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What Comes

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We know less than ever what death is.

—Derrida (2024)¹

In his last interview, *Apprendre à vivre enfin*, Derrida confesses that he has “never *learned-to-live*” (Derrida 2005, 24/24).² “In fact not at all!” (Derrida 2005, 24/24). In the “Exordium” at the beginning of *Specters of Marx* a voice remarks that living, by definition, is not something one learns (Derrida 1993, 14/xviii).³ Moreover, dying is also not something one learns (Derrida 1993, 15/14). Alluding to Montaigne’s famous essay, Derrida notes in his interview that “learning to live, that would mean learning how to die, learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality—without salvation” (Derrida 2005, 24/24). However, he admits, he hasn’t learned anything or acquired anything about this subject. Can one learn, he wonders, “to *accept* or, better, to *affirm* life?” (Derrida 2005, 24/24).⁴ In his last days, he writes with regret that the time of *sursis* (reprieve, deferment, probation, suspension, deferral, postponement) has shrunk, retreated, flattened, narrowed [*rétrécit*] in an accelerated way [*de façon accélérée*] and has rapidly run out (Derrida 2005, 25/25). The questions of

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survie or *sursis*, which always haunted him at *every instant* of his life in an unremitting fashion, now take color, become tinged, take on another glow (*se colore autrement*) (Derrida 2005, 26, trans. mod.). Always having been interested in the theme of *survie*, he comments that this theme is “originary: life *is* *survie*, living on, survival” (Derrida 2005, 25/25). This, of course, is not a conventional recovery or survival after a life-threatening event or some perdurance after death, but then how are we to interpret this *survie*?

In his last seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, Derrida writes of Heidegger, who, pursuing his earlier critique of the metaphysical concept of *animal rationale* and the *animalitas* of man, claims in his later works that it is not sufficient for men to simply *become* rational living beings, animals endowed with reason, but that it is also necessary for them to “become mortals.”⁵ In a reading of Heidegger’s “Das Ding,” Derrida explains that for Heidegger what has prevailed in metaphysics is a definition of man as a rational animal, an animal living being imbued with reason. It has represented man as an animal endowed with *ratio*. Yet rather than a rational animal, Heidegger believes, man must be defined as mortal. Then, men “must *not* ‘learn how to die’ (as the tradition has been saying since Plato, thus defining the task of philosophy as *epimeleia tou thanatou*, exercise or discipline of preparation for death), but *become* mortal” (Derrida 2010, 186/124).

Derrida recounts Heidegger’s assertion in “The Thing” that it is necessary for us to *become* mortal. “The mortals are human beings,” Derrida writes. “They are called mortals because they can die” (Derrida 2010, 182/121).⁶ In Derrida’s reading of Heidegger, death as such, access or relation to death as such, is a being-able, a power (*Können, Vermögen*), an ability. Dying is something that one *can* do—*Dasein* *can* die—and thus, to die means to be capable of death as death. This power or potency is what defines the mortal. This power of the *as such*, the power to have access to the *as such* of death, Derrida determines, is none other than the relation to the ontological difference—the difference between Being and beings—that springs from a certain *Walten* (Derrida 2010, 75/116).

Accordingly, we must learn to become mortals, and “that’s the great lesson to be learned,” Derrida explains ruefully,

for the deaf, like me, who keep trying to learn how to become immortal, or a-mortal [*a-mortel*], basically like beasts. Ah! If only we could stay beasts! Unless, contrary to what Heidegger says, we did remain beasts who do not have the power to die, to whom death as such never appears, dying remaining, as Blanchot often complains, impossible, alas. (Derrida 2010, 186/124).

What is Derrida suggesting by the curious statement that we must “try to learn how to become a-mortal”? The following remarks are devoted to exploring this question.

1. MORTALS

For Heidegger the examination of mortality has its starting point with Dasein, which is defined as that being that is concerned about its very being. In fact, the understanding of being is a determination of the being of Dasein. This is why Dasein takes an ontic-ontological priority over all other beings. Being toward death belongs primordially and essentially to the being of Da-sein. Heidegger devotes §§ 49–53 in Division II of *Being and Time* to the existential analysis of death, where he argues that the existential interpretation is prior to any biology and ontology of life. He defines the existential phenomenon of death, which is ontologically constituted by mineness, as the ownmost nonrelational possibility of Dasein. As Being-toward-death [*Sein zum Tode*], Dasein exists its death. In his writings Heidegger distinguishes dying [*Sterben*], the *way of being* in which Dasein is *toward* its death, from the intermediate phenomenon of demise [*Ableben*] and perishing [*Verenden*], the ending of what is alive (Heidegger 1977, 246–67/229–46). He asserts that Dasein never perishes; it can only demise as long as it dies.

It is in the lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (GA 29/30) that Heidegger seeks to discern what specific relation the stone, animal, and man have toward world. He formulates what he refers to as three distinctions or theses in order to unfold the question “What is world?” These theses are: 1. The stone is worldless [*weltlos*]. 2. The animal is poor in world [*weltarm*]. 3. The animal is deprived of world, but man does have a world. In fact, man is world-forming [*weltbildend*]. Heidegger then relates the question of death to

each of these, the stone, animal, and man. He states that the animal cannot die but comes to an end (*verenden*) because the animal does not have a relation to death as such. In truth, the animal lacks the experience of the *as such*—thus perishes (*verendet*)—while the stone, in contrast, is without world (Heidegger 1995, 388/267). What Derrida finds objectionable in *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II* about Heidegger's references to death is "the confidence with which Heidegger attributes dying properly speaking to Dasein" (Derrida 2010, 175/116). The force of Derrida's reading is that he not only reconsiders the question of death but also the privilege bestowed upon Dasein, by examining what limits the living from the nonliving, what delimits Dasein from the animal, god, and the stone.

In the 1940s Heidegger's thought witnesses a transition from a concern with Dasein to a vocabulary of "the mortals [*die Sterblichen*]" as part of taking up the fourfold [*das Geviert*], with Earth, Sky, and God. According to Werner Marx the term "the mortals" comes from Hölderlin's poetry.⁷ Discussions of "mortals" occur in several of Heidegger's essays, notably in "The Thing," "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954) and "The Essence of Language" (1957).⁸ In both "The Thing"—which Derrida reads as a great text on death and on the mortality of Dasein—and "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" we read: "The mortals are the human beings. They are called the mortals because they *can* die [*sterben können*]. To die means to be capable of death *as* death [*den Tod als Tod vermögen*]. Only the human dies" while "the animal perishes [*verendet*]" (Derrida 2010, 171/150).⁹ We now call mortals mortals—not because their earthly life comes to an end, but because, as noted in the preceding, they are capable of death as death. In 1957, broaching the relationship of the mortals to death and language Heidegger states in "The Essence of Language" (1957–1958) that "Mortals are they who can experience death as death. The animal is not capable of this" (Heidegger 1959, 203/107). A reference to "mortals" is also made in *Der Satz vom Grund, The Principle of Reason* (GA10), also published in 1957, where Heidegger states that the mortals never finish dying.

In his late Hölderlin interpretation, "Hölderlin's Earth and Sky" (1959), which appeared in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlin*, Heidegger claims that "the mortals die their death in life. In death the mortals become *im*-mortal [*unsterblich*]."¹⁰ In "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" Heidegger further elucidates that

“The mortals *are* in the fourfold, in that they *dwell*” (Heidegger 1954, 152/50, trans. mod.). To be a human then means “to be upon the earth as mortal: it means to dwell” (Heidegger 1954, 149/145, trans. mod.). Thereby, “in becoming a mortal, one must learn dwelling [*Wohnen*]” (Heidegger 1954, 163/159, trans. mod.). Heidegger proclaims that “only the human dies—and indeed continually, as long as he abides upon the earth, as long as he dwells” (Heidegger 1954, 200/219, trans. mod.).

2. “TO PHILOSOPHIZE IS TO LEARN HOW TO DIE”

In his reading of the *Phaedo* (80e) in *Donner la mort* Derrida examines very closely the discipline or “the exercise that consists in learning to die in order to attain the new immortality, that is, *meletē thanatou*, the care taken [*le soin pris*] with death, the exercise of death, the practicing (for) death [*s’exercer à la mort*] that Socrates speaks of” (Derrida 1999, 9/14). The *Phaedo*, for Derrida, explicitly names philosophy as the “attentive anticipation of death, care brought to bear upon dying” and “the experience of a *vigil* over the possibility of death” (Derrida 1999, 29/14). “Practicing death’ [*meletē thanatou*]” in Derrida’s reading of Plato is when the soul “has kept itself separate [from the body] as its regular practice—in other words, if it has pursued philosophy in the right way [*he orthōs philosophousa*] and really practiced how to face death easily” (Derrida 1999, 31/14). Derrida describes this *meletē thanatou* as “a matter of *souci*, care, a ‘*keeping-vigil-for*’ [*veiller-à*], a solicitude for death that constitutes the relation to self of that which, in existence, relates to oneself” (Derrida 1999, 31/16). Yet in Derrida’s view, the soul “only distinguishes itself, separates itself, and assembles itself within itself in the experience of this *meletē tou thanatou*. It is nothing other than this care about dying as a relation to self and assembling itself [. . .] becoming conscious [*s’éveiller*] [. . .] through this care for death” (Derrida 1999, 31–2/16). Then philosophy, or the dialectic, to the extent that it can be taught, as a discipline “is nothing other than this vigil over death [*veille de la mort*] that watches out for death and watches over death” (Derrida 1999, 32/17). “The Platonic philosopher is in no better a position than the animal,” Derrida claims, “when it comes to ‘looking’ death in the face and, as a result, to having access

to that authenticity of existence linked to the *epimeleia tēs psychēs* as *meletē thanatou*, the caring concern for the soul that cares by watching for/over death [*souci veillant sur la mort*]” (Derrida 1999, 38/21).

In his famous essay “[That to] Philosophize is to Learn to Die” Montaigne does not refer to Plato but to Cicero, who states in his *Tusculan Disputations*, having Socrates in mind, “For the whole life of the philosopher, as the same wise man says, is a preparation for death [*Tota enim philosophorum vita, uta it idem, commentatio mortis est*]” (Cicero 1996, 74).¹¹ Echoing Plato and inspiring Montaigne, Cicero inquires: “But is the severance of the soul from the body anything else than learning how to die [*Secernere autem a corpore animum ecquid aliud est quam mori descere*]?” Then he urges his reader, “Let us, therefore, believe me, make this preparation and dissociation of ourselves from our bodies [*disiungamus que nos a corporibus*], that is, let us habituate ourselves to die [*consuescamus mori*]” (Cicero 1966, I, xxx,74–xxx,75).

At the beginning of his essay Montaigne relates that “Cicero said that to philosophize is nothing other than preparing for death [*s’apprêter à la mort*]” (Cicero 1966, 17).¹² This is because “study and contemplation draw our souls somewhat [*retirent aucunement*] outside ourselves, keeping them occupied away [*embesognent*] from the body, which are both apprenticeship of and resemblance to death” (Montaigne 1950, 103–4/17).¹³ To this extent, for Montaigne “all the wisdom and reasoning [*discours*] in the world in the end come down to [*se résout enfin*] this point: to teach us not to be afraid to die” (Montaigne 1950, 104/17, trans. mod.). In *De Brevitate Vitae* collected in his *Moral Essays* Seneca echoes Cicero that “it takes the whole of life to learn how to die [*tota vita descendum est mori*]” (Seneca 2001, 7,3).¹⁴ He adds further that it is keeping the company of philosophers that teaches him how to die and he calls on the learned men of history such as Zeno, Pythagoras, Democritus, Aristotle, and Theophrastus, who will not “force you to die, but all will teach you how to die” (Seneca 2001, 15.1).

In his essay Montaigne declares that “The end of our course is death” (Montaigne 1950, 106/20). However, in a footnote, fn. 13, the English translator M. A. Screech contrasts this statement with another reference (III, 12) where Montaigne “denies that death is the end to which our life aims (its *but*) but merely its ending (*bout*) [*C’est bien le bout, non pourtant le but de la vie*]” (Montaigne

1950, 1180/20).¹⁵ Nevertheless, Montaigne believes that “To practise [*préméditation*] death is to practice freedom” (Montaigne 1950, 110/24). Accordingly, “knowing how to die gives us freedom from subjection and constraint” and death will be “the origin of another life” (Montaigne 1950, 111/30).

Let us recall that since Plato the philosophical tradition has described the practice of philosophy as preparation for and as an apprenticeship for learning how to die. Philosophy has been defined as promoting care and concern for the soul, which eventually separates from the body, enabling one to face death. Philosophers have described death not as something to be feared but prepared for without dread and faced with equanimity. While the Heidegger of *Being and Time* in order to overcome metaphysical partiality chose the term *Dasein* to refer to what in philosophy has been variously described as man, the human being, life, the self, *hypokeimenon*, *ego cogito*, *subjectum*, consciousness, self-consciousness, the “I think,” and so on, in his later writing he opted for the designation “mortal,” thus defining the philosophical task as learning how to become mortal. Heidegger believed that the thought of infinity prevalent in Western metaphysics is, in fact, derived from and secondary to finitude. Derrida’s approach would seem to go against the sacrosanct tenet or law of Heideggerian philosophy—that is to say, Being-toward-death—and the stress placed on the finitude of *Dasein*, perhaps suggesting that what is necessary to do is {to learn how to} become “a-mortal.”

Typically, the privative is an indication of deprivation, absence, or loss but the “a-“ in a-mortal of Derrida’s terminology, in distinction to Heidegger’s insistence on the primordial significance of being-toward-death, no longer places significance and stress on mortality. By naming the “a-human”—falling somewhere between god, *animot*, and human—and the “a-mortal” mentioned in the preceding, Derrida seems to be alluding to, addressing, and attempting to reconsider the question initially raised by Jean-Luc Nancy, who, serving as the guest editor of a special issue of *Topoi*, had proposed to organize the issue around the question “Who comes after the subject [*Qui vient après le sujet*]?” What is at stake is what happens when the philosophical “subject” is rethought.

3. LIFE DEATH

A reading of Derrida's recently published *Life Death* seminar given in 1975–1976 will provide a discerning insight into Derrida's approach toward the relation between life and death and will allow us to better interpret his apparently opaque comments in his last seminar regarding “living death” and “dying alive (*mourir vivant*).” In his *Life Death* seminar, as in other published writings addressing the question of death, Derrida calls into question the clear distinction made by metaphysics between life and death, reframing the preeminence and role given to the mortal human being. Derrida's reading, a radical reinterpretation of the entire framework of Heideggerian philosophy, puts into question the established injunction that we need to learn how to become mortal. The discussion of *life death* is a subtle shift away from an emphasis in the history of philosophy on the singularity and significance of mortality and death itself. It will be recalled that from his early writings Derrida always insisted that a thinking of *différance* is not a thinking of finitude (Derrida 1967).¹⁶

At the beginning of the *Life Death* seminar in the chapter entitled “Programs,” Derrida asserts that a reading of Hegel's *Logic* demonstrates that the difference between life and death is not of the order of opposition, of two sides facing each other, but that of an *other alterity*. Hegel's dialectic, he explains, presents itself as a very powerful thinking of life and death, a process in which one opposite passes into the other, the one being sublated into the other. The dialectic is propelled, Derrida elaborates, by “the driving schemas” of the concept and the position, the position of the concept (Derrida 2019, 19/1).¹⁷ In Hegel's *Logic* life is considered, Derrida notes, as a position [*Setzung*]. In his comments at the beginning of the seminar Derrida wonders, however, whether these concepts of position and op-position were not themselves constructed by the logic of “life death” (Derrida 2019, 20/2), as if dialectical logic were a ruse put forward by “life death,” so as to conceal or harbor something, something that would no longer be “in this sense of position,” something “that is no longer . . . posited” (Derrida 2019, 20/2). Thus, by proffering *life death*, Derrida is not intending to oppose opposition and identification but, he says, to *neutralize* opposition. This neutralization, according to Derrida, is in order to gesture [*faire signe*] not toward another logic—an opposite logic of life and death—but

toward an *other topos*, toward another topography. This would allow him to read “the entire program of the *and* and of the *is*” (that is to say, that life *is* death or that life *is opposed to* death), of the positionality and presence of being (Derrida 2019, 25/6). Position and presence then would need to be thought as effects, and this presupposes another thinking of effect (Derrida 2019, 25/6).

In Derrida’s synopsis, if life at the end of the *Greater Logic* has no opposition and it reappropriates itself, life is (the *reappropriation* of) being (Derrida 2019, 22/4). Derrida makes a reference to Nietzsche’s “Will to Power” fragments that Heidegger quotes in his *Nietzsche* book: “‘Being’ [das ‘Sein’]—we have no other representation [Vorstellung] of this than as ‘living’ [als ‘leben’]—How can anything dead ‘be?’”¹⁸ Therefore, Derrida summarizes, being-dead is “unthinkable,” “unrepresentable, unpresentable, unsayable.” Thus, those who identify being and life, like Hegel does, still “remain within representation” (Derrida 2019, 23/5). But we must go *beyond* representation. In other words, they are those whose point of view places the world or things *before* them. The Nietzschean–Heideggerian critique of representation involves “modern man” for whom to be is to-be-represented and who judges what is before it. “If language and logic are a language and a logic of the living, it is futile to try to say and to think within these something like the dead [*le mort*]” (Derrida 2019, 24/6). The only way to do this would be to think the dead beyond language, logic, metaphors, and so on. Then “the dead” would be “the generic name for everything that exceeds, overflows, transgresses the limits of the sayable, the expressible” (Derrida 2019, 24/6). In Derrida’s estimation “being-dead is something we are unable to think because we are unable to say it, etc.” (Derrida 2019, 24/6).

In contrast to what the philosophical tradition has maintained, in Derrida’s view life and death cannot be regarded as *concepts* to be *opposed* to each other. The philosophical goal of learning how to die assumes that living and dying are two separate, opposed positions or states. If life and death are not seen as discrete, unconnected states, then living cannot have as its task or vocation the exercise set by the philosophical tradition—learning to die.¹⁹ If we are not described merely as mortals, as Western metaphysics has conceived it, if life is haunted and inhabited by death, if life involves death in itself, then we cannot be limited to the definition of humans who will die. *Life death* is the very neutralization of the opposition of life *and* death. For Derrida, *Life death* is an

originary, quasi-transcendental notion that should be thought as an alterity or difference. Like other quasi-concepts or quasi-transcendentals, such as trace, archi-writing, *différance*, *life death* is inscribed in an anonymous field within a structure of generalized reference—a system of reference constituted as a tissue, web, or chain of other quasi-transcendentals.

It is the investigation of life and death in *Life Death* that allows Derrida, we can now speculate, to state in *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II* seminar that “perhaps thinking death as such [*la mort comme telle*], in the sense Heidegger wants to give it, is still only imagination. *Fantasia*, fantastic phantasmatics” (Derrida 2010, 176/117). Thinking death would only be the case of a phantasm. Yet, Derrida adds forcefully, “This fantasmatic virtuality in no way diminishes the real almightiness of what [. . .] organizes and rules over everything we call life and death, life death. This power of almightiness belongs to a beyond of the opposition between being or not being, life and death, reality and fiction or fantasmatic virtuality” (Derrida 2010, 192–93/130). Derrida underscores that in Greek the word *phantasmata* has at once the sense of “the product of the imagination and fantasy or revenant [*produit de l’imagination ou le fantasme et le revenant*]” (Derrida 2010, 200/136). This will then allow Derrida to leave philosophers with this parting shot: “The phantasm is really more effective, more powerful, it is really [*en effet*] more powerful [*plus puissant*] than what is opposed to it—let’s say, good sense and reality, the perception of the real, etc. The perception of the real has less power than this quasi-hallucination” (Derrida 2010, 201/137).

4. A - MORTAL, A - HUMAN

It is probable that no more than a few occurrences of the terms “a-mortal” or “a-human” could be found in Derrida’s later writings. Although he does not elaborate on these terms in any detail, they are an index, I believe, of his ongoing interrogation of the metaphysical distinction between the human and the animal. If we were to return to the passage with which I began, Derrida’s wistful wish for us to remain beasts, which occurs in the context of *The Beast and Sovereign Seminar, Vol. II*, a seminar partially devoted to reading Heidegger’s 1929/1930 lecture course, Derrida’s quip can be read as partly concerned with

his interrogation of the notion of the beast—which is not strictly speaking the animal—but also with the relation to death that different entities interrogated by Heidegger—god, animal, stone—have. Perhaps, like beasts, we do not have the power to die.

In his very last writings, in addition to the reference to what may be a-mortal mentioned already, there are three places where Derrida refers to the notions *a-mortal* (twice) and *a-human* (once), making use of the privative. In these late texts, Derrida, in contradistinction to the emphasis placed by Heidegger on the mortality of Dasein, puts into question not only the mortality but also the humanity of what we will no longer dare call “man” or “the subject.” In a section of *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) entitled “Tangente III” Derrida mentions that he has relinked “pre-originary mourning” to the motif of *ex-appropriation* “in order to mark that in this mourning before death, interiorization and even introjection, which one often takes for granted in normal mourning, cannot and must not be achieved” (Derrida 2000, 218/192).²⁰ This would be an “im-possible mourning” and moreover, he adds, “a-human [*in-humain*], more than human, pre-human, other than human ‘in’ the human of humanism [*humainisme*]” (Derrida 2000, 218/192). In *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I* from the following year (2001–2002) Derrida again makes a reference to the “a-human” that indicates, and refers to, the alliance of god and animal. He wonders whether the denied but common implication of the discourses of Lacan and Levinas about the other [*l’autre*] and the third party “do not situate at least one instance of the animal, of the animal-*other*, of the other *as animal*, of the *other-living-mortal*, of the nonfellow in any case, the nonbrother [the divine or the animal, here inseparable], in short of the a-human [*in-humain*] in which god and animal form an alliance according to all the theozoomorphic possibilities properly constitutive of myths, religions, idolatries and even sacrificial practices of monotheisms that claim to break with idolatry?” (Derrida 2010, 176–7/126). A little further on, Derrida questions whether the a-human [*in-humain*] falls between (or includes both) the animal and the human: “[The phallus] is it proper to man or else, already cut from man, is it a ‘something,’ a thing, an a-human, inhuman what, which is, moreover, scarcely more masculine than feminine? Neither animal nor human?”

(Derrida 2010, 297/222). How are we to read these allusions to the a-mortal and the a-human?

5. C O D A

What is compelling and of great import is that what Derrida's thinking calls for—the *arrivant*, who or what comes—cannot be solely *determined* as human, nor can it be necessarily defined by its relationship to its mortality and to death. In some of Derrida's writings we can find references to an unidentifiable alterity, to a gift, to what comes (indications of which we could already infer from his earlier writings on sexual difference and *Geschlecht*). When Derrida writes of the totally aleatory “what comes or arrives” (*ce qui arrive*), he does not necessarily have an identifiable subject, a consciousness, or a mortal in mind.

To illustrate this, I have selected four texts, which I would like to place an emphasis on, where Derrida writes about preparing for the arrival of an indeterminate, indistinguishable, uncategorized, and unclassified X, which is not necessarily a being. In these texts Derrida provides descriptions of an alterity that is to come. He does not speak of a subject or of subjectivity, whether it is identifiable or not, but of *ce qui vient*, who or what comes. These texts do not have as their concern that which is mortal (fr. *mortalis*, 1080, entered the English language in 1567) or mortality (fr. *mortalitas* 12th century, entered the English language 14th century). Here are the chosen passages.

In a discussion entitled “Fidelity to More than One” that took place in Rabat, Morocco, in April 1996 with a group of intellectuals of the Arab world, collected under the title *Idiomes, nationalités, deconstructions*, Derrida speaks of the *arrivant* or what comes whose features cannot be anticipated or determined.

The *arrivant* must be so surprising to me that I can't even determine it as human. . . . Now, the other who may be a god or a dog, and I can't even anticipate that the *arrivant* has a human face. In this social dis-solution [*dé-liaison*] I am bound to whomever and the hospitality unconditionally opened to the *arrivant* ought to expose me to any *arrivant* whatsoever, but also to what we

so quickly call an animal or a god. Good or evil, life or death. (Derrida 1998, trans. 2024, 27/77)²¹

In another discussion at the Philosophy Department of the University of Warwick published in 1997 in its journal *Pli*, only available in English, Derrida remarks that “the alterity that I am referring to under the mediality of maybe is perhaps radically inhuman, radically non-subjective, a non-subject,” which elsewhere in the discussion he refers to as “a singularity” (Derrida 1997, 4).²² In an interview that at first appeared as a journal article before appearing as the first chapter of *Echographies—de la Télévision* in 1997, “Artéfactualités,” Derrida speaks of an address to alterity that cannot be determined in advance:

For there to be an event and history, it is necessary that a ‘come’ is opened and is addressed to someone, to someone other who I cannot and must not in advance determine [*il faut qu’un “viens” s’ouvre et s’adresse à quelqu’un, à quelqu’un d’autre que je ne peux ni ne dois d’avance déterminer*], neither as subject, self, consciousness, nor as animal, god or person, man or animal, living or non-living (one must have the ability to *call/summon* [appeler] a specter). (Derrida 1996, 20/12)²³

And finally, in a conversation with Elisabeth Roudinesco under the title *De quoi demain . . .* in 2001, Derrida discusses

The coming of the one who or which comes but does not yet have a recognizable figure or face [*figure reconnaissable*—and who therefore is not necessarily another man, my Sovereign, my brother, my neighbor [*la venue de (ce) qui vient mais n’a pas encore de figure reconnaissable—et qui donc n’est pas nécessairement un autre homme, mon semblable, mon frère, mon prochain*] . . . it can also be a ‘life’ or even a ‘specter’ in animal or divine form, without being ‘the animal’ or ‘God,’ and not only a man or woman, nor a figure sexually definable according to the binary assurances of homo- or heterosexuality. (Derrida and Roudinesco 2001, 90–1/52)²⁴

What can be surmised is that Derrida's thinking *comprehends* not simply the philosophical sub-*ject*, a being-thrown under—the under-lying—but also takes in an other *-je[c]t* or fall [*chute*]. To think *le jeté*, that which is thrown, comprises a thinking of sending [*l'envoi*] and of falling. Turning from the thinking of the subject of Western metaphysics as the *substratum*, the base or persisting ground—substantial foundation—this *other* thinking of that which comes, of what comes is not concerned merely with what is human but is a welcoming of a singularity. One can guard against the unforeseeable and the unpredictable, be terrified and paralyzed, but what comes can also be an occasion for welcoming and generosity, an embracing of what cannot be predicted.²⁵

NOTES

1. Jacques Derrida. 2024. "Scènes des différences: Où la philosophie et la poétique indissociables, font événement d'écriture." *Littérature* 142, no. 2: 16–29. "Scenes of Differences; Where Philosophy and Poetics, Indissociably, Make the Event of Writing" 2024. Translated by Bradley Ramos. In *Thinking What Comes*, edited by Geoffrey Bennington and Kas Saghafi. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
2. Jacques Derrida. 2005. *Apprendre à vivre enfin: Entretien avec Jean Birnbaum*. Paris: Galilée, 24. *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, 2007. Translated by Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault. Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 24.
3. Jacques Derrida. 1993. *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle internationale*. Paris: Galilée, 15. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 1993. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.
4. He calls himself "uneducable" about this "wisdom [*sagesse*] of learning to die [*savoir-mourir*]" (Derrida 2005, 25/25, trans. mod.).
5. Jacques Derrida. 2010. *Séminaire La bête et le souverain. Volume II (2002–2003)*. Paris: Galilée, 186. *The Beast and the Sovereign, volume 2*, 2011. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Edited by Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 124.
6. Martin Heidegger. 1954. "Das Ding." In *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Pfullingen: Gunther Neske Verlag, 157–79, 171. "The Thing," 1971. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper and Row, 165–82, 178.
7. Werner Marx. 1987. *Is There a Measure On Earth? Foundations for a Nonmetaphysical Ethics*. Translated by Thomas Nenon and Reginald Lilly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *Gibt es auf Erden ein Mass?: Grundbestimmungen einer nichtmetaphysischen Ethik*, 1983. Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag. Martin Heidegger. 1936–1968. *Erläuterungen zu Holderlins Dichtung* (GA 4, 60).

8. Martin Heidegger. 1959. "Das Wesen der Sprache." In *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Pfullingen: Günther Neske, GA 12. "The Nature of Language," 1971. In *On the Way to Language*, translated by Peter D. Herz. New York: Harper & Row.
9. Martin Heidegger. 1954. "Bauen Wohnen Denken." In *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Pfullingen: Günther Neske Verlag, GA 7, 145–46. "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 1971. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row.
10. Martin Heidegger. 1991. *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, GA 4. *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, 2000. Translated by Keith Holler. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, GA 4: 165/190, trans. mod.
11. Cicero. 1966. *Tusculan Disputations*. Translated by J. E. King. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, I, xxx, 74.
12. Cicero. 1993. *Tusculanae disputationes*, I, xxx, 74–xxxI, 75. Translated by Michel de Montaigne. In *The Essays: A Selection*. London: Penguin, 17 (trans. mod). M. A. Screech notes that Cicero says "practice" not by *meditatio* but by *commentatio*, which means a careful preparation. Montaigne is echoing Cicero here, not Socrates.
13. Michel de Montaigne. 1950. "Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir." In *Essais*, texte établi et annoté par Albert Thibaudet. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard.
14. Seneca. 2001. "On the Brevity of Life." In *Moral Essays, volume II*. Translated by John W. Basore. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 73.
15. Montaigne. 2009. *Essais*, édition d'Emmanuel Naya, Delphine Reguig, et Alexandre Tarrête. Paris: Gallimard, Livre III, Chapitre 12, 1180.
16. Jacques Derrida. 1967. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit. *Of Grammatology*, 1974. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press "Difference is also something other than any finitude" (OG xx/68). In an early article Derrida is even more emphatic: "Difference is not finitude." Jacques Derrida. 1966. "De la grammatologie II." *Critique* 224: 36.
17. Jacques Derrida. 2019. *La vie la mort*. Paris: Seuil. *Life Death*, 2020. Translated by Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 19/1.
18. Martin Heidegger. 1979–1987. *Nietzsche* English v. 2. Translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper & Row, 91; *Nietzsche*, 1961. Pfullingen: Günther Neske Verlag, v. 1, 350.
19. On learning how to die, see Geoffrey Bennington. 2010. "Jacques Derrida: . . . A Life." In *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
20. Jacques Derrida. 2000. *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*. Paris: Galilée, 218. *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 2003. Translated by Christine Irizarry. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 192.
21. Jacques Derrida. 2024. "Fidélité à plus d'un." In *Idiomes, nationalités, deconstructions*, 27. "Idioms, Nationalities, Deconstructions: Encounter with Jacques Derrida in Rabat." Translated by Adam Rosenthal and Rodrigo Therezo. In *Thinking What Comes, Volume 1*, edited by Geoffrey Bennington and Kas Saghafi. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 51–93.

22. Jacques Derrida. 1997. "Perhaps or Maybe," *Pli* 6, Summer: 4. Discussion with Alexander Garcia Düttmann. Since no published French transcript exists, it is impossible to know what word Derrida may have used.
23. Jacques Derrida. 1996. *Echographies—de la télévision (Entretiens filmés avec Bernard Stiegler)*. Paris: Galilée, 20; *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, 2002. Translated by Jennifer Bajorek. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 12.
24. Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco. 2001. *De Quoi demain. Dialogue* [With]. Paris: Fayard/Galilée, 90–1. *For What Tomorrow . . . : A Dialogue*, 2004. Translated by Jeff Fort. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 52.
25. An early version of this paper was presented as "Learning How to Become A-mortal," on March 22, 2022, at the "Derrida & Phenomenology" Conference held at Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany.

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