
PICTURING TERROR: DERRIDA'S AUTOIMMUNITY

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It is a bad time, we are told, for criticism and theory. The *New York Times* declares that theory is dead, and then attempts to drive a stake through its heart by dismissing its most brilliant practitioner, Jacques Derrida, as an “abstruse theorist” whose popularity in American academia is a mystery.¹ Only one year earlier the *Times* performed a similar post-mortem on the greatest critic of our time, Edward Said.² The coincidence is worth pondering: an Algerian Jewish philosopher and a Palestinian Christian literary critic turned out to be the most influential figures in the American academic humanities in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Both were “engaged” intellectuals, not just in the promotion of their ethnic or political communities and constituencies, but in the critique of the very intellectual movements they inspired, postcolonial and deconstructive criticism. Both were utopian, futuristic thinkers, urging on us the possibility of a radical mutation of human thought: for Said, a commitment to the beginnings of a democratic and unified nation of Israel/Palestine; for Derrida, a global vision of justice and democracy “to come.” Both were accused of being “professors of terror,” the favorite canard of the militant ignorance and stupidity that passes for thinking in some quarters of American culture today.

For me, Jacques Derrida was one of the principal inspirations for what I have called “the pictorial turn” in modern culture. He is in many ways responsible for moving beyond the “linguistic turn” in the human sciences described by Richard Rorty, towards a renewal of traditional disciplines such as aesthetics, iconology, and art history, and the emergence of new formations such as visual culture and the study of media, and especially the materiality of media, as well as its equally important *immateriality*—what Derrida called “spectrality,” the ghostly

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¹ Jonathan Kandell, *Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies in Paris at 74*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 10, 2004, § 1, at 1.

² Richard Bernstein, *Edward W. Said, Literary Critic and Advocate for Palestinian Independence, Dies at 67*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 26, 2003, at A23.

realm of imagination, fantasy, speculation—the subject of a “hauntology” that renders all things or objects—all “beings” in other words—uncanny. And there is still more to absorb in his late writings: his critique of televisuality as a dominantly Christian globalizing medium; the importance of the Abrahamic (and Islamic) tradition of “peoples of the book” as the deep core of image theory, especially in its iconoclastic modes. I have repeatedly come back to Derrida’s work, then, though I have to confess that I have drifted away from it for periods as well, as if I could always count on some remark of his launching a new thought when I needed it. One consolation for me in Jacques’ death is that he left so much behind for us to read. And who knows when we will need to read it? It is, thanks to the gift of writing, always there waiting for us.

This has been the case, as always, in my current work on images, which has turned toward a peculiar nexus in the discourse of biopolitics, the convergence of cloning and terrorism as cultural icons of the principal techno-scientific anxieties of our time.³ The importance of terrorism and the so-called war on terror, which has replaced the Cold War as the major global image of conflict in our time, scarcely needs demonstrating. Cloning, likewise, immediately elicits images of horror, raising the spectre of a revival of Nazi eugenics, a Brave New World of engineered organisms, test tube babies, mutants, replicants, and cyborgs, of reproduction without sexual difference. The figure of the clone itself, as a mindless, even headless repository of “spare parts,” the reduction of the human being to “bare life,” the “acephalic clone” as Jean Baudrillard puts it, all turn out to be handy images for the figure of the terrorist himself.⁴ Terrorist and clone unite in the stereotype of the mindless automaton, an organism whose individuality has been eliminated, fit only for a suicide mission. Small wonder that the images of Palestinian suicide bombers circulated on the Internet are almost indistinguishable from the faceless “clone army” of the second episode of the Star Wars saga, *Attack of the Clones*. And no surprise that the horror of terrorism has been brought in to support the horror of cloning, as in the report of the President’s Council on Bioethics which explicitly links cloning to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001:

Since September 11 . . . one feels a palpable increase in America’s moral seriousness. . . . We more clearly see evil for what it is [We understand the need for] a prudent middle course, avoiding the

³ W. J. T. Mitchell, Iconic Turn Lecture, Cloning Terror: The War of Images from 9/11 to the Abu Ghraib Photographs (Dec. 3, 2004), <http://www.iconicturn.de/staticpages/index.php?page=StreamMitchell> (unpublished essay, University of Munich).

⁴ See JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *The Final Solution: Cloning Beyond the Human and Inhuman*, in THE VITAL ILLUSION 1, 3-29 (Julia Witwer ed., 2000), for a compendium of contemporary fantasies about the horror of cloning.

inhuman Osama bin Ladens on the one side and the post-human Brave New Worlders on the other.⁵

There are many other reasons for thinking of cloning and terrorism together. There is historical fact of their coincidence as political issues: on September 11, 2001, the lead story in the *New York Times* was (and had been for over two months) the controversy over stem cell research and human cloning which had occasioned the unveiling of President Bush's "faith-based" science policy. There is also a kind of metaphorical convergence, in the sense that cloning, as a figure for indefinite duplication of a life-form, is somehow the most apt image of the process by which terrorist "cells" breed and clone themselves. The comparison of terrorism to a virus or cancer, of invisible sleeper cells hidden inside the body waiting to strike, and of course, the Biblical predictions of plague and pestilence in the last days, all converge with the prospect of *literal* bioterrorism to make this a potent and inevitable icon in the collective imagination.

As I began researching the convergence of cloning and terror I of course wanted to see what Derrida had to say on the matter. And, as usual, no surprise: I found that he had been thinking along similar lines, but in a much more capacious manner. His lengthy interview with the philosopher Giovanna Borradori in the weeks after September 11 laid out the fundamental framework within which my own intuition about "cloning terror" began to make sense.⁶ Derrida had also turned to a biological metaphor, but one focused on the totality of the organism, namely, the immune system, in contrast to the figure of the clone, which is an image of the individual "soldiers" or "cells"—the antibodies and antigens on the biopolitical battlefield. Derrida diagnosed the attacks of September 11 as "a distant effect of the Cold War,"⁷ more precisely, of "a Cold War in the head," a global "head cold" that had now mutated in an "*autoimmunitary process* . . . [that is] that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its 'own' immunity."⁸

At first glance, this diagnosis of terrorism seems counter-intuitive, perhaps even in bad taste. It seems to "blame the victim," the United States and the global system of which it is the "head," for bringing on the attacks, or even for being guilty of a "quasi-suicide." The image of autoimmunity would seem more strictly applicable to something like a military *coup d'etat*, in which the armed defenders of the external

⁵ Leon R. Kass, *Foreward* to HUMAN CLONING AND HUMAN DIGNITY: THE REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON BIOETHICS, at xv-xvi (Public Affairs 2002).

⁶ See GIOVANNA BORRADORI, PHILOSOPHY IN A TIME OF TERROR: DIALOGUES WITH JÜRGEN HABERMAS AND JACQUES DERRIDA (2003).

⁷ *Id.* at 92.

⁸ *Id.* at 94.

borders and the internal order, the army and the police, turn against the legitimately constituted government, attacking the legislature, the judiciary, and deposing the executive.⁹ The terror attacks of September 11 came, we want to say, from *outside* the body politic, from far away places like the Middle East; it was an attack by *aliens*, by “foreign bodies” that had taken advantage of American hospitality to infiltrate our borders. Derrida’s image of autoimmunity, and of the immune system more generally, seems to be “stretched” to the breaking point.

But on reflection, the stretching of the metaphor seems to be exactly the point. The limits, borders, boundaries of the body (politic), its relations of inside/outside, friend/enemy, native/alien are exactly what is in question in the metaphor of the immune system, and in the new phenomenon of “international terrorism,” which is quite distinct from the terrorism of local resistance movements (Ireland, Palestine, Spain) focused on a definite territory. The United States is, as Derrida points out, not just a distinct body politic with its own determinate borders and identity; it is the “symbolic head of the prevailing world order,”¹⁰ the chief organ of a much larger, global body, the contemporary world system. The attacks of September 11 were not merely on “U.S. territory,” but on the “*World Trade Center*,” the symbolic “twin towers,” whose uncanny “twin-ness” or “clonal” character has been the subject of a great deal of commentary already. (As Baudrillard notes, “[T]he Twin Towers no longer had any façades, any faces[] . . . as though architecture, like the system, was now merely a product of cloning, and of a changeless genetic code.”¹¹) Like the boundaries of the world system, like globalization itself, the metaphor of the immune system stretches out to comprehend at least one dimension of the totality of the present historical reality.

In selecting the figure of the autoimmunity as a tool for analyzing modern terrorism, Derrida chose an image with considerable surplus value, one whose immediate applicability is startling, and which continues to resonate well beyond the use he makes of it. As Donna Haraway points out, “The immune system is both an iconic mythic object in high-technology culture and a subject of research and clinical practice of the first importance.”¹² It is important to stress Haraway’s

⁹ I am indebted here and throughout to conversations about the immune system with Dr. Hajo Grundmann, Senior Lecturer of Epidemiology at the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Bilthoven, The Netherlands.

¹⁰ BORRADORI, *supra* note 6, at 95.

¹¹ JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *THE SPIRIT OF TERRORISM* 44 (Chris Turner trans., 2002).

¹² DONNA J. HARAWAY, *The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitution of Self in Immune System Discourse*, in *CYBORGS, SIMIANS, AND WOMEN* 203, 205 (Routledge 1991). For a capsule history of the evolution of immunology, see Francisco J. Varela & Mark R. Anspach, *The Body Thinks: The Immune System in the Process of Somatic Individuation*, in *MATERIALITIES OF COMMUNICATION* 273 (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht & K. Ludwig Pfeiffer eds., William Whobrey trans., 1994).

insistence on the doubleness of the concept, its status as “iconic” on the one hand, and as an indispensable research tool on the other. That is, we can try to resist the image as a “mere metaphor,” a loose analogy, but it keeps coming back to haunt us in the biological figures that are part of the ordinary language for describing terrorism, and in the unavoidable language of biomedical research. Even more interesting is what I want to call the “bipolar” character of the entire foundational metaphor that Derrida’s figure presumes, namely, the ancient figure of the “body politic.” This image, which invites us to see the collective, society, the nation, mankind, even all living things, as “one body” is *reversible*. That is, we find ourselves speaking, whether we want to or not, of the “political body” as well as the “body politic.”¹³ And it turns out that the very notion of “immunity” as such is originally based in a socio-political discourse, not a biological one: “The Latin words *immunitas* and *immunis* have their origin in the legal concept of an exemption,”¹⁴ a sense which returns in the notion of “diplomatic immunity.”¹⁵ The whole theory of the immune system, and the discipline of immunology, is riddled with images drawn from the socio-political sphere—of invaders and defenders, hosts and parasites, natives and aliens, and of borders and identities that must be maintained. In asking us to see terror as autoimmunity, then, Derrida is bringing the metaphor home at the same time he sends it abroad, “stretching” it to the limits of the world. The effect of the “bipolar image,” then, is to produce a situation in which there is *no literal meaning*, nothing but the resonances between two images, one biomedical, the other political.

The impossibility of a literal meaning, of course, means that we literally “do not know what we are talking about” or what we are “literally” talking about.¹⁶ We are caught in the circuit between two images, dancing in the alternating current between two realms of discourse. For Derrida, this admission of ignorance is crucial, because the real politics of the autoimmunity metaphor, beyond its power to deconstruct all the easy, Manichean binary oppositions that have structured the war on terror, is the re-staging of terrorism as a condition that needs to be thought through analytically, systemically, and without moral tub-thumping, exactly as we would approach the diagnosis of a

¹³ Hans Belting reminds me that this “bipolar image” also has a religious foundation in the concept of *corpus Christi*, the “body of Christ,” which is both the collective body of believers and the Eucharistic body consumed in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The same indecidable figure of part for whole, whole for part, synechdoche and reverse synechdoche operates in the Christological discourse.

¹⁴ ARTHUR M. SILVERSTEIN, *A HISTORY OF IMMUNOLOGY* 1 (1989).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ As Derrida puts it, “[W]hat is terrible about ‘September 11’ . . . is that we do not *know* what it is and so do not know how to describe, identify, or even name it.” BORRADORI, *supra* note 6, at 94.

medical condition.¹⁷ Even more far-reaching is the implication that “a mutation *will have* to take place”¹⁸ in our entire way of thinking about justice, democracy, sovereignty, globalization, military power, the relations of nation-states, the politics of “friendship” and enmity, in order to address terrorism with any hope of an effective cure. In other words, we have something to learn here. Pre-established certainties are exactly the wrong medicine.

But one clue is offered by the metaphor (and the literal operations) of the immune system itself. There are two systems in the human body that are capable of learning. One is the nervous system (to which we will return in a moment); the other is the immune system, which learns by “clonal selection,” the production of antibodies which mirror the invading antigens and bond with them, killing them.¹⁹ The implications of this image are quite clear. The appropriate strategy for international terrorism is not war, which, like radiation or surgical intervention directed at a tumor, can actually breed new cancer cells which clone themselves more rapidly. (Cancer has an interesting relation to autoimmunity, since it is about the body’s inability to recognize a destructive cell structure as alien; the cancer cells are the body’s *own* cells—their DNA lineage is indistinguishable from the host body. So the immune system sleeps through the attack by the body’s own cells.) The best strategy is highly targeted and *intelligent* intelligence, not the “Black Ops” stormtroopers, private armies of “independent contractors,” and hooded torturers that have sprung from the Bush fantasyland of “war on terror,” but infiltrators who can simulate the enemy, who speak his language, understand, sympathize—who can clone themselves as “friends” of the terrorists. In other words, to some extent this would involve shifting the responsibility for dealing with international terrorism to the Islamic world, to its internal traditions of justice, its social and political networks, its established, legitimate police and military forces, its tendencies to modernization, secularization, as well as its deep religious commitment to peace and justice. U.S. military power would be kept in reserve for emergencies, humanitarian crises, and other limited-scale interventions. Outright pre-emptive war, invasion and occupation of a major foreign country that

¹⁷ It must be said, however, that Derrida is far less interested in pursuing the metaphor of the immune system in its “proper” realm of immunology than I am. He does not privilege this notion, as he says, ““out of some excessive biologicistic or geneticist proclivity.”” Rodolphe Gasché, *In the Name of Reason”: The Deconstruction of Sovereignty*, 34 RESEARCH IN PHENOMENOLOGY 289, 297 (2004) (quoting JACQUES DERRIDA, *ROGUES: TWO ESSAYS ON REASON* (Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas trans., 2005)). My aim here is to explore the “excess” or supplementarity of the metaphor.

¹⁸ BORRADORI, *supra* note 6, at 106.

¹⁹ The “clonal selection theory of acquired immunity” was developed by Frank MacFarlane Burnet, who won the Nobel Prize for his efforts. See JM Cruse & RE Lewis, *Frank Macfarlane Burnet*, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LIFE SCIENCES (2001), <http://www.els.net>.

had not attacked us would be pretty much out of the question. Military adventures in “regime change,” democratization at gunpoint, would be low on the agenda.

If we can listen to it, then, our immune system is whispering hints to us. That is, it is passing on a lesson to the nervous system, which is the other bodily system that can learn from experience. Not only that, the nervous system can accelerate its learning process with self-conscious reflection, critique, the preservation of memory and history. Immunity is a form of cellular “memory”; the body learns by experience how to fight measles, and it doesn’t forget. The most dangerous threat to the immune system, then, is amnesia, the forgetting of what it has learned: forgetting, for instance, that today’s terrorists (al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden) were yesterday’s allies, trained as antibodies against Soviet military power in Afghanistan; forgetting even more dangerously, that yesterday’s terrorists are almost invariably tomorrow’s heroes of national liberation, and that moral absolutes are not just useless, but positively dangerous in any counter-terrorist strategy.

Unfortunately, what Marshall McLuhan called “the central nervous system” of the social body, what Derrida calls the “technoeconomic power of the media,” has been traumatized by an image—the spectacle, the word, above all the *number as enigmatic name*: 9/11. This image, the spectacle of destruction of the twin towers, has been cloned repeatedly in the collective global nervous system.²⁰ The mediatizing of the event was, in fact, its whole point, as Derrida points out:

What would “September 11” have been without television? . . . [M]aximum media coverage was in the *common* interest of the perpetrators of “September 11,” the terrorists, and those who, in the name of the victims, wanted to declare “war on terrorism.” . . . More than the destruction of the Twin Towers or the attack on the Pentagon, more than the killing of thousands of people, the real “terror” consisted of and, in fact, began by exposing and exploiting . . . the image of this terror by the target itself.²¹

In short, the attack was not immediately on the immune system, but on the nervous system. And it was carried out by a fabricated, produced image, an “impression” or “spectacle” staged for the world’s cameras by the terrorists, exploited by a political faction to declare an indefinite state of emergency, of exemption—that is, immunity—from all the normal niceties of civil liberties and international law, not to mention, from all the legitimate, well-established institutions of its own immune and nervous systems, in the form of its own intelligence

²⁰ It was conjectured at the time that the short gap between the first and second impact on the Twin Towers was calculated to maximize media coverage, since it was obvious that every video camera at the center of the global media system would be trained on the World Trade Center immediately after the initial strike.

²¹ BORRADORI, *supra* note 6, at 108.

services, diplomatic and military experts, and the work of scholars who actually know something about the nature of the threat. What Rashid Khalidi calls a “faith-based foreign policy” was the perfect twin of the spectre of a faith-based terror. One fanatic deserves, begets another, and Uncle Sam is cloned as Uncle Osama.²² Serious medical research into human cloning is banned by the same government that clones terror by declaring a war on it.

It is the “nervousness” of the nervous system, then, that is producing the “autoimmunity” of the immune system. This, of course, is standard medical wisdom about the relation of these two systems. When the nervous system is in a state of panic, anxiety, or depression, or even worse, in a psychotic state, generating hallucinations and paranoid fantasies, the immune system has a tendency to respond inappropriately as well. What is the cure? Derrida’s answer may surprise those who write him off as an obscurantist or nihilist:

It is once again a question of the Enlightenment, that is, of access to Reason in a certain public space, though this time in conditions that technoscience and economic or telemedia globalization have thoroughly transformed If intellectuals, writers, scholars, professors, artists, and journalists do not, before all else, stand up together against such violence, their abdication will be at once irresponsible and suicidal.²³

Derrida invoking the Enlightenment? This will only surprise those who forget that it was the Enlightenment and the Goddess of Reason that presided over the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. Reason is on the side of both terror *and* counter-terror. This insight is crucial to the understanding of deconstruction as a rational operation, one which traces the fault lines in any system or structure. This leads us to a final thought on the image of autoimmunity that cannot be resisted any longer: Is it the case that deconstruction is a species of autoimmunity? That is, in purely textual terms, is the tendency of the law, of writing, of texts, and of any system or totality, whether political or institutional or cultural, to “deconstruct” at some point, whether or not a “deconstructor” comes along to hasten the process, symptomatic of a hidden affinity between deconstruction and autoimmune disorders? Derrida places deconstruction on the side of justice, of the undeconstructible demand, desire, and need for some notion of a justice “to come.”

²² See the “Uncle Osama” recruiting poster by TomPaine.com that appeared in the New York Times on September 24, 2002, calling on all patriotic Americans to invade Iraq, a bit of irony that was lost on the Bush administration, which did exactly what al Qaeda wanted. See also RICHARD A. CLARKE, *AGAINST ALL ENEMIES: INSIDE AMERICA’S WAR ON TERROR* (2004), for a discussion by the head of U.S. counter-terrorism under four different presidencies of the folly of the war in Iraq as a response to “terror.”

²³ BORRADORI, *supra* note 6, at 125.

Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice. It is perhaps because law . . . is constructible, in a sense that goes beyond the opposition between convention and nature, it is perhaps insofar as it goes beyond this opposition that it is constructible and so deconstructible . . .²⁴

Justice and deconstruction are not Kantian “regulative ideals,” and they are not teleological horizons for which we might plan in some projected futurity. They are “what arrives,” or simply “what happens.” Derrida sometimes compares deconstruction to an earthquake, a violent disruption in a system that is, as it were, “built into” the system, its structure of checks and balances, its normativities and symmetries. There is no “method” of deconstruction; the deconstructor is more like a seismologist who traces the disturbances, locates their origins, describes their qualities. This associates deconstruction with what Walter Benjamin called “natural violence,” which is to say, it is not a violence that concerns us in the way that political or judicial violence does.²⁵

There are some moments, however, when Derrida grants a bit more agency to the deconstructor:

When I was very young—and until quite recently—I used to project a film in my mind of someone who, by night, plants bombs on the railway: blowing up the enemy structure, planting the delayed-action device and then watching the explosion or at least hearing it from a distance. I see very well that this image, which translates a deep phantasmic compulsion, could be illustrated by deconstructive operations, which consist in planting discreetly, with a delayed-action mechanism, devices that all of a sudden put a transit route out of commission, making the enemy’s movements more hazardous. But the friend, too, will have to live and think differently, know where he’s going, tread lightly.²⁶

How seriously are we to take this fantasy, drawn from the lore of the French Resistance heroically fighting the German occupation?²⁷ And is it unfair to see that it is precisely a form of terrorism? I can imagine the cries of protest at the very suggestion that Derrida and deconstruction are in any sense aligned with terrorism, but I do not think that simple disavowal is going to be adequate. Terror has become so thoroughly reified and reduced to an ideological slogan, a synonym

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority”*, 11 CARDOZO L. REV. 919, 945 (Mary Quaintance trans., 1990).

²⁵ See WALTER BENJAMIN, *Critique of Violence*, in REFLECTIONS: ESSAYS, APHORISMS, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS 277 (Peter Demetz ed., Edmund Jephcott trans., 1978); Derrida, *supra* note 24.

²⁶ JACQUES DERRIDA & MAURIZIO FERRARIS, A TASTE FOR THE SECRET 51-52 (Giacomo Donis & David Webb eds., Giacomo Donis trans., 2001).

²⁷ BORRADORI, *supra* note 6, at 109 (Derrida pointing out that “members of the Resistance were regularly treated as ‘terrorists’ by the Nazis and the Vichy collaborators”).

for absolute evil, that it has become impossible to think clearly about it. And in fact, I think it even stymied the fabulous powers of the great deconstructor himself. Consider, for instance, Derrida's final remarks that allow him to condemn the terrorism of bin Laden, despite his acute awareness that "state terrorism" and "systemic terrorism" are rampant in the world system today:

What appears to me unacceptable in the "strategy" . . . of the "bin Laden effect" is not only the cruelty, the disregard for human life, the disrespect for law, for women, the use of what is worst in technocapitalist modernity for the purposes of religious fanaticism. No, it is, above all, the fact that such actions and such discourse *open onto no future and, in my view, have no future*. . . . That is why, in this unleashing of violence without name, if I had to take one of the two sides and choose in a binary situation, well, I would.²⁸

But two objections come to mind here. The first is simply that the terrorists do, in fact, envision a future, one in which the U.S. would leave the Middle East, would withdraw all its forces, military, economic, and political, making room for the revival of an Islamic "Kingdom of God," a caliphate in which "justice" (by their lights) would prevail, and become identical with the law. We might not like this future, but there is no denying that it is a possible future, one we must find ways to prevent, and one that is made all the more likely by the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. Derrida's assertion that bin Ladenism has no future is thus, not just empirically wrong, but the projection of a nihilism, a hollowness onto the figure of the enemy that is precisely the operation that mystifies that figure as an "idol of the mind," a hollow signifier to which any absolute can be attributed.

The second objection is drawn from Derrida's own account of revolutionary violence as that which simultaneously violates the law and inaugurates a new legal order at the same time in an act of "founding violence." Derrida asks of these revolutionary tactics:

Can what we are doing here resemble a general strike or a revolution, with regard to models, structures but also modes of readability of political action? Is that what deconstruction is? Is it a general strike or a strategy of rupture? Yes and no. Yes, to the extent that it assumes the right to contest, and not only theoretically, constitutional protocols, the very charter that governs reading in our culture and especially in the academy. No, at least to the extent that it is in the academy that it has been developed (and let's not forget, if we do not wish to sink into ridicule or indecency, that we are comfortably installed here on Fifth Avenue—only a few blocks away from the inferno of injustice).²⁹

²⁸ BORRADORI, *supra* note 6, at 113.

²⁹ Derrida, *supra* note 24, at 995-97.

Derrida's disclaimer strikes me as both a refreshing moment of realism, with a due sense of proportion, but at the same time a straightforward admission that, yes, deconstruction is strictly analogous to the upheaval of "divine" or "mythic" violence that erupts like a volcano within any system, whether textual or political, and which may lead on to a new order of reading, or of legality and political order, "to come." But that order "to come" will, if I understand him correctly, never arrive as justice itself (though it will invoke a justice "to come" at every moment), but only as a new order of law, a new horizon of interpretation. That is why justice, like deconstruction, like autoimmunity, like divine violence and terror itself, is not a regulative ideal or "horizon of possibility" that can be *foreseen*. They are precisely the *impossible*, the "madness of the law," and the law of madness. Which also makes them structurally, formally indistinguishable from the terror of the bin Ladens, even in its imputed lack of opening to futurity. The difference, in fact, is more like that of Benjamin's distinction between "mythic violence," which is foundational and future-oriented, and linked to fascism, and the "divine violence" of the general strike, which is a relatively bloodless deconstruction of a political system—perhaps a "Velvet Revolution."³⁰

The innocence, in the sense of academic "harmlessness" or non-violence, of deconstruction, then, is the only thing that saves it from the charge of being structurally equivalent to autoimmunity and even terrorism. But to say this is not to accuse deconstruction of anything (except perhaps being an academic pursuit). It is rather to make terrorism accessible to thought in a new way, beyond the moral certainties and the acts of mythical violence known as the "war on terror." The idea that one can implant a "democracy to come" by invading and occupying a country, sacrificing uncounted thousands of its citizens as collateral damage and holding elections in which the identity of candidates needs to be kept secret "for security reasons" is precisely an act of mythical violence, driven by a "regulative ideal" of formal democracy that is an obscene parody of the real thing, much less any democracy "to come" that is worthy of the name. It is fascism with a Christian face, an American face. Over three thousand precious souls died in the destruction of the World Trade Center, but over 100,000 equally precious souls have died as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, according to the British medical journal *Lancet*. Where is the memorial to them?

This brings me back to our present horizon of possibilities and impossibilities, the state of criticism and theory after Said and Derrida.

³⁰ Derrida describes the "violent entrance of the other in the course of history," as the moment of "justice . . . foreign to justness or the norm of adaptation." Jacques Derrida, *Artifactualities*, in *ECHOGRAPHIES OF TELEVISION* 1, 9 (Jennifer Bajorek trans., 2002).

I've said that they are linked by their utopian sense of a democracy to come, and an openness to possible/impossible futures such as a single democratic state known as Israel/Palestine. Said's secular sense of "beginnings" (as opposed to mythic "origins") is, I think, his parallel concept to Derrida's *l'avenir*.³¹ I want to conclude by linking them at the level of method, as well, working against the grain of deconstruction as "event," and thinking about ways that we might "go on," if not strictly follow rules, in continuing the project of deconstruction. I've argued elsewhere for a procedure in Said's critical practice I call "secular divination," a Nietzschean "sounding of the idols" without destruction.³² I've also described this as a "pictorial turn," a swerve from language to the image, a move which I see as characteristic of Derrida's interest in writing, the graphism, rather than linguistics and language as system,³³ and his frequent invocation of the imagination, fantasy, spectrality as the "third" that "comes" unannounced, the stranger or guest who demands, if not unconditional hospitality (the right of residence) but at any rate a right of "visitation."

A word on the subject of the various figures of appearing—image, *morphē*, *eidos*, and especially phantasm. It seems to me that if . . . we take the word 'phantasm' to mean that which weaves the universal and the individual together in the image, then we come right back to what we said earlier— . . . about the 'coming before' of the other in the I, i.e. as phantasm. But I would not free myself so easily of phantoms, as some people all too often think they do ('it's nothing but a phantom'). I think that we are structured by the phantasmic, and in particular that we have a phantasmic relation to the other, and that the phantasmicity of this relation cannot be reduced, this pre-originary intervention of the other in me.³⁴

If I read this correctly, Derrida is saying that the image can neither be created nor destroyed (though perhaps it can and must be deconstructed). It is the other in me, which must be embraced even as a figure of terror (I take this to be Derrida's sense of the risk involved in unconditional hospitality). It arrives, appears—it is a figure of appearing, and itself an apparition, a double presence of absence, a metapicture. The law is what opposes the image, interdicts and prohibits it, and the first law of the Abrahamic religions, the "peoples of the book," is the law against the making of graven images. The law can

³¹ EDWARD W. SAID, *BEGINNINGS: INTENTION AND METHOD* (Columbia Univ. Press, 1985) (1975).

³² W. J. T. Mitchell, *Secular Divination: Edward Said's Humanism*, in EDWARD SAID: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION 99 (Homi Bhabha & W. J. T. Mitchell eds., 2005).

³³ "The first step for me, in the approach to what I proposed to call deconstruction, was a putting into question of the authority of linguistics, of logocentrism." Jacques Derrida, *I Have a Taste for the Secret*, in *A TASTE FOR THE SECRET* 1, 76 (Giacomo Donis & David Webb eds., Giacomo Donis trans., Polity Press 2001) (1997).

³⁴ *Id.* at 89.

be shattered, as Moses shows in his rage at the appearance of the Golden Calf, but the Calf cannot be deconstructed in that way. It must be melted down, annihilated, and then taken in, drunk by the rebellious Israelites. This drastic treatment is based in a recognition that the image cannot be destroyed; it comes back to life, “appears” again in a spectral form, in the eyes of Moses’ own words, the vision conveyed by his narrative.³⁵

The idols of our time, the monumentalization of 9/11, the fetish concept of terrorism, the mythic cultural icon of immunity as “homeland security,” cannot be destroyed either. But they can be sounded, made to divulge their hollowness. They can be melted down and drunk, deconstructed, and subjected to a secular divination. This will have to do for now.

³⁵ Moses “strewing” of the ground-up Calf on the water is an image of *sowing*, which already suggests that the fragments of the Calf will regenerate, clone themselves, and spring back to life. See Arthur J. Jacobson, *The Idolatry of Rules: Writing Law According to Moses, With Reference to Other Jurisprudences*, in *DECONSTRUCTION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF JUSTICE* 95 (1992). For further discussion of the Golden Calf, see generally W. J. T. MITCHELL, *WHAT DO PICTURES WANT? THE LIVES AND LOVES OF IMAGES* (2005).