

Toward understanding a curriculum of being inhabited by the language of the other

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I feel lost outside the French language. The other languages which, more or less clumsily, I read, decode, or sometimes speak, are languages I shall never inhabit. ... But the “untranslatable” remains—should remain, as my law tells me—the poetic economy of the idiom... (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 56).

In the South, the suspense of an autumn harvest shortens, as the southeastern sugarcane fields reach up towards the bluish sky. The cypress and live oak trees, leaning from the levees, shed this season’s greenery into the depths of the Louisiana bayous murky meanderings. A grayness of Spanish moss still dangles

The southern wetlands await the Louisiana migratory birds to fall from their skies. The Canadian geese’s annual fly-patterned return from a summer of birthing life, reminds me of a departure, a birthing of otherness, migrancy of a name, its title and genealogical trace of migration from China to Guyana, South America to Britain, and Glasgow to Kapuskasing, a small rural logging town in northern Ontario.

from the nakedness. I fall behind, and delay any headings, towards a final arrival at the academic shores of the Louisiana State University instituted general examinations, what Derrida (1980/1983) calls elsewhere *a time of a thesis: punctuations*. I have difficulty finding, “...the potential values that sleep or play at the bottom...” of writing, on writing, about Derrida’s (1990/2002) philosophies, autobiography as *currere*¹, the relationships among self, other, institutions, and their housed systems of universal knowledge (p. 4). Often at the end of the night, after trying to negotiate and translate thoughts on Derrida’s various concepts (deconstruction, idiom, aporia, genealogy, trace,

difference, différance, language, translation, subject, etc.) into spoken and written words, I close his books which clutter the kitchen table in sweet submission, unable to surrender to the language of deconstruction, his deconstruction of language.

Dawn arrives before me, and as the sun surfaces at the horizon of Louisiana’s wetlands, I struggle to translate their alien landscape. My thoughts continue to tremble with fear in the face of examining the untranslatable poetics



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of Derrida's writing, his birthing of idiomatic conceptions, and their respective excesses of otherness. I long for the arrival of dusk, for the specters of Derrida to whisper a gift of understanding, a translation of his conceptual riddles, the secrets of his aporias, and inscribe this time of thinking into the marks of a written language, always situated, limited, "...on the verge of untranslatability" (p. 41). Under the shadows of the horizon, the following creative energy, electricity, teleports life, its materiality into re-marks, repetitions, and iterations from Derrida's writings onto the landscape of this textual body.

"Dusk is," Kohák (1984) reminds us, "the time of philosophy" (p. 32). In this nighttime of writing, its unconscious sleepwalking, its shadows, I am concerned most of all with where to begin a (philosophical, curricular) "complicated conversation," from where to affirm our departure (Pinar, 2004). This moment of writing then, is a response to questions raised in previous texts, in other academic landscapes, now mapped within the temporal limits of this autobiographical writing, as I "search for a method" of "understanding" Derrida's curriculum on inhabiting and being inhabited by the language of the other (see Pinar, 1975/2000; Pinar & Reynolds, W., & Slattery, P., and Taubman, P. 1995).

It is the end of August and under its starlit nights, off the shores of language, I continue to sleep and play on the horizon of Derrida's writing. This paper traces, often drawing on autobiographical examples, the temporal migrations of educational experiences in the language of the other. As a documented Canadian and British citizen, an immigrant with an ex-appropriated proper name traced to Guyana's indentured Chinese cane reapers, and thus, an imperial and postcolonial subject with certain identity disorders here in America, Canada, and elsewhere, how is a migratory subject subjected to the language of the other? More specifically, how might one learn, via *currere*, from a migrant subject's educational experiences of appropriation and alienation in the language of the other? In order to do so, in the first section I examine Derrida's concept of "deconstruction" and its relationships to deconstructing "the subject" of colonialism, language, and its translations.² In the second section I problematize the impossible colonial politics of properly appropriating the language of the other. In the last section, I introduce a curriculum of hospitality towards the language of the other which moves beyond alienation and appropriation. Now, let us open this paper with a letter.

Addressing a letter on the subject of deconstruction

...I would say that the difficulty of *defining* and therefore also of *translating* the word "deconstruction" stems from the fact that all the predicates, all the defining concepts, all the lexical significations, and even syntactic articulations, which seem at one moment to lend themselves to this definition or to that translation, are also



deconstructed or deconstructible, directly or otherwise, etc. (Derrida, 1983a/1991, p. 274).

The silence of that hyphen does not pacify or appease anything, not a single torment, not a single torture. It will never silence their memory (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 11).

It is before the thaw of daybreak. Yesterday's reading, thinking, and writing experiences a certain temporal death. However, the temporality of a yesterday—the writing and understanding of Derrida's concept of “deconstruction,” its immediacy—is suspended between the lines of these pages, dawn and dusk, life and death. My thoughts continue to inscribe their particular traces on these pages with a universal energy. Today, this paper opens with an addressing, a re-turning, to the subject of deconstruction in a *Letter to a Japanese Friend*.³ Derrida (1983a/1991) cautions professor Izutsu,

It goes without saying that if all the significations [on deconstruction] enumerated by the *Littré* interested me because of their affinity with what I “meant” [“voulais-dire”], they concerned, metaphorically, so to say, only models or regions of meaning and not the totality of what deconstruction aspires to at its most ambitious (p. 271).

These models themselves, Derrida (1983a/1991) maintains, must be submitted to “deconstructive questioning” (p. 271). Derrida (1992a/2001) reminds us, asks us, demands of us in the name of responsibility for the other, to free “deconstruction,” the “subject,” “its human rights,” from the “word,” and its assumed logocentric or phonocentric idiomatic forms. Deconstructive work involves tracing genealogies across academic borderlands, and uncovering the historical layers from which such concepts and their translations emerge, and thus are promised, and made

A gift of death instituting slavery created a historical space for Chinese indentured laborers, known as Cane Reapers, to birth their existence without origin into the margins of Guyana's national narrative. Britain abolished the slavery of African subjects in 1834. However the West Indies plantation owners' demands for cheap labor did not diminish. Chinese subjects subjected to persecution, famine, or wanting to escape a feudal system, in search of "common" wealth, migrated to British Guiana (see Sue-A-Quan, 1999). China prohibited such emigration, fearing the possible political revolution caused by those who returned from "foreign" places. A subject, not yet hyphenated, traveled the tumultuous seas, without the possibility of return, in order to become an indentured laborer cutting cane along the tributaries of the Demerara River. No longer with rights as a Chinese subject, or protected by rights as a British subject, Fook Ng, my great, great, grandfather, was now a subject subjected to the power of colonial rule.



possible through language. In this movement of deconstructing “the subject,”—which Derrida (1992a/2001) doubts is yet possible—the subject of deconstruction “is thus taking into account all the determinations and trying...to *improve* the concept of the human subject” (Derrida, 1992a/2001, p. 179).

The concept of “the subject,” like those of “deconstruction,” “colonization,” and their translations, can be traced, for example, through the Greek, Latin, German, French, and English languages. Derrida (1992a/2001) maintains that we must first translate the words philosophy, deconstruction, or subject for example, “...into a different idiom, and finally in *all* the possible idioms,” in order to make, the “...word subject understandable in other cultures” (p. 178). Therefore to approximate an understanding of deconstruction, or to deconstruct the subject of and subject within autobiography, one is faced first with the problem of translation.

The “first thing you have to do is a universal translation” of what “the subject” *is* and *is not* (Derrida, 1992a/2001, p. 178). Deconstruction of the word “subject” is then first for Derrida (1992a/2001), among other things, “the

Some time after the 1850s, the first ships from China made the arduous journey to the land of many rivers for which the local Amerindians named Guiana. On Fook Ng's arrival at the gates of the colonial port, a British magistrate translated and reinscribed this foreign subject's first and last names with the unfamiliar anglicized marks of John and Cyril respectively. His son later re-appropriated his Chinese name. Hyphenating his father's former Chinese title, the family surname became Cyril Ng-A-Fook. The descendents of John Cyril Ng-A-Fook Jr. learned how to embrace the inscription and father the language of this newly named title. Although his title was translated, the subject of Fook Ng's history continues to survive and surf the postcolonial hyphens between self, other, language, and culture.

genealogical analysis of the trajectory through which the concept has been built, used, legitimized, and so on” (p. 177-178). And to deconstruct the subject *is not*, Derrida (1983a/1991) makes it clear, to destroy, dissolve, or cancel the legitimacy of what you are deconstructing. Furthermore, “the subject” of which Derrida (1992a/2001) speaks, is not used the same way in the Anglo-American tradition for example, as it is in continental philosophy.⁴

Beyond a dogmatic critique of pure reason, Derrida (1990/2002, 1991a/1992, 1992a/2001) asks us to recall, with care and rigor, our double duty,⁵ our inheritance of concepts, and the language which conceives the subject of deconstruction, in order to reaffirm the limitless possibilities illuminated by the philosophical heritage of Husserl, Heidegger, Kant, Descartes, Aristotle, and so on. The “...subject was first,” Derrida (1992a/2001) explains, “in the Aristotelian tradition the *hypocheimenon*, something

which is underneath, identical to itself, and different from its different properties, qualities, attributes; it is *the* center of an identity” (p. 178).⁶ The “speaking subject” performs certain representations of identities—cultural and national—through language, his or her mother tongue (see Derrida, 1967/1973, 1996/1998). Butler (1990/1999) stresses, that “the domains of political and linguistic ‘representation’ set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are



formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject” (p. 4). How might one then reaffirm the structure of “the subject,” within autobiography for example, while questioning the limits of its canonized representations (e.g., a white European male bourgeoisie)? In the name of God, king, queen, country, state, or the metropolis, institutions such as the university guard and discipline the legitimacy of who is (which subjects are) entitled access to the universal systems of Euro-, Ameri, and/or Can-centric knowledge. And, as Butler (1990/1999) stresses, such universal systems work in turn to shape “the subject.”

The American State, albeit not globally alone, continues to invest in a cultural, linguistic and economic capital which attempts to reproduce a common subject, with a common curriculum, and thus disseminates its empire through ideological apparatuses—juridical, educational, medical, religious, media, etc.—which makes the subject of deconstruction, and the deconstruction of “the subject” all the more pressing today. In “Privilege,” Derrida (1990/2002) continues to work, without settling for a resolution, through the oppositions, paradoxes, and aporias of “*what is*,” and “*what is not*” philosophy. Who has the “rights” to such philosophical institutions? In following such lines of questioning, *what are* and *what are not*, the “rights” of a migrant subject? As a migrant, an indentured laborer, a postcolonial subject, what were John Cyril Ng-A-Fook’s rights of access to the institutions which house a knowledge of citizenship, its language, and in turn his en-title-ment to, the *right* to name and to *naming* his rights? Derrida (1990/2002) makes it clear that

...the title given (or refused) someone always supposes, and this is a circle, the title of a work, that is, an institution, which alone is entitled to give (or refuse) it. Only an institution (the title of the body entitled to confer titles) can give *someone* his or her title (p. 4).

But who then, entitles an (colonizing) institution? Such institutional entitlement is presupposed, Derrida (1990/2002) explains, for institutions (philosophical, juridical, medical, educational, etc.) are already entitled to give someone his or her title. Institutions entitle themselves through an exemplary system, a system of circular examples, (which, through a tradition of Western logocentrism proves, offers proofs of its logic) originated, established, and privileged by an instituted foundation of *what is* and *what is not*.

Deconstruction, therefore, is a “questioning in the sense of search, exploration, reflectivity, rejection of all assumptions, not as an act of demolition, but as striving for awareness” of alterity, heading towards the possibility of otherness which resides at the marginal limits of such institutions (Eg ea-Kuehne, 1995, p. 299). Derrida (1992a/2001) suggests that if you call deconstruction “...an ethics of affirmation, it implies that you are attentive to otherness, to the alterity of the other, to something new and other” (p. 180). How does “the



subject” of deconstruction negotiate his or her (human) rights to name, of naming, his or her rights of otherness, his or her citizenship in the language of a colonizing other? How do the institutions of schooling and their languages work in the configurations of such entitlements? What knowledges are privileged and presupposed in (colonizing) educational institutions? Writing towards the impossible terrain of “properly” understanding the answers to such questions is where this paper heads next.

Returning to the shores of a french language: Colonial politics of language

Every culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some “politics” of language (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 39).

It is another day after yesterday in August. In the South, the humid invisibility, damp and heavy, floats over the landscape’s eroding skin. Birds of flight continue their migration to the refuges of Louisiana’s vanishing wetlands. Once again, nighttime overshadows a place of thinking, reading, and writing. I entangle myself in *Le Monde* with the textual body of Derrida’s interview.⁷ Alien to the climate of this landscape, I sense the estrangement of invisibility coming from beneath the cracks of my apartment door. I struggle to translate, always with a certain amount of violence and death towards the language of the other. How might I then, whisper and breathe life into the words of Derrida? Under the alienating light of darkness and solitude, its shadows, I learn that Derrida’s breathing and his suspension between life and death is shrinking, shortening, slowly ceasing.

Through the process of translating Derrida’s interview, I stumble across words for which translation and their immediate understanding are, deferred, not ready-at-hand. Are they ever? But suspended, I am, in the cultural web of the French language. The following sentence, “Le temps du sursis se rétrécit de façon accélérée,” eludes my present comprehension. The words “sursis” and “rétrécit” are alien, and alienate, my ephemeral moment of understanding.

My memories of a language, the only language we had in the French Catholic School system I attended, a language that was never mine, eludes a proper appropriation. Although I find some reprieve keeping a French-English dictionary close at hand, I continue to struggle, while trying to negotiate the violence of universal translation, of excluding and reducing all possible meanings of the other, to a proper English idiom. I settle with the following phrase, “The time, suspended in reprieve, shrinks ever faster.” At the end of this process of translating French writing into language, its inscriptions into thoughts, thoughts back into English language, and its inscriptions into writing, I learn that Derrida’s time suspended between life and death shrinks ever faster.

He is suffering, internally, with pancreatic cancer. Just before daybreak, before the songs of mourning doves awake me, I am reminded of the parallels between him and my father’s colonial births, their shared encounters with



terminal illnesses, exclusions, separations, and en-titled ties to national citizenships and their alienating institutions. To be alien, an alien worker, is to live without title, without the human rights afforded under the language of en-title-ment.⁸

Alienation is a certain death of the subject, and yet one's own death is an alien moment in autobiographical writing. Can Derrida and my father write a *currere* of death, when death precedes such writing? One remains "...un-educatable with regards to the knowledge of knowing how to die," Derrida (2004) reminds us. Yet, can one write about a certain death of yesterday, of who "I" was yesterday? There is also death between the hyphenated spaces of alienation and appropriation, a violence, a loss of meaning, involved in first, and second, and third, and fourth, ...and...and...and, translations of a French language that was never mine, or an English language that never was Fook Ng's. But, there is also a birthing of a language and its otherness in such—hyphenated—"third space" (Wang, 2004). And therefore, how does one learn-to-live within the aporias—a language of undecidability—of such hyphenated third space?

In response to this question, Derrida (1996/1998) shares the following:

1. We only ever speak one language—or rather one idiom only.
2. We never speak only one language—or rather there is no pure idiom (p. 8).

In *Monolingualism of the other*, Derrida works to situate our lived experiences in, and with, a language which moves beyond the hyphenated spaces of appropriation and alienation. Derrida migrated from Algeria to study in Paris. But even before leaving the shores of Africa in 1949, Derrida spoke in the language of a country where he had never been himself. "My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak," Derrida (1996/1998) tells us, "is the language of the other" (p. 25).

Elsewhere Derrida (1997/2001) explains,

French is the only mother tongue I have, but while still a child I had a vague sensation that this language was not really my own. ... So I had the feeling that this language, which was the only one I had, came from somewhere else (p. 38).

His family migrated to Algeria from Spain before the French colonization. The Crémieux Decree in 1870 granted French citizenship to the Jews of Algeria. Less than a century later in October of 1940, during WWII and the German persecution of Jews, Henri Philippe Pétain's administration abolished the Crémieux Decree.⁹



Two years later Derrida was expelled from elementary school. “Here we have a 12-year old boy,” Derrida (1997/2001) writes, “who, without anyone explaining to him what anti-Semitism is, or what is happening politically, is kicked out of school” (p. 37-38).

Yet, Derrida (1996/1998) stresses, the denial of French citizenship did not prevent an unprecedented assimilation of the State official and institutionally privileged language. Derrida (1997/2001) continues, “a crack is opened in the relative security of the school, the place where culture is offered to him, where languages are taught—especially the dominant models of the French language” (p. 38). As a result of his expulsion, Derrida’s parents enrolled him in a Jewish school. But he still experienced anti-Semitism outside the school, in the streets, and among his circle of peers. The lived experience of not belonging, its alienation, affected his relationship with the Jewish community. Derrida’s (1997/ 2001) childhood trauma caused him to cultivate “a sort of not-belonging to French culture and to France in general, but also, in some way, to reject” his belonging to Judaism (p. 39).

Along with others, I lost and then gained back French citizenship. I lost it for years without having another. You see, not a single one. I did not ask for anything. I hardly knew, at the time, that it had been taken away from me, not, at any rate, in the legal and objective form of knowledge in which I am explaining it here (for, alas, I got to know it in another way). And then, one day, one “fine day,” without, once again, my asking for anything, and still too young to know it in a properly political way, I found the aforementioned citizenship again. The state, to which I never spoke, had given it back to me. ... That was, I think, in 1943; I had still never gone “to France”; I had never been there. (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 15-16)

In reading Derrida’s account of exclusions due to his paternal and genealogical ties to Judaism, cultural Jewishness, I try to imagine how exclusion emerged/emerges under the proper surname of Ng-A-Fook and its traces of Chinese-ness, or in turn, how it erases Gaelic-ness under the maiden name Gray.¹⁰ Father gained and lost his British citizenship in the land of many rivers. When Guyana was granted liberation in 1966, many former colonial subjects, who were not born on the Queen’s crown land, now occupied a post-colonial¹¹ status of not belonging, and lost their inalienable rights granted under the title of British citizenship and its entitlements: “citizenship, does not define a cultural, linguistic, or, in general, historical participation” (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 15). Even during the global decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s, institutions in France and Britain continued to define their national identities by the groups they did not—Chinese, Irish, Jewish, Black, Indian, migrants—belong to.

In “Privilege,” Derrida (1990/2002) writes,

The surface of its [the institutions’] archive is then marked by what it keeps outside, expels, or does not tolerate. It takes the inverted shape of that which is rejected. It lets itself be delineated by the very thing



that threatens it or that it feels to be a threat. In order to *identify itself*, to be what it is, to delimit itself and recognize itself in its own name, it must espouse the very outlines of its adversary, if I can put it thus (p. 5).

During different historical eras the French and British institutional apparatuses have had to react and redefine their cultural identities and respective national narratives in the “face” of a certain “masked” otherness, by declaring with a politics of language *what they were not* (Fanon, 1967/1991). This universal system of exclusionary logic, of defining philosophically *what the other is*, and what one *is not*, its system of deferral, *différance*, displacement, worked and still works today to privilege certain national identities associated to the metropolises of a colonial motherland or fatherland.

In the name of responsibility for the other, Derrida (1990/2002) asks us, to question recursively the “essences” and “functions” of language which privilege the foundations of such (educational and colonizing) philosophical institutions. “It is the apparent firmness, hardness, durability, or resistance of philosophical institutions,” Derrida (1990/2002) suggests, which “betrays, first of all, the fragility of a foundation. It is on the ground of this (theoretical and practical) ‘deconstructability,’ it is against it, that the institution institutes itself” (p. 10). Cane reapers, former colonial, colonized subjects, eventually learned the hard secrets, now no longer secrets, about the frailty of colonizing institutions. Some post-colonial subjects, alien in foreign lands, appropriated the languages of the other and learned to navigate the polyglot, hybrid, and hyphenated spaces between an appropriation of *what is* and an alienation of *what is not* colonial culture. Here Derrida (1991a/1992) tells us, “there is no culture or cultural identity without difference *with itself*” (p. 9). Yet, how does a colonial or post-colonial subject negotiate between the hyphenated spaces of sameness and otherness, alienation and appropriation, the colonizer’s institutional language and one’s native language, the schoolmaster’s tongue and one’s mother tongue, which in turn is always already occupied by the language of the other? What are the limits-situations of such (re)appropriations?

A curriculum of hospitality toward the language of the other

What is happening today, and has been for some time, I think, are philosophical formations that will not let themselves be contained in this dialectic, which is basically cultural, colonial or neo-colonial, of appropriation and alienation (Derrida, 1991b/2002, p. 337).

This mother language with which we are at home is the language belonging to a community—a language of sharing, a language of familiarity, a vernacular



language of daily conversation, a language with a profound respect of the other and self (Aoki, 1987/2005, p. 239).

...language is for the other, coming from the other, *the coming of the other* (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 68).

The sound of morning bells tolls. It is October. The suspension of Derrida's breathing between life and death has ceased.¹² Today, an unseasonal humidity, its invisibility, still heavy and damp, floats on the surface of Louisiana. I long for seasonal change. Until then, "you" and "I" must host the death foretold of this season's language. Dawn and dusk, self and other, two strangers in the same sky, share a universal terrain of such seasonal language.

Language is our invisible prosthesis for moving between the shifting terrain of self and other. But language, its promise of a universal terrain, has no material body. Self and other however, are able to perform their accents, intonations, and rhythms—of gender, class, race, culture, and differences—through the body of language. And yet, the universal landscape of language, its invisibility, eludes both a master's ownership and a colonial subject's (re)appropriations of a proper terrain called *homo-hegemonic meaning*.

In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida (1996/1998) maintains, the colonial master, the teacher, "wants to make others believe" in his ownership of the language, of a universal terrain called *homo-hegemonic meaning*, "as they do a miracle, through rhetoric, the school, or the army" (p. 23). A first trick is thus played—a master's ownership of an invisible place, which hosts language. "Mastery begins," Derrida stresses, "through the power of naming, of imposing and legitimating appellations. ... It always follows or precedes culture like its shadows" (p. 39). Therefore, like a shadow and its visible absence of light, the colonial master's lack of proper appropriation, ownership of invisibility, moves him to impose his fantasies of possessing the alchemy of a monolanguage, onto the linguistic landscape of a colonized other.¹³

Because that master does not possess exclusively, and naturally, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it, because he can give substance to and articulate [dire] this appropriation only in the course of an unnatural process of politic-phantasmatic construction, because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as "his own." (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 23).



The master's language of liberation, emancipation, revolution, and decolonization then plays a second trick. "It will provide freedom," Derrida

At Immaculé Conception I remember for the first time, hearing the teacher, master, perform and pronounce the accentuated strangeness of the name Ng-A-Fook, in the language of the other. Or learning with difficulty to differentiate, differ, the different, grave, acute, circumflex, dieresis accentuated sounds of é, à, è, ê, û, ë, au, eu, ou, and où. I have flashbacks of flashcards.

French was my language of learning at the elementary and secondary schools. For 6 hours a day the language of the other and its culture, attempted to teach me, they taught me. Each day, we mastered a model which promised good speech and good writing. As a child, there was always a certain amount of unconditional hospitality towards the language of the other. My attempts to appropriate the impossible purity of its idioms were not, however, without a certain sense of accentuated alienation.

English is my mother tongue. But there were few places of hospitality to receive its utterance at school. I was forbidden to practice the alchemy of the only language I spoke, never only spoke, and which never was mine inside and outside the school walls. For me, French was the schoolmaster's language. Because of my alien responses to experiencing the accentuation of a second language, or my refusal to utter in the language of the other, I often found myself sitting in the silent refuges of the hallway shadows, lost in translation, between the hyphenated spaces of appropriation and alienation.

language, to inhabit it as my second skin, I must be at home with the other.

Derrida (1996/1998) stresses that the very conditions of unconditional hospitality towards the language of the other "relies upon a foundation, whose sovereign essence is always colonial, which tends, repressively and irrepressively, to reduce language to the One" (p. 40). "This homo-hegemony," Derrida (1996/1998) adds, "remains at work in the culture, effacing the fold and flattening the text" (p. 40). Here, the host and the other's language we receive, house and feed have the dual possibilities of being a guest and an enemy, a

(1996/1998) asserts, "from the first while confirming a heritage by internalizing it, by reappropriating it—but only up to a certain point, for, as my hypothesis shows, there is never any such thing as absolute appropriation or reappropriating" (p. 24). A master's performed ownership, proper appropriation of a monolanguage, and the invisibility of its otherness, cannot be fully promised or assimilated by the other.

This lack of promise, the unattainable terrain of *homo-hegemonic meaning*, is the madness at the heart of language. Nonetheless, "the language, the only one I hear myself speak, and agree to speak, is the language of the other" (Derrida, 1996/1998, p. 25). Therefore, our responsibility for the other, in the face of a sovereign other, requires hospitality for the other's inalienable alienable rights to the landscape of a universal language that is never mine. Language is a structure, Derrida (1996/1998) writes, of alienation without alienation. The practices of colonial alienation and of being othered by its language, Derrida (1996/1998) maintains, is language. It is a mother tongue, which is already inhabited by the language of the other. Therefore to be at home with the French or the English



promise and a terror. And, if each of us is born into the concrete language of our mother tongue, as Aoki (1987/2005) suggests, how then does one negotiate a curriculum to migrate through and beyond the hyphenated spaces of colonizer and colonized, appropriation and alienation, the language of the other and a language reduced to the One? In response to this last question, of a yesterday, today, and tomorrow, there are many strategic turns.¹⁴ But, as dusk marks the death of another day, the specters of Derrida return and whisper, language must be a place of hospitality for the invisible movements of understanding between self and other to occur.

Concepts like deconstruction, subject, colonial, colonizer, postcolonial, alienation, appropriation, monolanguage, and their proper place of *homo-hegemonic meaning*, remain in a

... An irreducible experience of language, that which links it to the liaison, to commitment, to the command or to the promise: before and beyond all theoretic-constatives, opening, embracing, or including them, there is the affirmation of language, the "I am addressing you, and I commit myself, in this language here; listen how I speak in my language, me, and you can speak to me in your language; we must hear each other, we must get along" [nous devons nous entendre]. (Derrida, 1991/1992, p. 61)

perpetual movement, a migration of unfinished promises, of exappropriation, caught in the in-between spaces of translation, always on the verge of untranslatability. Therefore monolingualism of the other, learning language and its translation, is a promise, Derrida (1996/1998) suggests, which no longer expects what it waits for. And thus, learning the only language I speak, the only language I never speak, unconditionally hosting the invisible language of the other, its landscape of universal translation, welcoming him or her as a friend or enemy remains veiled by the promise of an understanding which can never be fully attained.

So French is my only language. Nevertheless, in the culture of the French in Algeria, there was a way in which, despite everything, France was not Algeria; the source, the norm, the authority of the French language was elsewhere. And, in a certain manner, confusedly, we learned it, I learned it as the language of the other—even though I could only refer to one language as being mine, you see! (Derrida, 1983b/1995, p. 203).

Falling behind: another heading

It is this language that holds us, as both hostage and support (Chambers, 1994, p. 33).

Wouldn't this mother tongue be a sort of second skin you wear on yourself, a mobile home? But also an immobile home since it moves with us? (Derrida, 1997/2000 p. 89).



The language of fall is here. It is November. I witness another season shrinking, shortening, changing. At dusk, during the time of philosophy, my windows and doors are now open to host a different kind of invisibility which still floats on this southern landscape. A language of unions, on this terrain called *homo-hegemonic meaning*, between self and other, Derrida's texts and my translations, has made its singularities present.

Through death, Derrida gives life to another language, a heritage of deconstruction, now suspended within these pages and the universal landscape of the English and French languages. Memories, or is it the nostalgia of experiencing the language of the other, its alienation, appropriation, exappropriation, always migrating with us, that faithfully keep Derrida's philosophical inheritance alive?

The responsible inheritance of Derrida's deconstruction asks us in the name of the other to recursively question "the subject's" rights to *name* for example, and to name the *rights* of his or her institutional language. Responsibilities of guarding this heritage of deconstruction, keeping it alive, also involve questioning any institutional language that presupposes its foundations with universal systems of exclusionary logic. Deconstruction, Derrida (1991/1992, 2004) tells us, guards against Euro- and Ameri-centric institutional, cultural, national, and linguistic incorporations of an official cultural capital.

The autobiographical examples utilized in this paper provide a foil, an exemplarity of singularities that challenges universal claims to a *homo-hegemonic meaning*. The value of exemplarity, Derrida (1991/1992) writes, is that it

... inscribes the universal in the proper body of a singularity, of an idiom or a culture, whether this singularity be individual, social, national, state, federal, confederal, or not. Whether it takes a national form or not, a refined, hospitality or aggressively xenophobia form or not, the self-affirmation of an identity always claims to be responding to the call or assignation of the universal (p. 72).

Each time that Fook Ng, John Cyril Ng-A-Fook, and I utter our differences, the disorder of our cultural identities, we must call upon the universal terrain of language and inscribe its universality in the singularities of our educational

To learn how to live is to grow, to educate also. To reprimand someone and say, "I will teach you how to live," signifies at times like a threat, I will shape you, even break you. The ambiguity of this play then is more important to me. This space opens to a more complex interrogation; can one actually learn how to live? Teach how to live? Can we learn, through discipline or through study, by experience or by experimentation, to accept, or better still, to affirm life? ... Yet, I remain un-educatable with regards to the knowledge of knowing how to die. I learned or acquired nothing yet about this subject. The time, suspended in reprieve, shrinks ever faster (Derrida, Le Monde, 2004).



experiences, for example, with alienation and appropriation. In such examples the migrant, post-colonial subject, does not settle for a proper cultural and national identity, but is rather, unsettled, between the hyphenated spaces of colonizer and colonized, alienation and appropriation, the language of the other and a language reduced to the One.

In *Monolingualism of the other*, Derrida teaches us the impossibility of properly appropriating the schoolmaster's language. Self and other are caught in

*As the death foretold of winter
nears, fly-patterned birds will once
again make their migration north, to
birth otherness into life. I continue
to learn how to live while I witness
my father leaning how to die. He is
also at war with himself. Robert Cyril
Ng-A-Fook continues to struggle with
the bodily language of lupus. On his
deathbed in Toronto, his father,
Bertie Cyril Ng-A-Fook longed to
return to Guyana, the landscape of
many rivers, the place that baptized
my proper surname. What landscape
and language will Father long for in
the face of death? How might I in
turn, learn to say goodbye?*

the double movement of exappropriation, a hyphenated space of understanding that verges on untranslatability. However, Derrida asks us to listen carefully, and host unconditionally, the language of the other. To do so, "you" and "I" must be open to a possible alienation without alienation caused by receiving each other's otherness. This double movement of teaching and learning involves a listening, heading towards the other.

wetlands of Louisiana. Meanwhile, I fear, the French language that was only mine, never only mine, the language of the other, held hostage inside me, is dying. How might I teach a dying language to survive, and in turn, learn to support a language that says goodbye? What landscape of language did Derrida long for in the face of death? How does one host the language of death? And, how might its invisible terrain greet "you" and "me"? Let us now say farewell to such goodbyes.

Notes

¹ *Currere* is the Latin infinitive form for curriculum and means to run the course. Pinar's (2004) method of *currere* consists of the four following intertwining parts: regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetic. In the regressive phase one conducts free association with the memories in order to collect autobiographical data. The purpose is to try and re-enter the past in order to enlarge and transform one's memories. The second phase, or the progressive, is where one looks toward what is not yet present. In the analytical stage one examines how both the past and the future inhabit the present. How might one's future desires and/or interpretations of the past influence present understandings of relationships with alienation and appropriation in the language of the other for example? At the analytical stage, how might one bracket such experiences in order to loosen emotional attachments and one's respective limit-situations? The synthetic is the last stage, where one brings together past, present, and future limitations and possibilities in order to re-enter the present moment hopefully with a sense of greater self-knowledge.



2 Under one form or another, Derrida's concept of deconstruction can be found in all his writings. However, within the constraints of this paper, I limit my references to deconstruction to the following texts: *Of Grammatology* (1967/1976), *A Letter to A Japanese Friend* (1983a/1991), *The Other Heading* (1991a/1992), and *Talking Liberties* (1992a/2001).

3 Not unlike Pinar's (1975/2000, 1995) use of *currere* in the field of curriculum theory, Derrida's concept of "deconstruction" is controversial in the academic field of philosophy. Although this section begins with *A Letter to a Japanese Friend*, it is important to realize that Derrida continued to discuss the concept of deconstruction in response to various questions put forth by fellow scholars in different academic fields and the French media until the moment of his death on October 9, 2004.

4 Derrida traces a genealogy of "the subject" through the Western tradition of continental philosophy. The purpose of this paper is not to trace the essence of what "the subject" is, but rather its relationships with language. For the convenience of keeping this conversation moving, this paper momentarily settles on how Derrida and Montefiore position "the subject" in *Talking Liberties*. In this interview, Montefiore and Derrida situate "the subject," among its other determinants, as "identity to itself, consciousness, intention, presence, or proximity to itself, autonomy, relation to the object" (in Biesta and Egéa-Kuehne, 2001, p. 188). It is important to realize that the "subject" is also conceived differently in psychoanalytical and feminist theory, etc. Even if this paper did pursue such a tracing of the "subject," how might tracing its trajectory through a westernized canon limit our conversation on the "subject"? What might Eastern philosophy have to say on the concept of the "subject," for example? For a further discussion on Derrida's deconstruction of the subject see for example *Eating Well: or the Calculation of the Subject* (1983b/1991), *From Speech and Phenomena* (1967/1973), and "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy* (1972/1982).

5 In *The Other Heading*, Derrida (1991a/1992) explains, that it is our national and individual duty to criticize, both in theory and in practice, a totalitarian dogmatism which works to destroy democracy and its European, American, and Canadian heritage. Such a duty, also involves criticizing institutions which institute dogmatism under new guises. Yet this same duty, Derrida stresses, "dictates cultivating the virtue of such *critique, of the critical idea, the critical tradition*" and submits it, "beyond critique and questioning, to a deconstructive genealogy that thinks and exceeds it without compromising it" (p. 77). Therefore this double duty, according to Derrida, asks us, in the name of responsibility, to affirm our philosophical heritage while also submitting it to a deconstructive questioning.

6 Here I offer a footnote on a footnote about the etymological closeness between "subject" and "substance." In *Talking Liberties*, Egéa-Kuehne (2001) explains, "Subject comes from the Latin *subjectum*, past participle of the verb *subjicere*, which signifies to 'throw or put under, to place underneath.' The Latin term *substantia* was constructed from the verb *substare* which means 'to stand' (*stare*) 'under' (*sub*)." Egéa-Kuehne continues that this word was utilized in order to translate Aristotle's "...huspotasis, which signified 'what is underneath, basis, foundation' (from *hupo*, 'under,' and *stasis*, 'the action of fixing itself')" (p. 184). The concept of substance was one of the most important notions in metaphysics up to the seventeenth century.

7 On August 18, 2004 *Le Monde* conducted an interview with Derrida titled "I am at War Against Myself." I have translated this interview in its entirety from French to English, yet not without losing some of its "original" meaning. Can one ever? In deconstructive fashion, Derrida avoids his interviewer's initial question about his war with pancreatic cancer. Yet Derrida moves through the interview to recount his past work and share his current thoughts on various topics and concepts such as the conflict in Iraq, same sex marriages, heritage, and the question of how one learns to live life.



8 In *The Oxford American English Dictionary*, alien is defined as: “belonging to a foreign country or nation; unfamiliar and disturbing; introduced from another country and later naturalized.”

9 Soon after the initial invasion of France in 1940, and in the absence of the official French government, the National Assembly voted in Henri Philippe Pétain as the head of what was later known as the Vichy administration which controlled the remaining two-fifths of unoccupied France. He then signed an armistice that gave Germany control over the northern landscape of France. During his administration the language of the French constitution was changed from freedom, equality, brotherhood, to labour, family, country. Not all French citizens supported the newly established government. Charles de Gaulle led *France Libre* (Free France), the French government in exile, from London. In the southern unoccupied terrain and elsewhere in France, the French Resistance continued to fight the Germans and help Jewish subjects escape the genocide of the Holocaust. After France’s liberation by the allies from the German occupation in 1945, Pétain was sentenced to death and expelled from the Académie Française. The following year his sentence was commuted to life in prison due to his old age (see encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com, 2004).

10 Elizabeth Gray is my mother’s family name and her mother spoke the Gaelic language.

11 The hyphen between post and colonial indicates a period of decolonization after WWII (see Boehmer, 1995).

12 Derrida died of pancreatic cancer on October 9th, 2004.

13 Upon arriving to foreign lands and during their colonization, it was common practice for Europeans to systematically re-inscribe the landscape itself, and the animals, insects, plants, and indigenous people who inhabited it, with anglicized remarks. The colonizer, the master, demonstrated his fantasies of ownership through renaming the land, and thus, appropriating the indigenous terrain of meaning. For a further discussion that complicates colonial power, naming, and ownership of land, see Smith’s (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

14 One of the concepts and strategies Derrida introduces in order to problematize an appropriation of a language proper to itself is “exappropriation.” In this deconstructive double movement, “exap-” marks the sense of “-propriation” with an irreducible discordance or dissociation between its two directions” (Kamuf, 1991, p. xxiii). “Whereas the proper movement of the proper” Kamuf (1991) states, “can only be in an appropriative direction back to itself, the circle of return cannot complete itself without also tracing the contrary movement of expropriation” (p. xxiii). The more master and colonial subject seek to appropriate, jealously own a language, one proper to itself, and thus uncontaminated by the other, the more “-propriation” loses itself in the “ex-” of an exteriority to itself. For a further discussion on the concept of exappropriation see Derrida’s *Of Hospitality* (1997/2000), *The Post Card* (1980/1987), and *There is No One Narcissism* (1983b/1995).

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