criticism in translation

Contre-jour

JACQUES DERRIDA AND SAFAA FATHY

INTRODUCTION AND TRANSLATION BY MAX CAVITCH

Introduction

"CONTRE-JOUR" IS THE OPENING SECTION OF THE COAUTHORED BOOK *TOURNER LES MOTS: AU BORD D'UN FILM* (2000), BY THE FRANCO-Maghrebian philosopher Jacques Derrida and the Franco-Egyptian filmmaker and poet Safaa Fathy. *Tourner les mots* is about their experience of film generally and, in particular, about their collaboration on Fathy's 1999 film *D'Ailleurs, Derrida*, released in an English subtitled version as *Derrida's Elsewhere*. One meaning of the word *tourner* in the book's title is "to film." But the word also shares with the English *turn* a wide range of meanings and associations, including "to turn," "to revolve," "to depend on," "to shape or form," "to consider," and "to trope." Thus *Tourner les mots* refers to cinematic practice (*le tournage* 'filmmaking,' 'the shoot') and to the relation between cinema and language (*les mots* 'words').

Tourner les mots—a work not yet available in English—is a book about language, importantly but by no means exclusively the language of cinema. Its introduction, "Contre-jour" (the technical term for backlighting), offers a prospect on the chapters to come and a retrospect on the film. It does so by turning, or troping, on the word *tourner* even as it turns, or reflects on, voice, silence, inscription, and excision in the making and reception of cinematic works, including, but not limited to, *D'Ailleurs, Derrida*. The word *d'ailleurs* too is frequently troped on in "Contre-jour" and means not only "elsewhere" (alluding, always, to the title of Fathy's film) but also, variously, "indeed," "moreover," and "besides." Less well known, at least in the United States, than the more conventional 2002 documentary *Derrida* (dir. Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick), *D'Ailleurs, Derrida* is truer to its subject's biography—Derrida's life as and in his writings, especially his later writings, and the concerns that animate them, such as witnessing, forgiveness, hospitality, circumcision, memory and futurity, the secret, and untranslatability.[1]

The customary caveats about translation hardly go far enough when translating Derrida. However, there is no reason for paralysis when paraphrasis will do nicely. I have pursued a dynamic rather than formal equivalence in rendering Derrida and Fathy's text into something as readable and strange, as smooth and stilted, as their original, which is by turns chatty, lofty, and lyrical.

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The reader should keep in mind that this is a preface, a vestibule, a prelude to a book-length work that is, more than almost any other book in Derrida's oeuvre, a book about a friendship. Derrida and Fathy were friends and collaborators for many years before his death, and the filmmaker spent countless hours toward the end of his life following him, as the Derrida biographer Benoît Peeters puts it, "like a shadow, even though it irritated many of his friends. It was as if his relationship to the image had finally been reversed, as if, from a radical rejection of photography, Derrida had shifted to an almost uninterrupted video recording, a multiplicity of traces that was no doubt another form of effacement" (490). In the final stages of Derrida's illness, Fathy was one of three or four friends who regularly sat with him, and, just days before he died, she was able to screen for him a rough cut of their final film collaboration: the experimental short *Nom à la mer* (2007). *D'Ailleurs, Derrida* is the record and the product of a cinematic collaboration that helped determine their friendship's shape and destiny.

At the margin of ("au bord de") this film, *Tourner les mots* comprises, among other things, an extended exchange on Judeo-Arabic relations and on the North African colonial and postcolonial orders. We find the authors working together or separately in economies of displacement and witnessing, of secrets and writings, all freighted with but never reducible to the Abrahamic tradition by which the economies are marked and marked out: Fathy's Muslim heritage and her vital engagements with Sufism, Derrida's Jewish heritage and his identification with the figure of the Marrano. *Tourner les mots* also includes Derrida's most substantial and extended writing on cinema, in the coauthored dialogue translated below and in his contribution of the book's longest essay, "Lettres sur un aveugle: *Punctum caecum*" ("Letters on a Blind Man: Blind Spot"). In "Contre-jour," Derrida credits much to the on-set experience, affirming that he "has learned more—more, or otherwise—about cinema (and about television) through the experience of this film than by watching thousands of films as a spectator. It was for him an introduction, even an initiatory experience."

Yet between the filmmaker and her initiate there was also some tension. In his remarks on blindness, Derrida revisits a key trope in his work and pinpoints one of the conditions of on-set conflict between the film's "Auteur" (Fathy) and its "Actor" (Derrida) as they shoot the film at various sites, from California to Île-de-France to Andalusia:

> One fine day, regarding our various disputes at Toledo and Almería, Safaa told me I was blind. That was the word she used. She called me a blind man and kept saying that I couldn't see the film and that all of my incomprehension, my impatience, my outbursts of anger, my tantrums were due to the fact that I saw nothing, that I couldn't see, from her point of view, the truth of the film in preparation. (*Tourner les mots* 86; my trans.)

We see little evidence of these disputes in the film itself. But there are two scenes that highlight Derrida's impatience, bemusement, and preoccupation with his situation as photographed subject. In one scene, he grows exasperated at the time it takes to produce some still shots of him; the shots "take" but an instant, but the taking of them feels "interminable" to him. In another scene, Derrida sits in front of a large tank of fish, and he compares his experience of being filmed—of being forced to sit still, subject to the director's instructions—to the fish's experience of being placed behind glass and exposed to the endless scrutiny of aquarium visitors. Yet the fish also prompt his musing on the completely "untranslatable" relation to temporality of that which we call "animal" (e.g., Derrida).

Tourner les mots tries hard—or, rather, self-consciously pretends—not to "translate" or analyze the film for readers of the book. Nevertheless, as "Auteur" and "Actor" make clear in the opening section, they are unable to keep away from the scenes of the film's making, to which they return, furtively, obsessively, as a criminal does to a crime scene. They haunt the film's unnamed locations with their reminiscences. They patch up their leftover quarrels even as they patch over holes in the film's self-narration. They make clear that the film is a valediction to everything but valediction, to

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the many acts of mourning that will be endlessly repeated, including the work of mourning the death to come, the struggle to emerge from blindness and learn to see the backlit scene of a death that would be one's own just coming into view.

Notes

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1. It is also part of a keenly reflexive corpus of feature-length films and shorts by Fathy, including *al-Ghawzi, raqisat Misr* (*Ghazeia, Dancers of Egypt*; 1993); *Le silence* ("Silence"; 1995); *Maxime Rodinson: L'athée des dieux* ("Maxime Rodinson: God's Atheist"; 1996); *Nom à la mer* ("Name to the Sea"; 2004), her other, more conceptual, film collaboration with Derrida; *Hidden Valley* (2004); *De tout coeur* ("With All My Heart"; 2005); *Dardasha, Socotra* ("Conversations on Socotra"; 2006); *Tahrir, lève, lève la voix* ("Tahrir, Lift, Lift Your Voice"; 2011); and, most recently, *Mohammad sauvé des eaux* ("Mohammad Saved from the Waters"; 2013), a virtuosic and poignant documentary about her brother's death and environmental politics in contemporary Egypt.

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Contre-jour

—[. . .][1]

—At this point, I would go on to say something like: here we are, the two of us, returned to the scene of the film.

—"Returned to the scene of the . . . ?" The very expression substitutes "crime," subliminally, for "film," where the film, the word "film," would wipe away traces of a guilty deed, if it didn't already confess or betray the unpardonable. Let's picture our two accomplices, those *hardened* [*acharnés*] criminals (that is to say, more properly, those still enticed, their memory drawn by the lure of the *carnal* [par la *chair*]), returning to the scene. Not to start over but to superimpose more traces and thereby to attempt to cover their tracks. They seek to confound the investigation by multiplying the clues.[2] Never will there be peace of mind for these two. They head back toward the scene but would prefer not to reach it. Nor would they lead anyone to it. For them the scene should remain *elsewhere*, inaccessible to return, and above all out of reach of all the discourses that would, after the fact, try to wrestle with it.

—It would be, then, as if we were entertaining [tenions] these remarks at the film's margin, as if we maintained [maintenions] or contained [contenions] them, as if we held on to the notion of holding ourselves [comme si nous tenions à nous tenir nous-mêmes] at the edge of a film that will never need our palaver.

—But as if we held on to the need to [tenions . . . à] maintain [tenir], as an afterthought, as a memento, a kind of backdated journal at the film's margin.

—I'd call it a *counterjournal* . . .

—. . . a little codicil, something twilit, a

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kind of second short film, after the fact . . .

—Let me clarify: a short in two voices.

—Agreed. But each of the voices will play its own part. Each one will speak for itself, before any consultation, beyond any consensus. The two who sign . . .

— . . . we who sign.

—Yes, we who sign this short film, without ever having spoken in a single voice or having clasped hands in the process, will be seen, the two of us, agreeing at least on one confession: our cooperation was never euphoric or symphonic.

—Far from it, that's certain. We (but what "we"? the question was posed literally, you'll recall, in the film, where it occupied an entire sequence), the two of us, we would then have tried to sketch, or rather mimic, a gesture that would amount to—if only it could somehow complete itself, which it neither will, nor should it attempt to, do—filming the film, all in all, to shoot the shooting of the film.

—Rather, to turn the shoot around, first by pretending to trace one's steps through each shot's location. To take them as if backlit [contre-jour], as was immediately suggested by the term *counterjournal* [*contre-journal*].

—Indeed, the backlit scene itself, if one may speak thus, or in terms of what some also call *mise en abyme*, was often played in the film. Played at/by being played [Jouée à être jouée].[3] Almost from the start, one can watch the scene being filmed in the film: from his assigned position, the "Actor" ("alias me, Jacques Derrida") comes into view, camera in hand,[4] and the film's "Auteur" ("alias me, Safaa Fathy"), and the whole production team, on the ocean-side terrace of a villa in California, getting its equipment in order. This should already suffice, *once and for all*, to decenter the *source* of the film, the word given by the Actor, and the authority of the Auteur. The aura of that source will never be found. Elsewhere, just as fleetingly, one sees the face of the Auteur, through a windowpane that resembles a mirror. Still elsewhere, one hears her voice, one recognizes her accent, slightly foreign, itself coming *from somewhere else*.

—Indeed, this is what we wanted: a film without authority, a work that would not be in any way regarded as authoritative. Allowing itself neither the authority of Truth or Reality (like a conventional Documentary, with its eyewitnesses), nor the free Sovereignty of Fiction. Forcing between the two an unmarked path for which there is no map. Even if the instant doesn't last, from the instant that the filmed Actor films himself, as soon as he is filmed filming, he marks, to be sure, the limits of his point of view thus subjected and the limits of a perspective. But, subjugated subject of the film, he also describes what takes place: the unforeseen event, unforeseeable and at the same time irreversible. For him and for everyone else, for the actual witnesses or the production crew, and for the virtual spectators. He delimits the space, the taking place, and the conditions. He describes them to the Auteur. With the mad pretension of being at the same time Actor and Witness, he shows them to her by pointing with a finger or with a camera, as they appear to him, the Actor.

—As he wants to *believe* they appear to him—a naïveté that, because of his situation, he cannot shake. In fact, he never sees anything. He doesn't see anything coming of what's really happening, nor anything of what bypasses him, or of what is being prepared, in the present, in the future perfect, for planning the film, the film now past that we're talking about.

—Moreover, let's not forget that he

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picked up [his own] camera ([a Super 8], small and easy to handle) only after having received a suggestion or accepted a command from the Auteur. Indeed, he has always accepted the Auteur's directives, with a docility all the more incredible since it concealed a constant revolt or contestation. But he did not fail to acknowledge all his errors, his lack of technique, his inexperience, even after the experience was over. He has learned more—more, or otherwise—about cinema (and about television) through the experience of this film than by watching thousands of films as a spectator. It was for him an introduction, even an initiatory experience.

—From this handing over of the reins, and of point of view, and of filming, something remains, right at the beginning, when the Actor describes (spontaneously, this time, without instruction) what is happening. He presents himself then as the simple instrument, indeed the raw material, in the hands of the Auteur who shapes, plans, writes, and signs the film. Questioned about the meaning of the writing with which he has lain/lain down [couché] his whole life, the Actor then cites the finitude of all writing [graphie], in particular that of cinematic writing [cinématographie], which can't proceed, in the montage, except by selecting, withdrawing, tearing, shredding, excluding, circumscribing—one could almost say circumcising (he's visibly thinking about it) if one wanted to (and one really should) stitch this moment back together with all the passages about circumcision and excision at the heart of the film.

—In the rushes, one would find further, analogous reversals: the Actor turned Cameraman, if not Auteur, etc. They were left out for reasons of *economy* as it were. One had to reckon with the restrictions of time; with the seemingly *external* "constraints" of a television broadcast; and of a channel, Arte; and of a coproduction, etc. One had also to comply, in a more *internal* way, with the need for a composition more discreet, sober, elliptical: showing without showing, never insisting, skimming, skipping . . .

—To turn the words would thus be to try to find the words, as one says—to seek the right turns of phrase, to construct sentences, to invent or appropriate verbal expressions—without thinking long or hard before speaking, however, to discuss what a film was, its body of silence above all, and beginning with the prelude to a shoot.

—Yes, but to talk about it in the past tense. The film is done, it's a fact. Whatever it is, it's irreversible and public. It escapes us forever. What we're attempting here would be, after the fact, simply to adjust some sentences, to turn certain words to say that which, already passing through words, instantly went past words, crossed or exceeded the discourse at every turn. As if starting a race, speech were unable to advance, so to speak, immobilized, riveted, kept at the point of departure. Yielding, letting itself be overtaken by the incommensurate speed of images. Incommensurate acceleration, because said images scatter rhetorical shortcuts infinitely faster than anything a metalanguage could say about them. The simple passing of a Siamese cat (two seconds), for example, "says" more (and faster) than would any learned treatise on the role of animals in the film (fish and cat), or on the force of anamnestic spectrality that this singular cat deploys. Instantly it recalls another cat, deceased, one of the Actor's own, whose garden tomb one sees, but also all the dead, all the ghosts and the resurrected of the film (his mother;[5] his little brother, whose tomb one sees in the Saint-Eugene Cemetery in Algiers;[6] his comrade from prison in Prague, etc.).

—Yes, words are like paralytics, struck dumb, impoverished and imprisoned; but then they let themselves be displaced in this

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way, dislodged by the speechless icons of a film, by figures more powerful than language, images promised, images taken, images still virtual, images kept, images left out. How could we speak of all the entangled durations in these possible events? How to speak of our respective experiences, so different, so untranslatable, from one into the other? How to match our endurance of what was one *shoot*—its wakefulness, its venues, the roles it assigned us, its special time and labor, and its aftermath, the editing of the montage, then the return to the screen?

—What a word, "screen"! And how to struggle against words, how to *turn* words when they put a screen over cinematic writing [l'écriture cinématographique]? And when they venture to usurp the power to divert to their profit the silent power of memory? The most innocent word may become in turn a screen memory, an opaque force opposed to the film, to the unconscious energy of its most proper truth . . .

—That is, if one can speak of such a "truth," and of the cinema's "most proper" truth, and that it would owe nothing to words. But let's allow it. Besides, from the first instant, we both knew, we both agreed, despite all our quarrels, that the shoot should, without doubt, in its own way, *shoot the words* [*tourner les mots*] in at least two ways. *On the one hand*, yes, it should turn them, these words, by going around them, bypassing them, removing them, dragging them elsewhere, steering clear of them: do anything so the words don't kill the image under the pretense of being in charge. The sovereignty of an elaborate discourse had to be diverted to catch speech off guard and then hand it over completely naked to improvisation: *to the unexpected* [*à l'improviste*]. Plan the image as much as possible, but improvise the words as much as possible. *On the other hand*, to turn the words would also be to reckon them up, today, after the fact, here where, in the shoot, they were surrendered defenseless to what came unexpectedly [à l'improviste].

—*À l'improviste*! Once again, what a word! I consider it untranslatable. Eternally French, therefore, even if it comes from Italian (*improvviso*). *À l'impourvu*, the only expression of French origin equivalent to "en improvisant," disappeared, buried in the cemetery of language, at least since the seventeenth century. There is no noun, no nominal usage of "improviste."[7] Although it encompasses a noun, the expression *à l'improviste* can never become a noun. No more, by the way, than can *elsewhere* [pas plus d'ailleurs que d'*ailleurs*] in the title of the film. I don't know why, but I sense always, in the force that resists the noun, that resists nominalization, a secret affinity with cinema, as with *virtue*, that is to say, with the energy of all the nondiscursive arts. The untranslatable, especially when it appears in a title, is like a proper name. Untranslatable remains always a proper name. Yet a proper name does not belong to language and to discourse in the same way as other nouns. In *D'ailleurs, Derrida*, all the words are untranslatable. We must then, one or the other, clarify how this film was a film untranslatably "French"—certainly belonging to the French language and yet as little French as possible—really coming from *elsewhere* [*d'ailleurs*] and called *elsewhere* [*ailleurs*]. For these two reasons, it would be called on to cross borders, if it crosses them, all the while preserving its untranslatability, like a sort of chastity that displays, without relinquishing, itself—that gives, without betraying, itself. It never propagates its secret, even as it seems to discourse on it. This untranslatability would be, on the whole, the film's crypt, the keep of its speaking body. The film speaks of nothing but the secret; "secret" remains its special theme, turning about the figure of the Marrano, who carries a "secret greater than himself and to which he himself

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does not have access." "The secret must be respected," reiterates the improvising Actor, making of it, a bit sententiously, an ethic and a principle of "political" resistance to totalitarianism. Untranslatability, thus, must not frighten (on the contrary) anyone who wants to internationalize television or cinema.

But *untranslatability*, for better or worse, splits or divides itself in two: 1. There is that pertaining to the *intersemiotic* order, as we would say, learnedly, following Jakobson, for example, between the visual arts, music, and the discursive arts—here the untranslatability between cinematographic art and an art dominated by the verbal; 2. And there is also that which pertains to the *intra-* or *interlinguistic* order, that is, pertaining to an individual language or to two different languages, in the endless idiomatic resistances and refusals of the possibilities of their singular economies. So, for example, who will translate—in French or German or any language whatsoever—the three semantic networks of "to turn" in our title: "Turn the Words"? "Turn" accrues here *three* significations in the same capital, with all the exchange value or use value you could want, and all the surplus value you could imagine:

a. the coded sense of cinematographic technique (one does not say "turn a film" in German or English); let's observe in passing that, in the coding imposed by a certain epoch in the mechanics of cinematography, the verb "to turn" may be *transitive* (to shoot [tourner] the scene, to film [tourner] the words) or *intransitive* ("quiet, we're rolling" [on tourne]);

b. the kinetic sense of movements such as "bypass, avoid, overtake, exceed, transgress," but also, insofar as it's a matter of *going around*, "turning about," and "alongside," which suggests practically the opposite: obsessional insistence, fascination, returning toward an inaccessible center, incessant thematization, etc.; yet the fabric, the text or tissue of our film, the film stock itself so well resembles a sieve—that is, the *hasped door* to such a rehashing;

c. the more stylistic sense of "to adjust"—refine, give pleasing shape to, etc.—when one must "turn the words" well, speak well, find the appropriate expression.

Yet these three senses aren't merely juxtaposed; they capitalize on one another in the abyss of a virtual speculation: *a* can turn *c* while returning to *b*, and *c* can implement *b* while "speaking" or "making speak" *a*, etc. That's what we would do, isn't it, in the film and at the margin of the film . . .

—*On the one hand*, as I was saying (if I may resume), the words had *either* to silence and renounce themselves—in any case to resist the rhetorical temptation, *or else* place themselves at the service of a cinematographic writing or even rhetoric. They had to give up their place respectfully to these figures proper to "cinema," to this writing without precedent or equivalent. Didactic speech, discursive assertiveness, even the continuity of narration or the self-indulgent impulse of confession, all had to be reduced to silence. Quiet, words; we're rolling! Quiet, words; even as we speak! We're rolling!

But at the same time and *on the other hand*, we had to *shoot* the words, to film them, to expose them to the camera. We ought, either you or I, to give some examples of one or the other. How to bring to light these clearly improvised words, to make them appear as images and to stage them as no more nor less than *filmic bodies*? Some of these terms preceded and oriented the shoot in advance, while others came to assert themselves, as if out of nowhere [à l'improviste], during the shoot itself. Sometimes they claimed the right of return; they demanded to come back to weave themselves *into* the fabric and even to invade the warp and woof, if I may say so, of the film stock: as if, stronger than the two of us, more insistent than all of us, proving more necessary than the Auteur, or the Actor now a mere *extra*, more commanding and more ancient than all the subjects of the film, they

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commanded that they be filmed. A lexicon would have determined the order of shooting: shoot me first, these terms would have decreed (I recall for example the recurrence of the words "obscene," "sublime," "ruins," "secret," "pardon," along with others . . .). We must be watched, this is our business, so the words would also insinuate. We are the landscape itself, composing it and existing as elements of it. We are henceforth *directly from* these places, the first occupants of these deserts; we reign over these coasts, these mountains, these streets, and these ruins, these sites of worship or teaching.

—These places are also therefore what the rhetoricians in their code call "topoi": figure, trope, metaphor, or metonymy; catachresis, rather, or anacoluthon. We had to *shoot* [*tourner*] these rhetorical *tours*.

—I have a weakness for "anacoluthon." That figure better suits the film's constantly elliptical, discontinuous, syncopated writing. Remember what Proust says about it, apropos of the lies of Albertine: "abrupt breaches of syntax not unlike that figure which the grammarians call anacoluthon or some such name." And Proust, or rather the Narrator, explains how anacoluthon prevents one from knowing easily "who was the subject of the action."[8] Whence the lie without the lie, the indeterminate perjury: one can no longer incriminate Albertine, or indeed anyone. For the Auteur of the film, anacoluthon was a law intractable, severe, menacing. But it justified the risks taken. Gamble and act of faith in the "knowing-how-to-read" of the Spectator.

—Indeed, one of the Actor's two accomplices (not Jean-Luc Nancy, this time, but J. Hillis Miller, of whom one catches a glimpse strolling with the Actor on the campus of the University of California, Irvine)—I remember now that he devoted a very beautiful text to the lie in the narrative fiction of *À la recherche du temps perdu*: "The Anacoluthonic Lie."[9]

—Moreover, this reference reminds us of one of the film's stakes: its internationality. Coproduced by Arte, a European or at least binational channel, this film entitled *Elsewhere*, . . . if, we have said, it is bound body and soul to French in its original version, it was shot in large part in the United States, Algeria, and Spain. Also the soundscape includes other languages (in particular, the English that is already subtitled in French in certain sequences in the original version). The film, moreover, is signed by an Auteur who, though she lives in France, is also an Egyptian poet whose literary oeuvre remains faithful to Arabic, her birth language, and who speaks English at home in Paris with her Scottish husband. As for the Actor, born in Algeria, a lover of the French language, a French citizen from 1930 to 1940 and again from 1943 to the present, the whole film turns on his Judeo-Hispano-Maghrebian origins, not to speak of the rather cosmopolitan sites of his education, including Paris. If he is a Frenchman, he comes from elsewhere. The bias, the gamble of the Auteur, was at first to emphasize this, at the risk of excluding, sacrificing, circumscribing, or excising many other possible zones . . .

—One has, moreover, the feeling that there is a little something of him left elsewhere, the poor Actor. Perhaps it's what he desires. Perhaps he hopes to save himself in this way.

—Here we catch sight of several policies of "cultural exceptionalism," several policies of language and of television undergoing Europeanization or "globalization." They may therefore be in contention about the production, even the managerial control, of works of this kind—and in contention about the subject matter, contesting the reading or the writing of such films, the subtitles, the dubbing, the hegemony of certain languages

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and therefore of certain cultures. There are nothing but exceptions.

—Regarding the choices made by the Auteur herself, they seem unequivocal, and the Actor seems to accept them as his own. It's by cultivating a *certain mode* of singularity or indeed the untranslatability of idioms; by welcoming the strangeness or the stranger that comes from elsewhere; by saluting it *as such* that one honors the passage of border crossings, hospitality, internationality, universality. These are the most obsessive themes of a film that turns on the question tackled explicitly elsewhere: "What is hospitality?"[10] An eternal question, certainly. But in the urgency conferred on it today by what one calmly calls "the European Union," "globalization," or *mondialisation* (*globalatinization* [mondialatinisation], as the Actor puts it in *Faith and Knowledge*),[11] we know it renews itself through the technological transformation of public space and therefore in large measure through the political future of television,[12] by the place it will reserve for idioms, by the respect with which it will embrace language and languages—filming speech, giving it the opportunity to speak, pledging its word to speech, promising to "shoot" speech with dignity. Body and soul. Here is what remains to be invented. Here, at the words' turn, one waits on the future of television and what it will make of discourse, of literature, of poetry, of philosophy, of science, of the body of thinking . . .

—You say that the film *turns on* . . . One could also say it *turns to* . . . Or *elsewhere*. But perhaps one should begin by repeating "return" and "to return." The movement, the temporality, the speed of the film, its kinematics obey memory first, the drive to anamnesis and nostalgic retrospection. One must first *return* to cherished landscapes, above all, to deserted spaces—sea or ocean or dry land; coastlines and beaches; places known or dreamed (Algeria, which the Actor calls his "nostalgeria"—El Biar, Algiers, and Kabylie—his childhood home, the schools, the houses of worship; ancestral Spain—Toledo, southern Andalusia, and Almería; Southern California where the Actor sometimes teaches; Laguna Beach, which is to say the America most evocative of Spain). These backdrops are not mere decor, but they remain, by design, unidentified in the film. One never knows exactly where one is. We betray the Auteur here by revealing the names: informing, contrary to the spirit of the film. These "backdrops" (visible, audible) dissolve into one another, effacing and overlapping one another. As in the turning and returning of waves.

—The waves crash [échouent] steadily. On the shores of the Pacific or the Mediterranean, they arrive in force. But they come only to run aground [échouer], arriving as a memory does, desperate to return, but which upon doing so fades in force, stops struggling, and gains only silence. They wind up remembering. To recall to themselves, hence to withdraw. This is one of the scansions, the very rhythm of the film. Indeed, the waves interrupt or accompany the flow of images or of discourse. Weary but inexhaustible. Sonorous waves that also turn the words, in a manner every bit as unintelligible and obsessive as Arabic-Andalusian music. The Pacific and the Mediterranean mix their waters on what looks like the same beach. All the words seem to be turned toward this surge, all dedicated to a kind of resurgence. Perhaps they wanted to toss themselves in it. Indeed, they end up getting lost in it, thankfully.

—Yes, they do nothing but run aground. In the end, it's always the same other place, the same "elsewhere"—even here, the same placeless place that is literally the subject in the Actor's impromptu—which does not fail, more than once, to confide what is for him the return and the desire for an eternal return. Everything he says, no matter what subject he has broached, comes back to coming back.

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Even his memories of prison seem to be magnetized by this love [aimantés par cet amour] of the past, by this desire for repetition, by the hospitality of memory, this fidelity to fidelity. This is what he says. Because if this film was thought out ahead of time (certainly), but shot, all in all, without rehearsals, and if the Actor improvised during the shooting, if he allowed himself to be shot as if it hadn't been planned [à l'improviste], nevertheless everything in the film turns on repetition, on the eternal return, on its "diction": "benediction" and "nonmalediction" are practically the last words, apropos of a certain eternal return. What the Actor confides is that he blesses (almost always) or does not bless (rarely), but he never curses, ever. Is this possible? Of what, or of whom, does he speak, exactly?

—Don't say what he says or doesn't say. Let's not repeat it. We're not going to renarrate the film. Or replace it. We're not going to pretend we're translating what is *said* into a scholarly or affected language (I'm not saying what is *done* or *written* there), what is betrayed also, helplessly, spontaneously, as if "live." Let's pretend that what we just did was nothing more than to propose a subtitle (*tourner les mots*) for a short film in two voices that refuses to choose between two laws of genre/gender,[13] fiction and documentary, dialogue and soliloquy. And as if we had just given ourselves over, in retrospect, to a notion of a generic [générique],[14] in short, to a genealogy. Remember: every offshoot of this film will say something about filiation . . .

—. . . filiation dispersed, moreover, an exodus, rather than a genesis sooner or later.[15]

—And now the Actor and the Auteur fight no more over anything. They fight no more between themselves.

—Let's acknowledge, at least, and tell the Reader, that even when they quarreled during the shoot (in truth, practically all the time) they never fought over the film.

—It's true that it was something else. But what, exactly [au juste]? Now, each one acts for himself . . . Each one takes back and takes up his word.

—To each one his or her memory . . .

Translator's Notes

1. All ellipses in the translation are in the original.

2. One may be disposed to recognize here an oblique reference to Levinas's remarks on the "trace" of the criminal.

3. The density of allusion—of play—in this short sentence evokes a range of texts by Derrida on the concepts of *jeu* and *jouer*, including his seminal writings on *différance* (e.g., *L'écriture*).

4. In the final version of this scene, Derrida wields a pipe rather than a camera. As we learn, footage he shot with his own camera and that was seen in the rushes was ultimately edited out. "Jacques avait une petite caméra super 8, avec laquelle il nous a filmés préparant le tournage. Les images ont été montées dans une version du film, mais elles n'y sont plus" (Derrida and Fathy 159).

5. Georgette Derrida (23 July 1901–5 Dec. 1991).

6. Norbert Derrida (11 Jan. 1938–26 Mar. 1940) (Peeters 16).

7. There are, in fact, rare occurrences of the nominal usage of "improviste," as cited, for example, in *Le trésor de la langue française*.

8. Proust, *In Search* 5: 197. For the original quotation in Derrida and Fathy, see Proust, *À la recherche* 3: 659.

9. The French text contains this publisher's note: J. Hillis Miller, *Reading Narrative*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1998.

10. E.g., Derrida, *Donner la mort* and *De l'hospitalité*.

11. Derrida, *Foi* 21. Derrida's neologism embeds the word *Latin* in the French term for globalization to highlight the link between that process and the dissemination, through the Latin language, of Christianity as one of its conditions. See also Derrida, "Faith" 50.

12. "[T]he struggle today to control the sky *with finger and eye*: digital systems and virtually immediate panoptical visualization, 'air space,' telecommunications satellites, information highways, concentration of capitalistic-mediatic power" ("Faith" 61–62).

13. Derrida, "Loi."

14. "Un générique" also means "film credits."

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15. The polysemy of this sentence underscores yet again the multiple meanings of the key term *d'ailleurs* (here both "elsewhere" and "moreover") throughout the text. Even more crucially, the references to the Abrahamic faiths and their narratives of origin and displacement allude in their ramifying, uncertain apposition to a historical struggle that ends, in the next line, in a qualified personal concord between two who act and play with their ascriptive (and resisted) roles in relation to this historical struggle.

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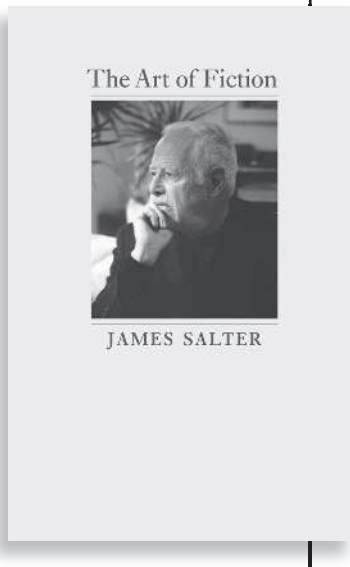
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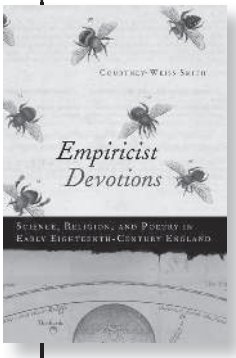


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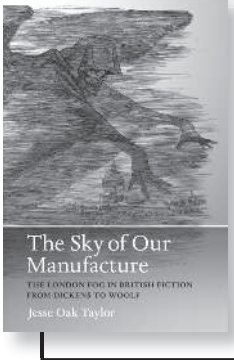
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