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But You Don't Get Used to Anything

Derrida on the Preciousness of the Singular

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ABSTRACT: This chapter argues against the view that Derrida's emphasis on change makes him complicit in the neoliberal requirement of flexibility that results both in precarity and in the dominance of English. To the contrary, the essay argues that Derrida's idea of *différance* includes the view that openness both involves loss and is always partial (since incision involves excision), that the singular is precious, and that deconstruction is justice since it is alert to what is excluded even by efforts at inclusiveness. Examples of the preciousness and loss of the singular are circumcision (where incision is excision), hospitality (in which unconditional hospitality has material limitations and conditions), subjectivity (which is never based on full presence), language (which both is my own and comes from an other), and neighbourhoods (since they continue only by incorporating new people). Deconstruction, the essay concludes, need not be complicit in neoliberal dominance but, properly understood, makes us aware of the power dynamics by which the openness of plurilingualism can lead to the dominance of English.

KEYWORDS: Derrida; singularity; neoliberalism; deconstruction; circumcision; hospitality; mother tongue; plurilingualism; loss; justice

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Plurilingualism, like multiculturalism, is moving from being insurrectionary to being supportive of the dominant global neoliberal business paradigm, one which demands flexibility and mobility for its success. In a change that is a prime example of the Derridean idea of iteration and *différance*, in which ideas are repeated but the context of their utterance changes so that certain meanings are 'hollowed out' and others come to the fore, plurilingualism now is a component of global economic structures that produce a flexible but precarious workforce. Postmodern ideas of instability and deferral of meaning could be seen, as a result, as complicit in problematic aspects of global, neoliberal business as well as in the global dominance of English since the plurilingualism many are encouraged if not required to acquire is the addition of English to their repertoire. Such requirements are leading to the dominant use of English and to the decline and loss of other languages.¹

1 See, for example, Nelson Flores, 'The Unexamined Relationship Between Neoliberalism and Plurilingualism: A Cautionary Tale', *TESOL Quarterly*, 47.3 (2013), pp. 500–20; Jan Blommaert, 'Superdiversity and the neoliberal conspiracy', *Ctrl+Alt+Dem*, 3 March 2006 <<http://alternative-democracy-research.org/2016/03/03/superdiversity-and-the-neoliberal-conspiracy>> [accessed 30 June 2017].

Can we find a paradigm for understanding the significance of language loss in our plurilingual, multicultural era? Such a paradigm would accomplish two things: (1) it would affirm flexibility, plurality, and change; and, at the same time, (2) affirm and account for the fact that loss of language and culture is indeed real loss. Jacques Derrida's work might not seem to be a likely source for such accomplishments given its association with change and difference. After all, *différance* (with an *a*) points to change, difference, and instability — even more, to the priority of change over stability and identity. It is the play of *différance* that produces differences. Are Derridean ideas unintentionally complicit with the worst aspects of neoliberal economics, then? Does his writing support and produce the kinds of people needed by the dominant economic power structure? Do his views provide justification or comfortable contextualization for a world in which more and more people are forced to accept insecurity and precarity? After all, we have learned that Derrida's ideas revalorize the rootlessness that used to be attributed to Jews and was seen as anathema to the then dominant nation-state ideal.² As positive as such revalorization may be, the iteration today of plurilingualism and multiculturalism has a different valence than in the past.

What such portrayals or construals of Derrida leave out is the sense of loss he expresses in his writings. New ideas are made possible by loss of old ones. There is a hollowing out of old meanings that makes room for new ones. There is an excision for every incision. In addition, there is no universal approach to universals. There is only idiomatic testimony to universal structures: such idioms are all we have.³ They are precious, though ephemeral.

Hence the title of this essay: 'But You Don't Get Used to Anything'. In the film *Derrida's Elsewhere*, Derrida says:

2 See Sarah Hammerschlag's *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) in which she discusses the revalorization of rootlessness in Levinas, Derrida, Blanchot, and others.

3 Derrida refers to 'the enigmatic articulation between a universal structure and its idiomatic testimony'. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 59; Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), p. 116.

I grew up in a country — Algeria — where you had to learn to get used to — but you don't get used to anything — to get used to the fact that all places [...] because of colonial and recent pre-colonial history [...] are, in one way or another, appropriated, expropriated, re-appropriated, closed, re-opened [...]. For example, the Great Synagogue where my father would take me and my brother on feast days was a former mosque which still had all the physical features of a mosque, became a synagogue and I know that, after de-colonisation and independence, it became a mosque again. Transitory, with provisional temporality.⁴

You get used to it — it happens frequently — but you don't get used to anything — it is a loss. This exemplifies Derrida's overall approach. Instability of meaning allows for openness to the new, but there is at the same time a loss. In the rest of this essay, I will gesture at articulating this idea further by pointing to and explicating some examples.

First example: 'circumcision, that's all I have ever talked about', Derrida says in his circumcision notebooks and quotes in 'Circumfession'.⁵ What does he mean in what may appear an overstatement? Can all of Derrida's work be understood, figuratively, to focus on circumcision? 'Circumfession' is one part of a two-part work entitled *Jacques Derrida*. The work features, at the top, a stripped down or bare summary of Derrida's ideas by Geoffrey Bennington and, at the bottom, 'Circumfession', a piece Derrida wrote with the goal of surprising and adding to the summary. In 'Circumfession', Derrida portrays himself as fighting with Bennington about such a bare summary. Derrida portrays himself as fighting with Bennington about 'the crude word'. The crude word would be like crude oil. Untouched. Pure. It is 'a crudeness I don't believe in', Derrida says, not surprisingly for one who describes deconstruction as the critique of the pure.⁶

4 *D'ailleurs Derrida: Un film de Safaa Fathy* (Derrida's Elsewhere: A Film by Safaa Fathy) (Gloria Films, 1999).

5 Jacques Derrida, 'Circumfession', in Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 3–315 (p. 70); Jacques Derrida, 'Circumfession', in Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), pp. 7–291 (p. 70). He goes on: 'consider the discourse on the limit, margins, marks, marches, etc., the closure, the ring (alliance and gift), the sacrifice, the writing of the body, the *pharmakos* excluded or cut off, the cutting/sewing of *Glas*, the blow and the sewing back up.'

6 Derrida states that 'the first impulse of what is called "deconstruction" carries it toward this "critique" of the phantasm or the axiom of purity, or toward the analytical

Interestingly, though, Derrida says he dreams of such purity: 'I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe, a suction point rather than that very hard weapon with which one must inscribe, incise, choose.' He dreams of a situation in which 'the right vein has been found' and there is 'no more toil, no responsibility.'⁷ But, instead, blood is mixed with prayer and tears. Derrida teaches, he says, 'so as to return in the end to what mixes prayer and tears with blood', where prayer, we may interpret, is openness to what is to come and tears express a sense of loss.⁸ There is no syringe-pen, that is, but only a responsibility that comes with writing in which we must 'inscribe, incise, choose.'⁹ 'As soon as there is inscription', Derrida says in *Derrida's Elsewhere*, 'there is selection — deletion, censorship, exclusion.'¹⁰ Selection, and exclusion. Openness, and loss. Returning to his playful battle with Bennington and utilizing the trope of circumcision, Derrida refers to Bennington actually having to leave some parts of Derrida's corpus out, of having 'to let them drop like skins':

if he has cut or lifted out some pieces, it's just so as not to keep them, to let them drop like skins useless to the understanding of my texts, to erase them in short, after having selected.¹¹

Writing is incision through excision, prayer and tears, openness and loss.

In a way, the fact that openness involves loss is what Derrida is all about. It's all he's ever talked about! Hospitality, for our second example, requires inhospitality, according to Derrida, since the ethical requirements of hospitality include feasibility and feasibility is limited. You cannot open your home and its contents to everyone, despite the ethical requirement that hospitality be universal, because resources of a home are limited and would be overwhelmed. Derrida likes and uses the pun on *pas d'hospitalité*, which results from the ambiguity of *pas de*

decomposition of a purification that would lead back to the indecomposable simplicity of the origin' (Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 46; Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme*, pp. 78–79).

7 Derrida, 'Circumfession', pp. 10, 12; Derrida, 'Circonfession', p. 13.

8 Ibid., p. 20; p. 22.

9 Ibid., p. 12; p. 13.

10 *Derrida's Elsewhere*.

11 Derrida, 'Circumfession', pp. 27–28; Derrida, 'Circonfession', p. 29.

in French, meaning either 'step of' or 'no': any step taken to produce hospitality is no hospitality since the law of hospitality is 'absolute, unconditional, hyperbolic', in short, 'categorical'.¹² Any act of hospitality will fall short of absolute hospitality for it will involve conditions, norms, rights, and duties.¹³ *The* law, that is, the unconditional law of hospitality, requires *laws*, that is, specific laws, rules, conditions: we will help any family, but we can only help one family; we will help you find a home, but we will not give you our home; some of us will help you, but mostly it will be those of us who are retired not those who work full-time; we will go with you to look for a job, but not if it means taking too much time off and losing our own job; we will help one family, but not several families; we will provide you with some monetary support for survival, but not so much that we ourselves will not survive and flourish; etc. The law of hospitality requires laws of hospitality since the law requires effectuation. The laws of hospitality, in turn, are inspired by the law of hospitality: 'conditional laws would cease to be laws of hospitality if they were not guided, given inspiration, given aspiration, required, even, by the law of unconditional hospitality.'¹⁴ We are inspired by the law of unconditional hospitality just as, regarding writing, Derrida dreams of a syringe pen that could suck meaning out pure and whole. In hospitality, as in the incision that is writing, we have to select and choose.

As a home cannot be open to everyone, so subjectivity, for a third example, cannot be pure or clear — as Descartes would have it, with his famous 'clarity and distinctness' in which clarity is defined as full presence to mind — since we must utilize a background to see the foreground: 'Foreground is nothing without the background', Husserl says, and Derrida is decidedly in this phenomenological tradition.¹⁵

12 Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmontelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 75; Jacques Derrida, *De l'hospitalité: Anne Dufourmontelle invite Jacques Derrida à répondre* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1997), p. 77.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 77; p. 78.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 79; p. 75.

15 Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*, trans. by John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), A.2S, p. 57: 'Foreground is nothing without the background. The appearing side is nothing without the non-appearing side. So too in the unity of time-consciousness: the

There is no completely clear or completely present idea. There is no syringe-pen, as much as we might dream of one. We do not get a direct relation to what is. That is the point of Derrida's well-known concept of writing. In a previous epoch, he says, writing was considered secondary. For Aristotle, Derrida says, writing is secondary to voice while voice has an 'essential and immediate proximity' to mental experiences which, in turn, simply convey what is: voice 'signifies "mental experiences" (*des états de l'âme*) which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance'.¹⁶ Moreover, the relation between mind and things is 'translation'. Voice, then, for Derrida's Aristotle, gives us the full presence of that which we understand, while writing is at a distance and does not give us full presence. For Derrida, to the contrary, even voice has the secondary relation previously attributed to writing alone and it is the privileging of the position of voice, or 'phonocentrism', that leads to the very idea of full presence, for example, to Descartes's idea of 'the self-presence of the *cogito*, consciousness, subjectivity'.¹⁷ For Derrida, there are no acts of subjectivity that do not involve loss.

What does all of this mean for language, a fourth example and the topic of the essays in this collection? Consider Derrida's relation to one, singular language: the French language, a language he describes, in *Monolinguisme de l'autre*, as his only language, a language he inhabits as well as it inhabits him. 'I have only one language', he says, 'yet it is not my mine (*ce n'est pas la mienne*).'¹⁸ Such loss is expressed in the statement. French was the only language he had, Derrida says in *Monolingualism*, and it was taken away. He goes further and says that he *is* that language, or at least he is that monolingualism: 'It is me. For me, this monolingualism is me.'¹⁹ And 'I would not be myself outside it. It constitutes me, it dictates even the ipseity of all things to me.'²⁰ Derrida dwells in it and it dwells in him:

reproduced duration is the foreground; the intentions directed towards the insertion [of the duration into time] make conscious a background, a temporal background.'

16 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), p. 7; Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p. 7.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 12; p. 23.

18 Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 2; Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme*, p. 15.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 1; p. 14.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 1; p. 14.

my monolingualism dwells, and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. It inhabits me. The monolingualism in which I draw my very breath is, for me, my element.²¹

Significantly, though, Derrida does not describe the loss as the loss of a mother tongue. Not for him is the colonial story of having a mother tongue that is prohibited by the colonizer. Derrida was, instead, Franco-Maghrebian by birth and, given the situation of many Algerian Jews at the time, had only one language, French, from the start. Even regarding his mother he says that she ‘herself did not, any more than myself, speak a language that one could call “entirely” maternal.’²² Algerian Jews in Derrida’s milieu did not have an idiom or language all their own — no Yiddish, no Ladino — that ‘would have ensured an element of intimacy, the protection of a home-of-one’s-own against the language of official culture.’²³

Language, in other words, is our dwelling, and is not our dwelling. It, like the actual dwelling Emmanuel Levinas describes in *Totality and Infinity*, is open, never closed off and finished, but a place of connection and exchange.²⁴ A place we enter to collect ourselves and resist incursions. In it, we can collect and, at the same time, connect. For Derrida, it is ours — and not ours, since what is in it comes from outside. Language changes by interaction and exchange. Hence, every language is a language of the other. Though the language participates in producing my identity, my ipseity, it can never be assimilated: ‘anyone should be able to declare under oath’, Derrida says, ‘I have only one language and it is not mine; my “own” language is, for me, a language that cannot be assimilated. My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other.’²⁵ I have a language, yet it is not my own. I have a language, yet I do not. A Derridean paradox or aporia. I have it, in that I see the world through

21 Ibid., p. 1; p. 13.

22 Ibid., p. 36; p. 65.

23 Ibid., p. 54; pp. 90–91.

24 Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Dwelling’, in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), II.B, pp. 152–74; Emmanuel Levinas, ‘La demeure’, in *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l’extériorité* (La Haye: Nijhoff, 1961), pp. 162–89.

25 Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 25; Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme*, p. 47.

it and my identity is produced in its terms. I do not have it, in that language is social and changes socially. Others use terms differently, so that their meaning changes, morphs, differs. New terms come in; old terms go out. I do not determine what comes in and out — or only determine it a little. Language, like *différance*, is middle-voiced. It acts on me — limits me, constrains me, enables me, produces me — and I act on it — in notable cases, by producing a new word, such as *différance*, or in ordinary cases, by using a word in a slightly different way until I am understood by some and that way becomes part of the language for us. None of this takes place except in a social context, since words must be understood if they are to signify.

For the idea of ‘mother tongue’, the middle-voiced quality of language means that all languages are similar to Ladino, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, or (to refer here to the U.S.) Spanglish. All languages, in other words, are produced in a process of interaction and exchange. But we may be as at home in these as some Jews are or were in rapidly vanishing Yiddish — Yiddish that began disappearing both with the death camps and with the decision in Israel to make Hebrew the national language. Many Jews have felt completely at home in the Judeo-German my parents referred to as ‘Jewish’ despite the fact that it is largely the language of a big other, the Germans. Derrida, whose family was monolingual, indicates the familiar, homey quality of languages of the other when he refers to ‘some idiom internal to the Jewish community, to any sort of language of refuge that, like Yiddish, would have ensured an element of intimacy, the protection of a “home-of-one’s-own” (*un chez-soi*) against the language of official culture.’²⁶

The middle-voiced quality of language also means that we can feel and be bereft, lost, homeless, without a home, even when we lose a language that is not natural or maternal. We dwell in that language, Derrida says. That is, we return to the familiar in it, we pull ourselves together and produce ourselves in it.²⁷ And the language dwells in us, he says. It is part not only of the foreground for us, but of the background, the underground, all the grounds, frameworks, points of view, perspectives. Moreover, though it is what I am, I do not control it.

26 Ibid., p. 54; p. 84.

27 For a comment on the familiar, see *ibid.*, pp. 45–46; p. 77.

And this is what Derrida describes, regarding his own case, in *Monolinguisism*. The French language dictated the ipseity of things for him. He lived in it. He loved it. It left him, he hyperbolizes, when he was forced to leave the French school due to the *numerus clausus*, the prohibition of Jews in French schools under the Algerian version of Vichy. Derrida loved the French language, learned literature in it, was ‘harpooned’ by it, or by philosophy and literature written in it, was penetrated and entered by them. He also wanted to change it, to join those who have an impact on language by pushing it, pulling it, or, as he puts it, setting it on fire:

I seemed to be harpooned by French philosophy and literature, the one and the other, the one or the other: wooden or metallic darts [flèches], a penetrating body of enviable, formidable, and inaccessible words even when they were entering me, sentences which it was necessary to appropriate, domesticate, coax [amadou], that is to say, love by setting on fire, burn (‘tinder’ [amadou] is never far away), perhaps destroy, in all events mark, transform, prune, cut, forge, graft at the fire, let come in another way, in other words, to itself in itself.²⁸

Levinas, in his discussion of the formation of ipseity, speaks of recurrence — a spiralling going forth and returning home that produces the self in a continuing process. With a self that is one part Abraham who goes forth (*lech lecha*, God says to him: ‘go yourself forth!’ (Genesis 12. 1)) and one part Odysseus who returns home (out of the pain of homecoming), thus avoiding the particularism of Odyssean Heidegger and the universalism of Abrahamic Sartre off in the non-place called the *Internationale*. What Derrida adds to this, in my opinion, salutary middle position on the self, the subject, and hospitality is — well, death, destruction, and pain! To love is to set on fire, burn, perhaps destroy. No hospitality without inhospitality! No meaning without loss of meaning — or, to be less cautious, language destruction. No comprehension without marking, transforming, pruning, cutting, forging, grafting by fire. To underscore the affinity of his autobiographical remarks and what I am saying about his thought, it is important to note that he felt both nostalgia for Algeria — ‘nostalgia’ he calls it — and

28 Ibid., p. 50, square brackets in the original; pp. 90–91.

independence from it.²⁹ His impact on French would be like a tattoo, mixing ink and blood to reveal its colours. Ink and blood. Incision and excision. Hope and loss. Through these, meaning is revealed. Through these, the French language is produced or reproduced. Young Derrida's hope was to tattoo the language, not to bring something forth in it in a manner similar to bringing forth a baby. The penetration results from the process of tattooing, violence from without that produces something new within, new in the sense of unpredictable and unique: 'not necessarily an infant but a tattoo, a splendid form, concealed under garments in which blood mixes with ink to reveal all its colours to the sight'.³⁰

What, then, does this understanding of language mean for our hopes, anxieties, and commitments in this neoliberal global age? First, language is always changing. Change in language, like change in a neighbourhood, for our fifth example, is not inauthenticity — or, at least, is no more inauthentic than anything else. Language is what it is by changing, flowing, incorporating, releasing. Second, change and loss of language is painful. It is a loss. It is an opportunity, for welcoming the new, the foreign, the stranger, the messiah, but also a risk — of loss, destruction, marginalization, loneliness, disappearance. The self, what we are, what we are being and have been, is processual and, even more, social. The self is not just ink but also blood. And, in some cases (not all), loss of blood is so great that it becomes loss of self. In other cases, the bleeding is just the bleeding required by life itself.

And that is where justice comes in. The question is not whether a language, a neighbourhood, a self is authentic but whether it is fair, whether and to what extent it manages and distributes loss and opportunity justly. Who has a right to a language? Who has a right to a neighbourhood or the city? Who bears the isolation and lack of influence caused by language loss? Who has to move — first, to the city centre when the suburbs are popular; then to the suburbs when the city centre becomes popular? Deconstruction is justice, Derrida says. If our languages are being dominated (or dominating); if our cultures are being absorbed (or absorbing); if our neighbourhoods are being over-

29 Ibid., p. 52; p. 86.

30 Ibid., p. 52; pp. 85–86.

run (or overrunning), what is the solution: to set up boundaries and restrictions to keep out those who have stepped over the boundaries of others? Or is that just a new injustice, a new imperialism? 'All culture is originarily colonial',³¹ Derrida says, without wanting to diminish the distinct arrogance of, and trauma caused by, specifically colonial regimes. In other words, all cultures, all languages, all thoughts come into existence by allowing or forcing others into disuse — others just as good, or better, or different.

Derrida critiques authenticity in 'A Testimony Given ...' and in 'Abraham, the Other', the latter his response to Sartre's portrait of the Jew in *Reflections on the Jewish Question*.³² If authenticity is being what you are all the way through, as authentic gold is gold all the way through and not just on the surface, then we simply are not authentic. Sartre, to the contrary, exhorts Jews to be authentic. Authentic Jews, according to him, choose themselves as Jews rather than being in bad faith and letting others make them what they are. The inauthentic Jew — a self-hating Jew, for example — lets the anti-Semite make him what he is, internalizing the anti-Semite's negative view of himself rather than focusing on that view and doing what is needed to resist it, internally and externally. The inauthentic Jew, for Sartre, is not what he might make of himself, a strong Jew through and through, but is what the anti-Semite makes of him, for example, inferior in various ways in the case of an inauthentic Jew who internalizes the anti-Semite's negative characterizations. For Derrida, instead, no Jew completely makes himself. No Jew is what he is all the way through. "Authentic", Derrida says, 'implies, in Greek as in French, the assured power, the mastery of speaking and of being oneself, the sovereign ipseity of one who is sure of oneself and of one's power to be oneself'.³³ But for

31 Ibid., p. 39; p. 68.

32 Jacques Derrida, 'Abraham, the Other', in *Judeities, Questions for Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Raphael Zagury-Orly, trans. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 1–35; Jacques Derrida, 'Abraham, l'autre', in *Le Dernier des Juifs* (Paris: Galiléé, 2014), pp. 69–126; Jacques Derrida, 'A Testimony Given ...', in *Questioning Judaism: Interviews by Elisabeth Weber*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 39–58; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken 1995 [1948]); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

33 Derrida, 'Abraham, the Other', p. 25; Derrida, 'Abraham, l'autre', p. 109.

Derrida, as we saw above, what I most am is not my own. I do not have complete power over being myself.

Regarding the example of being Jewish, Derrida says to the contrary, 'the less you are Jewish, the more you are Jewish.'³⁴ To be Jewish is not to be Jewish through and through but is to be less Jewish. To be Jewish, for some, is to subscribe to a universal such as love of neighbour or anti-idolatry. However, for example, many ideologies, groups, and religions are anti-idolatrous. As a result, a singular focus on Judaism or Jewishness would itself be idolatrous in taking one singularization of a principle as the only such singularization. Being Jewish, then, takes you out of being Jewish. As a result, Derrida says:

when I say 'the most jewish' (*le plus juive*), I also mean 'more than jewish' (*plus que juive*). Others would perhaps say 'other-wise jewish' (*autrement juive*), even 'other than jewish' (*autre-que juive*).³⁵

These are the alternatives to Sartrean authenticity: affirming that you are Jewish and more than that; being Jewish in a different way; leaving Jewishness. Derrida identifies with the first alternative, Jewish and more than Jewish. Others might find new ways of being Jewish. Some might take on another identity. The point is that the alternatives grow out of fidelity to that to which Jewishness or Judaism is faithful in the first place.

The justice question, then, cannot be one of authenticity versus inauthenticity. It cannot simply be eating only at old mom and pop restaurants and never trying out new places on the block. It cannot simply be making old traditions persist in their old form. It cannot be keeping all the old motels and hundred-year-old Victorian houses and prohibiting all postmodern green buildings and spaces. It can be neither hypermnesia, Derrida says, nor amnesia, neither 'the madness of a hypermnesia, a supplement of loyalty, a surfeit, or even excrescence of memory' nor 'an amnesia without recourse, under the guise of a pathological destructuring, a growing disintegration' or of 'con-

34 Derrida, 'A Testimony Given ...', p. 41.

35 Derrida, 'Abraham, the Other', p. 35; Derrida, 'Abraham, l'autre', p. 126.

form[ing] to the model of the “average” or dominant French person, another amnesia under the integrative guise.³⁶

Instead, Derrida calls for an ‘anamnesis of the entirely other.’³⁷ What would that be? Between early Sartrean amnesia and Heideggerian hypermnesia lies a different approach, a different kind of memory, whether it is the memory that is found in language, meaning, neighbourhoods, cities, or countries. It would be a remembering that is open to the coming of something new. Or an openness to the coming of something new that leaves place for recollection of what has been. An openness that leaves spaces for what has been. So, in some unexpected, undetermined way, the future will emerge from the past while including the past, interacting with it and neither simply dominating nor simply being dominated by it.

No future emerges from a past remembered entirely, however. And no future realizes all of the possibilities there were for a future. Here, too, there is selection, decision, choice, responsibility. Here, too, there will be incision and excision, selecting in and selecting out. The past is not an *archē* but an archive. The remembering that is open to something new is not a complete recall. It is not hypermnesia. We can only remember some of what has been. The openness that leaves a space for what has been is not a complete jettisoning of the old, either. It is not amnesia. Anamnesis of the entirely other must function with an awareness that, though it is remembering the past as it moves toward the new, it is only pulling together and focusing on selected aspects of the past and it is only singling out some possibilities for a future. All remembering involves forgetting. It is memory of this and not that, of foreground not background, and so on. Anamnesis of the entirely other is memory, or at least acknowledgement, of this other as well — the one left out or put in the background when one remembers some of the past in order to move into a one of a number of singular and new futures. This is how deconstruction is justice, by remaining open to what is excluded by one’s efforts at inclusiveness, by keeping in mind the cut required for any inclusion.

36 Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 60; Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme*, pp. 116–17.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 60; p. 117. *Anamnesis* is ancient Greek for ‘recollection’ or ‘memory’.

Language, neighbourhoods, meaning, countries: spaces of openness that recall and include what has been; spaces of tradition that allow for the unaccountably new. Spaces of opportunity and risk, prayers and tears, incision and excision, ink and blood. With this in mind, we can propose and love fluidity and change, while recognizing and finding ways of at least more justly handling the pleasure and opportunity, and the pain and loss, that change, like life itself, inevitably involves.

Deborah Achtenberg, 'But You Don't Get Used to Anything: Derrida on the Preciousness of the Singular', in *Untying the Mother Tongue*, ed. by Antonio Castore and Federico Dal Bo, *Cultural Inquiry*, 26 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2023), pp. 11–24 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-26_1>

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