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## Desire in Ashes

### Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy

Edited by Simon Morgan Wortham and Chiara Alfano

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## The Desire for Survival?

Kas Saghafi

How are we to contend with the provocation that has presented itself as 'the desire for *survival*'? Could Derrida's work be characterized as describing, representing or calling for a 'desire for survival'? Is what Derrida calls survival, or *survivance* as he prefers to refer to it in his later work, even something that can be *desired*? Is not surviving, or survivance, in addition to referring to the finitude of a mortal being, also a structural feature, of, for example, writing, the date and the name? Recent attention has been paid to the notion of desire in relation to Derrida's work by Martin Hägglund, whose *Radical Atheism* has garnered much critical attention. Foregrounding a notion of desire in *Radical Atheism*, Hägglund asserts that 'Derrida himself did not provide a systematic account of his notion of desire, and it has remained unexplored by his commentators, but I will argue that it is altogether crucial for his thinking' (*H*, 32).<sup>1</sup> Embarking upon 'a sustained attempt to reassess the entire trajectory of Derrida's work'—no small feat—in *Radical Atheism*, Hägglund refutes a notion, which Derrida never endorsed or promulgated, of 'an ethical or religious "turn" in his thinking' (1). Using as his pivot the notion of desire, Hägglund expresses a need for a systematic account in order to provide a shopping list of what is and what is not desirable. Since what has traditionally been designated as desirable, the absolute being of God or the immutability of the soul, fails to meet Hägglund's criteria, he provides an alternative: 'everything that can be desired is mortal in its essence' (111). Life, on his account, is 'essentially mortal, which means that there can be no instance' that is immortal, as immortality is equated with an existence uncontaminated by time (8).

According to Hägglund, what is desired is in its essence finite, which seems to designate the opposite of infinite and is thus something that terminates, ends or dies. Employing a Lacanian definition of desire inspired by Plato, Hägglund takes desire to be an attempt to attain fullness. In the account of

desire (*epithumia*) in the *Symposium* Socrates declares that the desiring subject 'desires what it does not have' (Griffith) or 'lacks' [*endeés*] (Lamb) (200b) and wants 'to continue to possess in the future what he possesses now' (Griffith) (200d).<sup>2</sup> As Diotima tells Socrates, what is mortal tries to be everlasting and immortal. This 'love [*eros*]' with a view to 'immortality [*athanasias*]', also translated as 'desire for immortality' (Griffith), is how a mortal being partakes of (Lamb), or tastes [*metexei*] (Griffith), immortality (208b).<sup>3</sup> For Lacan, the lack of fullness – the fact that desire cannot be fulfilled – is what gives rise to desire. What is ultimately desired, Hägglund reasons, is the desire for survival and not the desire for immortality. Thus the desire to survive is the desire to live on as a mortal being – hence Hägglund's relentless refutation and refusal of immortality and insistence in favour of a 'radical atheism'.

Hägglund approaches his reading of Derrida, which he opposes to those providing a 'theological account' of Derrida's work, from the perspective of the problem of atheism. Taking issue with traditional atheism in his crusading fervour and zealous denial of the existence of God and immortality, Hägglund aims to strongly rebuke those critics who write about Derrida from a 'religious framework'. Stating that there is nothing beyond mortality and that life is 'essentially mortal' (an oft-repeated phrase), Hägglund argues that 'the so-called desire for immortality' displays an 'internal contradiction' with a desire that 'precedes it and contradicts it from within' (*H*, 1). In fact, the desire for immortality disguises 'a desire for survival' (*ibid.*).

In Hägglund's view, the notion of survival defines life as 'essentially mortal' (48) and inherently divided by time (33). He defines 'to survive' as 'to remain after a past that is no longer and to keep the memory of this past for a future that is not yet' (1). (Isn't this a very classical and conventional definition of 'to survive'? Would one need to appeal to Derrida to come up with such a definition?) He argues hyperbolically – although one cannot but think here of the tone of an advertising slogan or a religious exhortation – that 'every moment of life is a matter of survival' (*ibid.*). Hägglund's notion of 'survival' is, at best, a Nietzschean affirmation of mortal existence, rejecting the desire for anything that exceeds or transcends finite human life. Life, for Hägglund, is predicated on the idea that it may come to an end at any moment (pathos or panic?). The fact of living should then be an affirmation of finitude. It is hard to see how this account differs from classical existentialism, peddled for decades in American philosophy departments urging young minds to take up the virtues of *carpe diem*. Why would we need Derrida to tell us what Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and others seem to have told us already – unless Derrida is saying something else entirely?

Presenting a purely formal account of Derrida's work shorn of subtlety, elegance and complexity, Hägglund, like a good analytic philosopher, points out inconsistencies, incoherences, fallacies and logical contradictions in Derrida's readers and interpreters, finding 'untenability' and incompatibility everywhere. Providing a systematic account of Derrida's notion of desire, an account that Derrida himself did not provide, and developing arguments in directions deemed by Hägglund as 'crucial' for Derrida's thinking, Hägglund seeks to explicate 'the logic of deconstruction' (as if there is such a thing, as if deconstruction is simply a logic and as if a younger generation, who may have never heard of Gasché and Bennington – who meticulously laid out the logical intricacies and [infra]structural aspects of Derrida's thought – is in need of being instructed about its logical operations) (82). Hägglund, who seems to mistake deconstruction's task as simply providing systematic accounts, treats deconstruction, according to Michael Naas, as 'a discourse of ontology or epistemology', restricting deconstruction to merely ontological claims.<sup>4</sup>

Displaying a dogged attachment to mortal life and a tenacious opposition to all that is immortal or smacks of it, Hägglund is adamant that as human beings we live on by remaining 'subjected to temporal finitude' (*H*, 2). His privileging of temporality can be discerned throughout *Radical Atheism*: for Hägglund, everything in Derrida seems to follow from 'the constitution of time' (in what sense of *follow*? Come after? Logically proceed from? And why just time and not space as well?)<sup>5</sup> In what sense does 'the structure of the trace *follow* from the constitution of time?' (*H*, 1). Hägglund refers to 'the trace structure of time' (9), but why is Derrida said to have had an insight simply into 'the trace structure' of *time*? Nothing is exempt from 'temporal finitude', Hägglund argues (2–3), yet all he seems to understand by 'the time of mortal life' is the fact we are 'finite', that is, that we die (2). This is how we are to understand the statement that immortality would annihilate the time of mortal life.

What is surprising is that in none of Hägglund's work, whether in *Radical Atheism* (2008) or in subsequently published texts, is there a mention of the notion of 'radical atheism' in Derrida's own work.<sup>6</sup> In 'Penser ce qui vient', a talk initially given at the Sorbonne in 1994 following the publication of *Specters of Marx* and published a year before Hägglund's book, during the course of thinking about the event and what comes, Derrida raises the notion of 'radical atheism' when he asks himself whether he is an atheist or a radical atheist.<sup>7</sup> Derrida broaches the topic of an atheism, not as a personal conviction that can or cannot be shared, but an atheism or a secularism [*laïcité*] or some kind of 'structural agnosticism' that characterizes *a priori* every relation to what comes

and who comes (21). Derrida's atheism differs from Hägglund's, whose atheism is fervently in opposition to religiosity or any belief that bears a resemblance to it. For Derrida, as he explains in 'Penser ce qui vient', to think the future is to be able to be an atheist. However, even if his atheism is a 'structural' atheism, Derrida wonders whether he is not a 'singular' atheist 'who remembers God and who loves to remember God' (ibid.). In his brief remarks Derrida states that he would like to think further about 'a hypermnesic atheism' that brings together the messianic promise, revolutionary spirit, the spirit of justice and emancipation. For, the concept and thinking of the political is, for Derrida, inseparable from this singular atheism (23).

In what follows, I would like to pursue several elements or themes of Hägglund's discourse of 'radical atheism', namely desire, finitude, immortality and survival, in order to examine in more detail his reading of Derrida's work.

### Desire in Derrida

There are many instances where the word 'desire [*désir*]' appears in Derrida's texts, but can it be said that desire as such is an operative concept in Derrida's work, as it is, for example, in Lacan? The usage of the term, which commonly denotes a wish, a want or an inclination for what is beneficial, useful, etc., is very complex in Derrida's writings and does not lend itself to easy summarizing. In his early writings, Derrida writes about philosophy's desire or the desire of metaphysics: references abound to the desire of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence (DLG, 71), philosophy's 'desire for sense' (ED, 349), the desire or wish to believe in the remaining of the thing itself (VP, 117), the suspicion of writing as a perfectly coherent desire of ethnocentrism (DLG, 161) and the desire of and for reason in Kant (*Ver P*, 45/38). One can also find references to metaphysical desires that Derrida puts into question, such as the desire for the origin (DLG, 345), the desire for presence (206), the desire for the centre (411), the desire for a 'centered structure' (ED, 410/279), the desire to exclude the foreigner/stranger (SM, 273), as well as the desire for the archive (*Mal*, 38/19) and the archive's desire (52/19). The appearance of the word at times refers to another thinker's desire, for example, Rousseau's desire for a rehabilitation of speech and condemnation of writing (DLG, 204), or to a concept in a thinker's writings, for example, the notion of desire in the work of Levinas (ED) or Fukuyama's usage of Hegelian desire (SM). On other occasions, desire is accompanied by another term in a pair, as in the desire and the disorder [*trouble*] of the archive in *Mal*

*d'archive* (*Mal*, 128/81), or terror and desire of being buried alive in *The Beast and the Sovereign, volume II*. It seems, one would be hard pressed to find many places where Derrida uses the term for his own purposes.

While the references in the earlier texts cast a suspicious eye on the notion of desire, in his later works Derrida is more likely to use the term favorably. For example, in 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other' he comments on the desire for invention (*Psy*, 34–5); in *Donner le temps* he writes of the desire to think and to give the impossible (DT, 52/35), in 'Faith and Knowledge' he writes of 'an invincible desire for justice' (FS, 31/18); in *Echographies*, he refers to what he calls 'exappropriation', where 'it is necessary' that I try to make what I desire mine, while it remains other enough for me to desire it (*E*, 125/111); in *Sauf le nom* he writes of the desire of God [*désir de Dieu*], double genitive (SN, 18–20/37) and the desire of the desert ('the desert as the other name, if not the proper place, of *desire*') (103/80); and in *The Death Penalty* seminar he notes that the death sentence is desired 'as desire itself' (PM, 339/249). It would be safe to say that the way desire functions in these Derridean texts does not adhere to any traditional concept of this term, whether Platonic or psychoanalytic, and would have to be assessed contextually and carefully read in relation to a notion of need.

### Finitude

Throughout his early writings, from an appraisal of 'originary' or 'primordial' finitude in Husserl in *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (1953–4) (PG, 171 n.91/98 n.91; 257 n.8/163 n.8) and *Introduction to Husserl's Origin of Geometry* (1962) (OG, 108/105–6; 151 n.1/138 n.164) to an investigation of the thinking of Levinas, Freud, Husserl and Heidegger in various essays in *Writing and Difference*, Derrida engaged with the thought of finitude. Yet, given what Rodolphe Gasché in *The Tain of the Mirror* refers to as 'Derrida's persistent critique of the notion of finitude', Derrida cannot simply be branded as a thinker of finitude since the latter has meaning only within the philosophy of presence.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the very idea of finitude is derived from the movement of supplementarity, Derrida tells us in the essay 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in *Writing and Difference* (ED, 337/228). In *Of Grammatology* he describes *différance* as 'something other than finitude' (DLG, 99/68) and in *Voice and Phenomenon*, published the same year, he informs us that we cannot think *différance* within the opposition of the finite and the infinite (VP, 114/87). As late as *Le Toucher*,

Jean-Luc Nancy (2000), a voice in Derrida's text half-jokingly, some would say sarcastically, refers to Nancy's notion of touching or *le toucher* as simply a thought of finitude: "Touching is finitude, period [*Le toucher, c'est la finitude, un point c'est tout*]" (LT, 160).

Thus Derrida's thinking of *différance* is not simply a thinking of finitude, whether radical or not, whether temporal or not, but a thinking together of the finite and the infinite. In 'Derridabase' Geoffrey Bennington refers to 'the inextricable complication of the finite and the infinite that *différance* gives us to think' while admitting that 'the terms "finite" and "infinite" function in a disturbing way in Derrida's texts.' Bennington, commenting on the notoriously difficult and misunderstood phrase (what he also refers to as 'a line' or 'a slogan, a motto, a maxim, a sentence, even perhaps a witticism' [75]) 'infinite difference is finite' from *Voice and Phenomenon* (VP, 114/87), observes in *Not Half No End* that the infinite and the finite are 'wrapped in a paradoxical relation.'<sup>10</sup> This indicates that the thinking of the infinite and the finite cannot be simply reduced to oppositions and that their complex and intricate relation would have to be carefully unfolded and explained.

Granted, Hägglund may be making efforts in this direction by describing *différance* as a thought of 'infinite finitude' (H, 220 n.14). Yet this notion, which is insufficiently developed, combined with his vociferous defence of and emphasis on finitude – however radical – still places the stress on a certain notion of finitude. Perhaps Hägglund's inspiration comes from Derrida's tangential question in 'Violence and Metaphysics' when he asks 'can one think "spurious infinity [*le «faux-infini»*]" as such (*time, in a word*)' (ED, 176/120, my emphasis)? Hägglund appeals to 'Violence and Metaphysics' to explain the difference between spurious and positive infinity and to show how *différance* is a form of non-totalization that contests a notion of positive infinity, as the latter reduces or 'sublimates' the trace. Contrary to the Hegelian true or genuine infinity (*Unendlichkeit*), which is an all-embracing totality, Derrida's thinking of infinity is non-Hegelian. Even though Derrida's thinking of the trace, the text and the infinite substitution of quasi-transcendental terms or non-concepts has been compared to a form of infinity, Derrida's infinite is not any form of endlessness.

Here it would be worth briefly referring to some of the central historical sources of the relation between finitude and infinity. The thought of what has been called examining 'positive infinity', according to Rodolphe Gasché, begins with Plato culminating via Spinoza in Hegel's theology of the absolute concept as logos.<sup>11</sup> Spinoza rejected the conception of the infinite that represents it as an

amount or series that is not completed, while Hegel also argued against spurious infinity for a genuine notion of infinity. For Hegel, the true or genuine infinite, associated with reason, is unconditioned and self-contained whereas the bad infinite, associated with understanding, is merely endless. Spurious infinity (*das schlechte Unendliche*), 'the indefinite, a negative form of infinity', associated with an infinitist metaphysics, is only another form of the finite (ED, 175/119). True infinity includes itself and its other. As he writes in the *Science of Logic*, true infinity must be an infinite that 'embraces both itself and finitude – and is therefore the infinite in a different sense from that which the finite regarded as separated and set apart from the infinite'.<sup>12</sup>

An echo of Heidegger's emphasis on finitude as temporal may be found in Hägglund's stance: for Heidegger finitude (*Endlichkeit*) is temporal finitude. Neither infinite nor immortal, Dasein exists as finite, exposed to its end. Dasein does not have an end (*Ende*), but 'exists finitely' (SZ, 378/329). As *Being and Time* demonstrates 'primordial time is finite' (379/331), while infinite time is derived or secondary. Primordially, then, is not infinity. It is in his reading of Kant in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* that Heidegger demonstrates that humankind is finite.<sup>13</sup> Finitude is the source of the understanding of Being and of all 'infinity'. Furthermore, from *The Concept of Time* (1924) to *On Time and Being* (1962) Heidegger distinguishes the thinking of time from the thinking of eternity. In contrast to the theological problematic of eternity, to think time is not to think eternity. The finitude of Dasein does not mean that it will die one day, but that it exists as dying. Finitude is connected to the limit, but for Heidegger the limit is not that at which something stops but that from which something begins.

## Immortality

*Radical Atheism* and subsequent publications set up an opposition between mortality and immortality, in which 'the desire for immortality' is contrasted with the mortal condition, thoroughly and unapologetically lived in time. What causes Hägglund's ire and draws his criticism is a conception of immortality, which he associates with religiously inclined interpreters of Derrida, as perfect and indivisible, not situated in time and having no relation to an outside. In contrast, Derrida is portrayed as espousing a thinking of radical finitude. So caught up is Hägglund in opposing or fighting those he sees as conservative religious advocates that he falls back on traditional conceptions of immortality

and eternity in the history of Western thought as discrete concepts and neglects to consider how mortality and immortality have been treated in Derrida's own work. Not only is there no clear-cut opposition or demarcation in Derrida's writings between immortality and mortality, as Hägglund would like to have it, but also Derrida's is a thought of the strange, paradoxical imbrication of mortality and immortality. Immortality is not a state reserved for the deathless but rather it is only the dead who become immortal.

However, before turning to his treatment of immortality, it would be helpful to very briefly see how immortality has been treated in the Western tradition. It has been shown by a number of scholars that as early as Heraclitus, mortality and immortality were not considered to be rigorously separated or demarcated from each other. Marcel Conche in his commentary on Heraclitus's fragment 62 argues that, for Heraclitus, 'the mortals [*thnetoi*]' and 'the immortals [*athanatoi*]' are not treated in separation from or in opposition to each other. In fact, immortality is thought by Heraclitus *in relation* to mortality.<sup>14</sup> There is an undoubted affinity between this fragment and certain mystic doctrines associated with the Orphic or Pythagorean tradition, indications of which may also be found in Empedocles' *Katharmoi* or 'Purifications'. From Homeric survival where the name and the renown of heroes who had shown valour in battle would be remembered and memorialized, Pericles' funeral oration bestowing immortality on patriots, the Pindaric *threnos* or lament for the dead and its related eschatology, to the Empedoclean *daimon* and the thought of the pre-existence of the soul and its transmigration into other beings, and the Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs about asceticism and inner life, notions of immortality in Greek thought are inseparable from the development of a notion of the *psuchē* or the soul. The Platonic notion, where the soul constitutes one's real being in the interior recesses of each individual, is a late development in Greek thinking. For Plato, the *psuchē* is immortal, permanent and unchanging, detaching itself from the body at death, while the living body is considered to be insubstantial and illusory. It is not until later that the pagan concept of immortality becomes contaminated by the Christian idea of resurrection.

Perhaps the notion of immortality in the Western tradition would best be considered in the context of survival, as a form of survival, as Derrida once did in *Aporias* (1993) when he referred to 'the theme of immortality like that of any form of survival [*survie*] or return [*revenge*]' (A, 103/55-6). While considering Heidegger's account of Dasein's relation to death and assessing the relationship between mortality and immortality in *Aporias*, Derrida writes that Dasein remains immortal, in other words, 'without end [*sans fin*]', in the sense of

*verenden*, and imperishable in its originary being-to-death. As Dasein, I do not end, I never end (76/40-1). In fact, Derrida will write later on, underscoring the inextricable relationship between mortality and immortality and the necessity of not thinking them in opposition to each other, 'only a living-to-death can think, desire, project, indeed "live" immortality *as such*' (102/55). He adds that in fact one cannot 'think being-to-death without starting from immortality' (103/55). More importantly for a consideration of Hägglund's work, Derrida emphasizes that 'the theme of immortality like that of any form of survival or *revenge* ... is not opposed to being-toward-death, it does not contradict it, it is not symmetrical with it, because it is conditioned by being-toward-death and confirms it at every moment' (103/55-6, my emphasis).

### Demeure

In order to further examine Derrida's thinking of immortality and its complicated relation to mortality, I would like to turn to one of his texts, *Demeure*, Maurice Blanchot, in which he pursues a probing, intricate reading of what he names 'immortality as death'. In the midst of a meticulous and painstakingly close analysis of Blanchot's *L'instant de ma mort*, the autobiographical account of the narrator's close call with death, in *Demeure*, Derrida refers to a stark phrase, what he calls a 'sentence without sentence [*phrase sans phrase*]': 'Dead-Immortal [*Mort-immortel*]' (D, 86/67). Two words held together and separated by a hyphen [*trait d'union*], a sole line [*un seul trait*] of union and separation (ibid.). (It is worth noting here that in the English translation, what is referred to as a hyphen by Derrida appears as a dash. Therefore, 'Dead-immortal' is one, hyphenated composite word.) In what follows I would like to comment on Derrida's description of this phrase and suggest that it can be used as an example of how he treats the question of immortality. Even though it is embedded in a text devoted to a close reading of a narrative, one could argue that Derrida generalizes this notion, as he often does when it comes to something that appears to be absolutely singular (like one's own language in *Monolingualism of the Other*, for example), to provide an account of 'immortality as death'. It will become clear that Derrida does not ever believe in a clear opposition between immortality and mortality or finitude, and his reading of mortality and immortality does not conform to any traditional definition.

Blanchot's text *L'instant de ma mort* ostensibly consists of an account provided by the narrator about a witness, who may be the narrator, involved in certain

events leading to the experience of being almost executed. Even though the reader may wish to assume that the text is the account of the narrator-witness – and much of the structure of the text seems to lead one to believe this – it is important to note that, as Derrida writes, there is a ‘null and uncrossable’ distance between the one who says ‘I’ and the ‘I’ of the young man of whom he speaks and who is himself (84/65). In other words, the reader must not forget that a distance separates the narrator from the witness and from the signatory of the text.

I would like to focus my attention on a couple of passages in this notoriously elliptical narrative in which the young man, about whom the narrator writes, and the female members of his family are forced by the invading troops to leave their home preparing to face a firing squad. As the young man pleads to have the members of his family, all female, be spared, he ends the sentence mentioning their long, slow procession suggesting that death had already taken place, that it had already happened (79/62). Death has already arrived because it is ‘inescapable’ (79/62–3). It is an experience from which one is not ‘resuscitated ... even if one survives it’ (79/63). For, ‘one can only survive [this death] without surviving it’ (80/63). Yet this survival should not be mistaken for a resurrection. In Derrida’s view, the entire scene mimics and displaces the Passion, the Resurrection and absolute knowledge. There can be no knowledge, for in ‘the life without life of this survivance’ all knowledge would tremble (ibid.).

Blanchot then makes a reference to ‘the encounter of death with death’, perhaps the encounter between what has already arrived and what is going to come (82/64). The two deaths meet, a death that is ‘both virtual and real’, at the tip of the ‘instant’ (ibid.). Death ‘has come to pass insofar as it comes; it has come as soon as it is going to come’ (82–3/65). ‘Death encounters *itself*’ in this ‘arrival of death at itself’ (83/65). This death that never arrives and never happens to me, Blanchot writes, is the event of an ‘unexperienced experience [*expérience inédite*]’ (quoted on 83/65).

Not only is death not an event that can be experienced but also one death cannot replace the other: the one who says ‘I’ cannot take the place of the young man he has been, substitute or speak for him or relive what has been lived, and consequently is not capable of describing this very ‘odd experience’ or what he felt at that moment. The two ‘egological identities’ are separated by nothing but death (85/66). The young man is ‘offered unto death’ (85/67). Blanchot’s text describes him as ‘Dead-Immortal’ (86/67).

Derrida glosses this phrase as

Dead and yet [*et cependant*] immortal, dead because [*parce qu’*] immortal, dead

insofar as [*en tant qu’*] immortal (an immortal does not live), immortal from the moment that [*dès lors que*] and insofar as [*en tant que*] dead, although and for as long as [*tandis que et aussi longtemps que*] dead; because once dead one no longer dies ... one has become immortal. (ibid.)

As Derrida explains a little further on: ‘an immortal is someone who is dead [*c’est un mort*]’, for only ‘someone who is dead can be immortal’ (ibid.). ‘What happens to him is immortality, with death and as death at the same instant’ (ibid.). The immortals are dead, but this immortality, Derrida explains, is ‘not a Platonic or Christian immortality in the moment of death or of the Passion when the soul finally gathers together as it leaves the body, having already been at work there in philosophy according to the *ēpimeleia tou thanatou* of a pre-Christian *Phaedo*’ (86–7/67). Rather, it is in the instant of death, in death, that ‘immortality yields to [*se livre*] an ‘unexperienced experience’ (87/67). Death arrives ‘where one is not yet dead in order to be already dead, at the same instant’ (86/67–8). At the same instant, I am dead *and* not dead (87/68). ‘I am immortal because I am dead: death can no longer happen to me’ (ibid.).

Blanchot designates this experience as ‘the happiness of not being immortal or eternal’ (quoted in 89/69). Even though ‘dead-immortal’ may appear to be the reverse of the above description, it does not, Derrida notes, in the least signify eternity (89/69). The condition that Derrida describes in *Demeure* – that of one who is dead and yet immortal, dead because immortal and dead insofar as immortal – is far from designating what has been understood as immortality in the Western tradition. ‘The immortality of death is anything save the eternity of the present’ (ibid.).<sup>15</sup> For, what Derrida designates as ‘abidance [*demeurance*]’ ‘does not *remain* [*reste*] like the permanence of an eternity’ but rather ‘is time itself’ (ibid.). Not timelessness or eternity of the present, but the time of an interminable lapse [*laps*] or interval. Not an ongoing or perduring state of timelessness, abidance [*demeurance*] would be an awaiting, a waiting for, a withstanding, an enduring, a bearing patiently. To abide somewhere is to sojourn or to continue in a place. What Derrida draws out of Blanchot’s text is what he describes as a ‘non-philosophical and non-religious experience of immortality as death [*l’immortalité comme mort*]’ (ibid.). This experience ‘gives [*donne*] ... the happiness, this time’ of being neither immortal nor eternal (ibid.). In ‘the immortality of death’, there is ‘a bond without bond, the disjointing [*désajointement*], the disadjusting [*désajustement*] of a social bond [with other mortals] that binds only ... to death, and on condition of death’ (89–90/69).

Returning to the narrative of *The Instant of My Death* we find that 'at that instant' death happened to the young man. But death had already taken place. The moment that the young man had begun to wait for 'the final order' of 'Fire', he had left the world

dying before dying, not for another world, but for a non-world beyond life, not for a transcendent beyond or the beyond that religions and metaphysics tell us about, but for a here-below without world [*ici-bas sans monde*], for a beyond here-below [*un au-delà ici-bas*], a without-world [*un sans-monde*] from which he who is already dead already returns [*déjà revient*], like a ghost [*comme un revenant*]. (91/70–71)

Like a ghost that returns.

The young man has left the world for a non-world that is not beyond this world or transcendent to it. Far from it. He is without world, in this non-world here-below. His being without world signifies that he is already dead. The dead one is not elsewhere but here-below. The beyond here-below differs from a transcendent beyond, since it is a beyond here from which the already dead returns. Survival or *survivance* is thus a ghostly returning, *revenance*.

The reference to immortality as death in *Demeure* harkens back to Blanchot's ruminations on mortality and immortality in 'Literature and the Right to Death', which are taken up again by Derrida in *The Death Penalty*, vol. 1, Seminar of 1999–2000. In the fourth session of that seminar, while discussing the writer's role and literature's relation to revolution, Derrida sheds further light on the notion of death as the impossibility of dying or on sur-viving as dying by citing Blanchot's famous phrase from 'Literature and the Right to Death':

As long as I live, I'm a mortal man, but when I die, by ceasing to be a man, I also cease to be mortal, I am no longer capable of dying, and my impending death horrifies me because I see it as it is: no longer death but the impossibility of dying.<sup>16</sup>

It would be instructive here to look at Blanchot's early interpretation of Kafka, particularly in the essays 'Reading Kafka' (1943), 'Literature and the Right to Death' (1948) and 'The Language of Fiction' (1949), all published in *The Work of Fire* (1949), in order to draw out themes from Blanchot's reading and to show the force that a reading of these essays has exercised on Derrida's thinking of mortality and immortality. It cannot be underestimated how uncannily consonant Derrida's terminology – motifs such as 'buried alive', 'survival', etc. – and conceptualization are with Blanchot's. Derrida's affinity with, and development of, Blanchot's reading of Kafka would have to be stressed here.

There is no end, there is no possibility of being done with the day, Blanchot writes in 'Reading Kafka'. Such is the truth that Western man has made 'a symbol of felicity' (PF, 15/8). He has tried to make the fact that there is no end 'bearable by bringing out [*en dégageant*] the positive side, that of immortality, a survival that would compensate for life'. But, rather than compensating for it, 'this survival [*survivance*] is our life itself' (15/8). We do not die but we do not live either, as Blanchot writes. 'We are dead as we live [*nous sommes mort de notre vivant*], we are essentially survivors' (16/8). Even though death 'ends our life', 'it does not end our possibility of dying' (ibid.). 'Dying', here as well as in Blanchot's other writings, is understood intransitively as an ongoing process while one is living. It is also worth recalling that in a later text, *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot, referring to the 'passivity' of dying (*Ec D*, 29), describes dying as 'without power' (67). In Hegel death is 'at work [*à l'oeuvre*]', linked with the power of negation (76), whereas for Blanchot dying is associated with 'non-power' (81). 'Dying outside of oneself [*hors de soi*]' (50) is described as something that is 'without goal' (67).

In 'Literature and the Right to Death' Blanchot observes that when we die we leave death behind. To die is to be absent from one's own death. It is the loss of death, 'the loss of what in it and for me made it death' (PF, 325/337). As alive, I am dying, but 'when I die, I cease to be mortal. I am no longer capable of dying' (ibid.). Death, then, occasions the impossibility of dying. Certain religions have taken this impossibility of death and have tried to 'humanise' it by calling it 'immortality' (ibid.). This means that by losing the advantage of being mortal, I also lose the possibility of being man. 'To be man beyond death' is 'to be, in spite of death, still capable of dying, to go on as though nothing happened' (ibid.). Other religions call this 'the curse of being reborn [*la malediction de renaissance*]' (ibid.). 'You die because you have lived badly, you are condemned to live again, and you live again' (325/338). 'In dying you become a truly blessed man – a man who is really dead' (325/337–8). According to Blanchot, Kafka inherited this idea from the Kabbalah and Eastern traditions. Whether, strictly speaking, it is understood as reincarnation or not, it nevertheless involves a kind of transformation or metamorphosis. Blanchot illustrates this wryly and succinctly: 'A man enters the night, but the night ends in awakening [*conduit au reveil*], and there he is, an insect' (ibid.).

In 'The Language of Fiction' (1949) Blanchot comes back to this idea reiterating that Kafka 'probably under the influence of Eastern traditions seems to have recognized in the impossibility of dying the extreme curse of man' (87/81). 'Man cannot escape unhappiness, because he cannot escape existence [and it



is in vain that he heads toward death because] ... he dies only to survive. He leaves existence, but only to enter the cycle of metamorphoses.' (ibid.) Thus, for Blanchot, there can be 'no actual death in Kafka, or more exactly, there is never an end' (ibid.). This is perhaps because Blanchot, in agreement with Levinas, believes that one cannot exit existence. The thought of the 'impossibility of dying' is derived from the interminability of existence – like the Ancient *apeiron*, existence is without beginning or end. Thus, most of 'Kafka's heroes are engaged in an intermediate moment between life and death' (ibid.). Blanchot observes that this strange condition of 'the dead who do not die' is expressed by Kafka in a couple of stories: 'The Hunter Gracchus', in which the Black Forest Hunter is alive *and* dead, and 'The Guest of the Dead'. Defining ambiguity, wherein 'assertion and negation are in continuous threat of reciprocity', Blanchot describes the ambiguity of the condition that he calls being 'buried alive' in the following way: 'death that is life, that is death as soon as it survives [*dès qu'elle survit*]' (89/84). One dies only to survive. If death is not a possibility, then life can only be described as the ambiguous survival of a 'death that is life, that is death'. An examination of Blanchot's thought has shown that rather than depicting a death-bound finitude, the condition that Blanchot terms 'buried alive' or survival speaks of the 'ambiguous' relation between life and death.

### Survivance

The rather mysterious notion of survivance makes an early appearance in Derrida's work. In one of its first instances, in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', it emerges in relation to writing (*l'écriture*), which is described as a 'surviving trace' (ED, 331/224). Later in 'Circumfession' writing is again portrayed as that 'intense relation to survivance' (Cir, 178/191). In *Shibboleth*, the 1986 text devoted to Paul Celan, the signature of the date is designated as capable of surviving and calling the disappeared or the vanished [*disparu*] (Sch, 59/32), while in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, from the same year, we learn that the name 'already survives' the name holder, bearing his death each time it is pronounced (MPdM, 63/49).

In an interview given in the mid-1980s Derrida explains that *survivre* is not a matter of survival in the sense of posterity.<sup>17</sup> Rather, surviving treats this 'strange dimension' of *plus de vie*, both 'more life' and 'no more life'. In the interview Derrida uses another expression *plus que vie*, more than life, to add to his

descriptions of what he means by *survie*. So, he remarks that for him *survivre* is a matter of both *plus de vie* and *plus que vie*. In response to a question about translation Derrida refers to the relation between the original text and the translated text as an *augmentation*. Translations, he explains, produce augmentations or new textual bodies. This augmentation is precisely *survivance*, not in the sense of merely allowing the original to survive but allowing it to have another life, as it were, in another language, a more invigorated, perhaps even richer, life. In *Mal d'archive* Derrida describes surviving in a similar way, referring to 'the surviving of an excess of life' (*Mal*, 96).

In the most extensive treatment – though not the systematic account desired by Hägglund – of *survie* in *Parages* (from 1986 again), Derrida writes of a survival and a ghostly return beyond the straight line of one's lifeline: 'Survival [*survivance*] and *revenance*, living on and ghostly returning. Living on [*survivre*] goes beyond [*déborde*] both living and dying' (*Par*, 153/134). (It 'goes beyond' but also overflows [*déborde*] as the entire text of 'Living On [*Survivre*]' treats the relation of shorelines to bodies of water.) Living 'beyond' one's death, *sur-vivre* is not to be mistaken with a life *after* death but rather *sur-viving* means life intensified, *more life still*. *Sur-* does not indicate superiority, supremacy, height, altitude or height above life (*BS II*, 194/131). In 'Living On' Derrida describes *sur-vie*, which Michael Naas renders as a 'sur-life', 'a surplus of life', for this 'more-than-life [*sur-vie*]', marks ... a survival in the time of life, in the form of a reprieve [*sursis*]' in which the survivor lives 'more than a lifetime [*plus qu'une vie*]' in the short span of a few moments (*Par*, 168/147, tr mod.).<sup>18</sup>

In *Politics of Friendship* Derrida writes that what is called *philia*, or friendship, begins with the possibility of survival. Friendship is a relationship that structurally necessitates that the friend 'already bear my death and inherit it as the last survivor' (*PA*, 30/13). The friend bears, carries [*porter*] my own death (which is expropriated in advance). In a way, he is the only one to bear it. 'Surviving [*survivre*]' would thus be 'another name of a mourning whose possibility is never to be awaited', since mourning, its anguished apprehension, will have begun before death (31/13). One does not survive without mourning – without literally bearing or carrying this grief [*porter le deuil*] (30/31). For Derrida, *survivre* is 'the essence, the origin, and the possibility, the condition of possibility of friendship' (31/14). The time of surviving thus gives the time of friendship. Such a time gives itself in withdrawing, it occurs through effacing itself. Its *contretemps* 'disjoins the presence of the present' inscribing 'intemporality and untimeliness [*intemporalité et intempestivité*]' in friendship (ibid.). In giving time and taking time friendship 'survives the living present' (32/15).

For Derrida, this bereaved survivance is to be distinguished from the stability, constancy or firm permanence of Aristotelian primary friendship (31–32/13). Friendship, as Derrida writes, is promised to testamentary revenance, the haunting return, of a more (no more) life, of a surviving [*le revenance testamentaire d'un plus-de vie, d'un survivre*] (20/3).

In a late discussion with Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in 2004, Derrida describes his feelings regarding the anticipation of his death. In his relation to the death to come, knowing that it will annihilate him, he acknowledges that there is beneath the surface 'a testamentary desire' that 'something survive, be left, be transmitted – an inheritance' that will not come back to him 'but that, perhaps, will remain.'<sup>19</sup> There is a feeling that haunts him about what will remain, not simply things that are in the public domain but also private things. This feeling, which he calls testamentary and is linked to the structure of the trace, is part of the experience of death.<sup>20</sup>

In his last years, in published texts, seminars and interviews Derrida publicly expressed his struggle with his so-called mortality, with the fact that he had come to terms with death or had to 'learn how to die'. The fact that he was not able to accept death for Derrida did not mean that his fatal illness was met by a 'refusal' to die, but rather that it caused a thoughtful consideration of how mortality has been defined throughout the philosophical tradition. Perhaps this 'refusal' to learn to die, as every philosopher must learn to do in order to properly be a philosopher, was itself a 'refusal', on the part of Derrida, of philosophy as a way of life that leads to the *soteria* of the soul and as a discipline or practice of and for death (and hence as a discipline for immortality). As demonstrated above, Derrida's thinking of survivance from the very beginning questioned the easy distinction between mortality and immortality. When, in his interview with Jean Birnbaum in 2004, initially published in *Le monde*, he said that he was at war with himself or against himself, this was because he could not believe that death was simply an end.<sup>21</sup> If surviving begins before death and not merely after it, as it is commonly thought, then life itself is originarily survival: 'life is living on, life is survival [La vie est survie]' (AV, 26).

As we have seen, *survivance* does not simply refer to what remains and endures for posterity nor does it signify surviving, or somehow living on after death in an afterlife or a life-everlasting in an afterworld, but the *sur-* in *sur-vivre* indicates 'more living', *plus de vie*, a more than life, *plus que la vie*, in life.<sup>22</sup> For, life and death, which are not separable as such, are themselves both traces of a *sur-vie* or irreducible survivance that dislocates the self-presence of the living present. The possibility of this *sur-vivre* does not wait for death 'to

make life and death indissociable', it comes in advance before death, to disjoin and dislocate the self-identity of the living present (*BS II*, 176/117). The living present is divided, divides itself, between its life and its survival, bearing death within itself. Survivance, then, is or says the complication, the inextricable alliance of the dead and the living. However, in order to adequately analyse the notion of survivance and its complex temporality, one would have to think it in relation to *revenance*, *restance* and *arrivance*. Alas, this is for another time.<sup>23</sup>

### List of abbreviations

Note: Where no page references to the published translations have been given, the translations are my own.

#### Works by Jacques Derrida

- A *Apories*. Paris: Galilée, 1996. Translated by Thomas Dutoit as *Aporias*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. [English version is a translation of the chapter 'Apories: Mourir-s'attendre aux limites de la vérité', published in *Le passage des frontières: autour du travail de Jacques Derrida*. Paris: Galilée, 1993.]
- AV *Apprendre à vivre enfin: Entretien avec Jean Birnbaum*. Paris: Galilée, 2005. Translated by Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault as *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*. Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2007.
- BS II *Séminaire La bête et le souverain. Volume II (2002-2003)*, edited by Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud. Paris: Galilée, 2010. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington as *The Beast and the Sovereign*, volume 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Cir 'Circonfession', in *Jacques Derrida* [with Geoffrey Bennington]. Paris: Seuil, 1991. *Jacques Derrida*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington as 'Circumfession', in *Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- D *Demeure, Maurice Blanchot*. Paris: Galilée, 1998. Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg as *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [Published with a translation of Maurice Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death*].

- DLG *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit, 1967. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1974, 2<sup>nd</sup> corrected edn 1998.
- DT *Donner le temps: 1. La fausse monnaie*. Paris: Galilée, 1991. Translated by Peggy Kamuf as *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- E *Echographies—de la télévision (Entretiens filmés avec Bernard Stiegler)*. Paris: Galilée, 1996. Translated by Jennifer Bajorek as *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.
- ED *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil, 1967. Translated by Alan Bass as *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- FS 'Foi et savoir: Les deux sources de la "religion" aux limites de la simple raison', in *La Religion*, edited by Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo. Paris: Seuil, 1996. Translated by Samuel Weber as 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two sources of "Religion" within the Limits of Mere Reason', in *Religion*, edited by Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 1–78.
- LT *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*. Paris: Galilée, 2000. Translated by Christine Irizarry as *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- M *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Minuit, 1972. Translated by Alan Bass as *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Mal *Mal d'archive. Une impression freudienne*. Paris: Galilée, 1995. Translated by Eric Prenowitz as *Archive Fever*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- MPdM *Mémoires: pour Paul de Man*. Paris: Galilée, 1988. Translated by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava and Peggy Kamuf as *Memoires: For Paul de Man*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edn 1989.
- OG *Introduction à 'L'Origine de la géométrie' de Husserl*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 1974. Translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. as *Edmund Husserl's 'Origin of Geometry': An Introduction*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 1989.

- PA *Politiques de l'amitié*. Paris: Galilée, 1994. Translated by George Collins as *Politics of Friendship*. New York: Verso, 1997.
- Par *Parages*. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Galilée, 2003. Translated by Tom Conley, James Hulbert, John P. Leavey and Avital Ronell as *Parages*, edited by John P. Leavey. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
- PG *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990. Translated by Marian Hobson as *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- PM *La peine de mort. Volume I (1999-2000)*. Paris: Galilée, 2012. Translated by Peggy Kamuf as *The Death Penalty. Volume I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Psy *Psyché, Invention de l'autre, t. 1 (nouvelle édition augmentée)*. Paris: Galilée, 1998.
- Sch *Schibboleth: Pour Paul Celan*. Paris: Galilée, 1986. Translated by Joshua Wilner as 'Schibboleth: For Paul Celan', in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, edited by Aris Fioretos. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- SM *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle internationale*. Paris: Galilée, 1993. Translated by Peggy Kamuf as *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- SN *Sauf le nom*. Paris: Galilée, 1993. Translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. as 'Sauf le nom', in *On the Name*, edited by Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Ver P *La vérité en peinture*. Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1978. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod as *The Truth in Painting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- VP *La voix et le phénomène*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967. Translated by Leonard Lawler as *Voice and Phenomenon*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

## Works by Blanchot

- EcD *L'écriture du désastre*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980. Translated by Ann Smock as *The Writing of the Disaster*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.
- PF *La part du feu*. Paris: Gallimard, 1949. Translated by Charlotte Mandell as *The Work of Fire*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

## Other works

- H Hägglund, Martin. *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- SL Hegel, G. W. F. *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 5. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969. Translated by A. V. Miller as *Hegel's Science of Logic*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999.
- SZ Heidegger, Martin. *Sein und Zeit*. 12<sup>th</sup> edn. Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1972. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as *Being and Time*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

## Notes

- I have benefited from the astute analysis of Hägglund's work by the following commentators: Michael Naas, 'An Atheism that (*Dieu merci!*) Still Leaves Something to be Desired', *New Centennial Review* 9, 1 (2009): 45–68; Jacques de Ville, *Jacques Derrida: Law as Absolute Hospitality* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Ernesto Laclau, 'Is Radical Atheism a Good Name for Deconstruction?', *Diacritics* 38, 1–2 (Spring–Summer 2008): 180–89; and Danielle Sands, Review article in *Parrhesia* 6 (2009): 73–8.
- Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. Tom Griffith (New York: Everyman's Library/Knopf, 2000) and Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. M. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), Loeb Classical Library. Lamb renders the latter passage as: 'I wish these things now present to be present also in the future.'

- We should note the Latinate vocabulary of immortality, which would be better rendered as 'deathless' in the Greek context.
- Michael Naas, 'An Atheism that (*Dieu merci!*) Still Leaves Something to be Desired', 49.
- Hägglund does not pay adequate attention to spacing, even though he mentions its importance in *H*, 72.
- Derrida mentions 'radical atheism' in *Sauf le nom* (SN, 103/80).
- Jacques Derrida, 'Penser ce qui vient', in *Derrida pour le temps à venir*, ed. René Major (Paris: Stock, 2007).
- Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 317.
- Geoffrey Bennington, 'Derridabase', in *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 117 and 115.
- Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 85.
- Rodolphe Gasché, 'Structural Infinity', in *Inventions of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1989), 144.
- In a footnote in 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida writes that Henri Birault's study 'Heidegger et la pensée de la finitude' shows that the theme of *Endlichkeit* is progressively abandoned by Heidegger (*ED*, 207 n.2/141 n.70). Birault claims that Heidegger no longer mentions finitude after *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.
- Héraclite, *Fragments*, text established, translated and commented on by Marcel Conche (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), 369–71. DK frag. 162; Frag. 106 of the Conche edition.
- Derrida defines eternity, the best treatment of which is found in 'Ousia and Grammê: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*', as another name for the presence of the present (*M*, 34/32). In *Being and Time* Heidegger announces 'the determination of the meaning of being as *parousia* or as *ousia*, which in the ontologico-temporal order means "presence" (*Anwesenheit*)' (33–4). The ontological *project* can be understood in relation to time. 'The entity is grasped in its being as 'presence' (*Anwesenheit*), that is, it is understood by a reference to a determined mode of time, the present (*Gegenwart*)' (34). In a note, Derrida continues quoting Heidegger from *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, who states that metaphysics has understood the Being of the entity as *permanence* and *persistence* (*Beständigkeit*). The project relative to time lies at the basis of the comprehension of Being. Even eternity, taken as *nunc stans*, the eternal now, is conceivable as 'now' and 'persistent' only on the basis of time. Being is synonymous with 'permanence in presence' (33–4/32). In the essay Derrida

explains that, for Hegel, everything that receives the predicate of eternity (the Idea, Spirit, the True, etc.) must not be thought outside (or necessarily inside) time (50/45). 'Eternity as presence is neither temporal nor intemporal. Presence is intemporality in time or time in intemporality' (51/45–6). Eternity, then, is another name of the presence of the present. Though, as Derrida notes, Hegel distinguishes this presence from the present as now (50–51/45–6).

- 16 Jacques Derrida, *La peine de mort. Volume I (1999–2000)* (Paris: Galilée, 2012); *The Death Penalty, Volume I*, trans Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 174/119. The quote is from 'Literature and the Right to Death', translated by Lydia Davis, which appears in Maurice Blanchot, *La part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 325; *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 337, trans. modified throughout.
- 17 Jacques Derrida, 'Deconstruction in America: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Critical Exchange* 17 (Winter 1985): 1–33.
- 18 Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 214. On survival, see Michael Naas, especially the chapter entitled 'The Passion of Literature', and Geoffrey Bennington, in *Not Half No End* throughout.
- 19 'Dialogue entre Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy', *Rue Descartes* 52 (2004): 86–99, 93.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Jacques Derrida, 'Je suis en guerre contre moi-même', *Le monde*, October 12, 2004: VI–VII.
- 22 In *A Taste for the Secret*, a book-length interview with Maurizio Ferraris, Derrida noted that 'I do not believe that one lives on post mortem', in Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret* (Malden: Polity Press, 2001), 88.
- 23 I have attempted elsewhere, in a companion essay, to discuss survivance in relation to what Derrida in *The Beast and the Sovereign, vol. II* calls a strange 'cycle' of *survivre*. See my 'Dying Alive', *Mosaic*, forthcoming.

## The King Is Dead! Long Live the King!

Chiara Alfano

### The king's two bodies

The king is dead! What happens after singularity? A wound 'no doubt comes in (the) place of the point signed by singularity, in (the) place of its very instant (*stigmē*), at its point, its tip!'<sup>1</sup> After the singularity of a life, the pain of mourning. Yes, but not only. The loss is always compensated for: 'But *in (the) place of this event, place is given over, for the same wound, to substitution, which repeats itself there, retaining of the irreplaceable only a past desire*' (*WM*, 67). Thus, after every 'the king is dead!' there will be a resounding 'long live the king!' The *king* is dead – the *king* lives. After death there is at once repetition and substitution, but not, mind, of the irreplaceable, which remains irretrievable. What is substituted is something different, in which nonetheless, writes Jacques Derrida, something of the irreplaceable lives on like a past desire. This strange incantation – the king is dead, long live the king – therefore unites both loss and substitution, both ashes and desire. Most importantly, however, it speaks of desire. But desire for whom or desire for what?

We have known at least since Ernst H. Kantorowicz that the king has two bodies: a natural body and a body politic.<sup>2</sup> These two bodies are both con- and disjoined, both dependent on and outstripping the other. Coming second the body politic is, in the words of renowned Tudor legal scholar Edmund Plowden, on whose reports Kantorowicz's study draws heavily, 'conjoined' to the body natural. At the same time, this secondary political body 'includes' the corporeal body.<sup>3</sup> Included by the body politic, the body natural is 'lesser', and yet the greater body depends on the lesser for its consolidation.<sup>4</sup>

The body politic needs a body natural. But whilst death may ravage the body natural, it has no power over the body politic. The body politic is, again in Plowden's words: