Excerpt from interview with Professor Jacques Derrida
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Q. Going back to the question of historicity and a-historicity. Why do you think that the Anglo-American philosophical sensibility has chosen to bracket (off) history and historicity after the Holocaust? Do you think that the troubled and sometimes aggressively expressed reaction against your thought, against Deconstruction, has to do with this disagreement – since, strangely enough, deconstruction was often received as “a-historical”, “a-political”, etc.? Do you think that these are both relevant and perhaps necessary responses to the Holocaust – namely, bracketing history altogether, avoiding the very danger of politicizing spirit, or else engaging it once again, but then, with precaution, care, less pretense?

D. You know, it will take us more than a couple of minutes to deal with the problem of Anglo-American philosophy (of which in fact there are many) and of its relation to history and its distance from work like mine, for instance. It has never occurred to me, but I may have been wrong, that the resistance of a certain type of Anglo-American philosophy to some work, such as mine, had any direct or indirect relation to the Shoah. But, through a certain number of mediations, it is possible that you may be right. That is to say that, for instance, we are reproached, or I am reproached with being too attentive to historicity, hence sometimes the reproach, altogether unjust, well, the reproach with relativism, historicism, etc. This is possible.

There is in fact in analytic philosophy, in any case in the dominant profile of analytic philosophy, one shouldn't simplify, there is an altogether spectacular disinterest in the political history of Europe in this century, that's true. They
philosophize as if nothing has happened. And so, there is perhaps in their resentment against Deconstruction a certain bad conscience before a philosophy that asks the question of Europe, that asks the question of history, etc. Now it seems paradoxical that, as is sometimes the case, some of these Anglo-American philosophers accuse me, for example, or accuse what they call "Deconstruction" of being a-historical, a-political. Since at the same time the opposite accusation is equally common, namely that deconstruction is a political radicalism, that it is too political. And there, in order to account for the incompatibility of these two accusations, it would be necessary, of course, to analyze the field very attentively. Which we cannot do now, very rapidly.

But, in any case, since you mention Anglo-American things, I think that, in the short time we have, at least two features should be emphasized. One has to do with its a-historical character or scant interest in history, political history and the political history of Europe among Anglo-Analytical philosophers. Not so much the philosophers who are in the United States, since there are after all many who are interested in continental philosophy. There are in the United States, as you know, a few centers, a few universities where they work very seriously, more seriously than anywhere else, I believe, on Husserl, Heidegger etc. But if we consider the greater part of the American philosophical territory, it is in fact dominated by what is called 'analytic philosophy', although it is currently in a somewhat critical phase. What stands out most often, even when there is interest in questions of morality, is a basic bracketing, as you were saying, a bracketing of all the events, all the traumas we're discussing right now. It must be emphasized that this philosophical disinterest or indifference (I do mean philosophical, in philosophical discourse, because some individuals may as individuals be interested in the Holocaust, but they do not integrate this interest in the Holocaust into their philosophical discourse. So, it must be emphasized that disinterest) in the Holocaust often co-habits in American academic culture, probably for reasons of a bad conscience, with a prosecutorial attitude towards the least offence committed by European intellectuals, as the de Man or the Heidegger affairs have revealed. That is to say that the Americans, who were basically strangers to
what happened in Europe, well, far away, American intellectuals and professors are often de-politicized, unlike many European intellectuals, they are shut up in their academic institutions, and they don't have any space for political intervention, and very often, all too often they are not interested even in the politics of their own country. They concern themselves very little with racism in the United States, with economic deprivation, with the homeless, etc, but are in big rush to set up trials concerning literary fascism in France: the de Man affair, or Blanchot, etc. And I believe this should be seen as a sign of the bad conscience of abstract, powerless intellectuals who often, how should I say it, are not too active in their own country. I am talking, naturally, of a typical generality. There are American academic intellectuals who are active or activist; but many of them, in any case those who set up those trials about de Man, are people who in their own country are totally blind and deaf to otherwise serious problems today. So, it would be necessary to reconstitute this scene, of which I'm only mentioning some schematic features.