JACQUES DERRIDA AND THE HUMANITIES

A Critical Reader

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CHAPTER I

The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the "Humanities," what could take place *tomorrow)*

Jacques Derrida

This will no doubt be *like* a profession of faith: the profession of faith of a professor who would act *as if* he were nevertheless asking your permission to be unfaithful or a traitor to his habitual practice.

Before I even begin to follow in fact a torturous itinerary, here is the thesis, in direct and broadly simple terms, that I am submitting to you for discussion. It will be distributed among a series of propositions. In truth, it will be less a thesis, or even an hypothesis, than a declarative engagement, an appeal in the form of a profession of faith: faith in the University and, within the University, faith in the Humanities of tomorrow.

The long title proposed for this chapter signifies first that the modern university *should* be without condition. By "modern university," let us understand the one whose European model, after a rich and complex medieval history, has become prevalent, which is to say "classic," over the last two centuries in states of a democratic type. This university claims and ought to be granted in principle, besides what is called academic freedom, an *unconditional* freedom to question and to assert, or even, going still further, the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the *truth*. However enigmatic it may be, the reference to truth remains fundamental enough to be found, along with light (*lux*), on the symbolic insignias of more than one university. The university professes the truth, and that is its profession. It declares and promises an unlimited commitment to the truth. No doubt the status of and the changes to the value of truth can be discussed *ad infinitum* (truth as adequation or truth as revelation, truth as the object of theoretico-constative discourses or as poetico-performative events, and so forth). But these are discussed, precisely, *in* the University and in departments that belong to the Humanities. I will leave these enormous questions suspended for the moment. Let us underscore merely by way of anticipation that this immense question of truth and of light, of the

Enlightenment – *Aufklärung, Lumières, Illuminismo* – has always been linked to the question of man, to a concept of that which is proper to man, on which concept were founded both Humanism and the historical idea of the Humanities. Today the renewed and reelaborated declaration of "Human rights" (1948) or as we say in French, "des Droits de l'homme," the rights of man, and the institution of the juridical concept of "Crime against humanity" (1945) form the horizon of *mondialisation* and of the international law that is supposed to keep watch over it. (I am keeping the French word "mondialisation" in preference to "globalization" so as to maintain a reference to the world – *monde, Welt, mundus* – which is neither the globe nor the cosmos.) The concept of man, of what is proper to man, of human rights, of crimes against the humanity of man, organizes as we know such a *mondialisation* or worldwide-ization. This worldwide-ization wishes to be a humanization. If this concept of man seems both indispensable and always problematic, well – and this will be one of the motifs of my thesis, one of my theses in the form of profession of faith – it can be discussed or reelaborated, as such and without conditions, without presuppositions, only within the space of the new Humanities. (I will try to specify what I mean by the "new" Humanities.) But whether these discussions are critical or deconstructive, everything that concerns the question and the history of truth, in its relation to the question of man, of what is proper to man, of human rights, of crimes against humanity, and so forth, all of this must in principle find its space of discussion without condition and without presupposition, its legitimate space of research and reelaboration, *in* the University and, within the University, above all *in* the Humanities. Not so that it may enclose itself there, but on the contrary so as to find the best access to a new public space transformed by new techniques of communication, information, archivization, and knowledge production. (Although I must leave this aside, one of the most serious questions that is posed, and posed here, between the university and the politico-economic outside its public space is the question of the marketplace in publishing and the role it plays in archivization, evaluation, and legitimation of academic research.) The horizon of truth or of what is proper to man is certainly not a very determinable limit. But neither is that of the university and of the Humanities.

This university without conditions does not, in fact, exist, as we know only too well. Nevertheless, in principle and in conformity with its declared vocation, its professed essence, it should remain an ultimate place of critical resistance – and more than critical – to all the powers of

dogmatic and unjust appropriation. When I say "more than critical," I have in mind "deconstructive" (so why not just say it directly and without wasting time?). I am referring to the right to deconstruction as an unconditional right to ask critical questions not only to the history of the concept of man, but to the history even of the notion of critique, to the form and the authority of the question, to the interrogative form of thought. For this implies the right to do it performatively, that is, by producing events, for example by writing, and by giving rise to singular *oeuvres* (which up until now has been the purview of neither the classical nor the modern Humanities). With the event of thought constituted by such *oeuvres*, it would be a matter of making something happen to this concept of truth or of humanity, without necessarily betraying it, that is, to the concept that forms the charter and the profession of faith of all universities. This principle of unconditional resistance is a right that the university itself should at the same time reflect, invent, and pose, whether it does so through its law faculties or in the new Humanities capable of working on these questions of right and of law – in other words, and again why not say it without detour – the Humanities capable of taking on the tasks of deconstruction, beginning with the deconstruction of their own history and their own axioms.

Consequence of this thesis: such an unconditional resistance could oppose the university to a great number of powers, for example to state powers (and thus to the power of the nation-state and to its phantasm of indivisible sovereignty, which indicates how the university might be in advance not just cosmopolitan, but universal, extending beyond world-wide citizenship and the nation-state in general), to economic powers (to corporations and to national and international capital), to the powers of the media, ideological, religious, and cultural powers, and so forth – in short, to all the powers that limit democracy to come. The university should thus also be the place in which nothing is beyond question, not even the current and determined figure of democracy, and not even the traditional idea of critique, meaning theoretical critique, and not even the authority of the "question" form, of thinking as "questioning." That is why I spoke without delay and without disguise of deconstruction.

Here then is what I will call the unconditional university or the university without condition: the principial right to say everything, whether it be under the heading of fiction and the experimentation of knowledge, and the right to say it publicly, to publish it. This reference to public space will remain the link that affiliates the new Humanities to the Age

of Enlightenment. It distinguishes the university institution from other institutions founded on the right or the duty to say everything, for example religious confession and even psychoanalytic "free association." But it is also what fundamentally links the university, and above all the Humanities, to what is called literature, in the European and modern sense of the term, as the right to say everything publicly, or to keep it secret, if only in the form of fiction. I allude to confession, which is very close to the profession of faith, because I would like to connect my remarks to the analysis of what is happening today, on the worldwide scene, that resembles a universal process of confession, avowal, repentance, expiation, and asked-for forgiveness. One could cite innumerable examples, day after day. But whether we are talking about very ancient crimes or yesterday's crimes, about slavery, the Shoah, apartheid, or even the acts of violence of the Inquisition (concerning which the Pope recently announced that they ought to give rise to an examination of conscience), repentance is always carried out with reference to the very recent juridical concept of "crime against humanity." Because I am preparing to articulate together Profession, the Profession of faith, and Confession, I note in passing and in parentheses (for this would require a long development), that in the fourteenth century it was possible to organize the confession of sins as a function of social and professional categories. The *Sulla Artesana* from 1317 (cited by my colleague Le Goff) prescribes that the penitent in confession be interrogated with reference to his socio-professional status: princes about justice, knights about plunder, merchants, officials, artisans, and laborers about perjury, fraud, lying, theft, and so forth, bourgeois and citizens in general about usury and mortgages, peasants about envy and theft, and so forth.[1]

To repeat, then: if this unconditionality, in principle and *de jure*, makes for the invincible force of the university, it has never been in effect. By reason of this abstract and hyperbolic invincibility, by reason of its very impossibility, this unconditionality exposes as well the weakness or the vulnerability of the university. It exhibits its impotence, the fragility of its defenses against all the powers that command it, besiege it, and attempt to appropriate it. Because it is a stranger to power, because it is heterogeneous to the principle of power, the university is also without any power of its own. That is why I speak of the *university without condition*. I say "the university" because I am distinguishing here, *stricto sensu*, the university from all research institutions that are in the service of economic goals

and interests of all sorts, without being granted in principle the independence of the university; I also say "without condition" to let one hear the connotation of "without power" and "without defense." Because it is absolutely independent, the university is also an exposed, tendered citadel, to be taken, often destined to capitulate without condition, to surrender unconditionally. It gives itself up, it sometimes puts itself up for sale, it risks being simply something to occupy, take over, buy; it risks becoming a branch office of conglomerates and corporations. This is today, in the United States and throughout the world, a major political stake: to what extent does the organization of research and teaching have to be supported, that is, directly or indirectly controlled, let us say euphemistically "sponsored," by commercial and industrial interests? By this logic, as we know, the Humanities are often held hostage to departments of pure or applied science in which are concentrated the supposedly profitable investments of capital foreign to the academic world. A question must then be asked and it is not merely economic, juridical, ethical, or political: can the university (and if so, how?) affirm an unconditional independence, can it claim a sort of *sovereignty* without ever risking the worst, namely, by reason of the impossible abstraction of this sovereign independence, being forced to give up and capitulate without condition, to let itself be taken over and bought at any price? What is needed then is not only a principle of resistance, but a force of resistance – and of dissidence. The deconstruction of the concept of unconditional sovereignty is doubtless necessary and underway, for this is the heritage of a barely secularized theology. In the most visible case of the supposed sovereignty of nation-states, but also elsewhere, the value of sovereignty is thorough dissolution. But one must beware that this necessary deconstruction does not compromise, not too much, the university's claim to independence, that is, to a certain very particular form of sovereignty that I will try to specify later. This would be what is at stake in political decisions and strategies. This stake will remain on the horizon of the hypotheses or professions of faith that I submit to your reflection. How to deconstruct the history (and first of all the academic history) of the principle of indivisible sovereignty even as one claims the unconditional right to say everything, or not to say anything, and to pose all the deconstructive questions that are called for on the subject of man, of sovereignty, of the right to say everything, therefore of literature and democracy, of the worldwide-ization underway, of its techno-economic and confessional aspects, and so forth?

I will not claim that, in the torment threatening the university today and within it some disciplines more than others, this force of resistance, this assumed freedom to say everything in the public space has its unique or privileged place in what is called the Humanities – a concept whose definition it will be advisable to refine, deconstruct, and adjust, beyond a tradition that must also be cultivated. However, this principle of unconditionality *presents itself*, originally and above all, in the Humanities. It has an originary and privileged place of *presentation*, of manifestation, of safekeeping in the Humanities. It has there its space of discussion as well as of reelaboration. All this passes as much by way of literature and languages (that is, the sciences called the sciences of man and culture) as by way of the non-discursive arts, by way of law and philosophy, by way of critique, questioning and, beyond critical philosophy and questioning, by way of deconstruction – there where it is a matter of nothing less than re-thinking the concept of man, the figure of humanity in general, and singularly the one presupposed by what we call, in the university, for the last few centuries, the Humanities. From this point of view at least, deconstruction (and I am not at all embarrassed to say so and even to claim) has its privileged place in the university and in the Humanities as the place of irredentist resistance or even, analogically, as a sort of principle of civil disobedience, even of dissidence in the name of a superior law and a justice of thought. Here let us call *thought* that which at times commands, according to a law above all laws, the justice of this resistance or this dissidence. It is also what puts deconstruction to work or inspires it as justice. This right must be without limit, if I may say so, to authorize the deconstruction of all the determined figures that this sovereign unconditionality may have assumed through history. For this, we have to enlarge and reelaborate the concept of the Humanities. To my mind, it is no longer a matter simply of the conservative and humanist concept with which most often the Humanities and their ancient canons are associated – canons which I believe ought to be protected at any price. This new concept of the Humanities, even as it remains faithful to its tradition, should include law, "legal studies," as well as what is called in this country, where this formation originated, "theory" (an original articulation of literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and so forth), but also, of course, in all these places, deconstructive practices. And we will have to distinguish carefully here between, on the one hand, the principle of freedom, autonomy, resistance, disobedience, or dissidence, the principle that is coextensive with the whole field of academic knowledge and,

on the other hand, its privileged place of *presentation*, of reelaboration, and of thematic discussion, which in my opinion would more properly belong to the Humanities, but to the transformed Humanities. If I link all of this with insistence not only to the question of literatures, to a certain democratic institution that is called literature or literary fiction, to a certain simulacrum and a certain "as if," but also to the question of the profession and of its future, it is because throughout a history of *travail* (usually translated as "work" or "labor" but I will leave it in French for the moment), which is not only trade or craft, then a history of trade or craft, which is not always profession, then a history of the profession, which is not always that of professor, I would like to connect this problematic of the university without condition to a pledge, a commitment, a promise, an act of faith, a declaration of faith, a profession of faith that in an original way ties faith to knowledge in the university, and above all in that place of the self-presentation of unconditionality that will go by the name Humanities. To link in a certain way faith to knowledge, faith in knowledge, is to articulate movements that could be called performative with constative, descriptive, or theoretical movements. A profession of faith, a commitment, a promise, an assumed responsibility, all that calls not upon discourses of knowledge but upon performative discourses that produce the event they speak of. One will therefore have to ask oneself what "professing" means. What is one doing when, performatively, one professes but also when one exercises a profession and singularly the profession of professor? I will thus rely often and at length on Austin's now classic distinction between performative speech acts and constative speech acts. This distinction will have been a great event in the twentieth century – and it will first have been an academic event. It will have taken place *in* the university and in a certain way, it is the Humanities that made it come about and that explored its resources; it is to and through the Humanities that this happened, and its consequences are incalculable. Even while recognizing the power, the legitimacy, and the necessity of the distinction between constative and performative, I have often had occasion, after a certain point, not to put it back in question but to analyze its presuppositions and to complicate them. I will do so once again today, but this time from another point of view and after having made this pair of concepts count for so much, I will end up designating a place where it fails and must fail. This place will be precisely *what happens*, comes to pass, that at which one arrives or that which happens to us, arrives to us, the event, the place of the taking-place – and which cares

as little about the performative – the performative power – as it does about the constative. And this can happen, this can arrive in and by the Humanities.

Now I am going to begin, at once by the end and by the beginning. For I began with the end *as if* it were the beginning.

I

As if the end of work were at the origin of the world. Yes, "as if," I indeed said "as if . . ." At the same time as a reflection on the history of work, that is, *travail*, it is also no doubt a meditation on the "as," the "as such," the "as if" that I will propose to you, and perhaps on a politics of the virtual. Not a virtual politics but a politics *of the* virtual in the cyberspace or cyberworld of worldwide-ization. One of the mutations that affect the place and the nature of university *travail* is today a certain delocalizing virtualization of the space of communication, discussion, publication, archivization. It is not the virtualization that is absolutely novel in its structure, for as soon as there is a trace, there is also some virtualization; this is the "abc" of deconstruction. What is new, quantitatively, is the acceleration of the rhythm, the extent and powers of capitalization of such a virtuality. Hence the necessity to rethink the concepts of the possible and the impossible. This new technical "stage" of virtualization (computerization, digitalization, virtually immediate worldwide-ization of readability, tele-work, and so forth) destabilizes, as we well know, the university habitat. It upsets the university's topology, disturbs everything that organizes the places defining it, namely, the territory of its fields and its disciplinary frontiers as well as its places of discussion, its field of battle, its *Kampfplatz*, its theoretical battlefield – and the communitary structure of its "campus." Where is to be found the communitary *place* and the social bond of a "campus" in the cyberspatial age of the computer, of tele-work, and of the World Wide Web? Where does the exercise of democracy, be it a university democracy, have its *place* in what my colleague Mark Poster calls "CyberDemocracy"?[2] One has the clear sense that, more radically, what has been upset in this way is the topology of the event, the experience of the singular taking-place.

What then are we doing when we say "as if"? Notice that I have not yet said "*it is* as if the end of work were at the origin of the world." I have not said anything whatsoever that was and I have not said it in

a principal clause. I left suspended, I abandoned to its interruption a strange subordinate clause ("as if the end of work were at the origin of the world"), as if I wanted to let an example of the "as if" work all by itself, outside any context, to attract your attention. What are we doing when we say "as if"? What does an "if" do? We are acting *as if* we were responding to at least one of several of the possibilities – or to more than one at a time – that I am going to begin to enumerate.

1. *First possibility*: by saying "as if," are we abandoning ourselves to the arbitrary, to dream, to imagination, to utopia, to hypothesis? Everything I am preparing to say will tend to show that the answer cannot be so simple.

2. Or, *second possibility*, with this "as if" are we putting to work certain types of judgment, for example those "reflective judgments" concerning which Kant regularly said that they operated "as if" (*als ob*) an understanding contained or comprehended the unity of the variety of empirical laws or "as if it were a lucky chance favoring our design [*gleich* als ob *es ein glücklicher unsre Absicht begünstigender Zufall wäre*]."[3] In this latter case, that of the Kantian discourse, the gravity, seriousness, and irreducible necessity of the "as if" points to nothing less than the finality of nature, that is, a finality whose concept, Kant tells us, is among the most unusual and difficult to pin down. For, he says, it is neither a *concept of nature* nor a *concept of freedom*. Therefore, although Kant does not say as much in this context and for good reason, this "as if" would itself be something like an agent of deconstructive ferment since it in some way exceeds and comes close to disqualifying the two orders that are so often distinguished and opposed, the order of nature and the order of freedom. The opposition that is thereby disconcerted by a certain "as if" is the very one that organizes all our fundamental concepts and all the oppositions in which they are determined and in which they determine, precisely, what is proper to man, the humanity of man (*phusis/techné*, *phusis/nomos*, nature *versus* humanity, and within this humanity, which is also that of the Humanities, one finds sociality, law, history, politics, community, and so forth, all set within the same oppositions). Kant also explains to us, in effect, that the "as if" plays a decisive role in the coherent organization of our experience. Now, Kant is also someone who attempted, in an extremely complex fashion, to both justify and limit the role of the Humanities in teaching, culture, or the critique of taste.[4] This was recalled and analyzed in a magisterial fashion by two of my friends and colleagues to whom I owe a lot: Sam Weber in an inaugural book in many ways, and one

that is very dear to me, *Institution and Interpretation*,[5] followed recently by a remarkable article on "The Future of the Humanities,"[6] and Peggy Kamuf who treats this same text of Kant's in her admirable book on *The Division of Literature, or the University in Deconstruction*.[7] Sam Weber and Peggy Kamuf say decisive things, and I refer you to them, concerning what is happening between deconstruction, the history of the university, and the Humanities. What I am trying to explore here would be another avenue on the same site, another path through the same landscape. And if my trajectory appears different here, I will doubtless cross their tracks at more than one intersection. For example, in the reference to Kant. There is nothing surprising in the fact that the *Third Critique* comes back with such insistence in the United States in all the discourses on the institutions and the disciplines tied to the Humanities, on the problems of professionalization that are posed there. Kant also has a whole set of propositions on this subject, notably on work, craft, and the arts, both the liberal arts and the salaried, mercenary arts, but also on the conflict of the faculties – something I discussed many years ago in *Economimesis* and *Mochlos*.[8] This recurrent appeal to Kant may be especially remarked, in fact, in the United States where, for reasons that should be analyzed, the term *Humanities* has known a particular history and still appears at the twentieth century's end in the figure of a problem, with a semantic energy, a conflictual presence, and resonance that it has doubtless never had or that it lost in Europe and no doubt everywhere else in the world where American culture is not prevalent. There are certainly interwoven reasons for this, in particular that of the effects of the worldwide-ization underway that always passes by way of the United States, its political, techno-economic, and techno-scientific power, in a more unavoidable and visible fashion.

3. Finally, *third possibility*, does not a certain "as if" mark, in thousands of ways, the structure and the mode of being of all objects belonging to the academic field called the Humanities, whether they be the Humanities of yesterday or today or tomorrow? I will not hasten for the moment to reduce these "objects" to fictions, simulacra, or works of art, while acting as if we already had at our disposal reliable concepts of fiction, of art, or of the work. But if one were to follow common sense, couldn't one say that the modality of the "as if" appears appropriate to what are called *oeuvres*, singularly *oeuvres d'art*, the fine arts (painting, sculpture, cinema, music, poetry, literature, and so forth), but also, to complex degrees and according to complex stratifications, to all the discursive idealities, to all

the symbolic or cultural productions that define, in the general field of the university, the disciplines said to be in the Humanities – and even the juridical disciplines and the production of laws, and even a certain structure of scientific objects in general?

I have already quoted two of Kant's "as if"s. There is at least one more. I would not subscribe to it without reservation. With it, Kant seems to me to place too much confidence in a certain opposition of *nature* and *art*, at the very moment when the "as if" makes it tremble, just as we saw happen a moment ago to the opposition of *nature* and *freedom*. But I recall this remark *for two reasons*: on the one hand, so as to suggest that what is perhaps at issue here is changing the sense, the status, the stake of the Kantian "as" and "as if," which would be a subtle displacement but one whose consequences seem to me limitless; on the other hand, I am preparing to cite an "as if" that describes an essential modality of experience of works of art, in other words, of that which, to a large extent, defines the field of the classical Humanities insofar as it concerns us here today. Kant says that "in a product of beautiful art, we must become conscious that it is art and not nature; but yet the purposiveness in its form must seem to be as free from all constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of mere nature."[9]

In a provisional way and so as to introduce from a distance my remarks, my hypotheses, or my profession of faith, I wanted to draw your attention to this troubling thing we do when we say "as if" and to the connection this troubling thing, which looks like a simulacrum, might have with the questions I am preparing to address, the conjoined questions of profession and confession, of the university with or without condition – of the humanity of man and of the Humanities, of work [*travail*] and of literature.

For what I would like to attempt with you is this apparently impossible thing: to link this "as if" to the thinking of an event, that is, to the thinking of this thing that *perhaps* happens, that is supposed to *take place*, that is supposed to find its place – and that *would* happen here for example to what is called *le travail* (work). It is generally believed that, in order to happen, to take place, an event must interrupt the order of the "as if," and therefore that its "place" must be real, effective, concrete enough to belie the whole logic of the "as if." What happens, then, when the place itself becomes virtual, freed from its territorial (and thus national) rootedness and when it becomes subject to the modality of an "as if"? I will speak of an event that, without necessarily coming about tomorrow, would remain perhaps – and I underscore *perhaps* – to come: to come *through*

the university, to come about and to come *through* it, *thanks* to it, *in* what is called the university, assuming that it has ever been possible to identify an *inside* of the university, that is, a *proper essence of the sovereign university*, and within it, something that one could also identify, properly, under the name of "Humanities." I am thus referring to a university that would be what it always should have been or always should have represented, that is, from its inception and in principle: sovereignly autonomous, unconditionally free in its institution, sovereign in its speech, in its writing, in its thinking. In a thinking, a writing, a speech that would be not only the archives or the productions of *knowledge* but also performative works, which are far from being neutral utopias. And why, we will wonder, would the principle of this unconditional freedom, its active and militant respect, its effective enactment, its *mise en oeuvre*, be confided above all to the new "Humanities" rather than to any other disciplinary field?

By putting forward these questions, which still resemble virtual desires taken for realities, or at best barely serious promises, I seem to be professing some faith. It is as if I were engaging in a profession of faith. Some would say perhaps that I am dreaming out loud while already engaging in a profession of faith. Assuming that one knows what a profession of faith is, one may then wonder who is responsible for such a profession of faith. Who signs it? Who professes it? I do not dare ask who is its professor but perhaps we should analyze a certain inheritance, in any case a certain proximity between the future of the academic profession, that of the profession of professor, the principle of authority that derives from it, and the profession of faith.

What does *to profess* mean in sum? And what stakes are still hidden in this question as concerns *travail*, work, career, trade, craft (whether professional, professorial, or not), for the university of tomorrow and, within it, for the Humanities?

This word "profess" of Latin origin (*profiteor, fessus sum, eri*; *pro et fateor*, which means to speak, from which comes also fable and thus a certain "as if"), means, in French as in English, *to declare openly, to declare publicly*. In English, says the *OED*, it has only a religious sense before 1300. "To make one's profession" means then "to take the vows of some religious order." The declaration of the one who professes is a *performative* declaration in some way. It pledges like an act of sworn faith, an oath, a testimony, a manifestation, an attestation, or a promise, a commitment. To profess is to make a pledge while committing one's responsibility. "To make profession of" is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one's word

and believe this declaration. I insist on this performative value of the declaration that professes while promising. One must underscore that constative utterances and discourses of pure knowledge, in the university or elsewhere, do not belong, as such, to the order of the profession in the strict sense. They belong perhaps to the craft, career, the "métier" (competence, knowledge, know-how), but not to the profession understood in a rigorous sense. The discourse of profession is always, in one way or another, a free profession of faith; in its pledge of responsibility, it exceeds pure techno-scientific knowledge. To profess is to pledge oneself while declaring oneself, while *giving oneself out to be*, while promising this or that. *Grammaticum se professus*, Cicero tells us in the *Tusculanes* (2, 12), is to give oneself out to be a grammarian, a master of grammar. It is neither necessarily to be this or that nor even to be a competent expert; it is to promise to be, to pledge oneself to be that on one's word. *Philosophiam profiter* is to profess philosophy: not simply to be a philosopher, to practice or teach philosophy in some pertinent fashion, but to pledge oneself, with a public promise, to devote oneself publicly, to give oneself over to philosophy, to bear witness, or even to fight for it. And what matters here is this promise, this pledge of responsibility, which is reducible to neither theory nor practice. To profess consists always in a performative speech act, even if the knowledge, the object, the content of what one professes, of what one teaches or practices remains on the order of the theoretical or the constative. Because the act of professing is a performative speech act and because the event that it is or produces depends only on this linguistic promise, its proximity to the fable, to fabulation, and to fiction, to the "as if," will always be formidable.

What relation is there between professing and working? In the university? In the Humanities?

II

From my first sentence, as soon as I began to speak, I named *le travail*, work, by saying "*As if* the end of work were at the beginning of the world."

What is work, that is, *le travail* (I believe we will have to keep this word in French here)? When and where does *un travail* take place, its place? For lack of time in particular, I cannot enter into a rigorous semantic analysis. Let us recall at least *two features* that concern the university. *Le travail* is not merely action or practice. One can act without working and it is not certain that a *praxis*, in particular a theoretical practice, constitutes, *stricto sensu*, *un travail*. Above all, whoever works is not necessarily

granted the name or status of worker, *travailleur*. The agent or the subject who works, the operator, is not always called a *travailleur* (*laborator*) and the sense seems to be modified when one goes from the verb to the noun: the *travail* of whoever *travaille* in general is not always the labor of a "travailleur." Thus, in the university, among all those who, in one way or another, are supposed to be working there (teachers, staff or administrators, researchers, students), some, notably students, as such, will not ordinarily be called "travailleurs" as long as a salary (*merces*) does not regularly compensate, like a commodity in a market, the activity of a craft, trade, or profession. A fellowship or scholarship will not suffice for this. The student may very well work a lot, he will be held to be a *travailleur*, a worker, on condition of being on the market and only if in addition he performs some task, for example, here in the US, that of the teaching assistant. Inasmuch as he studies, purely and simply, and even if he studies a lot, the student is not held to be a *travailleur*. Even if (and I will insist on this in a moment) every craft, trade, or career is not a profession, the worker is someone whose work is recognized as a craft, trade, or profession on a market. All of these social semantics are rooted, as you know, in a long socio-ideological history that goes back at least to the Christian Middle Ages. One may thus work a lot without being a worker recognized as such in the society.

Another distinction will count for us more and more, which is why I pay it considerable attention right away: one can work a lot, and even work a lot *as a worker*, a *travailleur*, without the effect or the result of the work (the *opus* of the operation) being recognized as a "work," this time in the sense not of the productive activity but of the product, *l'oeuvre*, that which *remains* after and beyond the time of the operation. It would often be difficult to identify and objectify the product of very hard work carried out by the most indispensable and devoted workers, the least well treated workers in society, the most invisible ones as well (those who dispose of the trash of our cities, for example, or those who control air traffic, more generally those who guarantee the mediations or transmissions of which there remain only virtual traces – and this field is enormous and growing steadily). There are thus workers whose work, and even whose productive work, does not give rise to substantial or real products, only to virtual specters. But when work gives rise to real or realizable products, one must then introduce another essential distinction within the immense variety of products and structures of products, within all the forms of materiality, of reproducible ideality, of use and exchange values, and so forth. Certain products of this working activity are held to be objectivizable use or

exchange values without deserving, it is believed, the title of *oeuvres* (I can say this word only in French). To other works, it is believed that the name of *oeuvres* can be attributed. Their appropriation, their relation with liberal or salaried work, with the signature or the authority of the author, and with the market are of a great structural and historical complexity that I will not analyze here. The first example of *oeuvres* that come to mind are *oeuvres d'art* (visual, musical or discursive, a painting, a concerto, a poem, a novel), but since we are interrogating the enigma of the concept of *oeuvre*, we would have to extend this field as soon as we tried to discern the type of work proper to the university and especially in the Humanities. In the Humanities, one no doubt treats in particular *oeuvres* (*oeuvres d'art*, either works of discursive art or not, literary or not, canonical or not). But in principle the treatment of works, in the academic tradition, depends on *a knowledge that itself does not consist* in *oeuvres*. To profess or to be a professor, in this tradition that is, precisely, undergoing mutation, was no doubt to produce and to teach a knowledge even while professing, that is, even while promising to take a responsibility that is not exhausted in the act of knowing or teaching. But, in the classical-modern tradition that we are interrogating, to know how to profess, or to profess a knowledge, or even how to produce a knowledge is not to produce *oeuvres*. A professor, as such, does not sign an *oeuvre*. His or her authority as professor is not that of the author of an *oeuvre*, a work. It is perhaps this that has been changing over the last few decades, encountering the frequently indignant resistance and protestations of those who believe they can discern, in writing and in the language, between criticism and creation, reading and writing, the professor and the author, and so forth. The deconstruction underway is no doubt not unrelated to this mutation. It is even its essential phenomenon, a more complex signal than its detractors admit and which we must take into account. In principle, if we refer to the canonical state of certain conceptual distinctions, and if we rely on the massive and largely accepted distinction between performatives and constatives, we may deduce from it the following propositions:

1. All work, all *travail* (work in general or the work of the worker) is not necessarily performative, that is, it does not produce an event; it does not make this event, it is not by itself, in itself, the event, it does not consist in the event it speaks of, even if it is productive, even if it leaves a product behind, whether or not this product is an *oeuvre*.

2. Every performative doubtless produces something, it makes an event come about, but what it *makes* in this way and *makes come about in this way* is not necessarily an *oeuvre*; it must always be authorized by a set of

conventions or conventional fictions, of "as if"s on which an institutional community is founded and to which it agrees.

3. Now, as traditionally defined, the university would be a place identical to itself (a non-substitutable locality, rooted in the ground, limiting the substitutability of places in cyberspace), a place, a single place, that gives rise only to the production and teaching of a *knowledge* [*savoir*], that is, of knowledges [*connaissances*] whose form of utterance is not, in principle, performative but theoretical and constative, even if the *objects* of this knowledge are sometimes of a philosophical, ethical, political, normative, prescriptive, or axiological nature; and even if, in a still more troubling fashion, the structure of these objects of knowledge is a structure of fiction obeying the strange modality of the "as if" (poem, novel, *oeuvre d'art* in general, but also everything that, in the structure of a performative utterance – for example of the juridical or constitutional type – does not belong to the realist and constative description of what is, but produces the event on the basis of the qualified "as if" of a supposed established convention). In a classical university, in conformity with its accepted definition, one practices the study, the *knowledge* of the normative, prescriptive, performative, and fictional possibilities that I have just enumerated and that are more often the object of the Humanities. But this study, this knowledge, this teaching, this *doctrine* ought to belong to the theoretical and constative order. The act of *professing* a doctrine may be a performative act, but the *doctrine* is not. This is a limitation concerning which I will say that *one must* indeed, at the same time, conserve it *and* change it, in a non-dialectical mode:

1. One must reaffirm it because a certain neutral theoreticism is the chance for the critical and more-than-critical (deconstructive) unconditionality that we are talking about and that, in principle, we all uphold, we all declare to uphold, in the university.

2. One must change while reaffirming this limitation because it must be admitted, and professed, that this unconditional theoreticism will itself always suppose a performative profession of faith, a belief, a decision, a public pledge, an ethico-political responsibility, and so forth. Here is found the principle of the unconditional resistance of the university. One may say that, from the point of view of this classical auto-definition of the university, there is no place in it, no essential, intrinsic, proper place either for non-theoretical work, for discourses of a performative type, or, *a fortiori*, for those singular performative acts engendering *today*, in certain places in the Humanities today, what are called *oeuvres*. The classical auto-definition and auto-limitation that I have just evoked characterized the

academic space reserved formerly for the Humanities, even where the *contents, objects, and themes* of these produced or taught forms of knowledge were of a philosophical, moral, political, historical, linguistic, aesthetic, anthropological nature, that is, belonged to fields where evaluations, normativity, and prescriptive experience are admitted and sometimes constitutive. In the classical tradition, the Humanities define a field of knowledge, sometimes of knowledge production, but without engendering signed works or *oeuvres*, whether these are works of art or not. I will once again invoke Kant in order to define these classical limits assigned to the traditional Humanities by those who demonstrate their necessity. Kant sees there first of all a "propaedeutic" to the Fine Arts rather than a practice of the arts. *Propaedeutic* is his word. The *Third Critique* specifies that this pedagogic preparation, this simple introduction to the arts will come at that point in the order of knowledge (the knowledge of what *is* and not of what *ought to be*) where it must not involve any "prescriptions" (*Vorschriften*). The Humanities (*Humaniora*) must prepare without prescribing: they would propose merely forms of knowledge that, moreover, remain preliminary (*Vorkenntnisse*). And without bothering, in this text, with considerations of the long and sedimented history of the word "Humanities," Kant discerns there solely the study that favors the legal communication and sociability among men, that which gives the taste of the common sense of humanity (*allgemeinen Menschensinn*). There is, then, a theoreticism here, but also a Kantian humanism that privileges the constative discourse and the form "knowledge." The Humanities are and must be sciences. Elsewhere, in "Mochlos," I tried to lay out my reservations on this subject even as I saluted the logic one finds at work in *The Conflict of the Faculties*. This theoreticism limits or forbids the possibility for a professor to produce *oeuvres* or even prescriptive or performative utterances in general; but it is also what permits Kant to withdraw the faculty of philosophy from any outside power, notably from State power and guarantees it an unconditional freedom to say what is true and to conclude as to the subject of truth, provided that it does so *in the inside* of the university. This final limitation (to say *publicly* all that one believes to be true and what one believes one must say, but only *inside* the university), has never been, I believe, either tenable or respectable, in fact or by law. But the transformation underway of public cyberspace, which is public on a worldwide scale, beyond state-national frontiers, seems to render it more archaic than ever. And yet I believe (this is *like* a profession of faith that I address to you and submit to your judgment) that the idea of this space of the academic type, which has to be protected by

a kind of absolute immunity, as if its interior were inviolable, is an idea we must reaffirm, declare, and profess endlessly – even if the protection of this academic immunity (in the sense in which we speak of biological, diplomatic, or parliamentary immunity) is never pure, can always develop dangerous processes of auto-immunity, and must not prevent us from addressing ourselves to the university's outside, without any utopic neutrality. This freedom or immunity of the University and above all of its Humanities, is something we must lay claim to while committing ourselves to it with all our might – not only in a verbal and declarative fashion, but in work, in act, and in what we make happen with events.

Against the horizon of these preliminary reminders and these classic definitions, one may see certain questions taking shape. They have at least *two forms*, for the moment, but we might see them change and become more specific as we go along.

1. First, if this is indeed the way things are, if in the classical and modern academic tradition (up through the nineteenth-century model) normative and prescriptive performativity, and *a fortiori* the production of *oeuvres*, must remain foreign to the field of university work, even in the Humanities, foreign to their teaching, that is, in the strict sense of the word, to their theory, to their theorems as discipline or doctrine (*Lehre*), then what does it mean "to profess"? What is the difference between a trade or craft and a profession? And then between any profession and the profession of the professor? What is the difference between the different types of authority granted to craft or trade, to profession, and to the profession of the professor?

2. Second, has something happened to this classical-modern university and to these Humanities? Is there something happening to it or promising to happen to it that upsets these definitions, either because this mutation transforms the essence of the university, and in it the future of the Humanities, or because it consists in revealing, through the seismic activities underway, that this essence has never conformed to these definitions however obvious and indisputable they are? And here once again the question "what does it mean 'to profess' for a professor?" would be the fault line of this seismic activity underway or still to come. What happens not only when one takes into account the performative value of "profession" but when one accepts that a professor produces "*oeuvres*" and not just knowledge or pre-knowledge? To make our way toward the definition of this type of particular performative action that is the act of professing, and then the act of profession of a professor, and

then finally of a professor of Humanities, we must pursue further our analysis of the distinctions between *acting, doing, producing, working, work in general, and the work of the worker.* If I had the time, I could recall once again and discuss some conceptual distinctions Kant makes between art and nature, *tekhné* and *physis*, as well as between *Tun* (*facere*) on the one hand and, on the other, acting (*Handeln*), realizing (*wirken*) in general (*agere*), or between the product (*Produkt*) as *oeuvre* (*Werk, opus*) on the one hand, and effect (*Wirkung, effectus*) on the other hand.[10] In the same passage, Kant distinguishes between art and science, art and craft (*Handwerke*), liberal art (*freie Kunst*) and mercenary art (*Lohnkunst*). Let us return for a moment to my equivocal expression: *the end of work.* It may designate the suspension, the death, the term of the activity called work. It can also designate the object, the aim, the product, or the *oeuvre* of the work. All action, all activity, as we were saying, is not work. Work is no more reducible to the activity of the act than it is to the productivity of the production, even if, out of confusion, these three concepts are often linked. We know better than ever today that a gain in production can correspond to a diminishing of work. The virtualization of work has always, and today more than ever, been able to complicate infinitely this disproportion between production and work. There are also activities and even productive activities that do not constitute work. The experience of what we call work, *travail*, signifies also the passivity of a certain affect; it is sometimes the suffering and even the torture of a punishment. *Travail*, is that not *tripalium*, an instrument of torture? If I underscore this doloristic figure of punishment and expiation, it is not only in order to recognize the biblical legacy ("in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"). It is Kant, once again, who sees in this expiatory dimension of work a universal trait that transcends biblical traditions.[11] If I underscore this expiatory interpretation of work, it is also so as to *articulate* or in any case interrogate *together* two phenomena that I am tempted today to gather into the same question: why is it that, on the one hand, we are witnessing throughout the world a proliferation of scenes of repentance and expiation (there is today a theatrical worldwide-ization of the confession, of which we could cite many examples) and, on the other hand, a proliferation of all sorts of discourses on the end of work?

Work supposes, engages, and situates a living body. It assigns it a stable and identifiable place even there where the work is said to be "non-manual," "intellectual," or "virtual." Work thus supposes a zone of passivity, a passion, as much as it does a productive activity. Moreover,

we must also distinguish between social work in general, craft or trade, and profession. Not all work is organized according to the unity of a craft or a statutory and recognized competence. As for "crafts" or "trades," even precisely where they are gathered under these names by legitimate institutions or by corporations, not all of them are called, not all of them can easily be called, in our languages, professions, at least when these languages remember their Latin. Even if this were not impossible, one would not easily speak of the profession of the seasonal farm worker, the priest, or the boxer since their know-how, their competence, and their activity suppose neither the permanence nor the social responsibility granted by the, in principle, secular society to someone who exercises a profession by freely committing himself to accomplish a duty. One would more easily and above all speak of the profession of physician, lawyer, professor, as if profession, linked more to the liberal and non-mercenary arts, implied a pledge of responsibility freely declared, very nearly under oath – in a word *professed*. In the lexicon of "professing," I will emphasize less the authority, the supposed competence, and the guarantee of the profession or of the professor than, once again, the pledge to be honored, the declaration of responsibility. For lack of time, I must leave aside this long history of the "profession," of "professionalization" that leads to the current seismic activity. Let us retain, all the same, one essential trait. The idea of profession supposes that beyond and in addition to knowledge, know-how, and competence, a testimonial commitment, a freedom, a responsibility under oath, a sworn faith obligates the subject to render accounts to some tribunal yet to be defined. Finally, all those who exercise a profession are not professors. We will thus have to take account of these sometimes hazy distinctions: between work, activity, production, trade or craft, profession, professor, the professor who dispenses a knowledge or professes a doctrine, and the professor who can also, as such, sign *oeuvres* – and who is perhaps already doing so or will do so tomorrow.

III

As if, I said at the outset, the end of work were at the origin of the world. I am indeed saying "as if": *as if* the world began there where work ends, as if the *mondialisation du monde* (which is what I call in French the *worldwideization of the world*, in short, what you call, in this country, globalization) had as both its horizon and its origin the disappearance of what we call *le travail*, this old word, painfully laden with so much meaning and

history: *work*, *labor*, *travail*, and so forth, which always has the sense of real, effective, and not virtual work.

By beginning or by pretending to begin with an "as if," I am neither entering into the fiction of a possible future nor into the resurrection of an historical or mythical past, still less of a revealed origin. The rhetoric of this "as if" belongs neither to the science fiction of a utopia to come (a world without work, "at the end without end," *in fine sine fine* of an eternal sabbatical rest, a Sabbath without evening, as in St. Augustine's *City of God*) nor to the poetics of a nostalgia turned toward a golden age or an earthly paradise, toward that moment in Genesis when, before there is sin, the sweat of laboring brows would not yet have begun to flow, either in man's toil and plowing or in woman's labor of childbirth. In these two interpretations of the "as if," science fiction or memory of the immemorial, it would be *as if* in fact the beginnings of the world originarily excluded work; there would *not yet* or *no longer* be work. It would be *as if*, between the concept of world and the concept of *travail*, there were no originary harmony, thus no given accord or possible synchrony. Original sin would have introduced work into the world and the end of work would announce the terminal phase of an expiation. The logical skeleton of this proposition in "as if" is that the world and work cannot coexist. One would have to choose the world or work, whereas according to common sense, it is difficult to imagine a world without work or some work that is not *of the world* or *in the world*. The Paulinian conversion of the Greek concept of *cosmos* introduces into the Christian world, among many other associated meanings, the assignation to expiatory work. I recalled a moment ago that the concept of *travail*, work, is laden with meanings, history, and equivocations, and that it is difficult to think it beyond good and evil. Although it is always associated simultaneously with dignity, life, production, history, the good, freedom, it connotes no less often evil, suffering, pain, sin, punishment, servitude. But the concept of world is no less obscure, in its European, Greek, Jewish, Christian, Islamic history, between science, philosophy, and faith, whether the world is wrongly identified with the earth, with the humans on earth, here below or with the heavenly world above, or with the cosmos, or with the universe, and so forth. Successful or not, Heidegger's project, beginning with *Sein und Zeit*, will have sought to remove the concept of world and of being-in-the-world from these Greek or Christian presuppositions. It is difficult to put any faith in the word "world" without careful prior analyses, and especially when one wants to think it with or without work, a work whose concept branches

out into the notions of activity, of the doing or *making* of technics, on the one hand, with passivity, affect, suffering, punishment, and passion, on the other hand. Whence the difficulty of understanding the "as if" with which I began: "as if the end of work were at the origin of the world." Once again, I am thinking this phrase in French, and I insist on that since the French of "globalization," *mondialisation*, marks a reference to this notion of world charged with a great deal of semantic history, notably a Christian history: the world, as we were saying a moment ago, is neither the universe, nor the earth, nor the terrestrial globe, nor the *cosmos*.

No, in my mind, this "as if" should not signal either toward the utopia or the improbable future of a science fiction or toward the dream of an immemorial or mythological past *in illo tempore*. This "as if" takes account, in the present, of two commonplaces, and it puts them to the test: on the one hand, there is a lot of talk about the end of work and, on the other hand, there is just as much talk about a "globalization," a worldwide-ization of the world, a becoming-world of the world. And these are always associated with each other. I borrow the expression "end of work," as you have doubtless already guessed, from the title of a recent but already well-known book by Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*.[12] As you also know, this book gathers up a fairly widespread sort of *doxa* concerning the effects of what Rifkin calls the "Third Industrial Revolution." This revolution has the potential, in his opinion, to be "a powerful force for good and evil," and the "new information and telecommunication technologies have the potential to both liberate and destabilize civilization" (xviii). I don't know if it is true that, as Rifkin claims, we are entering "a new phase in world history": "fewer and fewer workers will be needed to produce the goods and services for the global population." "*The End of Work*," he adds naming thus his own book, "examines the technological innovations and market-directed forces that are moving us to the edge of a near workerless world" (xvi).

What would be the consequences of this from the point of view of the university? To know whether these propositions are literally "true," one would have to agree about the meaning of each of these words (end, history, world, work, production, goods, etc.). I have neither the means nor the time and therefore no intention to discuss directly either this book or this serious and immense problematic, notably the concepts of world and work that are mobilized here. Whether or not one adopts the premises and the conclusions of a discourse like Rifkin's, one must

recognize at least (this is the minimal consensus from which I will set out) that something serious is indeed happening or is about to happen to what we call "work," "tele-work," virtual work, and to what we call "world" – and therefore to the being-in-the-world of what is still called man. We must also admit that this depends for a large part on a techno-scientific mutation that, in the cyberworld, in the world of the Internet, of e-mail, and of cellular telephones, affects tele-work, the virtualization of work and, at the same time as the communication of knowledge, at the same time as any putting-into-common and any "community," the experience of place, of taking place, of the event, and of the *oeuvre*: of that which happens, comes about, or as I would prefer to say, that which *arrives*.

I am not going to enter into this problematic of the so-called "end of work," which was not altogether absent from certain texts of Marx or Lenin. As for the latter, he associated the progressive reduction of the workday with the process that would bring about the complete disappearance of the State.[13] Rifkin sees in the third technological revolution underway an absolute mutation. The first two revolutions, that of steam, coal, steel, and textile (in the nineteenth century) and then that of electricity, petroleum, and the automobile (in the twentieth century), did not radically affect the history of work. This is because they both freed up a sector where the machine had not penetrated and where human labor, non-machine and non-substitutable by the machine, was still available. After these two technical revolutions comes ours, therefore, the third one, that of cyberspace, micro-computing, and robotics. Here, it seems that there exists no fourth zone where the unemployed can be put to work. A saturation by machines heralds the end of the worker, thus a certain end of work. End of *Der Arbeiter* and his age, as Jünger might have said. Rifkin's book treats teachers and more generally what he calls the "sector of knowledge" as a special case within the mutation underway. In the past, when new technologies replaced workers in some sector or another, new spaces appeared to absorb the laborers who lost their jobs. But today, when agriculture, industry, and services lay off millions because of technological progress, the only category of workers spared would be that of "knowledge," an "elite of entrepreneurs, scientists, technicians, computer programmers, professional educators, and consultants" (xvii). But this remains a narrow sector, unable to absorb the mass of the unemployed. Such would be the dangerous singularity of our age. Rifkin does not speak of unemployed teachers or aspiring professors, in particular in the Humanities.

I will not treat the objections one could make to these kinds of discourse, in their generality, neither as concerns the so-called "end of work" nor with regard to the so-called "worldwide-ization." In both cases, which are moreover closely linked, if I had to treat them head-on, I would try to distinguish, in a preliminary fashion, between the massive and hardly contestable phenomena that are registered with these words, on the one hand, and, on the other, the use people make of these words without concept. In fact, no one will deny that something is indeed happening to work in this century, to the reality and to the concept of work – active or actual work. What is happening there is indeed an effect of techno-science, with the worldwide-izing virtualization and delocalization of tele-work. What is happening indeed accentuates a certain tendency toward the asymptotic reduction of work-time, as work in real time and localized in the same place as the body of the worker. All of this affects work in the classic forms we have inherited, in the new experience of borders, of the nation-state, of virtual communication, of the speed and spread of information. This evolution goes in the direction of a certain worldwide-ization; it is undeniable and fairly well known. But these phenomenal indices remain partial, heterogeneous, unequal in their development; they call for close analysis and no doubt new concepts. Moreover, between these obvious indices and the doxic use – others might say the ideological inflation – the rhetorical and often hazy complacency with which everyone gives in to the words "end of work" and "globalization," there is a gap. I do not wish to bridge this gap in a facile way and I believe one must sternly criticize those who forget it is there. For they attempt thereby to induce forgetfulness of zones in the world, populations, nations, groups, classes, individuals who, massively, are the excluded victims of the movement called "the end of work" and "globalization" or "worldwide-ization." These victims suffer either because they lack the work they would need or else because they work too much for the salary they receive in exchange on a worldwide market that is so violently inegalitarian. This capitalistic situation (there where capital plays an essential role between the actual and the virtual) is more tragic in absolute figures than it has ever been in the history of humanity. Humanity has perhaps never been further from the worldwide-izing or worldwide-ized homogeneity of "work" and "without work" that is often alleged. A large part of humanity is "without work" just where it would like to have more work, and another has too much work just where it would like to have less, or even to be done with a job that is so poorly paid on the market. This history began a long time ago. It is interwoven

with the real and semantic history of "craft," "trade," and "profession." Rifkin is acutely conscious of the tragedy that could also ensue from this "end of work" that does not have the sabbatical or dominical sense it has in the Augustinian *City of God*. But in his moral and political conclusions, when he wants to define the responsibilities to be assumed in the face of "the technological storm clouds on the horizon," in the face of "a new age of global markets and automated production," he comes back to – and I believe this is neither fortuitous nor acceptable without examination – the Christian language of "fraternity," of "qualities not easily reducible to or replaceable by machines," of "renewed meaning and purpose in life," of "renewal of community life," of "rebirth of the human spirit"; he even envisions new forms of charity, for example "providing shadow wages for volunteering time, imposing a value-added tax on the products and services of the high-tech era to be used exclusively to guarantee a social wage for the poor in return for performing community service" and so forth (291–93).

If I had had the time to retrace it with you, I would no doubt still have insisted, on the time of work, while taking frequent inspiration from the research of my colleague Jacques Le Goff. In the chapter "Temps et travail" in his *Un autre Moyen Age*, he shows how, in the fourteenth century, there already coexisted demands for prolonging and demands for reducing the duration of work (69–71). We have here the premises for workers' rights and a right to work in the form in which they will later be inscribed in human rights. The figure of the humanist is a response to the question of work. In the theology of work that dominates the period and that is no doubt not dead today, the humanist is someone who begins to secularize the time of work and the monastic time schedule. Time, which is no longer just a gift of God, can be calculated and sold. In the iconography of the fourteenth century, the clock sometimes represents the attribute of the humanist[14] – the same clock that I am obliged to watch and that keeps a strict watch over the lay worker that I am here. I would have liked to speak to you for hours about the *hour*, about that purely fictional countable unit, about this "as if" that regulates, orders, and makes time (*fiction* is what *figures* but also what *makes*), the time of work outside and within the university, where everything, courses, seminars, lectures, is counted by hourly segments. The "academic quarter hour" is itself regulated by the hour. Deconstruction is also the question of the hour, a crisis of the unit called "hour." It would also have been necessary to follow the trace of that tripartite classification that, since the ninth to eleventh centuries, has divided society into the three

orders of clerks, warriors, and workers (*oratores*, *bellatores*, *laboratores*); and then the hierarchy of crafts (noble or servile, licit or illicit, *negotia illicita*, *opera servilia*, forbidden on Sunday) (89). Le Goff shows how the unity of the world of work, as distinct from the world of prayer and the world of war, if it ever existed, "did not last very long" (102). After the "contempt for the crafts . . . a new frontier of contempt is laid down which passes through the middle of new classes, and even the middle of the professions" (ibid.). Although he does not distinguish, it seems to me, between "craft" and "profession" (as I believe one must do), Le Goff also describes the process that gives birth in the twelfth century to a "theology of work" and to the transformation of the tripartite schema (*oratores*, *bellatores*, *laboratores*) into "more complex" schemas, which is explained by the differentiation of economic and social structures and by a more extensive division of work (165). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the "scholarly craft" appears as the hierarchy of *scolares* and *magistri* that will be the prelude to universities. Abelard had to choose between *litterae* and *arma*. He sacrificed "*pompa militari gloriae*" for "*studium litterarum*." I would be tempted to situate the profession of the professor, in the strict sense, at this highly symbolic moment of the pledge by which, for example, Abelard assumed the responsibility to respond to the injunction or the appeal: "*tu eris magister in aeternum*" (179), even if, as Le Goff emphasizes, he continued to describe his career in military terms, dialectics remaining an arsenal and the *disputationes* battles. It is often the figure and the name of *philosopher* (181), of the professor *as* philosopher, that becomes necessary in a new situation. The university is thought and is represented from the privileged place of the philosophical: within and outside the Humanities. There is nothing surprising in Kant's granting such a privilege to the Faculty of Philosophy in his architecture of the university. If for deconstruction, to a certain extent at least, philosophy is at once a privileged reference, resource, *and* target, this may be explained no doubt in part by this dominant tradition. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, scholarly life becomes a craft or trade (*negotia scholaria*). One then speaks of *pecunia* and *laus* to define what compensates the work and research of new students and scholars. Salary and glory articulate between them economic functioning and professional conscience.

What I wish to suggest with these meager historical indications is that one of the tasks to come of the Humanities would be, *ad infinitum*, to know and to think their own history, at least in the directions that we have just seen open up (the act of professing, the theology and the history of work, of knowledge and of the faith in knowledge, the question

of man, of the world, of fiction, of the performative and the "as if," of literature and of *oeuvre*, etc., and then all the concepts that we have just articulated with them). This deconstructive task of the Humanities to come will not let itself be contained within the traditional limits of the departments that today belong, by their very status, to the Humanities. These Humanities to come will cross disciplinary borders without, all the same, dissolving the specificity of each discipline into what is called, often in a very confused way, interdisciplinarity or into what is lumped with another good-for-everything concept, "cultural studies." But I can very well imagine that departments of genetics, natural science, medicine, and even mathematics will take seriously, in their work itself, the questions that I have just evoked. This is especially true – to make one last reference to the Kant of *The Conflict of the Faculties* – besides medicine, of law schools and departments of theology or religion.

I must now hasten my conclusion. I will do so in a dry and telegraphic manner with seven theses, seven propositions, or seven professions of faith. They remain altogether programmatic. Six of them will have only a formalizing value of serving as reminders, of reassembling or recapitulating. The seventh, which will not be sabbatical, will attempt a step beyond the six others toward a dimension of the *event* and of the *taking-place* that I have yet to speak of. Between the first six theses – or professions of faith – and the last, we will get our foothold in preparation for a leap that would carry us beyond the power of the performative "as if," beyond even the distinction between constative and performative on which we have up until now pretended to rely.

The Humanities of tomorrow, in all their departments, will have to study their history, the history of the concepts that, by constructing them, instituted the disciplines and were coextensive with them. There are many signs that this work has already begun, of course. Like all acts of institution, those that we must analyze will have had a performative force and will have put to work a certain "as if." I just said that one must "study" or "analyze." Is it necessary to make clear that such "studies," such "analyses," for the reasons already indicated, would not be purely "theoretical" and neutral? They would lead toward practical and performative transformations and would not forbid the production of singular *oeuvres*. To these fields I will give therefore six, and then seven thematic and programmatic titles, without excluding, obviously, cross-fertilizations and reciprocal interpellations.

1. These new Humanities would treat the history of man, the idea, the figure, and the notion of "what is proper to man" (and a non-finite

series of oppositions by which man is determined, in particular the traditional opposition of the life form called human and of the life form called animal). I will dare to claim, without being able to demonstrate it here, that none of these traditional concepts of "what is proper to man" and thus of what is opposed to it can resist a consistent scientific and deconstructive analysis.

The most urgent guiding thread here would be the problematization (which does not mean the disqualification) of these powerful juridical performatives that have given shape to the modern history of this humanity of man. I am thinking, for example, of the rich history of at least two of these juridical performatives: *on the one hand*, the Declarations of the Rights of Man – *and of the woman* (for the question of sexual differences is not secondary or accidental here and we know that these Declarations of the Rights of Man were being constantly transformed and enriched from 1789 to 1948 and beyond: the figure of man, a promising animal, an animal capable of promising, as Nietzsche said, remains still to come) and, *on the other hand*, the concept of "crime against humanity," which since the end of the Second World War has modified the geopolitical field of international law and will continue to do so more and more, commanding in particular the scene of worldwide confession and of the relation to the historical past in general. The new Humanities will thus treat these performative productions of law or right (rights of man, human rights, the concept of crime against humanity) there where they always imply the promise and, with the promise, the conventionality of the "as if."

2. These new Humanities would treat, in the same style, the history of democracy and the idea of sovereignty, which is also to say, of course, the conditions or rather the unconditionality on which the university and within it the Humanities are supposed (once again the "as if") to live. The deconstruction of this concept of sovereignty would touch not only on international law, the limits of the nation-state, and of its supposed sovereignty, but also on the use made of them in juridico-political discourses concerning the relations between what is called man and woman. This concept of sovereignty has been recently at the center of very poorly thought-out and poorly conducted debates, in my country, on the subject of man–woman "parity" in access to political offices.

3. These new Humanities would treat, in the same style, the history of "professing," of the "profession," and of the professoriat, a history articulated with that of the premises or presuppositions (notably Abrahamic, biblical, and above all Christian) of work and of the worldwide-ized

confession, at the very point where it goes beyond the sovereignty of the head of state, of the nation-state, or even of the "people" in a democracy. An immense problem: how to dissociate democracy from citizenship, from the nation-state, and from the theological idea of sovereignty, even the sovereignty of the people? How to dissociate sovereignty and unconditionality, the power of sovereignty, the powerlessness of unconditionality? Here again, whether it is a question of profession or confession, it is the performative structure of the "as if" that would be at the center of the work.

4. These new Humanities would treat, in the same style, the history of literature. Not only what is commonly called History of literatures or literature themselves, with the great question of its canons (traditional and indisputable objects of the classical Humanities), but the history of the concept of literature, of the modern institution named literature, of its links with fiction and the performative force of the "as if," of its concept of *oeuvre*, author, signature, national language, of its link with the right to say or not to say everything that founds both democracy and the idea of the unconditional sovereignty claimed by the university and within it by what is called, inside and outside departments, the Humanities.

5. These new Humanities would treat, in the same style, the history of profession, the profession of faith, professionalization, and the professoriat. The guiding thread could be, today, what is happening when the profession of faith, the profession of faith of the professor, gives rise not only to the competent exercise of some knowledge in which one has faith, not only to that classical alliance of the constative and the performative, but to singular *oeuvres*, to other strategies of the "as if" that are events and that affect the very limits of the academic field or of the Humanities. We are indeed witnessing the end of a certain figure of the professor and of his or her supposed authority, but I believe, as should now be obvious, in a certain necessity of the professoriat.

6. These new Humanities, finally, would thus treat, in the same style, but in the course of a formidable reflexive reversal, both critical and deconstructive, the history of the "as if" and especially the history of this precious distinction between performative acts and constative acts that seems to have been indispensable for us up until now. It will surely be necessary (things have already begun) to study the history and the limits of such a decisive distinction, and to which I have made reference today as if I believed in it without reservation up until now, as if I held it to be absolutely reliable. This deconstructive work would concern not only the original and brilliant *oeuvre* of Austin but also his rich and

fascinating inheritance, over the last half-century, in particular in the Humanities.

7. To the seventh point, which is not the seventh day, I arrive finally now. Or rather: I *let perhaps* arrive at the end, now, the very thing that, by *arriving*, as an *arrivant* or arriving one [*en arrivant*], by taking place or having place, revolutionizes, overturns, and puts to rout the very authority that is attached, in the university, in the Humanities:

1. to knowledge (or at least to its model of constative language),
2. to the profession or to the profession of faith (or at least to its model of performative language),
3. to the *mise en oeuvre*, the putting to work, at least to the performative putting to work of the "as if."

That which happens, takes place, comes about in general, that which is called event, what is it? Can one ask with regard to it: "What is it?" It must not only surprise the constative and propositional mode of the language of knowledge (*S* is *P*), but also no longer even let itself be commanded by the performative speech act of a subject. As long as I can produce and determine an event by a performative act guaranteed, like any performative, by conventions, legitimate fictions, and a certain "as if," then to be sure I will not say that nothing happens or comes about, but what takes place, arrives, happens, or happens *to me* remains still controllable and programmable within a horizon of anticipation or precomprehension, within a horizon period. It is of the order of the masterable possible, it is the unfolding of what is already possible. It is of the order of power, of the "I can," or "I may." No surprise, thus no event in the strong sense. Which is as much as to say that, to this extent at least, it does not happen, it does not come about, or as I would say in French: *cela n'arrive pas*, it does not arrive. For if there is any, if there is such a thing, the pure singular eventness of *what* arrives or of *who* arrives and arrives *to me* (which is what I call the *arrivant*), it would suppose an *irruption* that punctures the horizon, *interrupting* any performative organization, any convention, or any context that can be dominated by a conventionality. Which is to say that this event takes place only to the extent where it does not allow itself to be domesticated by any "as if," or at least by any "as if" that can already be read, decoded, or articulated *as such*. So that this small word, the *as* of the "as if" as well as the *as* of the "as such" – whose authority founds and justifies every ontology as well as every phenomenology, every philosophy as science or knowledge – this small word, *as*, is then everywhere the name of the

very issue, not to say the target of deconstruction. It is too often said that the performative produces the event of which it speaks. One must also realize that, inversely, where there is a performative, an event worthy of the name cannot arrive. If what arrives belongs to the horizon of the possible, or even of a possible performative, of its power of the "I can," "I may," it does not arrive, it does not happen, in the full sense of the word. As I have often tried to demonstrate, only the impossible can arrive. By frequently pointing out about deconstruction that it is impossible or the impossible, and that it was not a method, a doctrine, a speculative metaphilosophy, but *what arrives, what comes about*, I was relying on the same thought. The examples with which I have attempted to accede to this thought (invention, the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, justice, friendship, and so forth) all confirmed this thinking of the impossible possible, of the possible *as* impossible, of an impossible-possible that can no longer be determined by the metaphysical interpretation of possibility or virtuality. I will not say that this thought of the impossible possible, this other thinking of the possible is a thinking of necessity but rather, as I have also tried to demonstrate elsewhere, a thinking of the "perhaps," of that dangerous modality of the "perhaps" that Nietzsche speaks of and that philosophy has always tried to subjugate. There is no future and no relation to the coming of the event without experience of the "perhaps." What takes place does not have to announce itself as possible or necessary; if it did, its irruption as event would in advance be neutralized. The event belongs to a *perhaps* that is in keeping not with the possible but with the impossible. And its force is therefore irreducible to the force or the power of a performative, even if it gives to the performative, to what is called the force of the performative, its chance and its effectiveness. The force of the event is always stronger than the force of a performative. In the face of what arrives to me, happens to me and even in what I decide (which, as I tried to show in *Politics of Friendship*, must involve a certain passivity, my decision being always the decision of the other), in the face of the other who arrives and arrives to me, all performative force is overrun, exceeded, exposed.

This force in keeping with an experience of the "perhaps" keeps an affinity or a complicity with the "if" of the "as if." And thus with a certain grammar of the conditional: what *if* this arrived? This, that is altogether other, *could well* arrive, this *would* happen. To think *perhaps* is to think "if," "what if?" But you see quite clearly that this "if," this "what if," this "as if" is no longer reducible to all the "as if"s that we have been talking about up until now.[15] And if it is declined according to the

verbal mode of the conditional, this is also to announce the unconditional, the eventual, or the possible event of the impossible unconditional, the altogether other – which we should from now on (and this is something else I have not yet said or done today) dissociate from the theological idea of sovereignty. Basically, this would perhaps be my hypothesis (it is extremely difficult, and almost impossible, impossible to prove): it would be necessary to dissociate a certain unconditional independence of thought, of deconstruction, of justice, of the Humanities, of the University, and so forth from any phantasm of sovereign mastery.

Well, it is once again in the Humanities that one would have to make arrive, make happen, the thinking of this other mode of the "if," this more than difficult, im-possible thing, the exceeding of the performative and of the opposition constative/performative. By thinking, *in* the Humanities, this limit of mastery and of performative conventionality, this limit of performative authority, what is one doing? One is acceding to that place where the always necessary context of the performative operation (a context that is, like every convention, an institutional context) can no longer be saturated, delimited, fully determined. The brilliant invention of the constative/performative distinction would basically still have sought, in the university, to reassure the university as to the sovereign mastery of its interior, as to its proper power, a power of its own. One thus touches on the very limit, *between the inside and the outside*, notably the border of the university itself, and within it, of the Humanities. One thinks *in* the Humanities the irreducibility of their outside and of their future. One thinks *in* the Humanities that one cannot and must not let oneself be enclosed within the inside of the Humanities. But for this thinking to be strong and consistent requires the Humanities. To think this is not an academic, speculative, or theoretical operation; it is not a neutral utopia. No more than saying it is a simple enunciation. It is on this always divisible limit, it is at this limit that what arrives arrives. It is this limit that is affected by the arriving and that changes. This limit of the impossible, the "perhaps," and the "if," this is the place where the university is exposed to reality, to the forces from without (be they cultural, ideological, political, economic, or other). It is there that the university is in the world that it is attempting to think. On this border, it must therefore negotiate and organize its resistance. And take its responsibilities. Not in order to enclose itself and reconstitute the abstract phantasm of sovereignty whose theological or humanist heritage it will perhaps have begun to deconstruct, if at least it has begun to do so. But in order to resist effectively, by allying itself with extra-academic forces,

in order to organize an inventive resistance, through its *oeuvres*, its works, to all attempts at reappropriation (political, juridical, economic, and so forth), to all the other figures of sovereignty.

I do not have time to justify any further my profession of faith. I do not know if what I am saying here is intelligible, if it makes sense. I especially do not know what status, genre, or legitimacy the discourse has that I have just addressed to you. Is it academic? Is it a discourse of knowledge in the Humanities or on the subject of the Humanities? Is it knowledge only? Only a performative profession of faith? Does it belong to the inside of the university? Is it philosophy, or literature, or theater? Is it a work, *une oeuvre*, or a course, or a kind of seminar? I have numerous hypotheses on this subject, but finally it will be up to you now, it will also be up to others to decide this. The signatories are also the addressees. We don't know them, neither you nor I. For if this impossible that I'm talking about were to arrive perhaps one day, I leave you to imagine the consequences. Take your time but be quick about it because you do not know what awaits you.

NOTES

1 Jacques Le Goff, *Un autre Moyen Age* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 172.
2 Mark Poster, unpublished manuscript, "CyberDemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere."
3 *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, Einleitung, IV and V, in *Kantswerke*, *Akademische Ausgabe*, V, 181 (XXVII) and 184 (XXXIV).
4 Ibid., § 60.
5 Samuel Weber, *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 143.
6 Samuel Weber, "The Future of the Humanities," in C.S. de Beer, ed., *Unisa as Distinctive University for our Time* (Pretoria: Interdisciplinary Discussion Forum, University of South Africa, 1998).
7 Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature, or the University in Deconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 15.
8 Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," in Sylviane Agacinski *et al.*, *Mimésis (des articulations)* (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1975), trans. Richard Klein, in *Diacritics* 11, 2 (1981); "Mochlos ou le conflit des facultés," in *Philosophie* 2 (1984), "Mochlos; or, The Conflict of the Faculties," trans. Richard Rand and Amy Wygant, in Richard Rand, ed., *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).
9 "An einem Producte der schönen Kunst muss man sich bewusst werden, dass es Kunst sei und nicht Natur; aber doch muss die Zweckmässigkeit in der Form desselben von allem Zwange willkürlicher Regeln so frei scheinen, als ob es ein Product der Blossen Natur sei" (*Third Critique*, § 45, 306 [179]).

10 *Third Critique*, § 43; cf. also Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," 59.
11 See Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), unnumbered note, 67–68.
12 Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995).
13 V.I. Lenin, *L'Etat et la Révolution* (Paris: éditions sociales), 175.
14 Le Goff, *Un autre Moyen Age*, 78.
15 This "as if" is no longer simply philosophical. It is thus, for all these reasons, not that of *The Philosophy of the As If* (*Die Philosophie des Als ob*) by Vaihinger. Nor is it the one to which Freud alludes, when he makes reference to Vaihinger's work, at the end of the third chapter of *The Future of an Illusion*.