



JACQUES DERRIDA

COPY, ARCHIVE, SIGNATURE
A CONVERSATION ON PHOTOGRAPHY

Edited with an Introduction by Gerhard Richter
Translated by Jeff Fort

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Acknowledgments

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G. R.

September 2009

Between Translation and Invention

The Photograph in Deconstruction

GERHARD RICHTER

You could speak of these photographs as of a thinking, as a pensiveness without a voice, whose only voice remains suspended.

—Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection*

The most direct path toward an understanding of the relationship between deconstruction and photography paradoxically may be by way of a detour through the concept of translation that will have caused both a slowing down and an acceleration. The detour involves “translating” the discourses of deconstruction and photography into something else and, in so doing, eventually into themselves.

Jacques Derrida’s provocative assertion that the “origin of philosophy is translation or the thesis of translatability” situates deconstruction—whose heterogeneous operations presuppose that something can be presented, interpreted, explained, and even understood *in terms of something else*—as the mode par

excellence of philosophy.¹ In fact, we could say that the “as-ness” whereby something can signify as something that is not (quite) itself is the very condition of possibility for a mode of analysis that fundamentally is a thinking and problematization of the “as” as such and the “as-ness” of the “as.” We recall that the word *deconstruction* itself—a word that, for better or worse, has become synonymous with Derrida’s idiomatic protocols of reading—emerged from the thinker’s attempt, early in his career, to translate the conceptual operations of Martin Heidegger’s German words *Destruktion* and *Abbau* into French.² Wishing to avoid the Nietzschean connotation of demolition that the French word *déstruction*, like its English counterpart, conveys, Derrida hoped to capture the double movement of Heidegger’s notion of a mode of building (*bauen*) that also is a form of un-building (*ab-bauen*). The gesture involves taking something apart in a way that heeds the logic of its own architectural plan and thereby exposes the internal tensions that both enable and vex it. Heidegger takes pains in his accounts of Being to formalize the “building-unbuilding” construction that always also is an undoing of itself, mobilizing the words *Abbau* (partially derived from the phenomenological work of his teacher, Edmund Husserl) and *Destruktion*, or de-structuring, instead of the more usual German equivalent of *destruction*,

that is, *Zerstörung*. Derrida eventually found in etymological dictionaries the old and unusual French word *déconstruction*, which, in its various evocations of the figure of a construction that also undoes that same construction, comes close to capturing the unsettling epistemological investments of Heidegger's German concepts, expanding and radicalizing them in the process. To be sure, Derrida's interest in translating Heidegger's German terms was not exclusively philological but rather also signaled the beginning of a sustained engagement with and critical transformation of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, a thinking of Being that exerted a strong influence on Derrida, even while he often remained critical of it.³ What both the de-structuring of Heideggerian *Abbau* and the operation of deconstruction share is that they are meant not merely as negative, destructive, or rejecting. Rather, they simultaneously embody something positive, a mode of affirmation and even future-directedness. In his 1983 "Letter to a Japanese Friend," addressed to a translator who had raised concerns regarding the difficulties of translating *deconstruction*, itself already a translation of sorts, into Japanese, Derrida echoes the concerns with the concept of translation found in Heidegger's own "A Dialogue on Language Between a Japanese and an Inquirer":

To be very schematic I would say that the difficulty of *defining* and therefore also of *translating* the word “deconstruction” stems from the fact that all the predicates, all the defining concepts, all the lexical significations, and even the syntactic articulations, which seem at one moment to lend themselves to this definition or that translation, are also deconstructed or deconstructible, directly or otherwise, etc. And that goes for the *word*, the very unity of the *word* deconstruction, as for every *word*. *Of Grammatology* questioned the unity “word” and all the privileges with which it was credited, especially in its *nominal* form. It is therefore only a discourse or rather a writing that can make up for the incapacity of the word to be equal to a “thought.” All sentences of the type “deconstruction is X” or “deconstruction is not X” a priori miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false. As you know, one of the principal things at stake in what is called in my texts “deconstruction” is precisely the delimiting of ontology and above all of the third person present indicative: S *is* P.⁴

Departing from any kind of essentialism and dogmatism, Derrida proceeds to inscribe the translatability of *deconstruction* into its iterations in different forms and situations:

The word “deconstruction,” like all other words, acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is too blithely called a “context.” For me, for what I have tried and still try to write, the word has interest only within a certain context, where it replaces and lets itself be determined by such other

words as “écriture,” “trace,” “différance,” “supplément,” “hymen,” “pharmakon,” “marge,” “entame,” “parergon,” etc. By definition, the list can never be closed, and I have cited only names, which is inadequate and done only for reasons of economy. In fact I should have cited the sentences and the interlinking of sentences which in their turn determine these names in some of my texts.⁵

If, therefore, the thought and operation of deconstruction require that definitions and essentializing determinations be placed under erasure in favor of a perpetual recontextualizing, rereading, and reconfronting of deconstruction’s movements—which is to say, movements that are not merely brought to a given instance from the outside, by an external intervention or by a more conventional *Ideologiekritik*, but rather are shown silently to have been at work in the object, text, or idea *already*—then the thinking that Derrida imagines under the name *deconstruction* cannot be thought in separation from translation, substitution, and reinscription in a variety of alternative names and open-ended contexts. At the same time, these operations of translation are not arbitrary. They do not imply that the work of deconstruction is a good-for-everything label that can easily be “applied,” that is, instrumentalized, tamed, made respectable and palatable, ossified into a mere discourse on method. Derrida himself always emphasized that he had reservations about the word *deconstruction*—and even rejected outright such

convenient -isms as “deconstructivism” and “deconstructionism,” along with “deconstructivist,” that some felt compelled to derive from it—precisely to the extent that, as a label, a predictable category of thinking that could easily be scanned and co-opted by the market and ideological economy of critical “approaches,” a certain dogmatic and self-assured usage threatens to erase simultaneously its singularity and its plurality. For Derrida there can be no single deconstruction but only multiple deconstructions, singular and each time idiomatic operations that are related to each other only in their radical difference.⁶

The kind of thinking—regardless of the heading under which it is performed—that Derrida wishes to stage would have to take into account first and foremost something for which thought itself can never be quite prepared, something that, for instance, the structuralism, however powerful, of a Claude Lévi-Strauss cannot quite think, that is, the “structurality of structure” as a challenge to the metaphysical preference for Being as presence, as Derrida’s early essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” suggests. From that perspective, the substitution that is implied by the translation of deconstruction into other signs and contexts would have to come to terms with “a central presence which has never been itself, has always already been exiled from itself into its

own substitute. The substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it.”⁷ Therefore, we may begin to think a system “in which the central signified, the original and transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.”⁸ We could say, by extension, that when the thought of deconstruction is to be translated into its substitutions and its related contextual phenomena—and there can, by definition, be no other form of deconstruction—this translation will not retroactively yield, as though it were merely the expression of a kind of Freudian deferred action, the “original” essence of something that at one point in the past was present to itself, transparently available as a mode of anteriority. If this is so, then any “translation” of deconstruction into another substitute, another chain of signification, is called upon to show itself responsible to the ways in which its very operations embody both its conditions of possibility and its impossibility all at once.

Why begin a meditation on the relationship between deconstruction and photography with a consideration of the forces that place deconstruction and translation into a shared constellation of thinking and of experience? Does our reconstruction of the

imbrication of deconstructive movements of thought and the idea of translation not attest to the predominantly verbal or linguistic preoccupations of Derrida's project, preoccupations in which instances of visual culture and its proliferation of images of various kinds—including, precisely, photography—do not play a key role? In a 1990 interview with Peter Brunette and David Wills concerning the relationship between deconstruction and visual culture, including photography, Derrida admits his preference for words over images, while also undermining the strict hierarchy between these two orders of presentation and modes of cognition. In a remarkable passage he states:

It is true that only words interest me. It is true, for reasons that have to do in part with my own history and archaeology, that my investment in language is stronger, older, and gives me more enjoyment than my investment in the plastic, visual, or spatial arts. You know that I love words. I have the greatest desire to express myself in words. For me it involves desire and the body; in my case the relation of the body to words is as important as it is with painting. . . . I am often reproached: "You only like words, it is only your lexicon that interests you."

Having confessed his desire and the history of his investment in words, Derrida goes on to complicate the relationship between words and images, emphasizing the elusively translative relationship between them:

What I do with words is to make them explode so that the nonverbal appears in the verbal. That is to say that I make words function in such a way that at a certain moment they no longer belong to discourse, to what regulates discourse—hence the homonyms, the fragmented words, the proper names that do not essentially belong to language. . . . And if I love words it is also because of their ability to escape their proper form, whether they interest me as visible things, letters representing the spatial visibility of the word, or as something musical or audible. That is to say, I am also interested in words, paradoxically, to the extent that they are nondiscursive, for that's how they can be used to explode discourse. . . . Not always, but in most of my texts there is a point at which the word functions in a nondiscursive manner. . . . So I am very much in love with words, and as someone who is in love with words I treat them as bodies that contain their own perversity, let's say the regulated disorder of words. . . . It's when words start to go crazy . . . and no longer behave properly in regard to discourse that they have more rapport with the other arts, and conversely this reveals how the apparently nondiscursive arts such as photography and painting correspond to the linguistic scene . . . even in the case of the photographer Plissart. These are words that work on them whether they know it or not: they are in the process of letting themselves be constructed by words.⁹

One might say that Derrida here lays bare his particular and unconventional version of philology, *philologia*, the love of the word. This radical version of *philologia* is one that also undermines, even as it posits, the

hierarchical positionality of the word in relation to the image. After all, one way of glossing Derrida's explanations is to suggest that deconstruction, when it becomes effective in the words that it mobilizes and that are mobilized by it, always is translated into something else, even *translates itself* into something else. From this perspective the gesture of translation that deconstruction performs also involves a translative carrying across of the discursive realm of words into the realm of images, in a manner that shows how what is most unsettling in deconstruction may ultimately resist the conventional logic of words and how, by the same token, what is most transformative about images, including photographic ones, is the way in which, when their reading is pushed to the limits, they strongly begin to resemble the textual orbit usually thought to be inhabited by the word. It is, we might say, because of this chiasmic relation that Derrida can suggest that "the most effective deconstruction . . . is one that deals with the nondiscursive, or with discursive institutions that do not have the form of a written discourse."¹⁰ There can therefore be no love of the word in deconstruction that is not always also, whether acknowledged or not, a love of the image, no translation of deconstruction that is not always also a translation of (in both the genitive and accusative cases) the image. It is instructive to consider, therefore, that

one of the translations, alternate names, or “substitutes” for deconstruction that Derrida does not explicitly mention in the letter to his Japanese translator is precisely that of photography. But he does emphasize that, with regard to deconstruction’s possible names, “by definition, the list can never be closed,” so that there is always one more important translation yet to come. Indeed, the to-come structure of deconstruction’s translation is precisely what makes it a transformative mode of thinking, reading, and writing. We could say that photo-graphy, or light-writing, belongs to this list like few other terms because its hidden logic, at least as Derrida wishes to understand it, is inseparable from the technical and presentation-oriented movements that, in a variety of registers and modulations, always have traversed deconstructive thought. Although he himself for the longest time did not allow—in part for political reasons and in part as a protest against the bourgeois valorization of the “Author” at the expense of a generalized concept of *writing*—photographs of himself to be published, and although he retained a highly ambivalent relation to his own photographed image, to say that, for him, there is a strong affinity between deconstruction and photography would be to understate the matter.¹¹ Like photography, deconstruction is concerned, among other things, with questions of presentation, translation,

techné, substitution, deferral, dissemination, repetition, iteration, memory, inscription, death, and mourning. Yet while Derrida's engagement with concerns of visual culture more generally, especially painting and drawing (for instance, in such works as *The Truth in Painting* and *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*), with the imbrication of visual culture and technicity (such as in portions of his 1999 *Sydney Seminars*), and with visual media technologies such as television (*Echographies of Television*) and video art (for instance, in his reflections on Gary Hill's work in his essay "Videor"), is gradually coming into critical focus, his engagement with photography has been relatively neglected.¹² This relative neglect applies in particular to his "occasional" pieces on photography, including such works as his meditations on photographs by Jean-François Bonhomme entitled *Demeure, Athènes* (originally published in 1996 in Greece), a short excerpt of which also is included under the title "Athens and Photography: A Mourned-for Survival" in his collaboration with Catherine Malabou, the philosophical travelogue *Counterpath*; the 2002 conversation on the trace, the archive, and the photograph at the Collège iconique, entitled "Trace et archive, image et art"; the essay "Aletheia," originally published in Japanese in 1993 (and in French in 1996) on the work of the Japanese photographer Kishin Shinoyama and

his model Shinobu Otake; and his series of moving miniature essays on specific photographs by Frédéric Brenner in the latter's collection of images of Jewish life around the world, a monumental visual archive of cultural dispersal entitled *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile*.¹³ Among Derrida's statements on photography, even his seminal essay "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" and his discussion of the work of the Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart in *Rights of Inspection* have received comparatively scant scholarly attention.¹⁴ Derrida's interrogation of photography works to open the medium to its own alterity, to the ways in which photography exposes the non-self-identity and internal self-differentiation that, for him, ultimately condition any act of aesthetic experience and its ethico-political futurity. His engagement with the inscriptions of photography illuminates syntactical linkages among some of the major claims of a Derridean aesthetics and politics of presentation as they unfold in the language of technically mediated images. It always is tempting, from a deconstructive perspective, to think "the rhetoric of photography and the scene of deciphering" together, so that it is "difficult . . . to resist the temptation to read, in each of these photographs, a displacement and a condensation, an allegory, a metonymy or a metaphor," as Derrida writes in his meditation on a 1983 photograph by

Brenner depicting a young child and his grandfather intently studying or praying, with open books on their laps, in a Yemen jewelry workshop.¹⁵ The protocols of close reading and deciphering, analyzing and translating, questioning and obsessive revisiting that deconstruction follows hardly can be thought in separation from the kind of prayerlike attentiveness and careful, restless study that a serious engagement with photography requires. The place that the peculiar grammar of photography holds in his thinking, therefore, cannot be overestimated, as Derrida himself makes explicit in *Right of Inspection* when he argues that, taking “all differences into account, we would not be reducing the specificity of . . . photography were we to find it pertinent elsewhere: I would say everywhere.”¹⁶

When Derrida claims that an analysis of the peculiar logic that inhabits photography is pertinent everywhere, his statement should not be construed as encompassing only the image-saturated phenomena of modernity and postmodernity that require rigorous analysis, from the first so-called heliograph, “View from a Window at Gras,” recorded by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826, to the images of self-reflexively postmodern photographers such as Cindy Sherman and Victor Burgin and the more recent digital extravaganzas of an Andreas Gursky. The crux of the matter is not the prospect that an analysis of

photography would yield yet another view on the relationship between photography and “society,” as, say, Gisèle Freund, the great photographer and historian of photography paradigmatically postulated it in the 1970s.¹⁷ Nor would the main thrust of Derrida’s analytic gesture be confined to a philosophical appreciation of the artistic achievement of a certain photographer, as, for instance, in the case of the philosopher Arthur Danto discussing the oeuvre of Robert Mapplethorpe.¹⁸ As the art historian Graham Clarke reminds us in his standard work on photography, “far from being a literal or mirror image of the world, [the photograph] is an endlessly deceptive form of representation. As an object it announces its presence, but resists definition. It is, in the end, a sealed world,” even a “complex play of presence and absence.”¹⁹ What Derrida wishes to emphasize, rather, is that photography, once its idiomatic logic is elaborated and generalized, can be seen as an operational network and a metalanguage through which larger philosophical, historical, aesthetic, and political questions can be brought into focus. It is in this sense, too, that he wishes to preserve the singularity and particularity of photography—whether analog or digital—while making visible the ways in which it operates in a certain universality of thinking and of posing questions. We might even say that Derrida works to keep

the particularity of the photographic medium alive in order to preserve the universality that individual manifestations of the medium—we can only ever look at certain photographs, never at photography itself—tend to obscure.

To appreciate this interplay between singularity and universality in the space of photography, we may think of the photographic image as a technically mediated moment of witnessing, in which the inscription with light cannot be separated from an act of bearing witness, which, by definition, always must be addressed to the logic and unpredictable movements of a reception that is irreducible to the act itself. For instance, as Derrida writes in his discussion of Brenner's 1994 photograph depicting citizens protesting anti-Semitic acts in Billings, Montana, "photography always bears witness by interrogating us: What is an act of witnessing? Who bears witness to what, for whom, before whom? The witness is always singular, irreplaceable, unique, he presents himself in his physical body." He continues: "But as a *third party* (*testis, terstis*), he attests and testifies exemplarily to the universality of a law, a condition, a truth. In order to be able to call it as witness in turn, he addresses himself to the entire world."²⁰ Photography's function as a witness is not necessarily limited to what is depicted in any single photograph, its apparent subject or content. Witnessing also takes

place as the procedure of a recording, storing, and dissemination of technically mediated inscription; a photograph, therefore, also bears witness in that it activates the circulation of a certain cultural memory and exchange through its medium-specific modes of writing, inspection, and interpretation. The kind of looking, recording, and witnessing that a single photograph occasions is always also a bearing witness for the technical medium *tout court*; that is, a photograph, for all its singularity, cannot but evoke, in more or less subterranean ways, its relation to photography as such.



The current volume makes available for the first time in English—and for the first time in its entirety in any language—an important, yet little-known, interview that Derrida granted to the German theorist and historian of photography Hubertus von Amelunxen and the German literary and media theorist Michael Wetzel, who also has translated several books by Derrida into German. The conversation took place in French in the sun room (the winter garden, as it were) of Derrida's Ris-Orangis home in 1992 and was first published in an abridged form in German translation for an anthology of theoretical texts on photography, edited by von Amelunxen

in 2000.²¹ The present edition draws on the entire French transcript of the conversation, as well as on the abridged German translation prepared by Amelunxen and Wetzel. In light of Derrida's abiding concern with the relationship between deconstruction and translation, it is worth noting that German and English translations of the French conversation will have appeared before the so-called original, which still awaits publication in France. Once again, the original needs its substitutes, must no longer be itself, in order to become properly what it is. Such a movement shows, among other things, that "origin" is not a form of presence but rather a derivation.

It is no accident, then, that Derrida returns in his conversation on photography to questions of presence and its manufacture, the technicity of presentation, the aleatory volatility of the authorial subject in its image, and the concept of the archive as that which records and, precisely by archiving and recording, questions the status of the original and the metaphysical assumptions that saturate it. As Derrida reminds us in *Archive Fever*, technologies of inscription and the undoing of certain protocols of reading, writing, and thinking that they occasion must be thought together, so that, in addition to the affirmative, gathering, preserving dimension of the archive, there is "the violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival*

violence."²² For Derrida the photographic image cannot be thought in isolation from the concept of the trace and from the ways in which it allegorizes a subject's nonself-identity and dispersal, even when photography works to capture a subject by interrupting and arresting time in the moment of a shutter's release. The archive of the photograph, Derrida suggests in the conversation, "is constituted by the present itself" so that it is "necessary that the present, in its structure, be divisible even while remaining unique, irreplaceable and self-identical. The structure of the present must be divided so that, even as the present is lost, the archive remains and refers to it as to a non-reproducible referent, an irreplaceable place." This self-division will have been the domain of the photographic image.²³

Learning to read the ways in which the *techné* of the photograph perpetually illuminates and obscures cannot be separated from the experience of learning to learn from the medial specificity of photography as such and from the idiomatic and unverifiable language of a given photograph.²⁴ In contemporary work on photography, whether analog or digital, such issues are implicitly encoded—but only rarely addressed directly—by writers such as Susan Sontag on the relation of photography to the pain of others; by such philosophers of the image as Vilém Flusser and his concern with a positively inflected "telematic" society;

by historians of photography such as Geoffrey Batchen and their understandable preoccupations with the photograph's material and cultural inscriptions; and by theorists of photography such as Amelunxen himself and his ongoing and highly suggestive investigations of how certain indexical and postindexical modes of seeing have rendered the late modern subject a "homo photographicus."²⁵ For Derrida, what photography gives us to read is the elusive trace of vigilant thought itself, mediated and exposed by the image.

The ways in which the archive, the signature, and the copy of the photograph work to preserve a memory while also threatening to put it under erasure, "signing on" to memory while also silently moving to displace it, provide Derrida with the space into which the memory of deconstruction—to be understood in the double meaning of the genitive—can be translated.²⁶ Has not one of the movements of deconstruction always been the conservation of a memory, of disallowed and marginalized, even repressed, modes of knowing? In his final interview, given in 2004 shortly before his death, Derrida admits to having "the feeling that two weeks or a month after my death *there will be nothing left*. Nothing except what has been copyrighted and deposited in libraries."²⁷ And in an earlier reflection he makes explicit the centrality of the trope and experience of memory for his entire project, explaining that

if there were an experience of loss at the heart of all this, the only loss for which I could never be consoled and that brings together all the others, I would call it loss of memory. The suffering at the origin of writing for me is the suffering from the loss of memory, not only forgetting or amnesia, but the effacement of traces. I would not need to write otherwise; my writing is not in the first place a philosophical writing or that of an artist, even if, in certain cases, it might look like that or take over from these other kinds of writing. My first desire is not to produce a philosophical work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory.

Therefore, he confesses, “I struggle against this loss, this loss of memory.”²⁸ There can be no work of deconstruction without the work of memory, its promises as well as its failures. The thinking of deconstruction cannot proceed without the technical prostheses of its mnemonic devices and inscriptions. It works to conserve and to preserve, even as it undoes. It is in this sense, too, that Derrida’s thinking returns to what in “Videor” he calls “the history of an active, vigilant, unpredictable proliferation that will have displaced even the future anterior,” which is to say “another mode of reading . . . without destroying the aura of new works whose contours are so difficult to delimit” but that, for him, “are delivered over to other . . . modes of production, of ‘representation,’ archiving, reproducibility, while giving to a technique

of writing in all its several states (shooting, editing, ‘incrustation,’ projection, storage, reproduction, archiving, and so on) the chance for a new aura.”²⁹

To the extent that one dimension of photography, too, is concerned with the staging of a struggle against the loss of memory, an attempt to archive and preserve what is about to disappear for good, it also belongs to those moments that prepare the photographed subject for its own death, as Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, among many other thanatographical reflections on the photographic image, powerfully demonstrates.³⁰ As Eduardo Cadava reminds us, the photographic image “bears witness to the enigmatic relation between death and survival, loss and life, destruction and preservation, mourning and memory” so that the image often tells us that “what dies, is lost, and mourned within the image . . . is the image itself.”³¹ It is no accident, therefore, that “Aletheia” associates photography with birth and death, with the giving of light and life (“*elle donne naissance à la lumière*”), as well as with death and departure (“*l’expose et la dépose, la met au mont et la met à mort*”), in relation to Shinoyama’s photographic studies of his model, Otake.³² Along similar lines, in *Demeure, Athènes* Derrida thinks Bonhomme’s photographs by means of an incessant return to and obsessive meditation on the expression “*Nous nous devons à la mort*”—“we owe

ourselves to death” or “we owe each other to death.” This phrase stands as the first line of the book and returns throughout the text like reprints of a photograph that enact a central characteristic of the “clichés,” which in this context also could be translated as “stills,” according to which Derrida self-consciously divides his book, a book whose last word is, tellingly, “mort” (dead).³³ Here, “Athens and Photography: A Mourned-for Survival,” the key passage from *Demeure, Athènes* that Derrida selects for republication and reinscription, as if it itself were a reproducible photograph, in *Counterpath*, relates Bonhomme’s photographs of Athens to its cemeteries and tombstones, as well as to a vigilant guarding, within the photographic image, of the interplay of living and dying:

Who is that, death? The question can be posed at each and every step in this photographic journey through Athens, and not only in the cemeteries, in front of the amassed tombstones. . . . For the person who took his time to take these images of Athens over a period of almost fifteen years did not just devote himself to a photographic *review* of certain sites that *already* constituted hypomnesic ruins, so many monumental signs of death (the Acropolis, the Agora, the Kerameikos Cemetery, the Tower of the Winds, the Theater of Dionysus). He also saw *disappear*, as time passed, places he photographed, so to speak, “living,” and which are now “gone,” “departed” [*disparus*], this sort of flea market on Adrianou Street, for example, the Neon Café in Omonia Square, most of the

street organs, and so on. . . . Their ruin, the only telling archive for this Market, this Café, this Street Organ, the best memory of this culture, would be these photographs . . . an absolute mutation, though one prepared from time immemorial. . . . This book thus bears the signature of someone keeping vigil and bearing more than one mourning, a witness who is doubly surviving, a lover tenderly taken by a city that has died more than once, in many times, a city busy watching over all that is non-contemporaneous within it [*contretemps*], but a living city nonetheless. Tomorrow, living Athens will be seen keeping, guarding, regarding and reflecting its deaths.³⁴

There can be no photograph that is not about mourning and about the simultaneous desire to guard against mourning, precisely in the moments of releasing the shutter and of viewing and circulating the image. What the photograph mourns is both death and survival, disappearance and living-on, erasure from and inscription in the archive of its technically mediated memory. (One may think here, for instance, of the contemporary German artist Thomas Demand, whose work consists in reconstructing famous press photographs as meticulous life-size models made entirely from paper—notorious political scenes, buildings, parliaments, etc. He then photographs these paper reconstructions of iconic images before destroying them again, and the work survives only in true-to-life-sized photographic images of images of images.)³⁵ The

photograph captures the moment of the here and now that, once taken, no longer corresponds to any existing reality. Photographs of the self can be circulated in one's absence, even when the self pictured in them is still alive, just as they will be when the photographed self has died. In this way, the photographic portrait prepares the self for its own death; it is a form of mnemonic mortification that commemorates a passing that already has occurred or that is yet to come.³⁶ Does not the scene of the thanatographical image of photography therefore shed new light on Friedrich Nietzsche's intuition, memorably staged in his foreword to *The Anti-Christ*, that "some are born posthumously"?³⁷

To suggest that such questions are operative in the orbit of photography is ultimately to interrogate the problem of *invention* that attaches to it. Does photography, at least in its classical technical formulations, depict what is already present in the object world, or does it create its own reality? This question returns us to certain issues of the old debate—associated with writers of the mid-nineteenth century such as Charles Baudelaire and brought to a tentative end in the 1930s by critics such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, for whom photography assumed specifically aesthetic and epistemological functions—about whether photography is merely a mechanical form of technical reproduction or an aesthetic form in its own

right, an idiomatic instance of *poiesis*. Implicitly displacing the binary model of this exhausted discourse, Derrida in the conversation prefers to distinguish between two forms of invention, namely “invention as a discovery or a revelation of what already is there in the invention of the other” and “invention as technical intervention, as the production of a new technical apparatus that constitutes the other instead of simply receiving him.” The classic photograph invents in that it records an already existing presence while at the same time causing this other or this otherness to be there in the object world as a form of production, performance, and manipulation. (Indeed, photography’s movement along these two axes of image production recently has been taken up again, in a variety of registers, by art historians and historians of photography as one of the core *political* issues of visual studies in the twenty-first century.)³⁸ This double sense of invention leads Derrida to ask his central question: “Is photography simply the recording of the other or of the object as he or it is there, presented to intuition,” or does it rather “invent . . . in the sense of technical production”? To pursue the implications of these questions, we should turn to the text of a lecture that Derrida first gave in 1984, “Psyche: Invention of the Other,” which represents his most sustained engagement with the question of invention. There, arguing that an “invention always

presupposes some illegality, the breaking of an implicit contract,” he suggests that the kind of finding that an invention performs (as, we might add, in the German word for invention, *Erfindung*) always hovers on the brink of finding something for the first time and calling it into presence.³⁹ These movements of invention can be traced through the realms of finding or inventing oneself, finding or inventing the signature, finding or inventing truth, and finding or inventing God. Derrida, however, comes to the surprising conclusion that, even though all these concepts can be seen as effects of an invention, the other cannot be submitted to this law of invention. He writes:

The other is indeed what is not inventable, and it is therefore the only invention in the world, the invention of the world, *our* invention, the invention that invents *us*. For the other is always another origin of the world and *we are to be invented*. And the being of the we, and being itself. Beyond being. . . .

. . . The coming of invention cannot make itself foreign to the repetition and memory. For the other is not the new. But its coming extends beyond this past present that once was able to construct—to invent, we must say—the techno-onto-anthropo-theo-logical concept of invention, its very convention and status, the status of invention and the status of the inventor. . . .

The other, that’s no longer inventable.

“What do you mean by that? That the other will have been only an invention, the invention of the other?”

“No, that the other is what is never inventable and will never have waited for your invention. The call of the other is a call to come, and that happens only in multiple voices.”⁴⁰

If the purview of invention, according to this logic, does not extend to the domain of the other, if the movement by which everything can be invented cannot incorporate the other, this is because the other *as* other must remain the unknowable, that which in its radical otherness cannot be reduced to a self that could invent it—even by inventing itself—but rather to the very structure of self and other, close perhaps to what Emmanuel Levinas calls the *wholly* other. Indeed, it is possible to read this relation to an incommensurate other, in all its permutations and reinscriptions, as one of the main concerns that cuts across the entirety of Derrida’s variegated oeuvre, from the early writings on *différance* to the late “ethico-political” works.⁴¹ If the other, thought in this radical sense, were inventable, it simply would have waited to be invented or found, when in fact it resists this calling forth through finding or invention. Invention in that sense proceeds through a multitude of voices, the voices of those who are no longer one, no longer *either* self *or* other. This is also why Derrida’s passage about the multiple voices of the other, precisely in the moment when it thematizes the relation to this other,

itself breaks out into multiple voices, lest it be deaf to its own claims. The call of the other, if it is yet to come, can only be staged in multiple voices, and this future staging itself can only be written and thought about in multiple voices, ones that remain elusive and spectral. “The spectral,” Derrida reminds us, “is the essence of photography.”⁴²

We could say that, by the same token, the other of invention, the other that cannot be invented, also unhinges the binary opposition between invention as finding and invention as the *techné* of production or as *poiesis*. Does the photograph, understood in its most radical form—that is, as a name for certain complex figures of thought, experience, and their reproducibilities—not also participate in a movement that places the strict demarcation of the two senses of invention quietly under erasure? Is not photography itself a name for the impossible possibility of invention? If Derrida writes that “deconstruction loses nothing from admitting it is impossible” because it is a thinking whose interest is tied to “a certain experience of the impossible,” then “the experience of the other as the invention of the impossible” may well be “the only possible invention.”⁴³ One of the key questions to keep in mind when reading the following conversation, then, should be whether and to what extent Derrida’s reflections help us to learn to think photo-graphy, light-writing,

in terms of—that is, in the deconstructive *translation* of—the impossible possibility of invention, and perhaps even as an image—or as a translation—of the *only* possible invention. This will have been one of the reasons why Derrida can write: “The photographer left; he told the truth.”⁴⁴

Copy, Archive, Signature

A Conversation on Photography

JACQUES DERRIDA

Hubertus von Amelunxen: Skiagraphy refers to shadow writing, and to the absence of the referent. You speak of this in your work *Memoirs of the Blind*.¹ Skiagraphy seems to prefigure the imprint of an absent present. The inventor of the photographic negative, William Henry Fox Talbot, called his invention skiagraphy or “words of light.” In 1837 he made a photographic image with an inscription of the alphabet, the name of the place, and the date, as if he wanted to show that the entire alphabet could be taken into the image and that photography was going to be the first optical medium to enter the domain of writing and to bring writing into the very essence of the image. In *Memoirs of the Blind* you speak of skiagraphy, the writing of shadow, as a simultaneous memory, a memory of the present, a division of the instant. But whence, then, this memory of the instant, whence this archive of the present?

Jacques Derrida: It's a question of *point of view*, and you are touching on the *most acute point* [la *pointe*] of the difficulty.² Is it possible to think otherwise than from the *point of view of the point*? But is it possible also to think from a *point of view*? How to imagine an archive that is somehow immediate, a present that *consists* of its own memory or its own reproduction? In that case, which is something more and other than a case, experience itself, the experience of what one calls the present would be constituted as self-preserving, certainly, but in such a way that something may be lost, and something kept and preserved, from the same event, from the *point* of the event, from its miniscule extremity, its pointedness, its *pointe*. It is indeed a matter of the *pointe*, the most acute question, the sharpest and most pointed question about this *pointe*. For in general one conceives of the instant precisely as a *pointe*, as *stigmê*, as *Punkt*, and the punctuality of the point would be, first of all, indivisible. But in the situation that we are evoking, we have to do, paradoxically, with an experience of the singular, of the non-iterable, of the unique that would, however, be divisible enough for an archive to separate off from it somehow: an archive would remain; it would survive, whereas that of which it is the archive has disappeared—a normal phenomenon—but in this case the archive would not be simply the copy, the reproduction or the

imprint of another present. If the archive is constituted by the present itself, it is therefore necessary that the present, in its structure, be divisible even while remaining unique, irreplaceable and self-identical. The structure of the present must be divided so that, even as the present is lost, the archive remains and refers to it as to a non-reproducible referent, an irreplaceable place.

I don't know if this introduces us to the specific question of photography, or if this general law would be valid for every archive, or in any case for the phenomena of the signature in the broad sense. It's true that photography performs this miracle as a technology of the *miracle*, that is, by giving something to be seen. And of course it has often been remarked (Barthes insisted on this) that what seems to give the photogram its specificity is this apparently irreducible viewing of the referent, this pointing at and seeing the referent, insofar as it has taken place only *once*. In the end, photography seems to say (and to let this be dictated to itself): this took place, and it took place only once. It is the repetition of what has taken place only once. Reference, if not the referent, here seems to be ineffaceable. One would no longer be able to bracket it. That is what Barthes says, with a great deal of good sense. I don't know what you think of this. I think that, in the little text I devoted to Barthes, I hint at a

certain reserve regarding this question. I believe I understand what Barthes says, and what he proposes seems necessary to me. I only wonder what, in that case, is proper to photography. Every original imprint is divided as an archive and preserves its reference, as with the original manuscript of a letter, or a signature, for example. What happens, in those cases, when photography reproduces this original without *giving to be seen* a singular moment of the world, when for example a photocopy is made of this original signature? A photocopy is, after all, a photograph, isn't it?

HVA: Indeed, the photocopy, like the photograph, retraces and reproduces the original by means of light, but whereas the photograph fragments and ruins space, the photocopy seems to preserve the original through an exact duplication. Now the new technology of photography offers us digital cameras. The support is digital, and you have a diskette with twenty-four or fifty or more images, and as with a tape recorder or a VCR you can erase whatever has been recorded, or present it on a television screen. No more negative—and the trace, although it can be read by a computer, becomes invisible to the human eye, to the point that referentiality is called into question. Indeed, what then will be the future status of the referent in a production of images that points toward a repeated obliteration?

JD: This question concerns, perhaps, the name *photography* and the relation between this name and a certain concept of photography. Its relation to a certain history of this concept—a history that may be finite, that may be reaching an end; a relation in any case with the finitude of this history. That is what I was worried about a moment ago. Given the event and the technical possibility you are speaking of, does what we have available to us now deserve the name of photography? Is it of the same order as what was possible with the earlier technology and with a paper support? If one can erase images, since the imprint is no longer supported by a “support,” at least not the support of a stable paper substance, this means that we no longer have to do, one might say, with the recording of an image, even though one is recording something: *recording* an image would become inseparable from *producing* an image and would therefore lose the reference to an external and unique referent. As was perhaps always the case without our realizing it, we would be dealing with a photographic performativity, a notion that some might find scandalous and that singularly complicates—without dissolving it—the problem of reference and truth: the problem of a truth to be *made*, as Saint Augustine would have said, no less than revealed, unveiled, explicated, clarified, exposed, developed. Certain filmmakers, Wim Wenders or Peter

Greenaway for example, use technologies of image production in which the essential material does not consist simply in “taking” an image [*prise d’image*], although this is involved as well. Image taking gives way to image production on the basis of a given material. One then mimics photography or even cinematography, while at the same time bringing the graphic element to a certain completion, to what some might consider a higher dignity, since it becomes productive and “performative” rather than a mode of registering or recording that would be “constative” or “theorematic” (that is, an affair of the gaze and the point of view): it produces the point of view rather than placing itself within one or occupying one. Does this belong to what has previously been called photography and cinematography, or does it introduce a new art for which a new name must be invented? This question may be of interest to us insofar as it takes this novelty into account but also because of what it can teach us about what the structure of the old technology *already was*. Can we not say that there was *already* in photography, in the classic sense, as much production as recording of images, as much act as gaze, as much performative event as passive archivization? The indispensable recourse to a certain type of material support (a nonelectronic support such as paper) does not signify an absolute passivity in this respect, nor therefore

a recording process without any productive inscription. Is it necessary to recall that in photography there are all sorts of initiatives: not only framing but point of view, calculation of light, adjustment of the exposure, overexposure, underexposure, etc.? These interventions are perhaps of the same type as those in a digital treatment. In any case, to the extent that they *produce* the image and constituted something *of an image* [*de l'image*], they modify reference itself, introducing multiplicity, divisibility, substitutivity, replaceability. (Here is perhaps the location of a rupture between the photographic and a certain intuitionism, a certain phenomenological principle of principles—and I wonder how to interpret in this sense Barthes' need to inscribe *Camera Lucida* under the sign of a return to a [Sartrean] phenomenology of the image and the imaginary.)³ Retrospectively, the digital treatment of the image obliges us more than ever (for we did not need the digital in order to do this) to reconsider the supposed referentiality or passivity in relation to the referent from the very beginning, the very first epoch, so to speak, of photography—assuming that there was only one, for beginning with this “first epoch,” there were already technical and therefore structural differences. The question of the epoch, like that of the Husserlian *epochè*, would need to be reconsidered. . . .

HVA: . . . in photography the support determined time, the time of the pose. The sensitivity of the support was an active agent in the image's coming to be; it was constitutive for the time and the future of the photographic image.

JD: Let us open a parenthesis on this question of time. A chrono-logic of the instant, the logic of the punctual *stigmè*, governs Barthes' interpretation, which is in fact the common interpretation of the ineffaceable referent, of what has taken place only once. This *Einmaligkeit*—this “onceness”—supposes the undecomposable simplicity, beyond all analysis, of a time of the instant: the moment as the *Augenblick*, the eyeblink of a *prise de vue*, of a shot or of taking (in) a view. But if the “one single time,” if the single, first and last time of the shot already occupies a heterogeneous time, this supposes a differing/deferring and differentiated duration: in a split second the light can change, and we're dealing with a divisibility of the first time. Reference is complex; it is no longer simple, and in that time subevents can occur, differentiations, micrological modifications giving rise to possible compositions, dissociations, and recompositions, to “effects,” if you like, to artifices that definitively break with the presumed phenomenological naturalism that would see in photographic technology

the miracle of a technology that effaces itself in order to give us a natural purity, time itself, the unalterable and un-iterable experience of a pretechnical perception (as if there were any such thing). As soon as one takes into account the calculability of time, in perception as *prise de vue*, as soon as one considers time not as a series of irreducible and atomic instants but as a differential duration that is more or less calculable, a duration that is correlative to a technics, the question of references becomes complicated, and therefore so does the question of art, of photography as a *technê*. For one of the things suggested by Barthes, or at least something that lies outside his rich and moving discourse on death, the *studium*, and the *punctum* (the point, the poignant, the miniscule emergence of a point), is the beyond of art: however artful the photographer may be, whatever his or her intervention or style, there is a point where the photographic act is not an artistic act, a point where it passively records, and this poignant passivity would be the chance of this relation with death; it captures a reality that is there, that will have been there, in an undecomposable now. It would be necessary in sum to choose between art and death. Or else to choose between an art linked to technics, on the one hand, and on the other, an art that would exceed art and *technê*, while also fulfilling their authentic destination, in order to *set-into-the-work* truth itself

(in a sense close to what Heidegger appears to say in *Origin of the Work of Art*). This would be the beauty or the sublimity of photography but also its fundamentally nonartistic quality: suddenly, one would be given over to an experience that fundamentally cannot be mastered, to what has taken place only once. So one would be passive and exposed; the gaze itself would be exposed to the exposed thing, in the time without thickness of a null duration, in an exposure time reduced to the instantaneous point of a snapshot—an *instantané*, as it's called in French. Art would itself be conditioned by nonart, or what amounts to the same, by a hyperaesthetics, by a perception that is somehow immediate and natural: immediately reproduced, immediately archived. But if we admit that there is a duration, that this duration is constituted by a *technê*, the totality of the photographic act is, if not of the order of *technê*, at least undeniably marked by it. This would enjoin us also to rethink the essence of *technê*.

Michael Wetzel: This is also the decisive question of memory. With respect to photography one can show that this act of recording is not a passive act but rather one that arises out of an elaboration of material, an elaboration or processing of information. The relation between photography and psychoanalysis, of which you speak in *Right of Inspection*,⁴ is condensed into

that paradigmatic metaphor used by Freud, the “mystic writing pad,” with which he showed that in order for the trace to be preserved, it must be renewed. Likewise, we now have what is called information processing, which means that in order to preserve information, one must process data. And in this sense I see in your discourse a certain reserve with respect to Barthes’ ontologism of the photographic “take,” at least when it comes to the distinction between the act of photographing and what in photography is called development. Art also enters into the development process and, to a certain extent, into the handling of data. We have to do with a deferred time, or with a time of deferral, and the question of intensities and of decisions comes up here as well: at the moment of processing, one must decide, limit, exclude. In relation to the temporality of the shot, the objective reference, we find here the intervention of another temporality, of a certain context, of a signification.

JD: The process, here, would begin before what is referred to as *processing*. This is, in fact, the term used in English for the development of the photographic negative and of the image, view or “shot” thus “taken”—and the process of this *processing* has never had to wait to begin. Certainly, it would be necessary to reelaborate this entire question of an auto-affection,

at once passive and active, from the point of view of time, from the point of view of the time of taking a view [*de la prise de vue*]. And for this it would be necessary at least to explicate oneself courageously in relation to Heidegger's great meditation in the wake of Kant, and as an interpretive repetition of his thought.⁵ We will do this neither in an interview nor in a photograph, however knowledgeable or free from the capture of clichés it may be. If technics intervenes from the moment a view or shot is taken, and beginning with the time of exposure, there is no longer any pure passivity, certainly, but this does not simply mean that activity effaces passivity. It is a question of another structure, another sort of *acti/passivity*, if I can express it thus in a single word. Even when technics intervenes in a more and more complicated and differentiating way, it continues to treat passivity in a certain way; it continues to deal *with it*, to negotiate with it. In the opening (or "aperture") to light and to what is supposed to be an object, photography does not do everything. (The question of) "matter" *remains*—however many quotation marks we put around it—precisely as a remainder that cannot be reduced to a given substance, nor even to the *onto*-logical presence of a present-being, *on*, or of an object (the present-at-hand, *Vorhandenes*), whether it be the object in front of the lens (the photographed thing) or the object-support of

the print, the photograph that one holds in one's hand or before one's eyes and of which multiple copies can be made.

MW: But perhaps here we must go back to the metaphor of being armed, the metaphor of arming the senses by means of the media. In this metaphor, technical spontaneity is thought as an extension, as a prosthesis. If we think the new media technology within the order of prostheticity, how then can we think a dialectic of spontaneity and passivity?

JD: As I try to analyze it, the logic of the prosthesis and of the supplement as originary contradicts, of course, the common notion of the substitutive prosthesis.

MW: Of course. And that is why in my view the relation between activity and passivity must be reconsidered in terms of an interceptive mediatechnics, that is, a technics that plays the role of a deferred origin, an after-origin of the difference activity/passivity, and that produces by reproducing it.

HVA: And what if the *technê* of photography incited us not to make this classical distinction between activity and passivity, between giving and receiving?

JD: In a tradition that belongs both to common

language and to philosophy, “passivity” is opposed to “activity.” But the Kantian-Heideggerian (also no doubt Husserlian) analysis to which I referred a moment ago concerns temporality as a pure auto-affective synthesis in which activity itself is passivity. This problematic is indispensable, even if it may be unfamiliar in the milieu in which a competent discourse on photography is practiced. The meditations are numerous; certainly, they are difficult and nuanced, but the link with the specificity of photography is perhaps best indicated, although indirectly, in the fact that this meditation on auto-affectation as temporality passes through the *schematism* of the transcendental *imagination*. It is a question of the image, of the production of the fantastic, of an imagination that is productive in the very constitution of time and in ordinary temporality.

If digital photography without a “subjectile” allows us to think, retrospectively, what photography with a “subjectile” has been,⁶ then, likewise, this reflection on temporal auto-affectation *in* perception (and there is the perception of time as well as a time of any perception, whether of an image, of the visible and of the spatial) leads us retrospectively to say the same thing about what at first appears as pretechnical, that is, perception. We can no longer oppose perception and technics; there is no perception before the possibility of prosthetic iterability; and this mere possibility

marks, in advance, both perception and the phenomenology of perception. In perception there are already operations of selection, of exposure time, of filtering, of development; the psychic apparatus functions also *like*, or *as*, an apparatus of inscription and of the photographic archive. Think of Freud's *Wunderblock*, the "mystic writing pad." What I attempted to say about this a long time ago, about writing, also concerned photography. Retrospectively, looking into this techno-historical rearview mirror,⁷ we would therefore have to recomplicate the analysis or the description of what was supposed to have preceded technology or what is called photographic technology. We would have to go back along this path all the way to the Platonic *skiagraphia*, and to all shadow writing—before the modern technology summarily named "photography." What is described as a play of shadow and light is already a form of writing. There is the legend of Dibutade, who sees, retains, and draws only the shadow of her lover on the wall, before this operation is itself represented by drawing: is this not already a play of light, shadow, and archive? With this difference in terms of naturality, namely, the shadow in light, the white-black, appears thus as the first technical possibility in perception itself. The difference *in* light, the difference of exposure, if you will, which is not necessarily the difference between day

and night—here we have perhaps the first possibility of the trace, of the archive and of everything that follows from it: memory, the technics of memory, mnemotechnics, etc.

MW: This may be a good moment to turn to Balzac's story *Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu* (*The Unknown Masterpiece*), where in the context of a discussion of the most perfect painting, the thesis is put forth that there are no lines in nature. Can we say that the line is a break, the moment when *technê*, the technology of representation, appears?

JD: The question of the line leads us back again to the paradox of time and acti/passivity. In Aristotle, as you know, the question of time is connected to the question of *grammê*, which signifies first of all, in this case, the line. The difference between light and shadow in nature, their dividing line, as it were—Balzac would say that this is not a line. A line *as such* appears when the one who draws—with a sharp point, for example—makes an incision and inscribes a mark, even if he thus follows a natural line. When Dibutade follows a line, she is active; she has an instrument, a technique, but her human activity consists in passively taking as a model a line that is already there. And therefore at the point, at the sharp point or the pointed tip of the pencil, or at the extremity of the

metal or wooden point, activity is modeled on a given. It forms itself onto passivity, so to speak; it tracks along the point where it is passive, following something that is given in advance.⁸ So is it the line that is given? This depends on what one calls a “line.” But the possibility of the difference between light and shadow traces a line that I can then retrace with the point of my pencil. When Dibutade traces, she begins to retrace. And the *re*marking of the *re*tracing is at once active and passive. But the possibility of this repetition, this iterability, marks in advance the very threshold of perception. Activity is at the service of a certain passivity. And yet this passivity is not passive with respect to some given thing, light or shadow, but with respect to a difference. Activity and passivity touch together or are articulated along a differential border. This is the very movement of the trace: a movement that is a priori photographic. The fact that it did not wait for the invention of what for more than a century we have called photography does not mean that this technique is not an irreducible event and a transformation. But it is necessary also to think this irreducibility against the background of what made it possible.

MW: But if one follows this historical line, one can say at the same time that maintaining the line, fixing, arresting or suspending the line, is in opposition to

nature. Take Cezanne's painting, for example, where we see in the progression of a series of pictures on the same theme the painter's efforts to maintain the line, while at the same time he comes to realize that it is disappearing. When Cezanne says that "you have to hurry if you want to see something, everything is disappearing," this points directly to the problem, while at the same time it devalues the act of maintaining and fixing. Here, too, we have to do, in a way, with the question of death, for it is a matter to a certain extent of a stopping or a suspension, an arresting, which is also a continuation, a drawing back or a withdrawal that loses contact with nature, that disappears and confirms itself as a withdrawal.

JD: Yes, but the withdrawal [*le retrait*]⁹—let us keep this word—designates at once the *re-marking* and the erasure of the line: the mark is with-drawn in it.⁹ The "great art" of this double re-treat or with-drawal, no less for photography than for literature, for painting and for drawing, is to grasp this line or this instant, certainly, but in grasping it to let it be lost, to mark the fact that "this took place, it is lost," and that everything that one sees, keeps, and looks at [*garde et re-garde*] now is the being-lost of what must be lost, what is first of all bound to be lost. And the signature of the loss would be marked in what keeps and does not lose,

what keeps (from) loss.¹⁰ It is necessary to keep loss as loss, if I can put it this way. This is perhaps the photographic emotion, the poignancy of which Barthes speaks. One keeps the archive of “some thing” (of someone as some thing) which took place once and is lost, that one keeps as such, as the unkept, in short, a sort of cenotaph: an empty tomb. But are there any tombs that are not cenotaphs? And is there anything photographic [*de la photographie*] without kenosis?

MW: The present of photography—in both senses of the word, as gift and present moment—is in these circumstances always a false appearance. This is what Rodin meant when he said that photography is incapable of taking on the line in its state of retreat/withdrawal, in its movement or tension. What he proposed was rather a kind of choreographic writing that broke with the recording of the moment. In this sense we can see an opposition between painting and sculpture as a medium of intensive, animated temporality, and photography, which was perhaps misunderstood as a chronological medium.

JD: One could dream of another archive: an archive of misunderstandings, of contempt and of misapprehensions [*du mépris et des méprises*]. There is the text by Baudelaire, which you must know, on photography and literature. Fascinated by photography, he wanted

to disqualify it with regard to painting and literature. It seems to me that he does not much believe in his own demonstration. He senses an irreducible novelty, the event of an art that exceeds his argument, and that he envies in advance. . . .

HVA: Or to go even further—we keep adding parentheses here—I believe that in his anxiety Baudelaire thought profoundly about photography. And he thought of photography perhaps as a *counterfeit*. There is the phrase in “Counterfeit Money” that is central for Baudelaire’s work as a whole, or even for modernity: “chercher midi à quatorze heures” (literally, “to look for noon at two o’clock,” which means to look for the wrong thing at the wrong time, or to get entangled in pointless diversions).¹¹ This phrase would seem to be aimed at photography. Baudelaire therefore speaks against the use that was being made of photography—the industry of the portrait—but in so doing, he makes a case for a *thinking of photography*.

JD: He is already against a certain exploitation of photography, journalistic or otherwise, but he begins to open up to what could or should be, or already was, the art of photography. Yes, it is like his “position” regarding counterfeit money. In “Counterfeit Money,” when he lets the narrator speak, the most contradictory interpretations or speculations are possible, as I

have tried to show elsewhere.¹² But there is another passage, in “L’école païenne” (“The Pagan School”), where Baudelaire relates an analogous scene: an artist boasts of giving a counterfeit coin to a poor man. This is not a fiction but a discourse signed by Baudelaire, a polemical text assumed by the author. Baudelaire then states a moral judgment: he condemns the artist who glorifies himself for having abused another; he takes the side of the authentic against the simulacrum. At the same time, he knows that literature *also* participates in counterfeit; that is, it always participates in a *possible* counterfeit coin. With respect to photography, we probably do find again in Baudelaire the same instability or the same paradox: between two positions, one that is more moralizing, in favor of the authentic and the originary, and another that is much more perverse, for it mimics the first yet again, the simulacrum always being a simulacrum *of* the authentic.

MW: But perhaps that is always the case when one is on the scene of a photographic present: what does it mean if one gives (oneself) in photography, if one gives as a gift a photograph of oneself? One gives oneself, but at the same time one risks nothing, because one keeps oneself, one gives oneself and one keeps oneself at the same time. If one takes a “moraline” point of view, in Nietzsche’s sense,¹³ one can say that it is a risk

in reserve because one does not give oneself as oneself; it is as if the photograph were a protective surface (a *Bildschirm*, as one says in German)¹⁴ between one and the other. But at the same time, one gives oneself more, one gives oneself totally, one exposes oneself (in the sense of both exhibition and photographic exposure).

JD: A parenthetical remark: historically, there was a brief period (it would be necessary to tell the story and undertake the sociology of this period) during which it was common practice to give a signed photograph of oneself as a gift. “Great men” did this—Freud or Heidegger, for example. Like those who received them, they both thought that this was the most precious *present*, a priceless symbol, even, like an alliance or a bond. Most often it was a head or a face, a signed *portrait* for disciples and admirers. Today one thinks of stars, celebrities of the image and the spectacle, signing photographs. It would be rare, and ridiculous, for a “thinker” to do this now.

HVA: Yes, to give oneself in an image, or as an image. Schopenhauer, who had a passion for photography, frequently had photographs made of himself, daguerreotypes or calotypes. Once, out of a certain *Bösartigkeit*, or malice, he sent a photograph to his friend Frauenstädter, *unsigned*. He wanted to know

whether he would still be *rendered* by his photographic portrait, without a signature.

JD: The appearance of the signature is interesting. What does a signature do? It introduces a small transformation of the photographic portrait, making it a self-portrait (hence the supplementary risk of narcissistic complacency: there is always an element of the comic, I mean the ridiculous). It is a matter, too, of affixing a seal of authenticity: by means of a superimposition, a kind of double exposure (a writing upon writing—a name that calls for the audible present voice and performatively refers one to the giver shown on a silent photograph), one notes, and gives notice, that this photograph has been presented by the subject in the photograph; what is valuable is not that one has a photograph of Freud, which could be purchased; it is rather that one has entered into possession of a portrait that can be seen but that also directly concerns you, that looks *at you*, and bears a signature from the hand of the subject. It authenticates not only the subject of the photograph but also the gift and the subject who receives this thing, the gift-giver whose name is inscribed also at the bottom of the head. A priceless present, an absolute rarity, a unique event, the capitalization, at once infinite and derisory, of an irreplaceable fetish in the age of the technical reproducibility to which it simultaneously bears witness. Kings

were not able to sign so many painted portraits; they were not able to multiply the self-inscriptions (I met an American singer—who was in fact quite moving—who hastily signed her photo by writing between two first names, her own and the other person's, “Love ya”).

MW: It's a kind of title, a titling in the sense of a coining or coinage.

JD: One might be surprised to see someone like Heidegger, who so often opposed the technics of reproducibility (the typewriter, for example, in opposition to handwriting), giving in to the rite of the signed photograph. To give someone an original manuscript would be something else entirely: there is only one, at least in principle and hypothetically. Offering a photograph, it's as if one were giving away a photocopy; it would be very crude, too crude, if the signature did not restore some of its singularity and its supposed authenticity. Heidegger writes: “In the time of the first dominance of the typewriter, a letter written on this machine still stood for a breach of good manners. Today a hand-written letter is an antiquated and undesired thing; it disturbs speed reading.”¹⁵ (A history of politeness. Every history of politeness is a history of technology, and first of all of the technology that is ritualization. What is said about politeness obviously

applies to culture in general, beginning with the mark and with the language one draws on.) Without the signature the gift of the photographic portrait would have deserved, would have called for, the same sigh of disapproval from Heidegger. . . .

MW: With the signature it's different.

JD: Yes, because by rights it is not reproducible. At least not technically (and yet, as you know, it is more complicated: a certain iterability, as I tried to show elsewhere, constitutes the very uniqueness of the event of the signature).¹⁶ In the case of the signed photograph the event is not reproducible; in principle, it must have taken place only once, and what guarantees this singularity is neither the photograph nor the signature; it is the name of the dedicatee. This is the contract that links the two names. The same photographic portrait can be signed as many times as one likes. Only once does it bear the name of the one who receives it. The seal of the original is thus the site of this destination; and the true signature of the gift then returns to the one who does nothing but receive—or desires to receive, with a desire that sets the signature in motion, however narcissistic this desire may remain.

MW: We recognize here an intense engagement against mass ideology, which Baudelaire also

criticized. Corresponding to Benjamin's famous thesis, there was also the mass exploitation of the means of reproduction: there is the emergence of statistics, of large numbers, of the median and the mediocre. Heidegger speaks of this with his expression "*das Man*"—"the they." In these circumstances, what one can see in photographs is not the I or the ego but rather "the they," the aspect of the ego that corresponds to the impersonal "one," that is, the statistical double of the ego. This was the historical moment giving rise to processes of comparison and identification (as in Bertillon's data on criminals), of pathological and ethnological (etc.) typologies or, to use Heidegger's term, the *Gestell*, "enframing." But with the signature one acts as if it is possible to interrupt these processes . . .

JD: . . . sublimate . . .

MW: . . . "underwrite" or appropriate it, authenticate it.

JD: What is the difference between offering a book—for example, a copy of *Sein und Zeit* with an inscription—and offering a *signed* photograph of oneself? In the photograph the author himself, if one may say so, is not only represented (by his head, with his eyes and his mouth), but he also signs by hand. The

book represents him only as something produced by him, as his product. It is not an immediately visible double of himself. I suppose, too, that, to the extent that they were prisoners of a certain social and aesthetic academicism, these “great authors” would never offer a less conventional photograph of themselves, a full-length photograph or the photograph of a (more fetishizable) part of the body, a foot, a hand, a view from behind. They offer a portrait, a head: the mouth, the eyes, the face, but not the rest. They offer an original double, a double that has become an original because of the “authentic” signature below the head. This is the presupposition and foundation of the law: one is not first identified by one’s feet but by the gaze and the mouth, by what addresses the other: directly in the face.

MW: And in profile. In any case, in photography there is always the return of a kind of belief, a visual belief in *Dasein*, to speak with Heidegger: a belief in *Vorhandenheit*, the pure “*es gibt*” (“there is”).

JD: Heidegger might say the following: when one offers a portrait, what counts is first of all the *content* (what is shown, not the support and everything that is reproducible, etc., but the unique referent, if one can put it thus). But this “content” is not of the order of *Vorhandenheit* (presence-at-hand) or of *Zuhandenheit*

(readiness-to-hand). It is *Dasein*; it is an existence in the form of *Dasein* that is there, that has a world, that is in the world, in the *Erschlossenheit* (disclosedness) that opens the world, “in truth” or in the truth of non-truth, etc. And it is necessary to think photography on the basis of *Erschlossenheit*, even if this means problematizing what Heidegger says about it. What one sees by way of the portrait, beyond the reproduced double, is *Dasein*. That is why one would have to distinguish between a photograph of the face or the hands (in which the most immediately distinctive features of *Dasein* come together: the look [*la vue*], speech, the hand that gives or greets, etc.) and a photograph of something else. It is true that if a friend comes and gives you a photograph of his study, and if in this photograph one can make out a cup or a pitcher on the table, he would say: Careful, a *Krug* is not simply a material object that is *vorhanden*; it is determined as a gift, an offering, a *Geschenk*. To a friend I can offer a photograph of my house, of my study and my work table, or even of my books, a photograph that would thus have a value of hospitality. Photography is still marked by all the possibilities of *Dasein*.

MW: At the same time, because there is a very widely published photograph, one that is included in every biography of Nietzsche now, which is the

photograph of his typewriter. What does it tell us, what does it give us, this photograph of Nietzsche's typewriter?

JD: To use Benjamin's language, we can say that an attempt is being made to reconstitute the *aura* around something that has or is bound to have the effect of dispelling the *aura*: it is a very archaic typewriter, one of the first; it is unique inasmuch as it belonged to Nietzsche, at a time when few writers used a typewriter: an extreme rarity, with a correspondingly higher price on the real or symbolic market, a collector's object. If we learned that all this was a mystification, and that this typewriter didn't belong to Nietzsche, it would no longer hold any interest. The cultic value that becomes attached to photography always depends on uniqueness, the nonreproducibility at the heart of the reproducible itself in photography.

HVA: Nietzsche used it because he was losing his sight, whereas today one uses a typewriter to facilitate legibility, the vision of others.

JD: The mark of a wound, very close to death, in any case to blindness. Scar or trauma, it is a question of everything that is signified in the loss of sight—and especially of what bears witness to it.

MW: I'm unfamiliar with the photograph that Heidegger gave as gifts, but what is interesting is that he always made reproductions only of his head . . .

JD: I'm speaking of the photos he gave. . . .

MW: But the gifts always showed the face. . . .

JD: Yes, that's true in any case for the gift as a present. . . .

MW: I wanted to have an image of this portrait of Heidegger because in my opinion it breaks *Zuhandenheit*; it's as if it reproduced the face. At first one has to think . . . of the gaze; it is like a reproduction of something that one cannot reproduce, that one cannot show. It is like not only one but two holes in the image.

JD [after what seems to be an interruption in the recording]: Let's listen to the rain and what we say about it. Whenever an impression is left on your tape by the rain, we are no longer simply inside. We are in a kind of resonance apparatus, this room with transparent walls, a milieu of reception, a glassy surface that accentuates the sound of the rain. We are therefore inside, but exposed to the rain, to the sound of the rain, as we would not be if we were inside an apartment. This artificial milieu of reception, this artifact, is

different from that constituted by an ordinary dwelling; it is more sensitive, and now it conditions not only perception but the very recording of sound.

MW: A small remark: here we are in a place that was called in the eighteenth century a *Glashaus*. This, too, is a metaphor for photographers' studios because at the time one needed a lot of light, and that is why one always made portraits, especially portraits, because it is in the studios, the *Glashaus*. . . . To return to this *Dasein*-effect, what is the role of the gaze in the photographic portrait?

JD: One thinks that the portrait captures the eyes, the gaze that is, among other things, that for which something like photography [*de la photographie*] exists. The gaze is presumed to be what the subject himself cannot see in his own life. When one looks at oneself in a mirror, one sees oneself either as seen or as seeing but never as both at the same time. One believes that in principle the camera—photographic or cinematographic—should capture or hold a gaze which the looking eyes cannot see. I am seen as you see me speaking, etc., seen by you or photographed by you, but with a look that I, who am alive now in the present, cannot see. And therefore when I give someone my gaze, my look, the photographed double of my look, I give him something with which I see but which

I myself cannot see. This is a situation of heteronomy: I give myself to the other precisely there where I cannot give myself to myself, cannot see myself seeing, in a way. Nor can I see myself or know myself as giving. I can see myself as seen, but I cannot see myself seeing. This is an experience of the gift, of what cannot return to me. Obviously, an infinite increase of narcissism cannot be absent—or in any case cannot be theoretically determinable as absent—in this gift and in this heteronomy: look at me, here is my image, this is my body, etc. But at the same time, this narcissism gives to the extent that this does not return to it, or to the extent that it is lost. It is lost because it gives (the sign of) a look that it cannot see. At that point narcissism is somehow interrupted or obligatorily drawn into an infinite increase in which the distinction between renunciation and the promised reappropriation becomes undecidable. To give a photograph can be a deeply serious gesture: I give as if I were giving myself, as if I were giving even my impossible narcissism—eyes that cannot see themselves, that see and that see that they cannot see themselves. This is like the erotics of the gaze, the exchange of gazes, gazes that cross, and that cross at the point where each one cannot reappropriate itself, and therefore already gives itself, delivers itself and gives itself up, unarmed: this is a gesture that can in certain situations be more exposed, more giving

and more intense than “making love.” In it the gaze is naked, at once naked and not seeing itself. Exposed as overexposed, like nudity.

MW: If we take the very well-known and familiar metaphor of photography as a trace of itself, not like the trace as a signature, like writing, but like a trace as the imprint of the body itself, as a small piece, it is also something like a gift of love. Whereas it used to be that one gave, for example, a lock of hair, or something else from the body, now one gives oneself in the photographic medium as a partial object.

JD: All photography is from the outset a fetish, the immediate possibility of a fetishization, in itself, if I can put it this way, as a photographic thing (the thing itself is a fetish, that is what must be thought) and sometimes in what it shows. . . .

MW: But without risk?

JD: It depends. One can always neutralize the threat, buffer the risk, but it can also be very risky. When someone has a signed photograph of you, and from you, it is a kind of commitment.

MW: Now, in speaking of risk, we are touching on the problematic of the witness. What does one do with photographs taken clandestinely, like in the film

Blowup? One has caught someone in a compromising situation, for example, and one uses photographs to suppress the other in order to . . .

JD: . . . to blackmail him, of course. The photograph, prior to any signature, is a pledge that commits [*une gage qui engage*] to a certain modernity of “blackmail”¹⁷—a missive that then comes to bear out this name and this color. The juridical problems are new, complex, and shifting: who has the right to photograph whom? Where? in what context? What is the border between the private and the public? Who can hold, sell, reproduce, divide up, or distort a photograph? And so on. These questions are amplified and sharpened as public space is simultaneously extended and restructured by the teletechnologies of communication and by the possibility of sending the photograph at an accelerated speed, from one continent to another. In France I believe that one does not have the right to photograph someone in the street, in his car, or house without authorization. But one does have the right to photograph someone in a public place, in a political meeting, for example, or in a lecture hall. But not in *every* public place: a space in which teaching is taking place, such as a seminar at a university, is considered a public space in France, but its publicity is protected: one does not have the right, in principle, to

record or to photograph there without authorization. But it is impossible, in fact, to ensure that this right is respected.

HVA: This makes me think of Flaubert. Louise Colet wrote to him saying that she was going to see a photographer to have her portrait made, and she wanted to give him a portrait of herself. Flaubert, of course, refused and answered her by saying something like this: "Certainly not. I do not want your portrait, I already have it." He had an engraving of her; he continues, saying: "It is a very bad engraving, therefore it satisfies me perfectly." Is there not also a right of the gift, a right of giving?

JD: Yes, someone controls or chooses the photographs; one gives the photograph that one wants. In a series. The multiplicity is in principle immediate. A drawing, on the contrary, is singular: there is only one, in any case it does not of itself imply a series, as a photograph does, even if in some cases there is only one. The principle of the series is inscribed in the photographic act.

HVA: Baudelaire gave a photograph of himself to Poulet-Malassis. It was shortly before his death, around 1865, in Belgium. The photograph was signed, with a dedication addressed to Poulet-Malassis: he

calls him, more or less, “the only friend who lightened my time in Belgium”; and then at the top, as a kind of *inscriptio*, he writes, in a paraphrase of Horace: *Ridenten ferient ruinae*. The photograph, the dedication, and the *inscriptio* refer no less to the stoic hero of modernity than to Baudelaire’s theory of laughter, his theory of modernity, which is a theory of the fall, a theory of accelerated and interrupted motion, a theory of the catastrophe, of a fall into time. And perhaps even this gift to Poulet-Malassis already shows what Barthes had pointed out when he spoke of the anguish of the subject seeing itself become an object . . . , that the catastrophe has always already taken place when one sees oneself as having become an object, as having become one’s own loss. One is photographable, “photogenic,” and this is perhaps the catastrophe, that one can be photographable, that one can be captured and caught in time.

JD: One thinks also of what Bergson says about laughter, precisely: the movement of the fall provokes laughter, like every unexpected and instantaneous mechanization of life. As if, without killing, through the simulacrum of a sort of freeze-frame, death seized life by stiffening the grace of movement. It is also a matter of surprise, of the instantaneous “snapshot,” of the photographic immobilization of a movement,

therefore of a kinetics. Bergson was one of the first, perhaps the first philosopher, to refer in a systematic way to the techniques of photography and cinematography. He no doubt needed this reference at the heart of his thought, in a way that was essential and not merely rhetorical, pedagogical, or illustrative.

In the space where the two themes of law and life intersect, I wonder what happens to the modern or “postmodern” body and what the significance is today (from a political or phantasmatic point of view) of new possibilities of seeing inside the body and of taking photographic type images of it (X-rays, scans, and every sort of “scopy” from which one is able to preserve an imprint). What becomes of the “interior” of the body, if there is one, and how do these new techniques of the image, the imprint, the archive affect new forms of anxiety, of desire, of curiosity, etc.?

MW: There is a passage in Thomas Mann’s *Magic Mountain* in which Claudia Chauchat gives the hero . . . she has some photographic images from her X-rays, and this, too, is a gift of love.

JD: What is one giving at such a moment? When I was preparing with [Geoffrey] Bennington the book “on me,” if I can put it thus, the idea occurred to me—an idea that I abandoned—of publishing a scanner image, a photograph from a scanner. There had

been a moment when my eye, precisely, was threatened by a temporary facial paralysis caused by a virus (I speak of this in “Circumfession,”¹⁸ precisely, and in *Memoirs of the Blind*). I had been given the plates—I don’t know what they’re called—the negatives from the scanner; so here, in my home, I have the inside of my skull, of the internal and invisible space of my skull, of what still remains a surface or an exposed superficiality, certainly, but exposed internally, as in a fold, and exposed to a machine, traversed in its thickness by the rays of an inhuman gaze. The “great actors” of whom we spoke a moment ago could not have entertained this hypothesis or this game: to inscribe a dedication on the image of their skull. They could not do this and no doubt would not have wanted or dared to.

MW: There is an artist, Meret Oppenheim, who was involved in surrealism—and who also did some cups made of fur. She made some radiographic photographs of her skull with a hat, and she exhibited this.

HVA: The photography of the invisible, radiography, the photography of thought, so-called transcendental photography: the nineteenth century witnessed an entire debate, quite pronounced, concerning photography and spiritualism. The positivists demanded proof of the apparitions, and the spiritualists said to

themselves that nothing could be easier than producing *false testimonies* with photography. The spirit medium was at the center of the question concerning the technology of the revenant. What sort of signature does our body bear when it returns? How does it sign, and how does it become re-marked? Barthes speaks of this in *A Lover's Discourse* and also, of course, in *Camera Lucida*: the mediatic air is inhabited by ghosts, by revenants.

JD: When I played in a film called *Ghost Dance*, we improvised a scene in my study. The filmmaker, Ken McMullen, had only scripted one question, which my partner in the scene, Pascale Ogier, playing the role of a student, was supposed to ask me: "Do you believe in ghosts?" In my response I presented some variations on the theme of a spectrality that, far from being reduced by the rationality of modern technology, found itself, on the contrary, amplified, as if this medium (photocinematography, teleperception, teleproduction, telecommunication) was the very site, the proper element (also properly privileged), of a fantastical phantomaticity, of the *phainesthai* in its originary link with *technê*. The revenant is not confined to the culture of the manor house or to the spiritualism and fantastic literature from the last century. Every culture has its phantoms and the spectrality that is conditioned by its technology.

MW: I have a nonpublic question to ask you: at the beginning of this film by McMullen, the first scene is a shot of you, in the restaurant, and what is interesting is the way you keep blinking. Was this deliberate, or not? . . . Very rapid blinking.

JD: When I am anxious, tense, or attentive, also when I feel myself being observed, I blink very rapidly. It's spontaneous, but I can also do it in a deliberate and accelerated way.

MW: I thought that it might be because in the context of this scene it is a question of mediatechnics, and of presenting images in media technology, etc. I thought that it was a *mise-en-scène* of the medium itself, because what is the cinema, after all? It is the interruption of the gaze. It's like a *mise en abyme* or like in films when the gaze itself is cut.

JD: That's true, if one considers the eye as a diaphragm. In other situations, when I have seen myself in images on television or in video, I have noticed that as soon as I felt a camera pointed at me, in the process of capturing my image, my face was transformed and my eyes blinked more quickly. Perhaps a sort of protection—of the eyes or of the gaze, a retreat toward the interior. . . .

MW: But if we speak of film . . . I would like to insist on this a bit, because I believe that there is a great difference between photography and film. And I believe that it was not by chance that the surrealists placed photography in the foreground—films, too, but also photos—in order to show a thing. Because we spoke of ruins and I think that this is also the difference from laughter. I think that this effect of laughter is in my opinion a cinematographic effect because I believe, in speaking of the thesis of the instantaneous image or the “snapshot” also in Lacan in the mirror stage, I think that photography brings with it a sort of phantasmagoria, a sort of hypercharge of ideality; that is, one captures an idealized gaze. To give an example: there is a photograph by Yves Klein called (I believe) “Leap into the Void,” and there one sees—it’s very bizarre, I don’t know how this photo was taken, what the situation was—but one sees him as if he were flying over a wall, and it is very likely that after the wall he’s going to fall; it’s a direct fall, but at that moment, it’s the moment of triumph. . . .

JD: . . . He’s going to fall. . . .

MW: And it amounts to saying that in photography one does not see the ruins, one always sees the triumph, the triumph of fantasy. And that’s why—another association, a second remark—I think . . . I

brought up this passage also in my book: in Resnais' film *Hiroshima mon amour*, there too it's a question of photos, of seeing and of what is shown, and it's the French woman who has visited the museum in Hiroshima where photographs are exhibited as a way to show the catastrophe, and afterward we see the Japanese man, and she says: "I saw everything." And he says: "You saw nothing. You invented everything." And I think that this is to some extent the trick in photography: photography not only "gives to be seen" what exists; photography invents. It is a form of invention which at the same time transforms and also substitutes for the so-called real, as in another text by Bioy-Casares called "The Invention of Morel." I don't know if you're familiar with this novella. It's about a man who finds himself on an island and who notices some very bizarre things—people who appear and disappear, etc.—and after a certain moment he realizes that he is part of a film; that is, this island is a sort of scenic stage for a film, and there is an entire procession of characters who are all filmed and reproduced perhaps in a holographic form. It isn't clear, because it's a story from the 1940s, and I don't know if they already knew about holography; but the conception points in this direction. In order to reproduce the characters, they made films of them, but at the same time it is a sort of radiographic recording that burns the bodies as

they are filmed; that is, they are eternally reinvented by the filmic machine, but the original is burned, has disappeared. They must be reinvented.

JD: To take up this word *invention*, one could say that the photographic experience is situated right at the internal edge of a division that divides the two senses of the concept of invention: *on the one hand*, invention as a discovery or a revelation of what is already there (in the invention of the other, one discovers the other: photography takes and overtakes [*prend et surprend*] the other as he is, the referent, as one says, by a sort of gaze, a sort of intuition or artificial eye—that is at least what is thought or said); and then, *on the other hand*, invention as a technical intervention, as the production of a new technical apparatus that constitutes the other instead of simply receiving him. So of course there is a concept of photography as the simple recording of the other as he was, as he appeared there, but it is immediately contaminated by invention in the sense of production, creation, productive imagination. One produces the other there where he is not; therefore I can manipulate a photograph, intervene, transform the referent: I invent him, then, in the sense in which one invents what is not there. These two concepts of invention lie at the heart of photography. All the debates to which we have referred seem to lead back to this:

is photography simply the recording of the other or of the object as he or it is there, presented to intuition, independently of the photographic apparatus? Or, on the contrary, does it invent not in the sense of the discovery, the revelation of what is there, but in the sense of technical production? One invents the other there where he is not, and the two senses of invention constantly parasite off one another in the act (but one can no longer even say the photographic “act” [and anyway what is an act?]), in the operation, or let us say in the photographic experience.

MW: It is a way of summoning forth the other, of making him come . . . or of citing him.

JD: Yes, making come or letting come. Consider the judicial uses that photography can have. Is it a proof? Is it the equivalent of a testimony (which will never be a proof)? One is often tempted to consider photography, naively, as indisputable proof: the photographed thing was there (as Barthes says); the event happened there, it remains visible, it is irrefutable, etc. You are familiar with the trial in California, and the outcome, which is referred to as the Rodney King verdict. At the origin of this trial was the diffusion of an amateur video (by a young man who had just received a video camera as a gift from his parents and who happened to be there): it shows a group of policemen brutally and

relentlessly beating a young black man. Unfortunately, such violence is commonplace; things worse than this happen every day. But in this case we had an image that was taken to be indisputable, broadcast on every television station in the country, a “fact” apparently devoid of all artifact and that no one could deny or ignore: this happened, and happened thus, since we had an image of it. If someone had simply *recounted* this event, it would not have had the same force; it would have been possible to flee, avoid, deny the verbal narrative. It is more difficult to foreclose the image and its effect of immediate presence. During the trial, the defense attorney replayed the film—I don’t know how many times—he showed freeze-frame images of a fraction of a second, and he claimed that he was showing, by decomposing the flow of the filmic image, that, in fact, King tried to get up again and again and that he was therefore once again threatening the police, which in the eyes of the defense attorney justified the brutality of the police. This operation of analytic decomposition was also practiced by the prosecutor in order to demonstrate the opposite point of view. The same thing can be done with photography: decompose, re-compose, splice together, split apart, etc. In a way that is more programmatic than ever, I would situate here the history (as yet unwritten) of the relations between street scenes, the police, and the technology of images,

from Poe (“The Man of the Crowd”) to Baudelaire (the section of *The Painter of Modern Life* entitled “An Artist, Man of the World, Man of the Crowds, and Child”), and on to Benjamin. Benjamin analyzes the complicity between Poe and Baudelaire precisely with reference to “The Man of the Crowd,” which he calls “something like an X-ray of a detective story.”¹⁹ Earlier, in reference to the police procedures of surveillance and identification, he describes the invention of photography as a decisive phase in the history of a procedure of identification which before that had to be based on the signature. This invention, he says, is as important for criminology as the invention of printing was for literature. It is unclear whether Benjamin is describing a fact that he believes, or a more or less fantasmatic assumption that one pretends to credit, when he calmly states that photography makes it possible “for the first time” to fix durably and without any ambiguity the traces left by a man. The history that Benjamin then tries to retrace is also the history of a literary form, the detective novel, insofar as it is linked with a series of technological mutations.

To return to Los Angeles, some people have demanded that henceforth all police activity be monitored by video, that everything be filmed, in order to submit police surveillance itself to surveillance. There would thus be “black boxes” recording the police,

their movements, their actions and gestures, a constant recording and an immediate archiving of police activity, which itself consists in attempting a *panoptikon* of civic space—of the political, and of political space itself. If all this in turn is under surveillance by satellite, we would then see the determination of an *optimal optimization* of what could be called the *ontopolitological*: the totality of what binds the political to the topological and politics to space in the present (*on, ontos*) would be gathered together in the present, devoid of any shadow, beneath the gaze, exposed to an all-powerful photographic apparatus: no more secret, no more private life, instantaneous totalization: the totalitarian itself, perhaps, etc.

This was certainly not what a certain black gang, a very politicized gang, had in mind when they made some proposals for the “Rebuild L.A.” project—very democratic proposals, extremely interesting, at once very relevant and utopian.²⁰ In a text that I am now writing (called *Faxitecture*), I quote a member of one of these gangs speaking from a San Bernardino prison. A journalist asked him: what is politics? His response: politics is a relationship between people who see themselves contained or regulated by a state that has appropriated power. And then he proposes a series of measures for “rebuilding L.A.” All you have to do, he says, is give us the possibility: “Give us the hammer and the

nails and we'll rebuild L.A.” Among these possibilities and these instruments, among the numerous interesting concrete arrangements he proposes, there is the idea that some groups from their gang could work with the police, that they could receive training from the police, that they could do a kind of internship for this purpose, and that they could then secure order themselves—a sort of militia, if you like—equipped with video cameras. They would be under surveillance at the moment of carrying out a surveillance of police surveillance, and no breach would be possible any longer, neither in the public order nor in democratic vigilance.

MW: And yet, this is surprising, because there is also the possibility of manipulating video, of having fake video footage.

JD: Yes, but there are cases in which manipulation seems (wrongly) to be very unlikely. One then accepts the filmed document as a proof or a testimony. But it is neither of these and never will be. The mediatic apparatus as a whole has been transformed by video. In Los Angeles, the scenes of looting were videotaped²¹ and broadcast live on television. In principle, there is no longer any possibility of manipulation, or so we believe. The cameraman can orient his camera differently, but what is recorded is broadcast

live, is reproduced as is, on television screens in private homes. And in this case there were extraordinary spectacles that were obviously archived but that one saw live, in real time, as one says. This raises the whole question of “live” video. It makes it possible for a videographer to go anywhere, or in any case it allows for an extraordinary mobility. And we saw a shop burning in one place, another looted somewhere else; and so we were able to see both whites and blacks loading up their cars. But the police were there, observing but not intervening; they were under orders not to intervene (why? this is an enormous problem of political strategy that I won’t address here), purportedly to protect the firefighters who were trying to put out the fires and who were, it was said, threatened by certain demonstrators. The argument put forth by the police was thus the following: there were not enough of us, we had to protect the firefighters, the most urgent matter was to put out the fire, etc. The police who were there claimed that they were protecting the firefighters, and they contented themselves with watching the looters as they emptied out the Korean stores. All this was filmed and was immediately visible on all the televisions in the United States. I was in California at the time, not very far, only forty-five minutes away, but one saw it in New York too, all this at once, in the

same way, live. . . . Again, from the point of view of the law, what happens with trials, the Rodney King trial for example, is significant. The trial was filmed. In France this is not permitted; one cannot even take photographs in the courtroom. Instead, drawings or caricatures are published but never any photographs, as if the proceedings of the judgment, albeit public, might be disturbed or distorted by the presence of this process of archiving and publication. Notes taken by hand, however exhaustive, are presumed not to “intervene,” the way a camera would, in the judicial theater. But the idea that the presence of a gaze, of a visual witness equipped with a technical prosthesis, can affect behavior and therefore transform the event, this is an interesting idea. It implies a very naive view of what a prosthesis is and of where it begins, but our entire culture is constructed on this presupposition. The ceremony for bestowing a doctorate *honoris causa* at Cambridge has followed the same protocol for four centuries. I was sent a description of the ceremony so that I could prepare, and it says there that radio and television are excluded: they were not allowed into the room, although private cameras or video recorders were permitted. And then there is a history behind all these behaviors. When I first began speaking in public, for lectures at conferences or for teaching, the presence of tape recorders

or video would have been intolerable and would have affected the entire scene. Today I no longer pay any attention to them.

MW: But one thinks about a situation where something has been filmed, and, for example, one can very easily manipulate the public; this is a very well-known method in films, using what one calls in German *Schere* [or "*Text-Bild-Schere*"]. This doesn't mean "scissors" in this context; it's an expression that has been used for the split between text and image, for example: the defense attorney makes his statement, and at the same time one films the face of the accused; that is, there is a split between texts and images of faces in order to show the reactions, for example, in order to inculcate him, by showing an involuntary reaction, or . . .

JD: It's the same technique of writing at work in those television films that are proliferating now, about fictional trials. This is now an entire genre; one writes a script and then one films the trial.

MW: Likewise with the last film on John F. Kennedy; there, too, one wanted to reveal the secret.

JD: Yes, but I'm speaking of an imaginary trial. . . .

MW: This is also imaginary, even if one assumes

that now one is going to reveal the secret, the truth, but it is still imaginary. But nevertheless we have been speaking for some time about videography in television, in films; it's very bizarre because that's the difference . . .

JD: . . . photography is erased . . .

MW: . . . Yes, that's already been said, but still I wonder: what can we do with photography? For example, there are still some very famous photos, like, for example, the photo taken in Vietnam of an officer shooting . . . a prisoner. The photographer—an American [Eddie Adams]—won a [Pulitzer] prize for this photograph, and there one sees the revolver and one sees the bullet hitting . . . one can't say the accused . . . because he was directly executed. And . . .

JD: What is interesting in this history is the gradual waning of photography as cinematography, videography, etc., gained momentum. This produces a relative rarity and therefore an auratic surplus value of photography. There are collectors who collect photographs just as there are those who collect original documents, non- or prephotographic. When photography becomes an art, there is a surplus value of the archive that is connected to the neoarchaism of an art that is considered technically surpassed or that has been rendered

secondary; and suddenly, photography thus becomes as “cultivated”—in the sense of both culture and religious cult—as the book was before cinema and television, as writing by hand was before printing, before the typewriter or the computer, etc.

MW: But at the ideological level, I would say that here there is a capacity, a transcendental force, of photography to generate myths, because I think that this is a thesis or . . . a hypothesis that the myths of the big stars of the cinema are formed on the basis of photos. If we think, for example, of Marilyn Monroe, we saw all the films, but the typical scenes, for example, on the subway, the image with her skirt flying up, etc., this has been reproduced and sold as a photo, which one keeps in one’s head, for example the scene in *Casablanca* . . .

JD: It’s a photo from a film, a still shot, or a freeze-frame. . . .

MW: . . . Yes, that’s right, and sometimes—I don’t know if this is still done today—but at that time the photos weren’t taken directly from the film, as images from the film itself, but there were always photographers on the set during shooting who would take posed photographs; that is, they are poses, not freeze-frames, strictly speaking, of the situation, of the action

in the film; they are actually poses, and one constructed grand myths, faces. . . . What does one have in one's head? One has photographs. . . .

JD: Because it is more precious, because it seems to belong to a previous and internal time, to private space or to a space that is not yet public; when a photograph is taken of an actor playing a role or rehearsing, the image does not belong to the work; it is rather almost clandestinely taken from it. It is stolen, torn away from the market in which the work will then be published and sold. That is a sort of intrusion (theft and transgression) into a still private space, an image all the more precious in that it appears to be aleatory, exposed to its own loss, mortal, threatened with not being preserved, whereas the film, for its part, is programmed, preserved, multiplied, sold, etc. It belongs by rights to the space of publicity.

Notes

Between Translation and Invention

1. Jacques Derrida et al., "Roundtable on Translation," trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation—Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, ed. Christie McDonald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 91–161, here 120.

2. For a detailed history of the words *Destruktion* and *Abbau* in Heidegger, beginning with *Being and Time* in 1927, and its relations to the concept of deconstruction in Derrida and, through him, in Paul de Man, see Jean-Luc Nancy, "Our History," trans. Cynthia Chase, Richard Klein, and A. Mitchell Brown, *diacritics* 20, no. 3 (fall 1990): 97–115, here 102–5.

3. A useful general account of Derrida's relation to Heidegger, especially as it concerns the early translations of *Abbau* and *Destruktion*, is offered by Robert Bernasconi, "Heidegger und die Dekonstruktion—Strategien im Umgang mit der Metaphysik: Derrida, Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe und Irigaray," trans. Reiner Ansén, in *Heidegger-Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Dieter Thomä (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 440–50, esp. 440–45. As Bernasconi points

out, Derrida, in a 1966 essay for the French journal *Critique* entitled “De la grammatologie,” still employs the term *détruire*. One year later, in his book *De la grammatologie*, this word is silently replaced with *déconstruire* (441).

4. Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *Derrida and Différance*, ed. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1–5, here 4.

5. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

6. For an incisive consideration of the difficulty implied by the heading or “title” of deconstruction and its history, see Rodolphe Gasché, “Without a Title,” in *Views and Interviews: On “Deconstruction” in America* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 2007), 1–32. Reminding us that even the word *deconstruction* ought to be placed in brackets in order to remain faithful to its own radicality, Gasché proposes that we leave Derrida’s thought, and our own, without this title, precisely in the name of an encompassing “vigilance” of thinking that builds on Heidegger’s concept of *Achtsamkeit* and that cannot fully come to us as a name, a heading, or a title without betraying what is most useful in it.

7. Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278–93, here 280.

8. *Ibid.*, 281.

9. Peter Brunette and David Wills, “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” trans. Laurie Volpe, in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, ed. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9–32, here 19–20.

10. *Ibid.*, 14.

11. Derrida made this confession many times over the years. See, for instance, his 2002 interview with Kristine McKenna for *LA Weekly*, now included in Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman (eds.), *Derrida: Screenplay and Essays on the Film*, foreword by Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Routledge, 2005), no pagination. It would be useful to place Derrida's wish, prior to ca. 1980, not to have his photograph published into syntactical relation with some of the previously unpublished photographs of him in Michel Lisse, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française, 2005).

Shortly after I had written this essay, a thoughtful meditation on Derrida's relation to the photographic self-portrait appeared: Ginette Michaud, *Veilleuses: Autour de trois images de Jacques Derrida* (Quebec: Nota Bene, 2009).

12. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars*, ed. Paul Patton and Terry Smith (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001); Jacques Derrida, with Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002); and Jacques Derrida, "Videor," trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, ed. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 73–77.

13. Jacques Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes* (Paris: Galilée, 2009), an English version of which, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, is forthcoming from Fordham University Press under the title *Athens, Still Remains*;

“Athens and Photography: A Mourned-for Survival,” *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida*, by Catherine Malabou and Jacques Derrida, trans. David Wills (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 118–19; “Trace et archive, image et art,” a conversation at the Collège iconique on June 25, 2002, available as a transcript from the French “Institut national de l’audiovisuel” at www.ina-entreprise.com; “Aletheia,” in “*Nous avons voué notre vie à des signes*,” no editor named (Bordeaux: William Blake, 1996), 75–81, with an English translation by Pleshette DeArmitt and Kas Saghafi, forthcoming in *Oxford Literary Review*; and a series of untitled essays on Brenner’s photographs, trans. Peggy Kamuf, in Frédéric Brenner, *Diasporas: Homelands in Exile*, vol. 2, *Voices* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

14. Jacques Derrida, “The Deaths of Roland Barthes,” trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 31–67; and Jacques Derrida and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Right of Inspection*, trans. David Wills (New York: Monacelli, 1998). In a recent essay I have attempted to place Derrida’s philosophical reflections on photography into syntactical relation with certain moments in the prose of Franz Kafka and in the work of German photographer Stefan Moses; see Gerhard Richter, “Unsettling Photography: Kafka, Derrida, Moses,” in “Remainders: Of Jacques Derrida,” ed. David E. Johnson, special issue, *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 2 (fall 2007): 155–73. I borrow a few sentences from that essay in the present one.

15. See Derrida in Brenner, *Diasporas*, 51.

16. Derrida and Plissart, *Right of Inspection*, n.p.

17. Gisèle Freund’s 1974 French study was published in

English as *Photography and Society*, trans. David R. Godine (Boston: Godine, 1980).

18. See Arthur Danto, *Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Derrida's metatheoretical meditations on what photography as a concept makes available to thinking admittedly tend to focus on particular photographs and photographers, as his extended commentary on the photo-essay by the Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart in *Rights of Inspection* makes plain.

19. Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 25.

20. Derrida in Brenner, *Diasporas*, 103.

21. Jacques Derrida, "Die Fotografie als Kopie, Archiv und Signatur: Im Gespräch mit Hubertus von Amelunxen und Michael Wetzels," *Theorie der Fotografie IV, 1980–1995*, ed. Hubertus von Amelunxen (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2000), 280–96.

22. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7. For a recent discussion of aspects of Derrida's thinking of the archive as it relates to the uneasy status of his own archives at Irvine, see Peter Krapp, "Derrida und die vergangene Zukunft des Archivs," in *Mnema: Derrida zum Andenken*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mehl and Georg Christoph Tholen (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007), 221–31.

23. It is with regard to this constellation of photograph, archive, and trace that Derrida's conversation also convenes with a later one, the 2002 "Trace et archive, image et art" (see note 13 above).

24. For media-historical discussions of the idea of photography's medial specificity see, among others, Mary Ann Do-

ane, "Indexicality and the Concept of Medium Specificity," in *The Meaning of Photography*, ed. Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 3–33; Mary Price, *The Photograph: A Strange, Confined Space* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Bernd Busch, *Belichtete Welt: Eine Wahrnehmungsgeschichte der Fotografie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995); and Bernd Stiegler, *Theoriegeschichte der Photographie* (Munich: Fink, 2006).

25. See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003); Vilém Flusser, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* (Berlin: European Photography Verlag, 2000); Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Hubertus von Amelnunx, "Fotografie *nach* der Fotografie," in *Fotografie nach der Fotografie*, ed. Hubertus von Amelnunx, Stefan Iglhaut, and Florian Rötzer, with Alexis Cassel (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1995), 116–23.

26. One of the many heterogeneous demands that the deconstructive emphasis on memory formulates is the requirement that the tradition on which a philosophical perspective draws—the figures of discourse and modes of argumentation that it uneasily inherits, even as it formulates its "own" singular signature—deserves to be rethought as a problem, not as a given. In the case of Derrida's "memory" of the tradition of Western thought from the Greek philosophical tradition forward, such an inheriting is always also the engagement with a particular (and simultaneously destructive and affirmative) memory of that tradition. For an extended analysis of Derrida's relation to tradition and legacy see Michael Naas, *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). For a general analysis of Derrida's concept of memory and its

location within the discourse of memory in Western thought see David Farrell Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), esp. chaps. 4 and 7. Compare further my “Acts of Memory and Mourning: Derrida and the Fictions of Anteriority,” in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

27. Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2007), 34.

28. Jacques Derrida, “Dialanguages,” an interview with Anne Berger, *Points . . . Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 132–55, here 143–44. We might say that now, in Derrida’s radical absence, it may be more incumbent on us than ever to work through the memory of deconstruction, creating a mnemonic archive, open-ended and always reinterpretable, of what Geoffrey Bennington once envisioned as the machine of a “Derridabase,” an imaginary “memory containing all of Derrida’s texts, themselves simultaneously accessible by ‘themes,’ key words, references, turns of ‘style,’ etc. . . . , and then to a larger memory making accessible . . . the texts quoted or invoked by Derrida, with everything that forms their ‘context,’ therefore just about the (open) totality of the universal library, to say nothing of musical or visual or other . . . archives to be invented” (“Derridabase,” in *Jacques Derrida*, by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, trans. Geoffrey Bennington [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 315).

Derrida elsewhere expands on this imbrication of deconstruction and memory work when he explains that “the very condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work,

within the system to be deconstructed; it may *already* be located there, already at work . . . participating in the construction of what it at the same time threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes *afterwards*, from the outside, one fine day; it is always already at work in the work. . . . Since the disruptive force of deconstruction is always already contained within the architecture of the work, all one would finally have to do to be able to deconstruct, given this *always already*, is to do memory work” (“The Art of Memories,” trans. Jonathan Culler, in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, rev. ed. [New York: Columbia University Press, 1989], 45–88, here 73).

29. Derrida, “Videor,” 77.

30. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

31. Eduardo Cadava, “*Lapsus imaginis*: The Image in Ruins,” *October* 96 (spring 2001): 35–60, here 35. Compare further Cadava’s far-reaching meditations on the relation between photography and death in Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of history, in Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

32. Derrida, “Aletheia,” 80.

33. Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*, 60.

34. *Ibid.*, 15–17; the published English version of this passage can be found in Derrida, “Athens and Photography: A Mourned-for Survival,” 118–19. The translation I use here, which differs slightly from Wills’s, is from Pascale-Anne Brault’s and Michael Naas’s forthcoming translation of *Demeure, Athènes*. I thank them for making their admirable translation available to me prior to its publication.

35. See, for instance, the photographs in his recent major exhibition in Berlin: Thomas Demand, *Nationalgalerie* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009).

36. It would be instructive here to create a dialogue between the photographic portrait and other forms of portraiture, such as drawing and painting, from the standpoint of a rigorously deconstructive perspective. A good start could be made by drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy's recent reflection on a portrait of Derrida by Valerio Adami (an artist on whose images Derrida himself commented), a portrait that is now to be read under the thanatographic sign of Derrida's permanent absence. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *À plus d'un titre—Jacques Derrida: Sur un portrait des Valerio Adami* (Paris: Galilée, 2007).

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols" and "The Anti-Christ," trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1990), 125.

38. See, for instance, Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson, "Introduction: Photography's Double Index (A Short History in Three Parts)," in *The Meaning of Photography*, ed. Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), vii–xxxii.

39. Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Invention of the Other," trans. Catherine Porter, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1:1–47, here 1.

40. *Ibid.*, 45–47.

41. The most insightful study of this aspect of Derrida's work to date is Alexander García Düttmann, *Derrida und ich: Das Problem der Dekonstruktion* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008).

42. Derrida and Plissart, *Right of Inspection*, n.p. The epistemopolitical implications of the larger logics that Derrida names spectrality and hauntology are elaborated at length in

his *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), as well as in his response to critics of this work, "Marx & Sons," trans. G. M. Goshgarian, in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's "Specters of Marx,"* ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Routledge, 1999), 213–69.

It is the notion of spectrality, too, that provides one of the links between the image and more well-known deconstructive notions such as the trace. As Derrida reminds us in his Sydney seminars, "the concept of the spectral has a deconstructive dimension because it has much in common with the concepts of trace, of writing and *différance*, and a number of other undecidable motifs. . . . We always have to do with spectrality, not simply when we experience ghosts coming back or when we have to deal with virtual images" (Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged*, 44).

43. Derrida, "Psyche," 15.

44. Derrida, "Aletheia," 75.

Copy, Archive, Signature

1. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Unmarked notes are by the editor, while those marked "[Trans.]" are by the translator.

2. The French word *point* corresponds more or less to the English word with the same spelling; the word *pointe*, however, denotes something more specific: it refers to the sharp point of a tool (including a tool for writing or drawing), to the pointed or tapered extremity of an object, or to the maxi-

mum intensity reached by a given phenomenon. Both words come from the verb *poindre*, which denotes the miniscule beginning or hint of something, its most initial and tiniest appearance, as with the very first light of day (the expression *la pointe du jour* means daybreak). Evoking the stinging puncture of a poignant moment, it also clearly relates to Barthes' notion of the *punctum*, which Derrida refers to below. [Trans.]

3. *Camera Lucida* is preceded by a dedication, "In homage to *L'imaginaire* by Jean-Paul Sartre," a reference to Sartre's 1940 work published by Gallimard, *L'imaginaire: Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*. [Trans.]

4. See Jacques Derrida and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Right of Inspection*, trans. David Wills (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998).

5. See esp. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

6. On the question of the "subjectile" see Jacques Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile," in Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

7. *Rétroviseur: viseur* is the word for a viewfinder on a camera; thus, *rétroviseur* implies a strange photographic "rear-viewfinder." [Trans.]

8. In this sentence Derrida is playing on the French verb *épouser*, which means to marry, and to espouse, but also to mould, embrace, or hug onto the entirety of a shape, like a snug piece of clothing, as well as to follow a line, a path, a border, or a laid-out plan. [Trans.]

9. Derrida is playing on the close connection between the words *retrait* and *trait*, which means both a "feature" and (in

keeping with the word's etymological associations) a line that has been "drawn." [Trans.]

10. Derrida's phrase is "ce qui garde (de) la perte." Broken down into its various possible meanings, it says, simultaneously, what keeps and guards loss as such; what keeps something from loss, from being lost; and what keeps some loss or something of loss (*de la perte*). [Trans.]

11. See "Counterfeit Money," poem 28 in *Paris Spleen*.

12. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

13. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, section 2.

14. The word means literally "picture screen" on a television; the emphasis here is on the protective connotations of the "screen." [Trans.]

15. Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 81.

16. See esp. "Signature, Event, Context," in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

17. English in original.

18. Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession: Fifty-Nine Periods and Periphrases," trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

19. Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," trans. Harry Zohn, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 27.

20. “Rebuild L.A.” was the name of a nonprofit organization set up by the city of Los Angeles in the wake of the upheavals following the Rodney King verdict in April 1992. [Trans.]

21. English in the original.