knowledge, much less a truism, but at least something recognizable and receivable and, hence, worthy of praise (*preiswürdig*) even where, unmistakingly, fundamental disagreements with the intended audience and among the supporters must remain firmly in place.

When during a visit at Johns Hopkins, where he was a regular guest and former Associate of The Humanities Center, I hesitantly asked Derrida about the rumor that since his meeting in person with Habermas (in New York and at Northwestern University) there had been a reconciliation between the two philosophers, if not necessarily between their respective schools of thought, so to speak, Derrida's laconic answer was a gentle smile: "It is not a rumor at all, it is actually true." Habermas had instructed his collaborators to invite Derrida to Frankfurt for conversations and seminars. That some, especially but not exclusively on the Frankfurt side, considered this *ouverture* to be "purely strategic" (I am quoting one unnamed prominent figure in one of the camps, who thus almost verbatim characterized Habermas's gesture as neither serious nor sincere, exposing it to third-person accounts and psychological explanation at best), all this did not diminish the significance of the gracious invitation that had been extended, nor the fact that it was equally graciously accepted. After all, these and similar gestures, like the awarding and receiving of prizes and other honors, do count for something and reveal, precisely, in what spirit critical thinking is done and in what spirit, again, a shared legacy—here, Adorno's—is received and passed on.

The subsequent dialogue, if one can call it that, brokered by Giovanna Borradori and first published in English under the title *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*—published several years later in French as *Le concept d'11 septembre*—likewise testified to both Habermas's and Derrida's absolutely sincere and serious commitment to what both would have called the "ethics of discussion" (*Diskursethik; Éthique de*

la discussion"), which is the very opposite of tactical maneuvering or cultural or academic politics.

Indeed, there is little doubt that Derrida would not have obtained the Adorno-Prize were it not for the fact that an earlier Frankfurt visit and (before, with, and after it) Habermas's seal of approval had prepared the way. One doesn't receive a distinguished prize as one does the grace of God, that is, without the assistance of intermediaries or, for that matter, without deserving it. And although the awarding and receiving of prizes may well seem momentous and sometimes surprise us, they are usually long in the making.

As a consequence, some prizes don't come soon enough when one looks at the merits. Indeed, one rarely receives a prize too early (President Obama's Nobel Prize for Peace may be a case in point). Thinkers are more likely to receive prizes too late, when they, as it were, no longer need them. In this, then, the awarding of prizes resembles the "making of saints," but only up to a point. After all, saints are elevated and beatified posthumously, after firm post-mortem proof of their miraculous workings. And at least this, so far, no prize requires.

Yet, short of being martyred, one pays a certain price for being awarded a prestigious prize as well. Even Habermas's undeniable rapprochement with regard to Derrida and vice versa, together with the latter's being handed—and then also taking—the mantle of no one less than Adorno himself (the father spirit appearing to all Frankfurters since), may well have blurred some important distinctions, demarcations and *différends* that are no less crucial to maintain and return to.

But then, this is also a price that prize recipients are—and should be—willing to pay (and that one refuses only in vain, somewhat in vanity, or, worse, in bad faith, as Jean-Paul Sartre may have done by not accepting the Nobel Prize in 1964, for fear it that would make him *salonfähig* in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, thus distracting from the true 'cause of the people').

Yet prizes, as I have just implicitly characterized them, have no other formal or material implications than the receptions of works and authors in general. In awarding a prize, we merely *read things out loud*, *underlining a significance* that is principally or formally independent of our ultimate appreciation, approval or identification with the recipient of the honor in question. The bestowed prize *signals* or *flags*, it does not sign or countersign. We designate an author as, at least, *preiswürdig* and his or her oeuvre as *denk-* or even *fragwürdig* in the best sense of this term by bequeathing a prize. Perhaps this explains the remarkable divergence among authors and artists who receive the

same honor, in the name of the very same author, whether Adorno's or that of others.

There is no doubt that Adorno would have been horrified to have been associated in name with at least some of the awardees but, perhaps, not in this case. Adorno was known for being somewhat phobic of being wrongly associated with those he felt could he could not fully vow for (which left among the living only a dwindling minority of those whose company he could keep). In fact, we have a letter of him declaring his unwillingness to underwrite a petition to urge a new edition of Franz Rosenzweig's *Der Stern der Erlösung* on the very grounds that there might be co-signatories in whose presence he did not want to see himself cited.

Yet my hunch—a pure speculation (for what else could it be?)—is that he would have voiced no greater reservation and no lesser admiration than Derrida eventually would with regard to his own work, in turn, notably on this festive occasion.

Bernard Waldenfels, the Bochum *éminence grise* of the contemporary study of phenomenology in France, notably Paris, in its contradistinction with its German origins in Göttingen, Marburg, and Freiburg, intimated as much in his *laudatio*. Reminding his audience that Derrida “is not someone who philosophizes with the hammer” [*ist niemand, der mit dem Hammer philosophiert*], he went on to characterize him nonetheless by “the refusal to accord with a phenomenological or hermeneutic euphoria of meaning which suppresses the sediment of non-sense” [*Weigerung in eine phänomenologische oder hermeneutische Sinneuphorie einzustimmen, die den Bodensatz des Nicht-Sinnes unterschlägt*]. Adorno might just have agreed.

Elsewhere, Derrida would formulate provisos and hesitations, in “Kant, le juif, l'allemand” where he discusses Adorno's essay “Auf die Frage: Was ist Deutsch?” or in the pertinent analyses in *L'animal que donc je suis*, where he queries the conception of animality, introduced, among other texts, by the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. But this, he must have felt, was not the context to do so.

And while Derrida's speech accepting the Adorno prize lists all the important themes and open questions that any consideration of the relationship between 20th century French and German thought might want to revisit (the reception of Hegel, Heidegger, and Freud, to begin with), just as it concludes with a list of ten topics for chapters to be written on the parallels and differences between their respective projects, in its opening scene—after a brief invocation of the multiplicity of languages (inspired by a quote from Walter Benjamin to which I will

return in a moment)—*Fichus: Discours de Francfort* invokes the recital and threat of a “skepticism” broadly, that is to say, experientially and thus more than merely epistemologically, conceived.

What Derrida is, in fact, advocating with regard to the dreaming versus waking or awakening *topos*—a *Leitmotif* running through the whole history of thought, if ever there was one—is what I would like to call a dual aspect view of one and the same reality. This dual aspect theory of *Aufklärung* and critique sees what ever presents itself historically and empirically, psychologically and sociologically, under two radically contrasting, indeed, contradicting and mutually negating, perspectives, each of them animating an undeniable element of thought, albeit in a different—and, it is suggested, opposed—intentional mode. Inhabiting and practicing these two alternative modes would allow one to be inside and outside the phenomenon or matter of thought at once or, rather, in alternation, espousing the register and rigor of philosophy (“the essence of philosophy”) and that of poetry (literature, music, visual, and, interestingly, psychological analysis, indeed psychoanalysis, as Derrida frames things) one after the other, challenging one by the other.

Rather than assuming a dialectical or negative dialectical relationship between the two, Derrida describes this dual perspective as one of “hesitation,” that is, one of hesitating “between the ‘no’ and the ‘yes, sometimes perhaps,’ “sometimes that does happen,” allowing for a split screen of consciousness that makes us “heir to both” dreaming and waking traditions of thought, to a “double legacy” (14; 166).

Much more, then, than a posthumous homage to Adorno and, via him, to the “spirit,” if not the letter of Frankfurt “critique” is offered in the relatively short prize speech that first appeared in January 2002 in *Le Monde diplomatique* under the title “*La langue de l'étranger*” (“The Language of the Stranger”) only to be reissued separately the same year in a small volume simply, if somewhat enigmatically, entitled *Fichus: Discours de Francfort*—a title in which it is difficult to miss a subtle gesture towards other such types of “discourse” (perhaps the Bremer *Preisrede*, the *Discours de Bremen*, by Paul Celan), or, more tellingly, the colloquial, slang use of *fichu*, not as a substantive but as an adjective, meaning *foutu*, which, Derrida notes, “denotes evil: that which is bad, lost, condemned” and “suggests the eschatological register of death or the end” or, here, the fact that in addressing matters of intellectual inheritance, deserved or not, while dealing with anxieties of influence

from all sides, one is certainly ‘screwed’ (witness “the scatological register of sexual violence” [36/173–4] that *fichus* has as well). Indeed, Derrida insists, if his acceptance speech is “very oneirophilic,” the main reason is that “dreaming is the element most receptive to mourning, to haunting, to the spectrality of all spirits and the return of the ghosts (such as those adoptive fathers Adorno and Benjamin—that’s what they were for us and others too, in their disagreements as well, and that’s what Adorno perhaps was for Benjamin). The dream is also a place that is hospitable to the demand for justice and to the most invincible of messianic hopes” (Ibid.).

Fichus, the plural noun of *fichu* is, moreover, the word for a small woman’s triangular headscarf with its ends loosely knotted, while *fichu* is also the past participle of the French verb *ficher*, derived from the Latin *figere*, to fasten, to fix (to tighten the knot, as one might say in this case).

And, lest we forget, *Fichus*, the plural for veils (of *la voile*, the sail, on the one hand, and of *le voile*, the headscarf, on the other), conjures up yet another title, namely *Voiles*, a collaborative project in the autobiographical genre of confession and memoirs, co-authored by Derrida and H el ene Cixous. Indeed, as Derrida’s essay here is entitled “Savoir” (“Knowledge”) the register of sails and veils, but also, more indirectly, of fogs and shrouds as well as of seeing and, perhaps, wanting to touch complicates the philosophical inquiry as it raises an at once epistemic and deeply speculative question regarding the nature of skepticism no less than of truth. One is reminded, to add just another text to this extended dossier, of Derrida’s * perons* (*Spurs*) and *L’oreille de l’autre: Otobiographies* (*The Ear of the Other: Otobiographies*), which likewise tie the notion of philosophical and critical inquiry to the sinuous no less than pointed way in which truth can and must be given to leave its indelible mark. It is Nietzsche as well as Benjamin—and well before Adorno—who form here the reference.

One can feel further justified to hear in *fichus* a not so veiled reference to the aforementioned controversies, in France and soon elsewhere, regarding the veils, the headscarves in public. After all, Derrida begins his address by invoking “the language of the other, the visitor’s language, the foreigner’s language, even the immigrant’s, the  migr e’s, or the exile’s” (9/164). This, of course, was Benjamin’s language just as much as it was his own, just as it remains that of all those who have since reached Europe’s once again less and less hospitable shores. And, lest we forget, *Fichus* is an homage to “two expatriates,” one of whom “never returned,” while it is “not certain the other one ever did” (21/168).

In sum, in spite of or thanks to all its ceremonial and commemorative purposes, the Frankfurt address seems to find its primary motivation precisely in the undiminished urgency of this very question:

What will a responsible politics make of the plural and the singular, starting between the differences between languages in the Europe of the future, in the ongoing process of globalization? In what we call, ever more questionably, globalization, we in fact find ourselves on the verge of wars that, since September 11, are less sure than ever of their language, their meaning, and their name. (9–10/164)

Quoting Walter Benjamin's "happy" dream, which he communicated to Gretel, not "Teddy," Adorno in a letter in 1939, written in Nevers, in the internment camp that was one further step on the way to his untimely death—a dream dreamed in French: *Il s'agissait de changer en fichu une poésie*, which Benjamin translates as "Es handelte sich darum, aus einem Gedicht ein Halstuch zu machen" ("It was about making a scarf out of a poem") (Benjamin 60–62)—Derrida does not lose a beat, asking:

Are we responsible for our dreams? Can we answer for them? Suppose I am dreaming. My dream would be happy, like Benjamin's.

At this moment, speaking to you, standing up, eyes open, starting to thank you from the bottom of my heart, with the ghostly, *unheimlich*, uncanny gestures of a sleepwalker or even a bandit come to get his hands on a prize that wasn't meant for him—it's all *as if* I were dreaming. Admitting it even: in truth, I am telling you that in gratefully greeting you, I think I'm dreaming. Even if the bandit or smuggler doesn't deserve what he gets, as in a Kafka narrative—the pupil who thinks he has been called, like Abraham, to be the top of the class—his dream seems happy. Like me [*Comme moi*]. (11–12/165)

Yet how is a prize accepted—and, thereby, a mantle, a legacy, a "spirit"—*while dreaming, in dreaming*? Is nothing for real or what it seems in this official *oratio*, which follows the *laudatio* both in tone and substance, as the ceremony requires and makes one believe? Is the compliment of receiving the prize politely refused, the annexation cunningly diffused, *while accepting it*, graciously, as we said, but also gratuitously, as it now would have turned out? The answer, it comes as no surprise, is "yes and no!"

Whereas past attempts to characterize and hence condemn the deconstructive operation with epithets such ‘nihilistic,’ ‘relativistic,’ or even ‘skeptic’ by now mostly seemed moot, as they lacked sufficient analytical rigor and hermeneutic sensibility in their rendering of the central argument and gesture underlying Derrida’s overall philosophical project, the quotation with which *Fichus* opens places the reader squarely within the specifically modern skeptical “meditation” of which Stanley Cavell—meditating on Descartes and others—has shown us the meaning and force. True, the term “skepticism” does not appear here as such, but its central topos and its Cartesian depiction—the apparent indistinguishability or even interchangeability of states of dreaming and awakening, of being awake or being vigilant—is manifest from the *discourse’s* very opening pages, invoked in a studied, indeed, almost *methodic* manner (some would say mannerism).

We are reminded of an earlier engagement of this scene in the critical exchange with Michel Foucault in the earliest stages of Derrida’s career, in the essay “Cogito et histoire de la folie,” in *L’Écriture et la différence* (and revisited somewhat indirectly in an obituary Derrida published after Foucault’s death), but, in the context of *Fichus* the stakes of the skeptical “recital,” as Cavell calls it, seem to be raised. Whereas in the earlier discussion Descartes’s mental, indeed, spiritual exercise was taken to illustrate how the specter of madness haunts the interior—that is to say, the very definition and demarcation—of reason, in the later reference to dreaming/waking in Benjamin and thus, indirectly Adorno, all emphasis is put on the enormous strain this unavoidable and irrevocable uncertainty puts upon philosophy’s narrow, epistemological and rationalist self-image.

A much longer quote illustrates the content and tone of Derrida’s analysis (an analysis that, as Habermas rightly noted, is worthy of an Adorno in whose footsteps Derrida seems to step here more than elsewhere). Having quoted Benjamin’s letter to Gretel Adorno concerning a dream he has just had, Derrida writes:

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

I can imagine the two answers. The philosopher's would be a firm "no": you can't have a serious and responsible line on dreams, no one could even recount a dream without waking up. One could give hundreds of examples of this *negative* response, from Plato to Husserl, and I think it perhaps defines the essence of philosophy. This "no" links the responsibility of the philosopher to the rational imperative of wakefulness, the sovereign ego, and the vigilant consciousness. What is philosophy, for philosophers? Being awake and awakening. Perhaps there would be a quite different, but no less responsible, response from poets, writers, or essayists, from musicians, painters, playwrights, or scriptwriters. Or even from psychoanalysts. They wouldn't say "no," but "yes, perhaps sometimes." They would acquiesce in the event, in its exceptional singularity: yes, perhaps you can believe and admit that you are dreaming without waking yourself up; yes, it is not impossible, sometimes, while you are asleep, your eyes tight shut or wide open, to utter something like a truth of the dream, a meaning and a reason of the dream that deserves not to sink down into the night of nothingness.

When it comes to this lucidity, this light, this *Aufklärung* of a discourse dreaming about dreams, it is none other than Adorno I like to think of. I admire and love in Adorno someone who never stopped hesitating between the philosopher's "no" and the "yes, perhaps, sometimes that does happen" of the poet, the writer or the essayist, the musician, the painter, the playwright, or scriptwriter, or even the psychoanalyst. In hesitating between the "no" and the "yes, sometimes, perhaps," Adorno was heir to both. He took account of what the concept, even the dialectic, could not conceptualize in the singular event, and he did everything he could to take on the responsibility of this double legacy. (12-4/165-6)

By hesitating—philosophically, aesthetically, perhaps even theologically—between philosophy's "no" and the artistic "yes, perhaps, sometimes," Adorno himself, Derrida suggests, respected the possibility that philosophy's other—far from representing philosophy's abstract or, even determinate negation, that is to say, its denial, let alone its overcoming, repression-interiorization-sublation—holds something simultaneously in stock and in abeyance, to be expressed as well as desired: "As though dreaming were a more vigilant state than being awake, the unconscious more thoughtful than consciousness, literature or the arts more philosophical, more critical, at any rate, than philosophy" (18/167).

And while Derrida muses about the fact that this insight, in a sense, reveals deconstruction to be in tune or even in debt toward dialectics (or, at the very least, toward negative dialectics)—as if inviting the question, again, "why not recognize, clearly and publicly, once and for all, the affinities between your work and Adorno's, in truth your debt to Adorno? Aren't you an heir of the Frankfurt School?" (the

one question, he confesses, that all the “voices” that he hears in his “dreams” seem to imply—he is at once prudent and adamant in his ultimate answer: “Within me and outside me the response to this will always remain complicated, of course, and partly virtual” (43–4/176). And so it is with prizes, this one included. One assumes them for what they are, without assuming anything further. One assumes them “*as if* [one] were dreaming” and if not with an explicit sense of guilt, then at least in the full understanding that, again, one does so as “a bandit come to get his hands on a prize that wasn’t meant for him” (11/165).

Having one’s “eyes on the prize,” therefore, whether in vanity or for the best of causes is to participate in a cycle of exchange that is at once symbolic and material, following a logic that, since Marx and Adorno and Benjamin has stayed much the same. Not the least praise addressed to Adorno and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory is Derrida’s acknowledgment that their “analysis” of the so-called “commodification of culture” was a “harbinger of a structural mutation of capital, in the cyberspace market, in human reproduction, in global concentration, and in property” (17/167).

Fichus makes decisive incursions into territory that might have seemed the exclusive domain of philosophical skepticism in its modern Cartesian variety, just as it formulates an escape from the alternative of *either* submitting to it (say, by mitigating it in Humean, “Academic” rather than Pyrronian ways) *or* overcoming it (by epistemological, linguistic, or pragmatic-pragmatist reasoning, as has been common practice from Spinoza through Kant and Hegel, and from Husserl via Heidegger to Habermas, all of whom declared the “scandal of skepticism” to be the fact that the question of radically or seriously doubting the existence of the world and of others, and sometimes our selves, is raised at all).

In contrast, by asking: “What is a dream? And dream-thought? And dream language? Could there be an ethics or politics of dreaming that did not yield to the imaginary or the utopian, and was not an abandonment, irresponsible, and evasive?” (18/168); further, by invoking the Adornian figure of “the paradox of possibility of the impossible (*vom Paradoxon der Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen*), quoted from *Prismen*, in his 1955 “Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” and, finally, by referring to the latter’s *Traumkitsch* (Dream Kitsch), Derrida proposes what is,

in fact, an eminently Wittgensteinian or, if you like, Cavellian motif and motivation.

Indeed, he presents it in a mode and mood that seems strangely familiar to readers of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* as well as his *A Pitch of Philosophy*, and of essays such as "Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities." It is the continued acknowledgment of *the truth and moral no less than perennial threat of skepticism*, which no art, no literature can escape or circumvent either: in other words, our being unable to tell with absolute certainty when and where or how we sleep, dream, or awake and the curious *predicament of all predication* as well as the dual resource and double aspect of human finitude this must and can therefore entail, for the good and the worst (the best not ever being quite in our purview or reach, as it seems).

This predicament does not always—in fact, in most cases does not—present itself in terms of the yes/no positions (*Ja-Nein Stellungnahmen*) that a certain, limited reception of so-called speech act theory imparted on the now transcendental, then formal pragmatism of the second and third generations of the Frankfurt School, with Habermas leading the way. Without diminishing the importance of the genre of prize giving and the kind of speech it invites (*laudatio, oratio*), without neglecting the honest intentions of all those who take part in the selection process and eventual ceremony, that is, the awarding and receiving of such undeniable honors, there is no doubt that such speech and *a fortiori* the published documentation that follows its occasion put considerable strains upon the virtues and values of seriousness and sincerity in all parties involved. And, as we have seen, the *prima facie* academic or cultural phenomenon in question is eminently political or, at the very least, easily politicized just as well. In this, positive and life- and work-affirming prizes are no different from blatantly negative ones that form by now an integral, if much less debated, piece of the puzzle. By this, I do not only mean the public controversies regarding a nominee or grantee (the affair following Derrida's selection for a prize at Cambridge University being a case in point), but also the so-called bad writing or difficulty awards that some have found it useful to organize, to mixed effect.

My point here is this: whether positive or negative, the signs of widely shared appreciation and acclamation, scholarly and literary prizes change the terms and tone of public opinion and discourse, for the good and for ill. They have an undeniable educational, at times, edifying effect that feeds into our political culture. And, since such choices and their reception defy the strict formulation and rigorous

application of so-called criteria, they invoke something of a far more *spiritual* effort and practice or exercise than intellectual, academic or cultural work often seems to admit, from start to end.

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