

It is in his seminar *The Beast & the Sovereign, Volume II* that Derrida comes to argue that the phantasm, “dying alive,” and survival need to be thought in relation to, and with, each other. This essay explores the intriguing confluence of these three terms.

Dying Alive

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Somewhere in the middle of Session 5, almost at the mid-point of the second year of his ten-week seminar *The Beast & the Sovereign*, which turned out to be his last, Derrida provocatively declares: “If I say ‘Robinson Crusoe was indeed ‘buried alive,’ he was indeed ‘swallow’d up alive’; you would not believe me” (*Beast II* 127). He insists that, contrary to what readers of the novel would claim, “it is true, that really is the story [*récit*], the story itself, not what it tells [*raconte*]”.¹ It really did happen to him. Robinson Crusoe was indeed buried alive. Derrida here makes a distinction between the conscious phenomenality or representation and the fantasmatic content (128). Using classical phenomenological terminology concerning intentional experiences, he provides a gloss: “As though the noematic nucleus or kernel of the phantasm (being buried or swallowed up alive)” virtually but irreversibly happened; as if dying a living death, the material or the logical content, did happen to Robinson.

Robinson is “afraid of dying a living death, and so he already sees it happening, he is buried or swallowed alive, it’s what he wanted.” Derrida raises the stakes further by provocingly stating that in fact “it really did happen to him,” dying a living death did happen to “‘Robinson Crusoe,’ the narrative [*récit*] itself.” When Derrida refers to “*Robinson Crusoe*,” he further explains, he has been naming a “fictional narrative [*récit*], that is also a journal, a travel journal, a confession, the fiction of an autobiography, an anthropological treatise, an apprenticeship in Christian prayer,” etc. (129). Thus, “the narrative entitled *Robinson Crusoe* and, within it, the character and the narrator, the author of the journal and the character that the author of the autobiographical journal puts on stage,” are all living dead (130). Readers of the second volume of *The Beast & the Sovereign* may already be familiar with this seemingly outrageous declaration. Here I would like to explore a little further some of the consequences of Derrida’s comments and discuss the intriguing confluence of three terms—the phantasm, dying alive, and survival—which would need to be considered and thought in terms of each other.

Derrida states that not only the narrative, but also the character named Robinson Crusoe, the one who speaks and the one keeping a journal and so on, “might have desired that the book outlive [*survive*] them.” This living on or survival (*survie*), Derrida tells us, is that of the living dead. Like any trace, a book is at once alive and dead, or neither alive nor dead. Thus each time we trace a trace, each time we leave behind a trace, a certain “machinality” or technicality, “the machination of this machine [...] each turn, each re-turn, each wheel” then “virtually entrusts the trace” to a “sur-vival,” in which the oppositions of life and death, the living and the dead, have no relevance (*Beast II* 130). That which is living dead lives on, it sur-vives. However, before discussing the important notion of survival, what Derrida increasingly refers to as *survivance*, it is necessary to turn to what he calls the *phantasm* of living death.

Derrida proceeds to clarify his statement about the case of Robinson Crusoe by stating that since “dying a living death, in the present, can never really present itself, as one cannot presently be dead, die, and see oneself die, die alive, as one cannot be both dead and alive, dying a living death can only be a fantasmatic virtuality, a fiction.” Dying alive, then, is a phantasm. But what is a phantasm? What is a fantasmatic virtuality and how significant is it so that Derrida can later claim that it “organizes and rules over everything we call life and death, lifedeath?” (*Beast II* 130). Now, in Derrida’s estimation this fantasy of being buried alive or swallowed alive, the terror and the desire of living death, is Robinson’s “great organizing fantasy or phantasm [*le grand fantasme organisateur*] (terror and desire)” (117). To “disappear, leave, decease alive in the unlimited element, in the medium of the other,” is the phantasm that animates Robinson:

Robinson Crusoe's fundamental fear, *the* fundamental, foundational fear, the basic fear [*peur de fond*] from which all other fears are derived and around which everything is organized, is the fear of going to the bottom [*au fond*], precisely, of being "swallow'd up alive" [...]. He is afraid of dying a living death [*mourir vivant*, also "dying alive"] by being swallowed or devoured into the deep belly of the earth or the sea or some living creature [...]. That is the great phantasm, the fundamental phantasm or the phantasm of the fundamental. (77, emph. Derrida's)¹

Derrida wonders if "the threat" of being eaten and swallowed by the other is "not also nurtured like a promise, and therefore a desire" (77). This is why he refers to Robinson's "terrified desire" as a "double phantasm" (93).

"Dying alive" needs to be thought with the phantasm, *as* a phantasm. Now, as Derrida reminds us in *The Beast & the Sovereign, Volume II* seminar, in Greek *phantasma* means both "product of the imagination and fantasy [*fantasme*] or revenant" (136). The phantasm is a term belonging to the Platonic denunciation of *mimesis*, where the doubling of the model by the copy, the semblance, the appearance, the simulacrum, the ghost, or the phantom of the thing represents the false and the non-true. Already in *Glas*, using the terminology of the phantasm, Derrida challenged the determination of difference as opposition or contradiction, which is indispensable to Hegelian discourse. In an interview regarding the phantasm in *Paper Machine* entitled "Paper or Me, You Know..." Derrida explains: "The word condenses all together [*à la fois*] the image, spectrality, and the simulacrum—and the weight of desire, the libidinal investment of affect, the notions of an appreciation extended toward that which remains inappropriate" (63). The phantasm refers to a kind of phenomenon that does *not* exist or to *our belief* in a kind of phenomenon, a kind of phenomenon that due to its effects, we *believe* exists. As Michael Naas in his path-breaking article "*Comme si, comme ça*: Following Derrida on the Phantasms of the Self, the State, and a Sovereign God" on "the nature of the phantasm in general in Derrida's work" (187-88) observes, what is necessary is "to take into account the force and tenacity of a phantasm that, metaphysically speaking, does not exist but we *believe* exists" (192, emph. Naas's).³ Naas, one of the first to bring to our attention the notion of phantasm and analyze it, describes the characteristics of the phantasm in the following manner: the phantasm refers to the self-coincidence of a putatively indivisible, inviolable, and self-same self; it does not *appear* as what it "is," presenting itself as pure, natural, or organic and appearing as ahistorical and nonlinguistic while it is a "historically conditioned performative fiction" (199-200). What must be emphasized, Naas writes, is "less the ontological status of the phantasm than its staying power [...] its regenerative power"

(192). Thus, the phantasm should not “be understood simply in terms of truth and falsity, or image and reality, but in terms of power and affect” (200).

So, in what way is “dying alive” a phantasm? Doubtless, it cannot be taken as describing a true or real occurrence—one cannot really die alive—but this phantasm has a very powerful effect. As Derrida emphasizes, the phantasm, even though it is traditionally opposed to the real, is “really [*effectivement*] more effective, more powerful, it is *really [en effet]* more powerful than what is opposed to it, whether good sense, reality or perception of the real, etc.” (*Beast II* 137, emph. Derrida’s). In fact, the perception of the real has less power or effectiveness than this “quasi-hallucination.” Robinson’s phantasm is “more real, more effective for him, in its psychic reality, than what is opposed to it by or in the name of a reality principle” (137).

What, then, can be said of the phantasm of dying alive? The originary, spectral phantasm of “dying alive” conjoins two supposedly contradictory states or conditions. Since life and death as such are not separable as such; in other words, since death and, for that matter, life as such, is not a self-identical notion, the opposition of living and dying can no longer be strictly pertinent. The phantasm resists the “What is?” question regarding its ontological status. This is why the phantasm of dying alive—to survive death while really dying—is described by Derrida as “contradictory,” “inconceivable,” “unthinkable,” and “intolerable” (*Beast II* 148). Accordingly, a phantasm is described as “a certain ‘as if’ (an ‘as if’ in which one neither believes nor does not believe),” as if, perhaps “something could still *happen* to the dead one to affect the body” during cremation or the burial (149, emph. Derrida’s). Due to this undecidable structure, the only access or approach to the phantasm can be at the level of pathos.

The phantasm of dying alive describes the situation in which one allows oneself to be affected by this intolerable that goes beyond sense. As Derrida notes, “under the sign of this ‘as if,’ ‘perhaps,’ ‘I do not know,’ we allow ourselves to have an impression made on us, we allow ourselves to be *affected*” (emph. Derrida’s). What Derrida calls dying alive is “an affect, a feeling, a tonality of pathos, [where] we allow ourselves really to be affected by a possibility of the impossible, by a possibility excluded by sense.” The senses and good sense would indicate that dying alive and its affect or tonality be “excluded by what is often called the reality of the reality principle, i.e. by the impossible possibility that the dead one can be affected.” According to this reality, any “being-affected is interrupted by death”; in other words, there can be no affect without life, without sensibility (*Beast II* 149). Yet, Derrida states,

it is precisely because this certainty [that there can be no life without sensibility] is terrifying and literally intolerable, just as unthinkable [...] as the contradiction of the living dead,

that what I call this obscure word “phantasm” imposed itself upon me. I do not know if this usage of the word “phantasm” [*fantasme*] is congruent or compatible with any philosophical concept of the *phantasma*, of fantasy or fantastic imagination, any more than with the psychoanalytic concept of the phantasm [*fantasme*], supposing, which I do not believe, that there is one, that there is only one, that is clear, univocal, localizable. (*Beast II* 149)

So, we have surmised that dying alive is an all-powerful phantasm, but its “fictive or fantasmatic virtuality in no way diminishes the real almighty [*toute-puissance*] of what thus presents itself to fantasy.” For, as Derrida writes, the phantasm is omnipotent and almighty, an almighty that “organizes and rules over everything we call life and death, life death [*la vie la mort*].” Derrida further elaborates: “This power of almighty [*puissance de la toute-puissance*] belongs to a beyond of the opposition between being or not being, life and death, reality and fiction” (*Beast II* 130). Then, the only possible access to or presentiment of death can be via or through the phantasm of dying alive since it is not possible to have a direct access to death, to death *as such*.

To demonstrate this Derrida will accordingly take a detour through Heidegger’s essay “The Thing” to show that thinking death *as such*, as Heidegger would wish, is not possible. In Session 5 Derrida turns to a “famous passage” in Heidegger’s “The Thing” (*Beast II* 121). According to Heidegger, man alone dies. Human beings are called mortals (*Sterblichen*) because they “*can die [sterben können]*” (“Thing” 176, emph. Heidegger’s).⁴ He comments that to die means “to be capable of death as death [*Tod als Tod*]”. This capability, this ability, *Vermögen*, Derrida adds, is a power. This power is the “power of the *as such*,” a being capable of the *as such* (*Beast II* 122-23, emph. Derrida’s). Therefore, “access or relation to death is a being-able, a power (*Können, Vermögen*)” (122). Only man can die because only mortals are capable of death as death. “Such a power or potency defines the mortal, man as mortal,” and “this power to have access to the *as such* of death [...] is none other than access to the ontological difference, and thereby to Being as Being [*l’être en tant qu’être*]” (emph. Derrida’s) and not to “being as being [*l’étant en tant qu’étant*]” (123). Heidegger’s aim is to suggest that man must now be defined not simply as a living being but as a mortal. This is why “rational living beings [*vernünftigen Lebenwesen*] must first become mortals [*Sterblichen werden*]” (“Thing” 176, emph. Heidegger’s). This is what Derrida calls Heidegger’s great lesson.

Derrida, however, finds himself deaf to this lesson. As he conveys in *The Beast & the Sovereign, Volume II*, access to death as such, access to dying properly speaking or to death itself, is not possible. We cannot *think* death as Heidegger believes. What the phantasmatics of living death suggests is that perhaps death *as such* is not something

that can be *thought about*. If death *as such* does not appear to us, if our only possible access is not through thinking death, then it is only via a meditation on the phantasmatic that we can have access to it. And, conversely, any reflection on the phantasmatic must pass through the experience of living death, a “living death beyond life” (124). Derrida observes, thus putting into question the supposed difference between thinking and imagining, “perhaps thinking death as such, in the sense that Heidegger wants to give it, is still only imagination. *Fantasia*, fantastic phantasmatics [*fantastique phantasmatique*]”. For, as Robinson knows, “we die alive anyway [*de toute façon on meurt vivant*]” (117).

In his essay “The Unconscious” Freud situates the phantasm in “this place without place,” at once “ubiquitous” and “unlocatable,” between “the system of the unconscious and the system of conscious perception.”⁵ The phantasm’s liminal location is due to the fact that the concept of each system is “inadequate” to account for it or for what Freud calls “phantasmatic formations [*Phantasiebildungen*]” (*Beast II* 150). In Section 6 of this essay, entitled “Communication between the Two Systems,” Freud mentions that “the processes of the unconscious system are intemporal (*Zeitlos*) and are not ordered according to the consecutiveness of the temporal order.” As Derrida points out, this intemporality is also “an indifference to contradiction” (151). If we are to continue to dare to think what “phantasm [*fantasme*],” dying a “living death or to *die in one’s lifetime*,” means, we have to remember this unlocatability, this intemporality of what is under question (151-52, emph. Derrida’s).

At once situated between consciousness and the unconscious, simultaneously inside and outside, the phantasm is auto- and hetero-affective. If auto-affection, as Derrida formulates it in *Of Grammatology*, is a universal structure of experience and associated with life and all living beings, then the experience of the phantasm is “simultaneously auto- and hetero-affective” (*Beast II* 83), where the “nearest and the farthest, the same and the other, touch each other and come into contact” (78). For, “the phantasmatic nature of what orients our desire and our terror, our experience (let’s call it our Robinsonian experience) of the living dead” concerns “the simultaneously [*à la fois*] auto-affective and hetero-affective structure of the phantasm” (170). Put otherwise, the auto-affective experience of the phantasm, *my* phantasm, is irreducibly inhabited by hetero-affection.

In “*Comme si, comme ça*,” the previously discussed chapter from *Derrida from Now On*, Naas, while stating that the phantasm belongs to the set of words or quasi-concepts such as spectre, ghost, phantom, spectrality, fantomaticity, and haunting, would like to reserve for the phantasm “a rather special use and status in Derrida’s work” (189). Examining three phantasms (which are also forms of sovereignty), those

of the self, the nation-state, and God, Naas argues that the “deconstruction of the phantasm nonetheless remains for us an essential task” (188). In fact, he stresses, “deconstruction would thus be, first and foremost, a deconstruction of the phantasm, a deconstruction of any putatively pure origin, indeed, of any phantasm of purity and of any simple, seemingly self-evident or axiomatic origin, any indivisible, inviolable order” (191). During a discussion of the phantasm of sovereignty in Derrida’s text entitled *Unconditionality or Sovereignty*, Naas adds: “The phantasm needs to be exposed and denounced not because it is untrue, false, or merely apparent but because it is so powerful it threatens the very freedom that makes it possible” (197).

If what Naas has in mind here is that the phantasm of indivisible sovereignty needs to be exposed and denounced, we would be in full agreement. However, if he is suggesting that the phantasm in general needs to be denounced, then we would have to ask whether “dying alive” is a phantasm like that of sovereignty, or that of a pure origin, ipseity, uncontaminated presence, and the self-coinciding self, which would need to be exposed and denounced. In other words, if deconstruction is, as Naas argues, the deconstruction of the phantasm, does the phantasm of “dying alive” need to be deconstructed too?

The living dead survive, live on. What survives in this sense of living on is living dead.

It would then seem necessary to think dying alive with survivance. But what is survivance? What does the *-ance* ending of this word indicate? Since the “Différance” essay where Derrida argued that *différance* remains undecidable between the active and the passive, he has consistently shown a preference for the *-ance* ending, which marks a suspended status between the active and passive voice. Like *différance*, *revenance*, and *restance*, Derrida expresses that he “prefers ‘survivance’ to the active voice of the active infinitive ‘to survive’ or the substantializing substantive *survival*” (*Beast II* 131). To survive is not to escape death or to go on living after death but to die alive. We die alive. In fact, everything, every trace dies alive and what dies alive survives.

Having already discussed the phantasm of living death, let us now turn to a number of crucial passages in Session 5 on the question of survivance in order to show the interrelation of the notions of dying alive, the phantasm, and survivance. My remarks will be in the form of a commentary on these passages. We started out with Derrida’s claim in his discussion of *Robinson Crusoe* that a book, the text of which is fiction in the first person, inserting into the living narrative quotations, inserts inscriptions from a journal speaking in the first person, is both alive and dead. Each time a trace is left behind, whether gestural, verbal, written, and so on, a certain machinality consigns this trace to a sur-vival. Derrida further comments: “The book lives its beautiful

death. That's also finitude, the chance and the threat of finitude, this alliance of the dead and the living" (*Beast II* 130). What is most notable in this passage is Derrida's description of finitude. It has become very popular these days to speak about Derrida's work as espousing a radical finitude. What the above passage and the ones that follow make clear is that finitude is not to be considered as the being-toward-death or mortality of a living being called man or *Dasein*, but rather involves an alliance of the living and the dead. This thinking of finitude, rather than indicating the limit or termination of mortal life, leads to thinking a *certain circle* of lifedeath.⁶ I will briefly turn to this *certain circle* at the end of this essay.

Derrida proceeds to provide a further gloss on finitude, elaborating it as survival: "I shall say that this finitude is *survivance*. Survivance in a sense of survival that is neither life nor death pure and simple, a sense that is not thinkable on the basis of the opposition between life and death" (*Beast II* 130, emph. Derrida's). This survival, however, despite the grammar of *überleben* or *fortleben*, as in the case of Walter Benjamin, for example, already discussed in *Mémoires: for Paul de Man*, does not signify something that is "*above* life" (131, emph. Derrida's). For Derrida, survivance is considered as life enhanced, more than life, the most intense life possible and not something above it or added to it.

Derrida goes on to expound what he is calling survivance by contrasting it with "lifedeath," a notion from the 1970s and 80s that he discussed in texts on Freud (*The Post Card*), Nietzsche (*The Ear of the Other*), and Blanchot (*Parages*), in which he considered and questioned prevalent notions of life and death: "No, the survivance I am speaking of is something other than life death, [*la vie la mort*] but a groundless ground [*un fond sans fond*] from which are detached [*se découpent*], identified, and opposed what we think we can identify under the name of death or dying (*Tod, Sterben*)."⁷ Survivance is not quite lifedeath then but forms the abyssal base, the almost more "primordial" ground from which life and death arise, as it were. "It [*Ça*] begins with survival [*survie*]" (*Beast II* 131). What Derrida refers to here as *ça*, besides grammatically designating the third-person, singular neutral pronoun "it," bears the traces of a reading of the psychoanalytic notion of *ça* as well as what in Heidegger's *On Time and Being* brings together Being (*Sein*) and time (*Zeit*). Originally the French translation of Freud's *das Es* (the id), *ça* for Lacan, was conceived in linguistic terms as the unconscious origin of speech and was later equated with "the subject." Derrida may also be thinking of "it gives (*ça donne*)" in Heidegger's *On Time and Being* where the *Es gibt* gives Being and time to one another, holding them together in a relation. With a nod to psychoanalysis and to Heidegger, Derrida is referring to the abyssal ground without ground that is survivance as "it [*ça*]." *Ça* is survivance.

Survivance, Derrida continues, “is where there is some other that has me at its disposal.” Survival, then, rather than referring to *my* survival, has become what happens when I am turned over to the other. I am survived by the other: “That is what the self is, that is what I am, what the *I* is, whether I am there or not. The other, the others, that is the very thing that survives me.” In a subtle rewriting, “the other” becomes what is “called to survive me” (*Beast II* 131, emph. Derrida’s).

As Derrida declares, “Like every trace, a book, the survivance of a book, from its first moment on, is a living-dead machine [*machine morte-vivante*]” (*Beast II* 131). Every trace dies alive, is a living-dead machine that sur-vives, for there is survivance from the very first trace, from the very first breath. Derrida comments:

This survivance is broached from the moment of the first trace that is supposed to engender the writing of a book. From the first breath, this archive as survivance is at work. But once again, this is the case not only for books, or for writing, or for the archive in the current sense, but for everything from which the tissue of living experience [*le tissu de l’expérience vivante*] is woven [*tissé*], through and through. A weave of survival [*Tissage de survie*], like death in life or life in death, a weave that does not come along to clothe a more originary existence, a life or a body or a soul that would be supposed to exist naked under this clothing. (132)

The first thing to recall is that this survivance does not simply concern living experience or simply apply to what is living but is equally at work in writing, the book, the mark, the archive, or wherever there is a trace. We might then ask, How to think this weave of survival? This weave is the interweaving of life with death or the intertwining of life and death, a meshwork, the texture of a fabric that would not be like clothing that covers a naked body or soul but that itself constitutes dying alive. Survivance is, Derrida writes, a weave, an interlacing of life and death in which the two can no longer be separable concepts or entities.

The consideration of the notion of the weave is a long-standing matter in Derrida’s writings. Recall that *texte* (derived from the Latin *textus*, meaning “cloth,” and from *texere*, “to weave” [*tisser*]) means cloth (*tissu*). Rodolphe Gasché in *The Tain of the Mirror*, referring to “the problem of *symploκē*,” the weave, as “a major *fil conducteur* in Derrida’s writings,” contrasts references in Derrida’s work to a textual chain, a tissue of differences, textile, and texture with its classical treatment in Plato’s dialogues, in particular the *Statesman* (97). In Plato’s dialogue the craftsmanship of the weaver is the leading paradigm for the activity of the true statesman even though the latter is shown to have a much more complicated task. Gasché shows that for Plato dialectics unites and unifies elements that are opposite, tying together strands that are

diverse in nature with the aim of forming an organic whole (95). At the beginning of *Dissemination*, Derrida makes a reference to “‘a kingly weaving process’ (*basilikēn symplokēn*) (306a),” the activity of the true statesman (*politikon*). He notes that *symplokē* is essentially dialectical when he states that “dialectics is also an act of weaving, a science of *symplokē*” (122). In the *Sophist* Plato goes as far as calling *symplokē* “the very condition of discourse” (166). While acknowledging the importance of terms such as *Geflecht*, *Verflechtung*, and *Verwebung* in the works of Freud, Husserl, and Heidegger, Derrida’s notion of the text—what he calls the tissue of differences of force, the system of referrals of difference or chain of differential referrals, the economy of traces, the texture of the text, or the text in general—differs from the classical *symplokē* in that it is not governed by the values of truth, totality, and unity.

What is of even greater interest is that Derrida follows the discussion of the weave with the mention of “the groundless ground [*le fond sans fond*] of this quasi-transcendentality of living to death [*vivre à mort*] or of death as sur-vivance” (*Beast II* 132). The weave constitutes the quasi-transcendental condition of possibility and impossibility of life and death, forming a ground without ground for living death or dying alive. The phantasm of living death then has as its source, ground, or base (but a ground that is abyssal, an originary ground without ground) this tissue of survivance. Here Derrida seems to be pushing the thinking of the second of what, in the *Death Penalty, Volume II* seminar,⁷ following Heidegger, he calls the two “accentuations” of the principle of reason, namely the interpretation of reason that bears on sameness, the Same as Being and *Grund*.⁸ It would no longer be a matter of thinking the famous Leibnizian dictum “*Nihil est sine ratione* [Nothing is without reason]” in terms of reason, or a thinking of being from beings or from that which is a being, but rather as being, that is, as ground (*Grund*).⁹ Heidegger’s interpretation emphasizes a history of Western thinking that thinks being as ground and not as *ratio* or cause.¹⁰ This, for Heidegger, leads to a thinking of a ground of the ground, a ground without ground, a ground that is also an abyss. For, to the extent that being as such grounds, it remains without-ground. Being, then, “is” the abyss—the fathomless. I have argued elsewhere that in various writings in his last years (i.e., in *Rams; Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde; Death Penalty, Volume II*; and *The Beast & the Sovereign, Volume I*) Derrida advances an elaboration of this second accentuation as far as possible, developing every other as a ground, whose death inevitably leads to an abyssal loss of ground.¹¹

To summarize very schematically: A trace is the minimal structure necessary, or the constituting possibility, for there to be any difference. As soon as there is difference, referral to the other, or experience, there is a trace. Each and every trace dies

alive and thus survives. This does not mean that it lives on after death, but that its condition, to begin with, is one of dying alive, of being living dead. The living dead live on, survive. Since “dying alive,” by definition, resists the tribunal of truth and reality—in other words, since we cannot really die alive—dying alive can only be a phantasm. A phantasm is a phenomenon that does not exist but that we *believe* exists because of its almighty ness, its omnipotence. We are affected by the phantasm, a virtuality, a certain impossibility that organizes all that we call life and death.

Following a discussion of the weave of survival at work from the moment of the first trace, Derrida then turns to a consideration of what we may call a “certain circle.” Survivance belongs to this *certain* circle of lifedeath, a circle that by definition cannot be self-enclosed but rather is in excess of itself. As Derrida remarks in *The Beast & the Sovereign, Volume II*, “Living death beyond life, live to death, living death, etc. This is perhaps the same circle [*Vivre la mort au-delà de la vie, vivre à mort, mourir vivant, etc. C'est peut-être le même cercle*]” (124). Derrida immediately poses the question “What is that—the circle?” without providing an obvious answer. In a seminar taken up by the treatment of a series of circles, the details of the circle of dying alive, composed of the interweaving of *mourir vivant, survivance, revenance, and arrivance* (to which we could also add *restance*, in addition to *demeurance* and *demourance* from *Demeure, Maurice Blanchot* and *la mourance* from “Avances”), remain unexplored. The question before us is this: How are we to think this *certain* circle—circle and not cycle—if life and death cannot be rigorously separated, if death is not termination, and what is “beyond” life belongs to a returning circle of survivance whose intertwined elements are made up of dying alive, remaining, arriving, and ghostly returning, forming a ground without ground from which life and death are detached?

NOTES

1/ Throughout the essay I quote from English translations and place the original French in brackets.

2/ Derrida takes Robinson’s greatest fear, a fear that is Robinson’s—the fear of dying alive—and derives from it a general structural component of survivance.

3/ “*Comme si, comme ça*” was first presented as a keynote lecture during *Mosaic’s Following Derrida: Legacies* conference in 2006, subsequently published in *Mosaic* (40.2 [2007]: 1-26. Print), and then collected in *Derrida From Now On*.

4/ Throughout the essay I quote from English translations and place the original German in brackets.

5/ See “Das Unbewusste” (1915).

6/ See my essay “The Desire for Survival?” (forthcoming).

7/ *Death Penalty, Volume II* will be published in French in the fall.

8/ Accentuation translates as *Tonart*, emphasis or intensification (“accentuation” in French), which is rendered as “tonality” in the English translation of Heidegger’s *The Principle of Reason*.

9/ The first accentuation understands Leibniz's maxim as a statement about *beings* ("every being has a reason"), while the second accentuation reveals the principle of reason as an ontological principle of being (*Sein*).

10/ In *The Principle of Reason* Heidegger writes that "being *qua* being grounds" (51). Thus, being comes to be as grounding; being is ground-like.

11/ I have ventured some preliminary thoughts about this thinking of ground and the abyss in my paper "The World after the End of the World," presented at the fourth *Derrida Today* conference at Fordham University in May 2014.

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