

**“RACE,” WRITING,
AND DIFFERENCE**

Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Contents

For Dominique de Menil, artist and humanitarian

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	1	Introduction: Writing "Race" and the Difference It Makes
<i>Anthony Appiah</i>	21	The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race
<i>Edward W. Said</i>	38	An Ideology of Difference
<i>Jane Tompkins</i>	59	"Indians": Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History
<i>Abdul R. JanMohamed</i>	78	The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature
<i>Bernard Lewis</i>	107	The Crows of the Arabs
<i>Israel Burshatin</i>	117	The Moor in the Text: Metaphor, Emblem, and Silence
<i>Mary Louise Pratt</i>	138	Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen
<i>Homi K. Bhabha</i>	163	Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817
<i>Patrick Brantlinger</i>	185	Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent
<i>Sander L. Gilman</i>	223	Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature
<i>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak</i>	262	Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism
<i>Christopher L. Miller</i>	281	Theories of Africans: The Question of Literary Anthropology
<i>Hazel V. Carby</i>	301	"On the Threshold of Woman's Era": Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory

<i>Barbara Johnson</i>	317	Thresholds of Difference: Structures of Address in Zora Neale Hurston
<i>Jacques Derrida</i>	329	Racism's Last Word
<i>Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon</i>	339	No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme"
<i>Jacques Derrida</i>	354	But, beyond . . . (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)
<i>Tzvetan Todorov</i>	370	"Race," Writing, and Culture
<i>Houston A. Baker, Jr.</i>	381	Caliban's Triple Play
<i>Harold Fromm</i>	396	The Hegemonic Form of Othering; or, The Academic's Burden
<i>Mary Louise Pratt</i>	400	A Reply to Harold Fromm
<i>Henry Louis Gates, Jr.</i>	402	Talkin' That Talk
	410	Index

Editor's Introduction: Writing "Race" and the Difference It Makes

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

The truth is that, with the fading of the Renaissance ideal through progressive stages of specialism, leading to intellectual emptiness, we are left with a potentially suicidal movement among "leaders of the profession," while, at the same time, the profession sprawls, without its old center, in helpless disarray.

One quickly cited example is the professional organization, the Modern Language Association. . . . A glance at its thick program for its last meeting shows a massive increase and fragmentation into more than 500 categories! I cite a few examples: . . . "The Trickster Figure in Chicano and Black Literature" . . . Naturally, the progressive trivialization of topics has made these meetings a laughingstock in the national press.

—W. JACKSON BATE, "The Crisis in English Studies"

Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.

—MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, "Discourse in the Novel"

Hurston herself? As Nathan Huggins writes after an attempt to determine the sincerity of Hurston's poses and self-representations, "It is impossible to tell from reading Miss Hurston's autobiography who was being fooled."⁶ If, as Hurston often implies, the essence of telling "lies" is the art of conforming a narrative to existing structures of address while gaining the upper hand, then Hurston's very ability to fool us—or to fool us into *thinking* we have been fooled—is itself the only effective way of conveying the rhetoric of the "lie." To turn one's own life into a trickster tale of which even the teller herself might be the dupe certainly goes far in deconstructing the possibility of representing the truth of identity.

If I initially approached Hurston out of a desire to re-referentialize difference, what Hurston gives me back seems to be difference as a suspension of reference. Yet the terms "black" and "white," "inside" and "outside," continue to matter. Hurston suspends the certainty of reference not by erasing these differences but by foregrounding the complex dynamism of their interaction.

1. See Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," *World Tomorrow* 11 (May 1928): 215–16; rpt. in *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader*, ed. Alice Walker (Old Westbury, N.Y., 1979), pp. 152–155; all further references to this work, abbreviated "CM," will be to this edition and will be included in the text.

2. See Hurston, "What White Publishers Won't Print," *Negro Digest* 8 (Apr. 1950): 85–89; rpt. in *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*, pp. 169–73; all further references to this work, abbreviated "WP," will be to this edition and will be included in the text.

3. See Hurston, *Mules and Men* (1935; Bloomington, Ind., 1978); all further references to this work, abbreviated *MM*, will be included in the text.

4. Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York, 1963), pp. 238–39.

5. This formulation was suggested to me by a student, Lisa Cohen.

6. Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (London, 1971), p. 133.

Racism's Last Word

Jacques Derrida

Translated by Peggy Kamuf

Translator's Note.—"Racism's Last Word" is a translation of "*Le Dernier Mot du racisme*," which was written for the catalog of the exhibition *Art contre/against Apartheid*. The exhibition was assembled by the Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid, headed by Antonio Saura and Ernest Pignon-Ernest, in cooperation with the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid. Eighty-five of the world's most celebrated artists contributed paintings and sculpture to the exhibition, which opened in Paris in November 1983. In addition, a number of writers and scholars were invited to contribute texts for the catalog. "*Le Dernier Mot du racisme*" serves in particular to introduce the project of the itinerant exhibition, which the organizers described briefly in their preface to the catalog:

The collection offered here will form the basis of a future museum against apartheid. But first, these works will be presented in a traveling exhibition to be received by museums and other cultural facilities throughout the world. The day will come—and our efforts are joined to those of the international community aiming to hasten that day's arrival—when the museum thus constituted will be presented as a gift to the first free and democratic government of South Africa to be elected by universal suffrage. Until then, the Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid will assume, through the appropriate legal, institutional and financial structures, the trusteeship of the works.

A somewhat modified version of "Racism's Last Word" was originally published in the bilingual catalog of the exhibition.

APARTHEID—may that remain the name from now on, the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many.

May it thus remain, but may a day come when it will only be for the memory of man.

A memory in advance: that, perhaps, is the time given for this exhibition. At once urgent and untimely, it exposes itself and takes a chance with time, it wagers and affirms beyond the wager. Without counting on any present moment, it offers only a foresight in painting, very close to silence, and the rearview vision of a future for which *apartheid* will be the name of something finally abolished. Confined and abandoned then to this silence of memory, the name will resonate all by itself, reduced to the state of a term in disuse. The thing it names today will no longer be.

But hasn't *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?

The exhibition, therefore, is not a presentation. Nothing is delivered here in the present, nothing that would be presentable—only, in tomorrow's rearview mirror, the late, ultimate racism, the last of many.

1

THE LAST: or *le dernier* as one sometimes says in French in order to signify "the worst." What one is doing in that case is situating the extreme of baseness, just as, in English, one might say "the lowest of the . . ." It is to the lowest degree, the last of a series, but also that which comes along at the end of a history, or in the last analysis, to carry out the law of some process and reveal the thing's truth, here finishing off the essence of evil, the worst, the essence at its very worst—as if there were something like a racism par excellence, the most racist of racisms.

THE LAST as one says also of the most recent, the last to date of all the world's racisms, the oldest and the youngest. For one must not forget that, although racial segregation didn't wait for the name *apartheid* to come along, that name became order's *watchword* and won its title in the political code of South Africa only at the end of the Second World War. At a time when *all* racisms on the face of the earth were condemned,

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it was in the world's face that the National party dared to campaign "for the separate development of each race in the geographic zone assigned to it."

Since then, no tongue has ever translated this name—as if all the languages of the world were defending themselves, shutting their mouths against a sinister incorporation of the thing by means of the word, as if all tongues were refusing to give an equivalent, refusing to let themselves be contaminated through the contagious hospitality of the word-for-word. Here, then, is an immediate response to the obsessiveness of this racism, to the compulsive terror which, above all, forbids contact. The white must not let itself be touched by black, be it even at the remove of language or symbol. Blacks do not have the right to touch the flag of the republic. In 1964, South Africa's Ministry of Public Works sought to assure the cleanliness of national emblems by means of a regulation stipulating that it is "forbidden for non-Europeans to handle them."

APARTHEID: by itself the word occupies the terrain like a concentration camp. System of partition, barbed wire, crowds of mapped out solitudes. Within the limits of this untranslatable idiom, a violent arrest of the mark, the glaring harshness of abstract essence (*heid*) seems to speculate in another regime of abstraction, that of confined separation. The word concentrates separation, raises it to another power and sets separation itself *apart*: "apartitionality," something like that. By isolating being apart in some sort of essence or hypostasis, the word corrupts it into a quasi-ontological segregation. At every point, like all racisms, it tends to pass segregation off as natural—and as the very law of the origin. Such is the monstrosity of this political idiom. Surely, an idiom should never incline toward racism. It often does, however, and this is not altogether fortuitous: there's no racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, color, birth—or, rather, *because* it uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse—racism always betrays the perversion of a man, the "talking animal." It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates.

THE LAST, finally, since this last-born of many racisms is also the only one surviving in the world, at least the only one still parading itself in a political constitution. It remains the only one on the scene that dares to say its name and to present itself for what it is: a legal defiance taken on by *homo politicus*, a juridical racism and a state racism. Such is the ultimate imposture of a so-called state of law which doesn't hesitate to base itself on a would-be original hierarchy—of natural right or divine right, the two are never mutually exclusive.

This name apart will have, therefore, a unique, sinister renown. *Apartheid* is famous, in sum, for manifesting the lowest extreme of racism, its end and the narrow-minded self-sufficiency of its intention, its es-

chatology, the death rattle of what is already an interminable agony, something like the setting in the West of racism—but also, and this will have to be specified below, racism as a Western thing.

2

In order to respond to this singularity or, better yet, to fling back an answer, the singularity right here of another event takes its measure. Artists from all over the world are preparing to launch a new satellite, a vehicle whose dimensions can hardly be determined except as a satellite of humanity. Actually, it measures itself against *apartheid* only so as to remain in no measure comparable with that system, its power, its fantastic riches, its excessive armament, the worldwide network of its openly declared or shamefaced accomplices. This unarmed exhibition will have a force that is altogether other, just as its trajectory will be without example.

Its movement does not yet belong to any given time or space that might be measured today. Its flight rushes headlong, it commemorates in anticipation—not its own event but the one that it calls forth. Its flight, in sum, is as much that of a planet as of a satellite. A planet, as the name indicates, is first of all a body sent wandering on a migration which, in this case, has no certain end.

In all the world's cities whose momentary guest it will be, the exhibition will not, so to speak, take place, not yet, not *its* place. It will remain in exile in the sight of its proper residence, its place of destination to come—and to create. For such is here the *creation* and the work of which it is fitting to speak: South Africa beyond *apartheid*, South Africa in memory of *apartheid*.

While this might be the cape to be rounded, everything will have begun with exile. Born in exile, the exhibition already bears witness against the forced assignment to “natural” territory, the geography of birth. And if it never reaches its destination, having been condemned to an endless flight or immobilized far from an unshakable South Africa, it will not only keep the archival record of a failure or a despair but continue to *say* something, something that can be heard today, in the present.

This new satellite of humanity, then, will move from place to place, it too, like a mobile and stable habitat, “mobile” and “stabile,” a place of observation, information, and witness. A satellite is a guard, it keeps watch and gives warning: Do not forget *apartheid*, save humanity from this evil, an evil that cannot be summed up in the principal and abstract iniquity of a system. It is also daily suffering, oppression, poverty, violence, torture inflicted by an arrogant white minority (16 percent of the population, controlling 60 to 65 percent of the national revenue) on the mass of the black population. The information that Amnesty International

compiled on political imprisonment in South Africa and on the whole of the judicial and penal reality is appalling.¹

Yet, what can be done so that this witness-satellite, in the truth it exposes, is not taken over and controlled, thus becoming another technical device, the antenna of some new politico-military strategy, a useful machinery for the exploitation of new resources, or the calculation in view of more comprehensive interests?

In order better to ask this question, which awaits an answer only from the future that remains inconceivable, let us return to immediate appearances. Here is an exhibition—as one continues to say in the old language of the West, “works of art,” signed “creations,” in the present case “pictures” or “paintings,” “sculptures.” In this collective and international exhibition (and there's nothing new about that either), pictorial, sculptural idioms will be crossing, but they will be attempting to speak the other's language without renouncing their own. And in order to effect this translation, their common reference henceforth makes an appeal to a language that cannot be found, a language at once very old, older than Europe, but for that very reason to be invented once more.

3

Why mention the European age in this fashion? Why this reminder of such a trivial fact—that all these words are part of the old language of the West?

Because it seems to me that the aforementioned exhibition exposes and commemorates, indicts and contradicts the whole of a Western history. That a certain white community of European descent imposes *apartheid* on four-fifths of South Africa's population and maintains (up until 1980!) the *official* lie of a white migration that preceded black migration is not the only reason that *apartheid* was a European “creation.” Nor for any other such reason: the name of *apartheid* has managed to become a sinister swelling on the body of the world only in that place where *homo politicus europaeus* first put his signature on its tattoo. The primary reason, however, is that here it is a question of state racism. While all racisms have their basis in culture and in institutions, not all of them give rise to state-controlled structures. The judicial simulacrum and the political theater of this state racism have no meaning and would have had no chance outside a European “discourse” on the concept of race. That discourse belongs to a whole system of “phantasms,” to a certain representation of nature, life, history, religion, and law, to the very culture which succeeded in giving rise to this state takeover. No doubt there is also here—and it bears repeating—a contradiction internal to the West and to the assertion of its rights. No doubt *apartheid* was instituted and maintained against the British Commonwealth, following a long adventure

that began with England's abolition of slavery in 1834, at which time the impoverished Boers undertook the Long Trek toward the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. But this contradiction only confirms the occidental essence of the historical process—in its incoherences, its compromises, and its stabilization. Since the Second World War, at least if one accepts the givens of a certain kind of calculation, the stability of the Pretoria regime has been prerequisite to the political, economic, and strategic equilibrium of Europe. The survival of Western Europe depends on it. Whether one is talking about gold or what are called strategic ores, it is known to be the case that at least three-fourths of the world's share of them is divided between the USSR and South Africa. Direct or even indirect Soviet control of South Africa would provoke, or so think certain Western heads of state, a catastrophe beyond all comparison with the malediction (or the "bad image") of *apartheid*. And then there's the necessity of controlling the route around the cape, and then there's also the need for resources or jobs that can be provided by the exportation of arms and technological infrastructures—nuclear power plants, for example, even though Pretoria rejects international control and has not signed any nuclear nonproliferation treaty.

Apartheid constitutes, therefore, the first "delivery of arms," the first product of European exportation. Some might say that this is a diversion and a perversion, and no doubt it is. Yet somehow the thing had to be possible and, what is more, durable. Symbolic condemnations, even when they have been official, have never disrupted diplomatic, economic, or cultural exchanges, the deliveries of arms, and geopolitical solidarity. Since 1973, *apartheid* has been declared a "crime against humanity" by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Nevertheless, many member countries, including some of the most powerful, are not doing all that's required (that's the least one can say) to put the Pretoria regime in a difficult situation or to force it to abolish *apartheid*. This contradiction is sharpest no doubt in today's France, which has provided more support for this exhibition than anywhere else.

Supplementary contradictions for the whole of Europe: Certain Eastern European countries—Czechoslovakia and the USSR, for example—maintain their economic trade with South Africa (in phosphoric acids, arms, machinery, gold). As for the pressures applied to Pretoria to achieve the relaxation of certain forms of *apartheid*, in particular those that are called petty and that forbid, for instance, access to public buildings, one must admit that these pressures are not always inspired by respect for human rights. The fact is, *apartheid* also increases nonproductive expenditures (for example, each "homeland" must have its own policing and administrative machinery); segregation hurts the market economy, limits free enterprise by limiting domestic consumption and the mobility and training of labor. In a time of unprecedented economic crisis, South Africa has to reckon, both internally and externally, with the forces of

a liberal current according to which "*apartheid* is notoriously inefficient from the point of view of economic rationality."² This too will have to remain in memory: if one day *apartheid* is abolished, its demise will not be credited only to the account of moral standards—because moral standards should not count or keep accounts, to be sure, but also because on the scale which is that of a worldwide computer, the law of the marketplace will have imposed another standard of calculation.

4

The theologico-political discourse of *apartheid* has difficulty keeping up sometimes, but it illustrates the same economy, the same intra-European contradiction.

It is not enough to invent the prohibition and to enrich every day the most repressive legal apparatus in the world: in a breathless frenzy of obsessive juridical activity, two hundred laws and amendments were enacted in twenty years (Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act, 1949; Immorality Amendment Act [against interracial sexual relations], Group Areas Act, Population Registration Act, 1950; Reservation of Separate Amenities [segregation in movie houses, post offices, swimming pools, on beaches, and so forth], Motor Carrier Transportation Amendment Act, Extension of University Education Act [separate universities], 1955; segregation in athletic competition has already been widely publicized).

This law is also founded in a theology and these Acts in Scripture. Since political power originates in God, it remains indivisible. To accord individual rights "to immature social communities" and to those who "openly rebel against God, that is, the communists" would be a "revolt against God." This Calvinist reading of Scripture condemns democracy, that universalism "which seeks the root of humanity in a set of worldwide sovereign relations that includes humanity in a whole." It points out that "Scripture and History each demonstrate that God requires Christian States."³

The charter of the Institute for National Christian Education (1948) sets out the only regulations possible for a South African government. It prescribes an education

in the light of God's word . . . on the basis of the applicable principles of Scripture.

For each people and each nation is attached to its own native soil which has been allotted to it by the Creator. . . . God wanted nations and peoples to be separate, and he gave separately to each nation and to each people its particular vocation, its task and its gifts. . . .

Christian doctrine and philosophy should be practiced. But we desire even more than this: the secular sciences should be taught from the Christian-National perspective on life. . . . Consequently, it is important that teaching personnel be made up of scholars with Christian-National convictions. . . . Unless [the professor] is Christian, he poses a danger to everyone. . . . This guardianship imposes on the Afrikaner the duty of assuring that the colored peoples are educated in accordance with Christian-National principles. . . . We believe that the well-being and happiness of the colored man resides in his recognition of the fact that he belongs to a separate racial group.

It happens that this political theology inspires its militants with an original form of anti-Semitism: thus the National party excluded Jews up until 1951. This is because the "Hebrewistic" mythology of the Boer people, coming out of its nomadic origins and the Long Trek, excludes any other "Chosen People." None of which prevents (see above) all sorts of worthwhile exchanges with Israel.

But let us never simplify matters. Among all the domestic contradictions thus exported, maintained, and capitalized upon by Europe, there remains one which is not just any one among others: *apartheid* is upheld, to be sure, but also condemned in the name of Christ. There are many signs of this obvious fact. The white resistance movement in South Africa deserves our praise. The Christian Institute, founded after the slaughter in Sharpeville in 1961, considers *apartheid* incompatible with the evangelical message, and it publicly supports the banned black political movements. But it should be added that it is this same Christian Institute which was, in turn, banned in 1977, not the Institute for National Christian Education.

All of this, of course, is going on under a regime whose formal structures are those of a Western democracy, in the British style, with "universal suffrage" (except for the 72 percent of blacks "foreign" to the republic and citizens of "Bantustans" that are being pushed "democratically" into the trap of formal independence), a relative freedom of the press, the guarantee of individual rights and of the judicial system.

5

What is South Africa? We have perhaps isolated whatever it is that has been concentrated in that enigma, but the outline of such analyses has neither dissolved nor dissipated it in the least. Precisely because of this concentration of world history, what resists analysis also calls for another mode of thinking. If we could forget about the suffering, the humiliation, the torture and the deaths, we might be tempted to look at

this region of the world as a giant tableau or painting, the screen for some geopolitical computer. Europe, in the enigmatic process of its globalization and of its paradoxical disappearance, seems to project onto this screen, point by point, the silhouette of its internal war, the bottom line of its profits and losses, the double-bind logic of its national and multinational interests. Their dialectical evaluation provides only a provisional stasis in a precarious equilibrium, one whose price today is *apartheid*. All states and all societies are still willing to pay this price, first of all by making someone else pay. At stake, advises the computer, are world peace, the general economy, the marketplace for European labor, and so on. Without minimizing the alleged "reasons of state," we must nevertheless say very loudly and in a single breath: If that's the way it is, then the declarations of the Western states denouncing *apartheid* from the height of international platforms and elsewhere are dialectics of denegation. With great fanfare, they are trying to make the world forget the 1973 verdict—"crime against humanity." If this verdict continues to have no effect, it is because the customary discourse on man, humanism and human rights, has encountered its effective and as yet unthought limit, the limit of the whole system in which it acquires meaning. Amnesty International: "As long as *apartheid* lasts, there can be no structure conforming to the generally recognized norms of human rights and able to guarantee their application."⁴

Beyond the global computer, the dialectic of strategic or economic calculations, beyond state-controlled, national, or international tribunals, beyond the juridico-political or theologico-political discourse, which any more serves only to maintain good conscience or denegation, it was, it will have to be, it is necessary to appeal unconditionally to the future of another law and another force lying beyond the totality of this present.

This, it seems to me, is what this exhibition affirms or summons forth, what it signs with a single stroke. Here also is what it must give one to read and to think, and thus to do, and to give yet again, beyond the present of the institutions supporting it or of the foundation that, in turn, it will itself become.

Will it succeed? Will it make of this very thing a work? Nothing can be guaranteed here, by definition.

But if one day the exhibition wins, yes, *wins* its place in South Africa, it will keep the memory of what will never have been, at the moment of these projected, painted, assembled works, the presentation of some present. Even the future perfect can no longer translate the tense, the time of what is being written in this way—and what is doubtless no longer part of the *everyday current*, of the cursory sense of history.

Isn't this true of any "work"? Of that truth which is so difficult to put into words? Perhaps.

The exemplary history of "Guernica" (name of the town, name of a hell, name of the work) is not without analogy to the history of this

exhibition, to be sure; it may even have inspired the idea for the exhibition. *Guernica* denounces civilized barbarism, and from out of the painting's exile, in its dead silence, one hears the cry of moaning or accusation. Brought forward by the painting, the cry joins with the children's screams and the bombers' din, until the last day of dictatorship when the work is repatriated to a place in which it has never dwelled.

To be sure; still it was the work, if one may say so, of a single individual, and also Picasso was addressing—not only but also and first of all—his own country. As for the lawful rule recently reestablished in Spain, it, like that of so many countries, continues to participate in the system which presently assures, as we have been saying, the survival of *apartheid*.

Things are not the same with this exhibition. Here the single work is multiple, it crosses all national, cultural, and political frontiers. It neither commemorates nor represents an event. Rather, it casts a continuous gaze (paintings are always gazing) at what I propose to name a continent. One may do whatever one wishes with all the senses of that word.

Beyond a continent whose limits they point to, the limits surrounding it or crossing through it, the paintings gaze and call out in silence.

And their silence is just. A discourse would once again compel us to reckon with the present state of force and law. It would draw up contracts, dialecticize itself, let itself be reappropriated again.

This silence calls out unconditionally; it keeps watch on that which is not, on that which is not yet, and on the chance of still remembering some faithful day.

1. See *Political Imprisonment in South Africa: An Amnesty International Report* (London, 1978).

2. Howard Schissel, "La Solution de rechange libérale: comment concilier défense des droits de l'homme et augmentation des profits" [The liberal alternative as solution: how to reconcile the defense of human rights with increase in profits], *Le Monde diplomatique*, Oct. 1979, p. 18. For the same tendency, cf. René Lefort, "Solidarités raciales et intérêts de classe: composer avec les impératifs de l'économie sans renoncer au 'développement séparé'" [Racial solidarity and class interests: meeting economic imperatives without renouncing "separate development"], *Le Monde diplomatique*, Oct. 1979, pp. 15–16. For the same "logic" from the labor-union point of view, see Brigitte Lachartre, "Un Système d'interdits devenu gênant" [A system of prohibitions become a nuisance], *Le Monde diplomatique*, Oct. 1979, pp. 16–17, and Marianne Cornevin, *La République sud-africaine* (Paris, 1972).

3. *The Fundamental Principles of Calvinist Political Science*, quoted in Serge Thion, *Le Pouvoir pâle: Essai sur le système sud-africain* (Paris, 1969).

4. See *Political Imprisonment in South Africa*.

No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme"

Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon

Jacques Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme" ("Racism's Last Word," pp. 329–38) leaves no doubt as to his signal opposition to the South African regime.¹ Certainly the essay is tendered as a call to action, an urgent injunction to "save humanity from this evil" *apartheid*; besides exposing the "truth" of *apartheid*, its purpose is to "fling back an answer" (*riposter*). If, then, Derrida seeks not merely to prize open certain covert metaphysical assumptions but also to point to something *beyond* the text, in this case the abolition of a regime, then the strategic value of his method has to be considered seriously. This entails, in particular, pondering the political implications of both his extended reflection on the word *apartheid* and his diffuse historical comments.

As it stands, Derrida's protest is deficient in any sense of how the discourses of South African racism have been at once historically constituted and politically constitutive. For to begin to investigate how the representation of racial difference has functioned in South Africa's political and economic life, it is necessary to recognize and track the shifting character of these discourses. Derrida, however, blurs historical differences by conferring on the single term *apartheid* a spurious autonomy and agency: "The word concentrates separation. . . . By isolating being apart in some sort of essence or hypostasis, the word corrupts it into a quasi-

1. The English translation of the title—"Racism's Last Word"—does not quite do justice to the original. "The Last Word in Racism" might have been a preferable rendition, at least keeping in play Derrida's double sense of *apartheid* as not merely the last remaining word of racism but also racism's apogee.

ontological segregation" (p. 331). Is it indeed the word, *apartheid*, or is it Derrida himself, operating here in "another regime of abstraction" (p. 331), removing the word from its place in the discourse of South African racism, raising it to another power, and setting separation itself apart? Derrida is repelled by the word, yet seduced by its divisiveness, the division in the inner structure of the term itself which he elevates to a state of being.

The essay's opening analysis of the word *apartheid* is, then, symptomatic of a severance of word from history. When Derrida asks, "Hasn't *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?" (p. 330), the answer is a straightforward no. Despite its notoriety and currency overseas, the term *apartheid* has not always been the "watchword" of the Nationalist regime (p. 330). It has its own history, and that history is closely entwined with a developing ideology of race which has not only been created to deliberately rationalize and temper South Africa's image at home and abroad, but can also be seen to be intimately allied to different stages of the country's political and economic development. Because he views *apartheid* as a "unique appellation" (p. 330), Derrida has little to say about the politically persuasive function that successive racist lexicons have served in South Africa. To face the challenge of investigating the strategic role of representation, one would have to part ways with him by releasing that pariah of a word, *apartheid*, from its quarantine from historical process, examining it instead in the context of developing discourses of racial difference.

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The word *apartheid* was coined by General Jan Smuts at the Savoy Hotel, London on 27 May 1917 but had barely any currency until it rose to prominence as the rallying cry of the Nationalist party's victorious electoral campaign of 1948. Derrida has reflected on the word's "sinister renown," but as far back as the mid-fifties the South Africans themselves began to recognize that the term *apartheid* had become sufficiently stigmatized to be ostentatiously retired. The developing history of South African racial policy and propaganda highlights the inaccuracy of Derrida's claim that South African racism is "the only one on the scene that dares

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to say its name and present itself for what it is" (p. 331). For in striving both to win greater legitimacy for itself and to justify ideologically the Nationalist bantustan policy,² South African racism has long since ceased to pronounce its own name: *apartheid*, the term Derrida misleadingly calls "the order's watchword" (*mot d'ordre*) (p. 330), was dismissed many years back from the lexical ranks of the regime. From the 1950s onward, the Nationalist party has radically rephrased its ideology, first tempering the grim rhetoric of *apartheid* into talk of "separate development," then into the even more insidious language of "multinationalism" and "self-determination," and most recently into the self-congratulatory discourse of "democratic federalism." These changes in the language of racism are closely, though not always symmetrically, allied to changes in Nationalist party policy.

F. A. van Jaarsveld, an apologist for the Nationalist regime, divides South African racial policy since 1948 into three phases. From 1948 until 1958, he argues, there was the "ideological, doctrinaire and negative" phase of *apartheid*, a period he admits was "severely racist." Second, between 1958 and 1966, this mellowed into the "homeland phase of separate development," a phase he characterizes as one of "internal decolonisation." Third, the period from 1966 onward has seen what he considers to have been "the unobtrusive dismantling of *apartheid*," "the movement away from discrimination," "the elimination of color as a determinant," and the introduction of "democratic pluralism."³ As a very general way of periodizing changes in the *official discourse*, van Jaarsveld's schema may be instructive. But if one is to understand the political role that the regime's justificatory ideology has played, one must expose the contradiction between the uneven, somersaulting evolution of the official discourse in a "democratic" direction and the actual process of deepening brutalization and oppression which it belies.

Prior to the unexpected Afrikaner victory in 1948, South African society had been rife with racial discrimination, but much of it had been ad hoc rather than legislated. From 1948 onward, however, the official policy of *apartheid* ensured in a doctrinaire, unapologetic fashion that the old colonial racist edifice was buttressed with more methodical legislation. That *apartheid* came to supplant the earlier English term "segregation" was symptomatic of the waning influence of English speakers in political life: ever since 1949, the leadership and bureaucracy have been securely in Afrikaans hands. The 1950s were an era of strident *baasskap* ("mastery" or "domination"), but as early as 1953 a certain defensiveness began to creep into the regime's representation of its policies.

2. We here follow the practice of using the term "bantustan" in place of the more glamorous and euphemistic "homelands."

3. Our translation from the Afrikaans. F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Die Evolusie Van Apartheid* (Cape Town, 1979), pp. 1-2.

The attempts by Prime Minister D. F. Malan to rationalize the language of *apartheid* can be seen to prefigure the movement toward abandoning a rhetoric of *racial* for one of *national* difference:

Europe, itself the matrix of Christian civilization, is the outstanding example of apartheid. The map resembles a Joseph's coat of some twenty-five sections, each represented by its own nationality, and for the most part also its own race with its own tongue and its own culture. . . . Apartheid is accepted in Europe as natural, self-explanatory, and right.⁴

Such efforts to improve South Africa's image abroad were, however, hampered by the word *apartheid* itself, which was already dragging a train of sinister connotations. It was in 1958, with the election of Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd as prime minister, that a truly decisive turn took place in the rhetoric and ideology of South African racism. References in the official discourse of the regime to the inferiority of blacks to whites started to be phased out, and the country was no longer referred to as "multiracial" (which would imply a single political entity) but as "multinational." White leaders were careful to speak of the "peoples" of South Africa, not the "people," and, most important, the rhetorically more benign "separate development" came to replace *apartheid*. Here is Dr. Verwoerd's plodding, patronizing explication of the new language before a group of black councillors:

"Separateness" means: something for oneself. The other word refers to what is bigger still, viz. "development", which means growth. . . . Development is growth brought about by man creating something new in a continuing process. Therefore, separate development means the growth of something for oneself and one's nation, due to one's own endeavours.⁵

The ingeniously bipartisan phrase, "separate development," expresses in miniature the acute schizophrenia which marked both the ideology and practice of South African racism under Verwoerd, proclaiming to the world at large that there would be changes and whispering to the white folks at home that there would be no changes at all.

Verwoerd's attempts to whitewash the rhetoric of racism were closely bound to his Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, which involved the extension and deepening of the migrant labor system into the bantustan policy. After 1959, under Verwoerd, the restructuring of

the bantustans gathered momentum, overlapping broadly with the ideological shift from *apartheid* to "separate development." From 1963 until 1964 there was a major overhaul of the urban areas legislation in order to provide a more powerful apparatus for channeling the flow of labor and controlling its every movement. Under Vorster in 1966 the system was deepened. General Circular No. 25 of 12 December 1967 became the basis for massive forced removals and resettlements. As the circular noted:

As soon as they [Bantu] become, for some reason or another, no longer fit for work or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin or the territory of their national unit where they fit in ethnically.⁶

Since the development of the bantustan policy, the Nationalist party has strained to couch its policies in the language of *nationalities* rather than that of *color*, creating the impression that South Africa's difficulties are the same as those of modern Europe and that it could overcome them similarly. As one cabinet minister put it:

The problem in South Africa is basically not one of race, but of nationalism, which is a world-wide problem. There is a White nationalism, and there are several Black nationalisms. . . . My Government's principal aim is to make it possible for each nation, Black and White, to achieve its fullest potential, including sovereign independence, so that each individual can enjoy all the rights and privileges which his or her community is capable of securing for him or her.⁷

Verwoerd's replacement of the alienating racial language of *apartheid* with the more conciliatory rhetoric of multinationalism was sustained by Prime Minister B. J. Vorster. But neither Verwoerd nor his successor managed to create a perfectly watertight discourse of multinationalism, caulked against any seepage of racism. For the dominant ideology of race in white South Africa proved so insistent that it could not be suppressed entirely, even at the level of discourse. Despite the Nationalists' contention that their new egalitarian ideology of multiple nations had supplanted the purportedly outmoded ideology of race, it was manifest that the two ideologies coexisted, often in grinding contradiction, as dramatized by references to "biologically demarcated tribal states."⁸ Contradictions aside, the general drive toward a more palatable idiom continued and, during

4. D. F. Malan, *Die Burger*, 6 Mar. 1953, quoted in Martin Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa," in *South African Capitalism and Black Political Opposition*, ed. Martin J. Murray (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 505 n. 74.

5. Quoted in M. T. W. Arnheim, *South Africa after Vorster* (Cape Town, 1979), p. 23.

6. Quoted in Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy," p. 496.

7. R. F. Botha, *The Star*, 2 July 1976, quoted in No Sizwe, *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa* (London, 1979), p. 12.

8. J. A. Coetzee, quoted *ibid.*, p. 85.

the latter years of Vorster's rule (from roughly 1970 onward), the discourse of multinationalism graduated, in turn, into the even more desperately appeasing rhetoric of "plural democracy." The pace of this discursive transformation has increased markedly under Vorster's successor, P. W. Botha. By the end of 1981, South Africa had implemented the bantustan policy so relentlessly that the majority of the country's blacks had been officially declared citizens either of the four "independent" states or of the six "self-governing" territories. In the ideological realm, too, the Nationalist regime had moved well beyond Verwoerd—by now its official discourse had, as far as possible, been purged of open references to race.

Under Botha, the domestic and international campaign to gain acceptance for the Nationalists' wretched, inequitable partitioning of the land has been conducted not so much in the solicitous rhetoric of multiple nationalities as in the new proud language of democratic federalism. Verwoerd's was a language of promises, of "nations" to be; Botha's is the language of achievement, of an allegedly full-blown "confederation of independent states." In the words of one government publication:

... 20 years ago it was postulated that ... the need for segregation or discrimination, as a protective measure for Whites, would begin to fall away, since the Black peoples would ... have their own bases for political hegemony and sovereignty.⁹

The pages of such publications resound with choice phrases from Botha's new lexicon: "the policy of multinational development [is] assuming the dimensions of what may be called a plural democracy—i.e. a democratic solution to the plural population structure of South Africa."¹⁰ In this vein, the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD) was rechristened Plural Relations and Development, and the names of other state departments were similarly disinfected. And in an attempt to ground the rhetoric of "plural democracy" in a less political, more homely idiom, Botha persistently describes his regime's relation to the black pseudostates within South Africa's borders as one of "good neighborliness," a phrase that banishes all thought of race and racism, and offers in its stead images of the lending and borrowing of lawn mowers in an atmosphere of suburban goodwill.

If an examination of South Africa's representation of racial difference is to be at all politically enabling, the changing hegemonic functions of the word *apartheid* and its kindred terms must be investigated in the context of an active, social language. Here, with Gareth Stedman Jones, we should underscore the prefigurative capacity of political discourses,

their power not merely to address preexistent constituencies but to reconstitute them, or even to generate new ones.¹¹ While the new discourses of South African racism may seem pitifully transparent, they have proved far from innocuous in bracing and rationalizing policies at home and in marketing them abroad. Conveniently for the Nationalists, their latest set of vocabulary—that of democratic federalism—is consonant with the political idiom of the country they need most urgently to impress: the United States. Reagan, for his part, has capitalized on this correspondence, at times even hinting that beneath their common language the two countries may have comparable histories—all the more reason for sympathy and patience. Complaining of "a failure to recognize . . . the steps they [the South Africans] have taken and the gains they have made" in moving toward the abolition of racial discrimination, Reagan has declared, "As long as there's a sincere and honest effort being made, based on our own experience in our own land, it would seem to me that we should be trying to be helpful."¹² In following a diplomatic course euphemistically described as one of "constructive engagement," then "quiet diplomacy," and most recently "active constructive engagement," Reagan and his subordinates in the State Department too often have given credit to the claims of that insidious Nationalist idiom which conveys the illusion of bodying forth democratic progress, reform, and "self-determination." This complicity between the Reagan administration and Botha's regime reached a new pitch with the State Department endorsement of South Africa's constitutional changes. Far from paving the way for full democracy, this new constitution sealed the disenfranchisement of the country's black majority and centralized power to an unprecedented degree, granting Botha personally, as state president, frightening authority. Yet George Shultz could say of this very constitution:

We have tailored our programs, our diplomatic exchanges, and our rhetoric to the facts. Let us be candid with each other. Changes are occurring. . . . South Africa's white electorate has given solid backing to a government that defines itself as committed to evolutionary change.¹³

As the past two years have shown, white South Africa's endorsement of Botha's new constitution did not open the sluice gates of *political* reform. But it has proved a pivotal event in the development of a legitimating *language* of reform. For the centerpiece of the new constitution

11. See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 23–24.

12. Ronald Reagan, "Interview with the President: Question-and-Answer Session with Walter Cronkite of CBS News, Mar. 3, 1981," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 17, 10:235.

13. George Shultz, *Department of State Bulletin* 84, 2085 (Apr. 1984): 12.

9. *South Africa 1983: Official Yearbook* (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 210.

10. *South Africa 1979: Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1979), p. 211.

is the notion of "power-sharing," whereby select Indians and Coloreds are admitted as junior members to the previously all-white parliament and govern the country in unison with the whites. With the advent of this attempt to disperse the regime's opponents by coopting the Indians and Coloreds, the resilient ideological opposition between white and nonwhite became more unpronounceable than ever. If the Coloreds and Indians were to be persuaded that they were entitled to white privileges, they could not be lumped together with the disenfranchised blacks under the category "nonwhites." So the opposition was (theoretically) to be between a "power-sharing" nonblack alliance and the blacks. Of course, the ruse has failed politically. Nevertheless, the discursive reforms remain and are gauged to present policy as pragmatic, reasonable, and transcendent of mere racial ideology.

The latest phase in Botha's attempts to institute a nonracial language has corresponded not only to the strategy of coopting Coloreds and Indians but also to the regime's unprecedented concern with persuading both foreign investors and the liberal, predominantly English-speaking capitalists at home that the old brittle racism has been rationalized into a flexible responsiveness to the "law" of the marketplace. Correspondingly, the regime's most pressing crisis—how to appease the millions of urban blacks barred from power under the constitution—has been transformed, through Botha's new technocratic language, into a crisis which has nothing to do with blacks, with South African racism, or even with politics. Where in the mid-seventies the Nationalists would talk of the need to remove unproductive, unwanted "foreign citizens" (that is, blacks) from the cities, the crisis is now couched as a purely structural one of a generic Third World sort; it is, in Botha's favorite catchphrase, a problem of "orderly urbanization."

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Derrida's indictment of Western complicity with South Africa is possibly the most valuable contribution of "Le Dernier Mot," but his passionate condemnation remains troubling for a number of reasons which stem largely from his blindness to the unfolding of the racial discourses in their historical context. Rightly denouncing the discrepancy between rhetorical condemnations of South Africa and the West's economic and strategic stakes in shoring up the regime, Derrida suggests that pressure on South Africa for liberal reform may be prompted by motives less ennobling than concern for human rights. Far from being the flower of humanist outrage, liberal protest may be nothing more than an economic reflex of "the law of the marketplace" (p. 335). But Derrida's apparently pragmatic and economic argument—that "segregation hurts the market economy, limits free enterprise by limiting domestic consumption and

the mobility and training of labor" (p. 334)—is less a "fact" than it is a very frayed liberal strand of controversy that has been tightly woven into the center of political and economic debate on South Africa since the 1930s. This controversy bears directly on the Nationalist's bantustan policy, in turn the only context in which one can understand the laborious ideological efforts the Nationalists have made to replace the racial language of black and white with a language of national difference.

Very simply, two rival interpretations of South African history have emerged over the past few decades. The debate turns on whether the rational forces of capital are in contradiction with the irrational, archaic policies of white racism, or whether *apartheid* can profitably coexist with modern capitalism. The liberal-reformist school, which emerged during an optimistic period of uninterrupted growth in the 1930s, has argued that *apartheid's* cumbersome racial laws serve only to hamper the forward-thrusting momentum of the country's capitalist economy. Since the 1950s it has been a liberal tenet of faith that the "progressive force" of an efficient market economy will inevitably compel South Africa to slough off the heavy trappings of white racism and spell the demise of *apartheid*.¹⁴

In the late fifties and early sixties, in the wake of the African nationalist movements, the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, and the Treason Trial, and throughout a decade of brutality, bannings, torture, and crushed resistance, a powerful counterargument began to be raised. The "revisionist" school (living for the most part in exile) has argued that *apartheid* and modern capitalism are bound in a flourishing blood brotherhood, a pragmatic and flexible alliance which is collaborative and of spectacular mutual benefit. The revisionists argue, against Derrida, that far from hurting the market economy, "racial policy is an historical product . . . designed primarily to facilitate rapid capital accumulation, and has historically been used thus by all classes with access to state power in South Africa."¹⁵ They charge that South Africa's "economic miracle" cannot be explained on economic grounds alone, as the liberals would have it, but must be seen in terms of a shifting alliance between capital and racial ideology which has, to be sure, created acute internal tensions, but which has nevertheless successfully safeguarded both economic privilege and white racial supremacy.¹⁶

14. The liberal reformist literature is legion. Some representative examples are: Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, eds., *The Oxford History of South Africa*, 2 vols. (New York, 1971); Leo Marquard, *Liberalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1965); and M. C. O'Dowd, "The Stages of Economic Growth and the Future of South Africa," in *Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa*, ed. Lawrence Schlemmer and Eddie Webster (Johannesburg, 1978), p. 28-50.

15. Dan O'Meara, "The 1946 African Mine Workers' Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa," in *South African Capitalism*, p. 362.

16. The revisionists, however, do not present a monolithic front. See David Yudelman, "Industrialization, Race Relations and Change in South Africa: An Ideological and Academic

The Nationalist bantustan policy, central to any understanding of this debate, places in perspective not only Derrida's assertion that "*apartheid* also increases nonproductive expenditures (for example, each 'homeland' must have its own policing and administrative machinery)" (p. 334) but also the changes in the racial discourses of successive regimes as outlined above. It is misleading to claim, as Derrida does, that "no doubt *apartheid* was instituted and maintained against the British Commonwealth" (p. 333). A color-caste system became deeply entrenched after the abolition of slavery in 1834 through vagrancy laws, a pass law, and the Masters and Servants ordinances (1841, 1856, and 1873) preventing strikes and desertion. Moreover, as early as the mid-nineteenth century two British governors, George Grey in the Cape and Theophilus Shepstone in Natal, had recognized the bounty to be reaped from creating native reserves from which white farmers could draw labor at will. The discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) dramatically increased the need for more African workers, and hut and land taxes were levied on African farmers to force them to enter the white wage economy. An intricate system of labor controls subsequently developed, laying the ground for modern *apartheid*. The Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 allocated to blacks thirteen percent of the most arid and impoverished land, reserving for whites (sixteen percent of the population) eighty-seven percent of fertile and productive South Africa. The bantustans consist of eighty-one scattered pieces of land divided along artificial "ethnic" lines, where people live under conditions of deprivation that are barely possible to describe. There is virtually no running water or electricity and health conditions are disastrous, with malnutrition and disease resulting in an infant mortality rate of 220 per thousand. According to Nationalist policy this meager thirteen percent of the land is to be the destined home of all South Africa's black people—seventy-two percent of the population.

The reserve system came to serve two major functions. It coerced into existence a malleable and immiserated black migrant force to guarantee a constant, controlled source of labor. At the same time it drove the costs of reproducing labor as low as possible. Since it was argued that black workers could supplement their wages with food grown in the reserves, "family" wages rather than individual wages were paid. These were forced lower than the minimum needed to eke out a precarious survival, thereby reaping disproportionate profits for white farmers, industries, and mines. The system yields a number of other advantages. The bantustans are

Debate," *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society* 74 (Jan. 1975): 82–96. See also Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," *Economy and Society* 1 (Nov. 1972): 425–55; Frederick A. Johnstone, "White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today," *African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society* 69 (1970): 124–40; and Barbara Rogers, *White Wealth and Black Poverty: American Investments in Southern Africa* (Westport, Conn., 1976), pp. 60–83.

not only a constant source of cheap labor: they are also the places to which are banished the aged, the sick and broken people who are no longer fit to serve the needs of whites; professionals who are not "needed" in South Africa; strikers and dissidents; and, most critically, women and dependent children ("superfluous appendages" in the official terminology). The bantustan system bears most cruelly on women. Very limited job opportunities, low wages, and the fact that urban residence leases are given only to men make circumstances for women seeking work in urban South Africa especially difficult. This, together with forced removals, has meant that by 1982 fifty-seven percent of all black South African women were living in the bantustans under appalling conditions. Critical employment problems can also be shifted onto the shoulders of black bantustan governments as their own "national" problems to be solved outside South Africa. Similarly, social welfare becomes the responsibility of the bantustans which do not figure in official employment, health, or census statistics, but which are de facto economically impotent and politically at the beck and call of South Africa.

In 1948, the year the Nationalists came to power, South Africa was at a turning point in its economic development. The primary economy based on the gold and diamond mines was replaced by an economy based on the secondary industry of manufacturing. The paradox was that gold mining and farming had traditionally battered off a migrant black work force drawn from the reserves. The manufacturing industry, on the other hand, required a more skilled and stable black urban work force. The changes in the economy generated a major dilemma: who was to fill the new semiskilled roles created by mechanization? Manufacturing needed semiskilled operatives for factory work, but the central problem was that the uninhibited substitution of cheap black labor in place of white workers would not only give black labor some measure of bargaining power but would also bring black workers into direct competition with the white workers who had helped bring the Nationalists to power. Indeed, after the price of gold fell in the wake of World War I, miners had cut costs by substituting cheaper black labor for the more expensive whites, a state of affairs white workers had always feared deeply. Strikes and violent unrest among white workers erupted in 1922 (the Rand Revolt), resulting in a compromise between white workers and capital which limited certain jobs to whites (the infamous "color bar") and prohibited the formation of legal black unions. Thus white workers came to constitute a labor aristocracy militantly committed to preserving their privileges against the encroachment of black labor. Traditionally, the electoral triumph of the Nationalists in 1948 has been seen as a victory of backward racism over liberal British capitalism. But the Nationalists were in fact borne to power on an alliance of white mine workers, petit bourgeois and professional Afrikaners, and Afrikaans farmers. Thus, as Ruth Milkman points out, "while the Nationalist government was strongly committed to challenging

the power of the British mining capitalists, it never opposed the development of South African capitalism."¹⁷ It was rather a question of who was to control the process.

After 1948 the Nationalists chose a route which gives the clearest sense of how *apartheid* policy has adapted itself to the double goal of retaining access to black labor for manufacturing while protecting white cultural and political power. In apparent conflict with the manufacturing industry's need for a stable, urban work force, they chose to expand the system of migrant labor. It is in the context of this extremely profitable compromise between capital and *apartheid* that the allied changes in the justificatory Nationalist ideologies can be seen.

In 1952 the reserves were systematized on a national basis by the Orwellian Natives (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act, which bars from urban areas blacks who are not "ministering to the needs of whites." The system was enforced by a ruthless and constantly refined machinery of state legislation: through the hated passes which blacks have to carry at all times, by the registration of all black workers through labor bureaus which can terminate employment at their own discretion, by laws binding farm workers to their jobs and making desertion a crime, by the job reservation system, by the mesh of influx control legislation which makes it illegal for blacks to stay in a white urban area for more than seventy-two hours without government permits, and by forced removals to the bantustans.

The linchpin of Nationalist policy became the gradual enforcement of black citizenship in the bantustans, with the intention of depriving blacks forever of the right to demand the benefits of South African citizenship while not forgoing their labor. As the Minister of Bantu Development put it in a 1978 speech: "if our policy is taken to its full logical conclusion as far as the black people are concerned, there will not be one black man with South African citizenship."¹⁸ Since 1960, the government has forcibly resettled 3.5 million Africans and effectively deprived 8 million of their citizenship by means of statutes carefully worded to avoid defining citizenship on racial grounds.

In the mid-seventies radical governments came to power in Angola and Mozambique, internal and external resistance increased, and large-scale civil unrest culminated in the Soweto riots of 1976. Certain elements in big business and the military began to press for labor policy changes that would relieve some of the tension by creating a black middle-class elite with a stake in shoring up the capitalist state. In 1979 the government appointed Wichahn and Riekert Commissions set the stage for a renewed

compromise between capital and state *apartheid*. The Wichahn Commission proposed the legal recognition of black unions which would bring them into the industrial conciliation system while tightly curtailing their activity through legal restrictions, vetoes, prohibitions on political activity, arrests, detentions, and murders. The Riekert "reforms" amounted to a refinement of state labor control by means of two principal factors: controlling jobs and limiting housing to certain privileged groups of urban African workers. As Kevin Danaher puts it:

At no time were the proposed reforms intended to improve the lot of the African majority. Rather, the changes were designed to 1) meet the needs of the white business community for a more well-regulated African workforce, and 2) divide the African workers into several distinct strata with a hierarchy of rights and wealth, thus dividing Africans along class as well as ethnic lines.¹⁹

Ultimately, the alliance between capital and *apartheid* was refined, not undermined, and the overall goals of *apartheid* remained the same. As the Riekert report declared: "Every black person in South Africa . . . is a member of his specific nation. . . . The fundamental citizenship rights may only be enjoyed by a Bantu person within his own ethnic homeland."²⁰

In this way, the bantustan system, constantly refined and strengthened, has buttressed the capitalist economy while simultaneously serving the ideological purpose of justifying Nationalist claims that their policy is no longer one of racial discrimination but of safeguarding the sovereignty of distinct "nations." The deliberate efforts to fragment the black community into mutually antagonistic "ethnic" communities, into those with limited residence rights and those without, feed the perverse argument that South Africa is indeed a "working democracy." By pointing to the ten bantustans, the government can claim that "numerically the White nation is superior to all other nations in South Africa. . . . It demonstrates the folly of saying that a minority government is ruling others in South Africa."²¹

The progressive force/revisionist debate has a number of crucial implications which are left out of Derrida's account. The crux of the matter for the liberals is that the triumph of the impersonal "law of the market" over racial ideology will take an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary course and will be aided and abetted by deepening capital

19. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

20. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 19.

21. *IAD* 11 (13 Oct. 1966), quoted in Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy."

the power of the British mining capitalists, it never opposed the development of South African capitalism."¹⁷ It was rather a question of who was to control the process.

After 1948 the Nationalists chose a route which gives the clearest sense of how *apartheid* policy has adapted itself to the double goal of retaining access to black labor for manufacturing while protecting white cultural and political power. In apparent conflict with the manufacturing industry's need for a stable, urban work force, they chose to expand the system of migrant labor. It is in the context of this extremely profitable compromise between capital and *apartheid* that the allied changes in the justificatory Nationalist ideologies can be seen.

In 1952 the reserves were systematized on a national basis by the Orwellian Natives (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act, which bars from urban areas blacks who are not "ministering to the needs of whites." The system was enforced by a ruthless and constantly refined machinery of state legislation: through the hated passes which blacks have to carry at all times, by the registration of all black workers through labor bureaus which can terminate employment at their own discretion, by laws binding farm workers to their jobs and making desertion a crime, by the job reservation system, by the mesh of influx control legislation which makes it illegal for blacks to stay in a white urban area for more than seventy-two hours without government permits, and by forced removals to the bantustans.

The linchpin of Nationalist policy became the gradual enforcement of black citizenship in the bantustans, with the intention of depriving blacks forever of the right to demand the benefits of South African citizenship while not forgoing their labor. As the Minister of Bantu Development put it in a 1978 speech: "if our policy is taken to its full logical conclusion as far as the black people are concerned, there will not be one black man with South African citizenship."¹⁸ Since 1960, the government has forcibly resettled 3.5 million Africans and effectively deprived 8 million of their citizenship by means of statutes carefully worded to avoid defining citizenship on racial grounds.

In the mid-seventies radical governments came to power in Angola and Mozambique; internal and external resistance increased, and large-scale civil unrest culminated in the Soweto riots of 1976. Certain elements in big business and the military began to press for labor policy changes that would relieve some of the tension by creating a black middle-class elite with a stake in shoring up the capitalist state. In 1979 the government-appointed Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions set the stage for a renewed

compromise between capital and state *apartheid*. The Wiehahn Commission proposed the legal recognition of black unions which would bring them into the industrial conciliation system while tightly curtailing their activity through legal restrictions, vetoes, prohibitions on political activity, arrests, detentions, and murders. The Riekert "reforms" amounted to a refinement of state labor control by means of two principal factors: controlling job and limiting housing to certain privileged groups of urban African workers. As Kevin Danaher puts it:

At no time were the proposed reforms intended to improve the lot of the African majority. Rather, the changes were designed to 1) meet the needs of the white business community for a more well-regulated African workforce, and 2) divide the African worker into several distinct strata with a hierarchy of rights and wealth thus dividing Africans along class as well as ethnic lines.¹⁹

Ultimately, the alliance between capital and *apartheid* was refined, not undermined, and the overall goals of *apartheid* remained the same. As the Riekert report declared: "Every black person in South Africa . . . is a member of his specific nation. . . . The fundamental citizenship right may only be enjoyed by a Bantu person within his own ethnic homeland."²⁰

In this way, the bantustan system, constantly refined and strengthened has buttressed the capitalist economy while simultaneously serving the ideological purpose of justifying Nationalist claims that their policy is no longer one of racial discrimination but of safeguarding the sovereignty of distinct "nations." The deliberate efforts to fragment the black community into mutually antagonistic "ethnic" communities, into those with limited residence rights and those without, feed the perverse argument that South Africa is indeed a "working democracy." By pointing to the ten bantustans, the government can claim that "numerically the White nation is superior to all other nations in South Africa. . . . It demonstrates the folly of saying that a minority government is ruling others in South Africa."²¹

The progressive force/revisionist debate has a number of crucial implications which are left out of Derrida's account. The crux of the matter for the liberals is that the triumph of the impersonal "law of the market" over racial ideology will take an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary course and will be aided and abetted by deepening capital

17. Ruth Milkman, "Apartheid, Economic Growth, and U.S. Foreign Policy in South Africa," in *South African Capitalism*, p. 427.

18. Quoted in Kevin Danaher, *In Whose Interest? A Guide to U.S.-South Africa Relations* (Washington, D.C., 1984), p. 31.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

20. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 19.

21. *IAD* 11 (13 Oct. 1966), quoted in Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy," p. 506 n. 88.

investment—that is, they believe that one can invest one's way to nonracial democracy. For the revisionists, on the other hand, as Martin Legassick points out, there is something troubling in the a priori faith (which Derrida appears to endorse) that such beneficial fruits as the demise of *apartheid* might be borne from the mere fact of capitalist growth alone.²² Of paramount importance, moreover, is the influence of the debate on foreign investment policies toward South Africa. Derrida's optimistic vision of *apartheid* brought to its knees by a liberalizing capitalism has been staunchly defended by many in the South African business community; by Michael O'Dowd, for example, for whom capitalism is an "equalizing" factor with a "strong tendency" to overcome the color bar.²³ Indeed, if Derrida takes to its logical conclusion his argument that *apartheid* may be abolished by the imposition of the "law of the market," he will find himself in the position of advocating accelerated international investment in order to hasten the collapse of the regime.

But the business community's faith in the logic of capitalism has lost much of its clout over the years for, as Greenberg points out, "the historical record on African living standards is reasonably clear: nearly a century of capitalist development between 1870 and 1960 brought almost no gains to the African majority." Despite South Africa's "economic miracle," the "basic pattern of income inequality and racial income shares has proved remarkably stable in this century," and the discrepancy in living standards remains staggeringly disproportionate by almost any international standard.²⁴

3

It must be emphasized that to question the strength of Derrida's method is not to question his commitment to change in South Africa. His repugnance for the policies of the Pretoria regime is never in doubt. However, we have argued that for anyone concerned with the cultural component in national and international politics, it is crucial to supplement the kind of symbolic vigilance embodied in the Exhibition with another kind of watchfulness entirely absent from "Le Dernier Mot," an alertness to the protean forms of political persuasion. For most of the essay, Derrida allows the solitary word *apartheid* to absorb so much of his attention that the changing discourses of South African racism appear more static and monolithic than they really are. Paradoxically, what is most absent from Derrida's essay is an attentiveness to racial and class difference: his insights

22. See Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy," p. 468.

23. See Stanley B. Greenberg, "Economic Growth and Political Change: The South African Case," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 19 (Dec. 1981): 669.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 678, 680.

are premised on too uniform a conception of South Africa's discourses of racial difference, while his historical comments are too generalized to carry strategic force.

To remedy these shortcomings, an alternative approach is required, one which integrates discursive, political, economic, and historical analyses. The lineaments of such a method are traced by Stedman Jones when he enjoins us

to study the production of interest, identification, grievance and aspiration within political languages themselves. We need to map out these successive languages . . . both in relation to the political languages they replace and laterally in relation to rival political languages with which they are in conflict. . . . It is clear that particular political languages do become inapposite in new situations. How and why this occurs involves the discovery of the precise point at which such shifts occur as well as an investigation of the specific political circumstances in which they shift.²⁵

For an analysis of racial representation, at least, this would mean abandoning such favored monoliths of post-structuralism as "logocentrism" and "Western metaphysics," not to mention bulky homogeneities such as "the occidental essence of the historical process" (p. 334) and a "European 'discourse' on the concept of race" (p. 333). Instead one would have to regard with a historical eye the uneven traffic between political interests and an array of cultural discourses—a traffic at times clandestine, at times frank, at times symmetrical, at times conflicting and rivalrous, but at all times intimate. Derrida's call to fling back an answer to *apartheid* is inspiring, but until one recognizes, with Dan O'Meara, that "racial policy is open to a sequence of somersaults, deviations, and permutations which endlessly confuse those who regard it as the product of a monolithic racial ideology," and until one embeds the analysis of racial policy in the dense everyday life of South Africa, such calls to action will remain of limited strategic worth.²⁶

[December 1984]

25. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 22.

26. Dan O'Meara, "The 1946 African Mine Workers' Strike," p. 363.

**But, beyond . . .
(Open Letter to Anne McClintock
and Rob Nixon)**

Jacques Derrida

Translated by Peggy Kamuf

Dear Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon,

We have never met but, after reading your “response,” I have a sense of something familiar, as if our paths had often crossed at colloquia or in some other academic place. So I hope you will not mind my addressing you directly—in order to tell you without delay how grateful I am to you and to avoid speaking of you in the third person. Whenever I take part in a debate or, which is not often, in a polemic, I make it a point to quote extensively from the text I am discussing, even though this is not standard practice. Since I am going to be doing that here, by addressing you directly I will save the space (and I’m thinking also of *Critical Inquiry*’s hospitality) otherwise needed for lengthy formulas such as: “Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon go so far as to write” “the authors of ‘No Names Apart’ claim that” “my interlocutors have not understood that” and so forth.

Yes, that’s right, I am grateful. You have brought useful details to the attention of ill-informed readers. Many who want to fight *apartheid* in South Africa still know little of the history of this state racism. No doubt you will agree with me on this point: the better informed, the more lucid, and, I dare say, the more competent the fight, the better it will be able to adjust its strategies. I am also grateful to the editors of *Critical Inquiry*. By publishing your article and inviting me to respond to it, they have chosen to continue the debate that I began here in a modest way. Despite the duly celebrated liberalism and pluralism which open

the pages of this excellent journal to the most diverse and opposed intellectual currents, it has in the main been devoted until now to theoretical research such as goes on for the most part in especially academic environments. Now, here is a case where this journal has organized and given free rein to a discussion on a violently political issue, one which has the appearance at least of being barely academic. I am very pleased with this development and even congratulate myself for having been the occasion for it. But I must add, to the credit of certain American colleagues and students, that *apartheid* is becoming a serious issue on several campuses [see “Postscript” below], and I regret that the same is not the case elsewhere, in other countries. Given this, academic journals have the obligation to speak about it; it is even in their best interest. Initially, my short text was not intended for *Critical Inquiry* (and in a moment I will come back to this criterion of “context” which your reading entirely neglects). Nevertheless, I agreed to its republication in *Critical Inquiry* with this in mind: to engage a reflection or provoke a discussion about *apartheid* in a very visible and justly renowned place—where, in general, people talk about other things.

Reading you, I very quickly realized that you had no serious objections to make to me, as I will try to demonstrate in a moment. So I began to have the following suspicion: what if you had only pretended to find something to reproach me with in order to prolong the experience over several issues of this distinguished journal? That way, the three of us could fill the space of another twenty or so pages. My suspicion arose since you obviously agree with me on this one point, at least: *apartheid*, the more it’s talked about, the better.

But who will do the talking? And how? These are the questions.

Because talking about it is not enough. On such a grave subject, one must be serious and not say just anything. Well, you, alas, are not always as serious as the tone of your paper might lead one to think. In your impatient desire to dispense a history lesson, you sometimes say just anything. The effect you want to produce is quite determined, but in order to arrive at it, you are willing to put forward any kind of countertruth, especially when, in your haste to *object*, you *project* into my text whatever will make your job easier. This is a very familiar scenario, as I will try to demonstrate as briefly as possible.

Jacques Derrida, professor of philosophy at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, is the author of, among other works, *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, *Margins of Philosophy*, and *Dissemination*. **Peggy Kamuf** teaches French at Miami University, Ohio. She is the author of *Fictions of Feminine Desire*.

As you ought to have realized, I knew well before you did that an eight-page text accompanying an art exhibit couldn't be a historical or anthropological treatise. By reason of its context and its dimensions (which I was not free to choose), by reason also of its style, it could only be an *appeal*, an appeal to others and to other kinds of action. You're quite right when you say "such calls to action will remain of limited strategic worth" (p. 353). I had no illusions in this regard and I didn't need to be reminded of it by anyone. What I, on the other hand, must recall to your attention—and I will remind you of it more than once—is that the text of an *appeal* obeys certain rules; it has its grammar, its rhetoric, its pragmatics. I'll come back to this point in a moment, to wit: as you did not take these rules into account, you quite simply *did not read* my text, in the most elementary and quasi-grammatical sense of what is called *reading*.

As for the original context of "Racism's Last Word,"¹ the catalog of an exhibit, I regret that you didn't read the careful note placed in introduction to Peggy Kamuf's excellent translation. It's true, of course, that if you *had* taken it into account, you would not have written anything, this debate would not have taken place and that would have been too bad. On "limited strategic worth," we're in total agreement, alas. Yet you know, these things are always more complicated, more difficult to evaluate, more overdetermined than people think. My very modest contribution is part of a complex ensemble which I have neither the time nor the space to reconstitute. And even if I could, its limits are by definition not fixed and are in the process of shifting at the very moment I am writing to you. These overdeterminations should be of interest to historians, politologists, or activists who are eager to go beyond abstraction and partial perspectives, who, like you, are concerned not to dissociate words and history. If I had done nothing more than provoke the present debate in a place of high academic visibility, induce the article which I am now about to discuss, and get the attention of a certain number of influential and competent readers, the interest of "such calls to action" "will remain of limited strategic worth," no doubt about that, but it would be far from nil. As for its limits, they are no more restricted than those of a "response," yours, which not only *supposes* the appeal to which it responds in its own fashion but also, without appealing to any action, is content to chronicle

1. Translator's note.—I might acknowledge receipt here of Anne McClintock's and Rob Nixon's suggested revision to this translated title. In fact, however, I had already considered and rejected "The Last Word in Racism" for reasons which may now have become ironic. To me, the cliché "the last word in . . ." suggested pop fashions or fads. What is more, it is often used ironically to undercut the very finality it seems to announce. I wanted to avoid these associations in order not to undermine, however subliminally, the sense and force of Jacques Derrida's appeal: that *apartheid* remain the final name of racism.

the word "apartheid," while advising that, rather than making history, we all ought to become more like historians. I quote from your conclusion: "Instead," you say, "one would have to regard with an historical eye the uneven traffic between political interests and an array of cultural discourses" (p. 353). By the way, that's *also* what I did, as I will remind you in a moment, but without stopping there. In this domain, as in all domains, no one strategy is sufficient; there is, by definition, no ideal and absolute strategy. We have to multiply the approaches and conjugate efforts.

My "appeal" had to be launched according to a certain mode and in a determined context. You take no account of them. Isn't this a serious mistake on the part of those who constantly invoke the relations between words and history? If you had paid attention to the context and the mode of my text, you would not have fallen into the enormous blunder that led you to take a *prescriptive* utterance for a *descriptive* (theoretical and constative) one. You write for example (and I warned you that I was going to cite you often): "Because he views *apartheid* as a 'unique appellation,' Derrida has little to say about the politically persuasive function that successive racist lexicons have served in South Africa" (p. 340). But I never considered (or "viewed") *apartheid* as a "unique appellation." I wrote something altogether different, and it is even the first sentence of my text: "*Apartheid*—que cela reste le nom désormais, l'unique appellation au monde pour le dernier des racismes. Qu'il le demeure mais que vienne un jour . . .," which Peggy Kamuf translates in the most rigorous fashion: "APARTHEID—may that remain . . . May it thus remain, but may a day come . . ." (p. 330). This translation is faithful because it respects (something you either could not or would not do) the grammatical, rhetorical, and pragmatic specificity of the utterance. The latter is not an historian's assertion concerning the lexicon of the South African racists or the past vicissitudes of the word *apartheid*. It is an appeal, a call to condemn, to stigmatize, to combat, to keep in memory; it is not a reasoned dictionary of the use of the word *apartheid* or its pseudonyms in the discourse of the South African leaders. One may think such an appeal is just too pathetic, one may judge its strategic force limited, but does one have the right to treat it as one would an historian's observation? To do so would be proof either that one didn't know how to read (by which I mean how to distinguish a subjunctive, with the value of an imperative, from an indicative) or else that one was ready to shortchange the ethics, to say nothing of the politics, of reading or discussion. What is more, although it is not limited by the form of descriptive observation, my "appeal" in no way contradicts the historian's truth. Whatever may have been the vicissitudes of the word *apartheid* and especially of the desperate efforts of the Pretoria regime's propagandists and officials to rid themselves of it (to rid themselves of the word, and not the thing, of *their* word and not *their* thing!), no one can deny that *apartheid* designates today in the eyes of the whole world, beyond all possible equivocation or pseudonymy, the last state

racism on the entire planet. I wanted therefore simply to formulate a wish: may this word *become* and *remain* (subjunctive! optative or jussive mode!) “the unique appellation” destined to maintain the memory of and stigmatize this state racism. It was not a thesis on the genealogy of a word but an appeal, a call to action, as you put it, and first of all an ethical appeal, as indicated by that which, in both ethics and politics, passes by way of memory and promising, and thus by way of language and denomination. Besides (and here I am speaking as a historian, that is, in the *indicative*), whatever efforts the ideologues and official representatives of South Africa may have made to efface this embarrassing word from *their* discourse, whatever efforts *you* may make to keep track of their efforts, the failure is not in doubt and historians can attest to it: the word *apartheid* remains and, as I hope or expect, it will remain the “unique appellation” of this monstrous, unique, and unambiguous thing. You say “Derrida is repelled by the word” (p. 340). No, what I find repulsive is the thing that history has now linked to the word, which is why I propose keeping the word so that the history will not be forgotten. Don’t separate word and history! That’s what you say to those who apparently have not learned this lesson. It is the South African racists, the National party, the Verwoerds and the Vorsters who ended up being afraid of the word (*their* word!), to whom it began to appear too repulsive because it had become so overseas. It’s you, and not me, who also seem to be frightened by this word because you propose that we take seriously all the substitutes and pseudonyms, the periphrases and metonymies that the official discourse in Pretoria keeps coming up with: the tireless ruse of propaganda, the indefatigable but vain rhetoric of dissimulation. To counter it, I think the best strategy is to keep the word, the “unique appellation” that the South African racists and certain of their allies would like to make people forget. No doubt one should also pay attention to the rhetorical contortions of the ideologues and official politicians of *apartheid*. But should we, because they wish it, abandon the word *apartheid* and no longer consider it to be the most accurate word with which to designate this political reality, yesterday’s and today’s?

I could limit myself to this remark about grammar or pragmatics. In your haste, you took or pretended to take a subjunctive to be an indicative, a jussive or optative utterance to be an assertion, an appeal to be a thesis. At the same time, you took no account of what was nevertheless *realistic* in my appeal, you missed the way, even in my syntax, the performative was articulated with the constative (forgive me for using this language). In sum, I asked for a promise: let this “unique appellation” “remain,” which means that it *already is* this unique appellation. Who can deny it? The official ideologues of South Africa can denegate it, but they cannot deny that they are now *alone* in no longer using this word. And if I ask that we keep the word, it is only for the future, for memory, in men’s and women’s memory, for when the thing will have disappeared.

Thus, my appeal is indeed an appeal because it calls for something which is not yet, but it is still strategically realistic because it refers to a massively present reality, one which no historian could seriously put in question. It is a call to struggle but also to memory. I never separate promising from memory.

Here, then, is a first point. I could stop at this: you confused two verbal modes. Whether or not they are fighting against *apartheid*, whether or not they are activists, historians must be attentive to rhetoric, to the type and status of utterances, at the very least to their grammar. No good strategy otherwise. Yet, I don’t regret your reading error, however elementary it might be. As everything in your paper follows from this misreading which begins with the first sentence—what am I saying? with the first two words (“APARTHEID—may . . .”)—just a moment’s lucidity would have prevented your bringing out these documents on South African policy. *Critical Inquiry* would not have opened its pages to this debate, and that would have been too bad.

So I could stop there, but to prolong the conversation, I will point out still some other mistakes, just the most serious and spectacular ones.

2

Another question of reading, still just as elementary and directly linked to the preceding one. You write: “The essay’s opening analysis of the word *apartheid* is, then, symptomatic of a severance of word from history. When Derrida asks, ‘hasn’t *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?’, the answer is a straightforward no. Despite its notoriety and currency overseas, the term *apartheid* has not always been the ‘watchword’ of the Nationalist regime” (p. 340). Once again you mistake the most evident meaning of my question. It did not concern the use of the word *by* the Nationalist regime but its *use value* in the world, “its notoriety and currency overseas,” as you so rightly put it. The word “always” in my text referred to this notoriety and there is little matter here for disagreement. But I never said that *apartheid* had “always” been the *literal* “watchword” *within* the Nationalist regime. And I find the way you manage to slip the “always” out of *my* sentence (“but hasn’t *apartheid* always been the archival record of the unnameable?”) and into *yours* (“the term *apartheid* has not always been the ‘watchword’ of the Nationalist regime”) to be less than honest. To be honest, you would have had to quote the whole sentence in which I myself speak of the “watchword” as such. I do so precisely in order to say that this “watchword” has a complex history, with its dates and places of emergence and disappearance. I knew this before reading you and I emphasized it despite the brevity of my text. Here, then, is *my* sentence—if you don’t mind, I

will quote myself whenever you have not done so or whenever you manipulate the quotations:

For one must not forget that, although racial segregation didn't wait for the name *apartheid* to come along, the name became order's *watchword* and won its title in the political code of South Africa only at the end of the Second World War. At a time when *all* racisms on the face of the earth were condemned, it was in the world's face that the National party dared to campaign "*for the separate development of each race in the geographic zone assigned to it.*" [Pp. 330–31]

This sentence, among others, gives a clear enough indication, I hope, of the historical concern with which I approached the question in general, and the question of the name *apartheid* in particular.

And while we're on the subject of this word, I would like to understand the meaning of a certain "but" in a passage I am going to cite at length. Its logic totally escapes me. You write:

The word *apartheid* was coined by General Jan Smuts at the Savoy Hotel, London on 27 May 1917 [I knew it was in London, but I thought it was at the Lord Russell Hotel. Are you sure about the Savoy? Check it. This is one point of history on which you would have taught me something.] but had barely any currency until it rose to prominence as the rallying cry of the Nationalist party's victorious electoral campaign of 1948. [This is exactly² what I was recalling, incorrigible historian that I am, in the sentence I just cited above. You might have mentioned that.] Derrida has reflected on the word's "sinister renown," *but* [my emphasis, J. D.] as far back as the mid-fifties the South Africans themselves began to recognize that the term *apartheid* had become sufficiently stigmatized to be ostentatiously retired. [P. 340]

So what? [In English in the text.] Why this "but"? Has the word *apartheid* effaced its "sinister renown" because the South Africans wanted to retire it from circulation and precisely because of its "sinister renown"? It so happens that in spite of their efforts to "retire" this "sufficiently stigmatized" term, the renown has not been effaced: it has gotten more and more sinister. This is history, this is the relation between words and history. It's the thing and the concept they should have retired, and not just the word, if they had wanted to put an end to the "sinister renown." So why this "but"? What objection is it making? Should I have said nothing about

2 Translator's note.—The exactness is still more striking when one recalls that Derrida's term *mot d'ordre*, translated as "watchword," could also have been rendered by McClintock's and Nixon's term: "rallying cry."

the "sinister renown" because the South African Nationalists deemed it advisable to clean up their lexicon?

The unfortunate thing is that your entire text is organized around the incredible "logic," if one can call it that, of this "but"; it is even oriented by the stupefying politics of this "but." You are asking that we regulate our vocabulary by the lexical strategies of the South African regime! For, immediately after the passage just cited, you go on to write:

The developing history of South African racial policy and propaganda highlights the inaccuracy of Derrida's claim that South African racism is "the only one on the scene that dares to say its name and present itself for what it is." For in striving both to win greater legitimacy for itself and to justify ideologically the Nationalist bantustan policy, South African racism has long since ceased to pronounce its own name: *apartheid*, the term Derrida misleadingly calls "the order's *watchword*" (*mot d'ordre*), was dismissed many years back from the lexical ranks of the regime. [Pp. 340–41]

What do you want? That everyone stop *considering* that *apartheid* is—and remains, as far as I know, still today—the watchword, the rallying cry, the concept, and the reality of the South African regime? And even that everyone stop *saying* it, on the pretext that the South African racists deem it more prudent to utter it no more, this word which you yourselves recognize to be the "proper name" of this racism, the word it has given itself, "its own name" ("South African racism" you clearly say, "has long since ceased to pronounce its own name: *apartheid* . . ." [p. 341])? Come on, you're not being very serious, either as historians or as political strategists. Where would we be, where would all those struggling against *apartheid* be if they had considered that *apartheid* ceased to be the watchword of the South African regime on the day that, as you put it so well, "the Nationalist party . . . radically rephrased its ideology"! (p. 341). Because that happened in 1950, it would have been necessary to stop talking about *apartheid* from then on! Thanks all the same for your strategic advice and your reminder of historical reality! You speak of a "quarantine from the historical process" but it's you, coming on the heels of the Nationalist regime, who want to put the word *apartheid* in quarantine! I, on the other hand, insist that we continue to use the word, so that we may remember it, in spite of all the verbal denegations and lexical stratagems of the South African racists. I, on the contrary, insist that we remember this: whether or not the term is pronounced by South African officials, *apartheid* remains the *effective* watchword of power in South Africa. Still today. If *you* think, on the other hand, that it's necessary to take account of the diplomatic prudence or the lexical ruses of this power to the point of no longer speaking of *apartheid* as a watchword, well, then you're going to have to ask the whole world to go along with you and

not just me. Historical reality, dear comrades, is that in spite of all the lexicological contortions you point out, those in power in South Africa have not managed to convince the world, and first of all because, still today, they have refused to change the real, effective, fundamental meaning of their watchword: *apartheid*. A watchword is not just a name. This too history teaches us, as you should know since you're so concerned with history. A watchword is also a concept and a reality. The relation among the reality, the concept, and the word is always more complex than you seem to suppose. The South Africans in power wanted to keep the concept and the reality while effacing the word, an evil word, *their* word. They have managed to do so in *their* official discourse, that's all. Everywhere else in the world, and first of all among black South Africans, people have continued to think that the word was indissolubly—and legitimately—welded to the concept and to the reality. And if you're going to struggle against this *historical* concept and this *historical* reality, well, then you've got to call a thing by its name. What would have happened if throughout the world—in Europe, in Africa, in Asia, or in the Americas—people had sworn off speaking of racism, anti-Semitism, or slavery on the pretext that the offenders never spoke of these things or did *not* use those words, better yet *no longer* used those words? In the best hypothesis and assuming one didn't want to accuse it of simple complicity with the adversary, such a strategy would have been both childish and disastrous.

So I stand by what I said. One must be attentive, and I was, to the word, to the watchword, and to their history. One must be attentive to what links words to concepts and to realities but also to what can dissociate them. Now if even as it kept the concept and the reality, the power in South Africa has tried to get rid of the word, nobody has been fooled. The concept and the reality persist, under other names, and South African racism, I repeat, "is the only one on the scene that dares to say its name and present itself for what it is," which is to say a state racism, the only one in the world today which does not hide its face. When I wrote that it "dares to say its name," I wanted to recall simply this: *apartheid* may have disappeared since 1950 from official speech or from the dispensaries of propaganda as if by magic, but this changes nothing in the fact ("facts are stubborn," you know) that the system of *apartheid* is not only practiced but *inscribed in the constitution* and in an impressive judicial apparatus. In other words, it is *declared, assumed, publicly approved*. To speak one's name, in politics (as history has shown over and over), is not simply to make use of a substantive but to present oneself as such, for what one is, in complex discourses, the texts of the law or of socioeconomic, even police and "physical" practices. In politics, as history should have taught you, a "watchword" is not limited to a lexicon. You confuse words and history. Or rather, you make poor distinctions between them.

What would have happened if I had followed your "strategic" advice? But I was fighting against the state racism named *apartheid*

(so named at the outset by its inventors!); instead I would have cautiously murmured as you do: "Careful, don't say *apartheid* anymore, you no longer have the right to use this word in order to name the watchword of South African racism because those who instituted the word, the concept, and the thing have not 'pronounced' the word since 1950"! Or maybe this: "Don't say *apartheid* anymore, but know that since 1948 there have been 'three phases' of racial policy in South Africa. Only the first of these (1948–58) would have been an 'ideological, doctrinaire, and negative' phase; the second (1958–66) is the one that 'mellowed into the homeland phase of separate development,' 'internal decolonisation'; the third, since 1966, would correspond to 'the unobtrusive dismantling of *apartheid*,' 'the movement away from discrimination,' 'the elimination of color as a determinant' and the introduction of 'democratic pluralism.'" Should I have said all that each time in place of the word *apartheid*? All that, which is to say what? Well, what you say by citing F. A. van Jaarsveld, "an apologist for the Nationalist regime," for the "periodizing changes in the *official discourse*" and for "the regime's justificatory ideology" (p. 341). Should I have been content to reproduce this official discourse? It is, in fact, the only one you cite at any length—the point of view of blacks being less represented in your text than that of *apartheid*'s partisans, even if you must admit that their "ruse has failed politically" (p. 346).

I'm still trying to imagine what I should have written if I had been carefully following your "strategic" advice. Perhaps I should have said: You know, *apartheid* is no longer the right word, even *racism* is no longer the right word because ever since "the development of the bantustan policy," "the problem in South Africa is basically not one of race, but of nationalism, which is a world-wide problem. There is White nationalism, and there are several Black nationalisms" (p. 343). Unfortunately, if I had done that, I would have been quoting you quoting Verwoerd or Vorster, or else at best I would have written a paper on the ideological strategies of state racism in South Africa. But I would not have said the essential thing, to wit: *apartheid*, as a state racism and under the name initially chosen by the Nationalist party, then in control in South Africa, has been and remains the effective and official practice, still today, in spite of all the denegations and certain softening touches to the facade (which, by the way, I also mentioned). And *apartheid* must be fought as such. Once again, it's a question of context and of "pragmatics": I wrote a brief text for an exhibit entitled "Art against Apartheid" and not a paper on Verwoerd's and Vorster's rhetoric, whatever interest there may be in knowing the resources of this discourse. And despite the constraints on the length of my text, I also spoke of the secondary transformations of *apartheid* (p. 334), of the discourse, the culture, what I call the "official lie," the "judicial simulacrum," and the "political theater" (p. 333) that organize the racist and nationalist ideology in South Africa (see in particular parts 3 and 4). If *you* think *apartheid* has effectively given way to one

nationalism among others, then you ought to have said so. If you don't think that's the case, well, then I don't see what objection you can have with me.

3

In spite of the brevity of my text, I never made do with what you call "such favored monoliths of post-structuralism as 'logocentrism' and 'Western metaphysics,' not to mention bulky homogeneities such as 'the occidental essence of the historical process' and a 'European "discourse" on the concept of race'" (p. 353). To be sure, I said, and I'll say it again, that the history of *apartheid* (its "discourse" and its "reality," the totality of its *text*) would have been impossible, unthinkable without the European concept and the European history of the state, without the European discourse on race—its scientific pseudoconcept and its religious roots, its modernity and its archaisms—without Judeo-Christian ideology, and so forth. Do you think the contrary? If so, I'd like to see the demonstration. That said, you would have shown a little more honesty if you had noted that, far from relying on "monoliths" or "bulky homogeneities," I constantly emphasized heterogeneity, contradictions, tensions, and uneven development. "Contradiction" is the most frequently occurring word in my text. You force me to quote myself again. I spoke of "a contradiction internal to the West and to the assertion of its rights" (p. 333). I even wrote that one is right to insist on these contradictions ("and it bears repeating" [p. 333]) and that one must never simplify ("but let us never simplify matters" [p. 336]). Is that what you call monolithism? In spite of the brevity of my text, I multiplied the examples of "contradiction" in the theologico-political discourse, of the strategic "contradiction" of the West, of economic contradiction (see pp. 335, 334). Is that a sign of monolithic thinking and a preference for homogeneity? This will surely have been the first time I have met with such a reproach, and I fear you deserve it more than I do.

4

To what level of bad faith must one stoop in order to palm off on me the credo of unbridled capitalism by implying that, in my view, it would suffice to let the law of the marketplace work to put an end to *apartheid*? You have the nerve, for example, to write the following: "The revisionists argue, against Derrida [!!!], that far from hurting the market economy, 'racial policy is an historical product . . . designed primarily to facilitate rapid capital accumulation, and has historically been used thus by all classes with access to state power in South Africa'" (p. 347). *On*

the contrary, I have always thought that there was some truth—it's stating the obvious—in this "revisionist" view. If, however, I *also* said that, despite the apparent contradiction, "*apartheid* also increases nonproductive expenditures (for example, each 'homeland' must have its own policing and administrative machinery); segregation hurts the market economy: limits free enterprise by limiting domestic consumption and the mobility and training of labor" (p. 334). I did so because it's true and *especially* as a reminder that, if *apartheid* is abolished one day, it will not be for purely moral reasons. You force me to quote myself again, the passage immediately following the sentence you have just read:

In a time of unprecedented economic crisis, South Africa has to reckon, both internally and externally, with the forces of a liberal current according to which "*apartheid* is notoriously inefficient from the point of view of economic rationality" [I'm not speaking here, this is a quote]. This too will have to remain in memory: if one day *apartheid* is abolished, its demise will not be credited only to the account of moral standards—because moral standards should not count or keep accounts, to be sure, but also because, on the scale which is that of a worldwide computer, the law of the marketplace will have imposed another standard calculation. [Pp. 334–35]

After you had read that, it is quite simply indecent to make me out to be pleading *for* capitalism or suggesting that laws of the marketplace ought to be allowed free rein because *all by themselves* they would take care of *apartheid*. You have the nerve nonetheless to do just that. Your argument at this point reaches such a degree of bad faith that I even wondered whether I ought to continue our dialogue in these conditions and respond to *Critical Inquiry's* generous invitation. You actually go so far as to speak of "Derrida's optimistic vision of *apartheid* brought to its knees by a liberalizing capitalism . . ." and you continue: "Undeed, if Derrida takes to its logical conclusion his argument that *apartheid* may be abolished by the imposition of the 'law of the market,' he will find himself in the position of advocating accelerated international investment in order to hasten the collapse of the regime" (p. 352). To be sure, I defy you to find the least hint in my text of such an "optimistic vision" (even supposing that it is optimistic!). Had I such a "vision," I would not have written anything "against *apartheid*." I would have thought: *laissons faire le capital!* That said, here again things are complex, heterogeneous, and contradictory, whether you like it or not. *Apartheid* can at the same time serve the interests of capitalist accumulation and get in the way of capitalist development. One has to distinguish here among different phases and *various* capitalisms or different, even contradictory sectors of capitalism. No more than logocentrism and the West, capitalism is not

a monolith or a "bulky homogeneity." Have you ever heard of the contradictions of capitalism? Is it really that difficult for you to imagine how *apartheid* might serve capitalism in certain conditions and impede free enterprise at some other moment, in other conditions? You see, I fear you have a simple, homogeneous, and mechanistic vision of history and politics.

5

One last point with which perhaps I should have begun. It's about your first paragraph, that little word "beyond" which you underline ("*beyond* the text") and what you call my "method." Once again, it's best that I quote you: "If, then, Derrida seeks not merely to prize open certain covert metaphysical assumptions but also to point to something *beyond* the text, in this case the abolition of a regime, then the strategic value of his method has to be considered seriously" (p. 339).

I am not sure I clearly understand the extent of what you mean by my "method." If you mean my "method" in this text against *apartheid*, in the appeal that I launch and in my treatment of the word *apartheid*, I have just answered you and told you what I think of *your* methods. But if you are suggesting that my "method" in this specific case reveals all that my "method" in general and elsewhere could learn from your lessons, well in that case, there are one or two more things I will have to add. I am led to think that you mean to contest, beyond the precise context of *apartheid*, the "strategic value" of my "method" in general by the allusions or insinuations tied to the word "text" ("*beyond* the text" is no doubt, and I'll come back to this in a moment, a clever, oh so clever nod in the direction of something I once said: there is nothing beyond the text), by the use of the word "post-structuralism" (which I myself have never used but which is commonly applied to me), or by words such as "logocentrism," "Western metaphysics," and so forth.

A serious response here would take hundreds and hundreds of pages, and we mustn't abuse *Critical Inquiry's* hospitality. Know, however, that these pages are already written. If you wish to continue our correspondence privately, I will give you some exact references.

But one thing at least I can tell you now: an hour's reading, beginning on any page of any one of the texts I have published over the last twenty years, should suffice for you to realize that *text*, as I use the word, is not the book. No more than writing or trace, it is not limited to the *paper* which you cover with your graphism. It is precisely for strategic reasons (set forth at length elsewhere) that I found it necessary to recast the concept of text by generalizing it almost without limit, in any case without present or perceptible limit, without any limit that *is*. That's why there is nothing "*beyond* the text." That's why South Africa and *apartheid* are,

like you and me, part of this general text, which is not to say that it can be read the way one reads a book. That's why the text is always a field of forces: heterogeneous, differential, open, and so on. That's why deconstructive readings and writings are concerned not only with library books, with discourses, with conceptual and semantic contents. They are not simply analyses of discourse such as, for example, the one you propose. They are also effective or active (as one says) interventions, in particular political and institutional interventions that transform contexts without limiting themselves to theoretical or constative utterances even though they must also produce such utterances. That's why I do not go "*beyond* the text," in this *new* sense of the word text, by fighting and calling for a fight against *apartheid*, for example. I say "for example" because it also happens that I become involved with institutional and academic politics or get myself imprisoned in Czechoslovakia for giving seminars prohibited by the authorities. Too bad if all this strikes you as strange or intolerable behavior on the part of someone whom you, like others, would like to believe remains enclosed in some "prison-house of language." Not only, then, do I not go "*beyond* the text," in this new sense of the word text (no more than anyone else can go beyond it, not even the most easy-to-recognize activists), but the strategic reevaluation of the concept of text allows me to bring together in a more consistent fashion, in the most consistent fashion possible, theoretico-philosophical necessities with the "practical," political, and other necessities of what is called deconstruction. The latter, by the way, has never presented itself as a method, for essential reasons that I explain elsewhere (once again, if you care to write to me, I'll send you the references).

This letter is too long. In order to hasten its conclusion, I will give you my opinion in two words:

1. Your "response" is typical. It reflects an incomprehension or "misreading" that is widespread, and spread about, moreover, for very determined ends, on the "Left" and the "Right," among those who think they represent militancy and a progressivist commitment as well as among neoconservatives. It is in the interest of one side and the other to represent deconstruction as a turning inward and an enclosure by the limits of language, whereas in fact deconstruction *begins by* deconstructing logocentrism, the linguistics of the word, and this very enclosure itself. On one side and the other, people get impatient when they see that deconstructive practices are also and first of all political and institutional practices. They get impatient when they see that these practices are perhaps more radical and certainly less stereotyped than others, less easy to decipher, less in keeping with well-used models whose wear and tear ends up by letting one see the abstraction, the conventionalism, the academism, and everything that separates, as you would say, words and history. In a word, verbalism. On one side and the other, on one hand and on the other hand (but you see now how the two hands join and

maintain each other [comme les deux mains se tiennent, maintenant]), there is an interest in believing, in pretending to believe, or simply in making others believe that the "text" which concerns "deconstructionists" has as the first time I use this word and I do so, as others have done, (to go quickly) can be found neatly in its place on some library shelves, but being the case, in order to act (!) in the area of *real* politics, in history (!), these poor "deconstructionists" should go "*beyond* the text," into the field, to the front! As you do, I suppose.

Well, it so happens that the text which various deconstructions are speaking of today is not at all the *paper* or the *paperback* with which you would like to identify it. If there is nothing "*beyond* the text," in this new sense, then that leaves room for the most open kinds of political (but not just political) practice and pragmatics. It even makes them more necessary than ever. But that is no reason—on the contrary—to give up reading the books and writings still to be found in libraries. It is no reason to read quickly or badly or to stop learning how to read otherwise other texts—especially if one wants to better adjust one's political strategies. It is thus no reason to continue to spread the most uneducated interpretations and the crudest prejudices about "deconstruction," the "text," or "logocentrism." It is no reason to go on manipulating them as you do, to keep rolling them along in a primitive fashion, after having erected them into monolithic menhirs.

2. So, you share the impatience of those who would like texts to remain in the libraries, who would like text to signify "book." And you want this order maintained: let all those who concern themselves with texts understood in this latter sense (the "deconstructionists"!) remain in their compartments, better yet in their departments! Let no "deconstructionists" concern themselves with politics since, as we all know, don't we, deconstruction, difference, writing, and all that are (in the best of cases) politically neutral, ahistorical! Those people are not to concern themselves with politics because we always believed that they never did, that they left such things to the qualified, conscious, and organized activists whom we clearly are according to that *good old tradition* [in English in the text] which anyone can easily recognize. Otherwise, you seem to be saying, what would be left for us to do? Let the theoreticians of literature concern themselves with literature, philosophers with philosophy, historians with history, Africanists with Africa, and we, the activists, with politics! There, that's the best strategy! When a "deconstructionist," as one says, concerns himself with *apartheid*, even if he is on the "good" side, his strategy is all wrong, he's getting mixed up with things that are none of his business because he's going "*beyond* the text"! He exceeds the limits of his competence, leaves his own territory! "The strategic value of his method has to be considered seriously!"

In short, you are for the division of labor and the disciplined respect of disciplines. Each must stick to his role and stay within the field of his

competence, none may transgress the limits of his territory. Oh, you wouldn't go so far as to wish that some sort of *apartheid* remain or become the law of the land in the academy. Besides, you obviously don't like this word. You are among those who don't like this word and do not want it to remain the "unique appellation." No, in the homelands of academic culture or of "political action," you would favor instead reserved domains, the separate development of each community in the zone assigned to it.

Not me.

Cordially,

Jacques Derrida
6 February 1986

Postscript (April 1986): I am rereading the translation of this letter while in the United States, at several universities (Yale, Harvard, Columbia) which have seen an intensification of demonstrations against *apartheid*: the divestiture movement, "shantytowns," student arrests, and so on. I want to reiterate my admiration and solidarity. Such courageous demonstrations on campuses are also signs of strategic lucidity because the problem of *apartheid* is surely an *American problem*, as are so many others. *In a first sense*, this means that its evolution will depend from now on in large measure on American pressure. These signs of lucidity are carried by an energy and perseverance which cannot be explained *simply* by the economy of necessarily ambiguous motivations. Some might be tempted in effect to seek there the mechanism and dynamic of bad conscience. The latter is always quicker to arise among intellectuals and at the university, especially in universities obliged to manage their capital. For here again, and *in a second sense*, *apartheid* would be an *American problem*. According to this insufficient but necessary hypothesis, *apartheid* might have to be put at some remove, expelled, objectified, held at a distance, prevented from returning (as a ghost returns), parted with, treated, and cured *over there*, in South Africa. *Apartheid* might bear too great a resemblance to a segregation whose image continues at the very least to haunt American society. No doubt, this segregation has become more urban, industrial, socioeconomic (the frightening percentage of young black unemployed, for example), less immediately racial in its phenomenon. But this might recall much more, by some of its features, the South African hell.