

Questions of responsibility and legacy pervade Derrida's later work. How can there be a response, legacy, remainder? How is respons-ability the capacity to respond without any expectation of a reply, and yet to respond nevertheless?

## Response-abilities for Legacies: Jacques—on vous suit à travers vos texts

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*“Cher Jacques:”*

*I write these words once more, as I have on various occasions since 1972 when we first met when you presented three days of seminars at the École Normale Supérieure (in Paris) on metaphor, on Plato's divided line, and on other margins of philosophy. But this paper is not about “address,” nor is it an essay in the guise of an “address.” You are not here for us to hear you, to follow your words, to note down what you say, to respond to you, to think beyond where you go . . . In 1972, while living in Paris, I wrote an essay that appeared two years later in a Canadian journal called Mosaic. Like the shoelaces in Van Gogh's painting, laces that call out to be tied together, a certain crossing brings me here to the University of Manitoba—at the end of this conference—to the home of Mosaic (where I published my first article) and for this celebration of Jacques Derrida's legacy. For their hospitality, I thank especially Dawne McCance and Lisa Muirhead, as well as former students who are here (Michael Naas, Len Lawlor, William Melaney, Peter Gratton,*

*Marie-Eve Morin, Peter Zeillinger), also old friends and new acquaintances whom I've met these three days . . . they all will have shared in the responsibility for the achievement and success of this conference and its aftermath. Without a doubt, Jacques, you would have been pleased—just as you were at the first “Derrida” conference in which you yourself participated—one which I organized at Stony Brook thirty years ago . . .*

*Amitiés,*

*Hugh*

Since, however, this paper is not an address, I will not “address” Jacques Derrida here any more—even if this whole *Mosaic* conference will have served as an address—hortatory and honorific as it may be. As we have seen again and again, Derrida’s writings haunt us and will continue to do so with each and every new reading. Here, however, we must ask what there is of Jacques Derrida’s voice, his wry smile, his intense articulation of complex webs of thinking and writing, textualizing and marginalizing that persists—even today—in our polyvalent readings of his work. As much as he would not want to speak of an “*oeuvre*” there is nevertheless an *oeuvre* at work here—now that he is no longer with us. There will have been endless readings of his writings, his pressing issues of the day in literature, in philosophy, in politics, in psychoanalysis, in art, in architecture, in every imaginable domain of textual production. And yes, there is much that is localized in a certain time and place, in a certain conflict or theoretical framework. And so much of Jacques Derrida’s writings were addressed to the great writers and thinkers of all time—Husserl, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Plato, Kant, Hegel, Rousseau, Levi-Strauss, Celan, Blanchot, Valery, Artaud, Kafka, Joyce, and on and on. These readings, however, are occasions for Jacques Derrida to demonstrate how to read a text in its marginalities, its textualities, its indecidabilities.

But as one reads these texts, it is not the texts that he reads that signify, but rather the strategies of reading that bring out radically different ways to think some of the most persistent philosophical, political, literary, even theological issues of all time. So what would it mean to speak of Derrida’s legacies? What is he leaving from the past that is projected into the future? What comes out of his texts that persists in future readings? If there is something unique and ingenious about his deconstructive strategies for textual readings, where is the “legacy” in the sense of that which is passed on to his inheritors, to those who come after, to those who will need to philosophize or theorize or critique or write or practice in their own right? Derrida’s writings, in some sense, elude the thetic, the postulates that can be cited as pithy sententious statements for all time. Of course, there are many repeatable sentences in Derrida’s writings: “difference is neither a word nor a concept” (*Margins*) “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” (there is

no text outside the text or there is no outside-text) (*Grammatology* 158), “there are no phantoms in Van Gogh’s paintings” (*Truth* 257) “O my democratic friends” (*Politics* 306) “justice cannot be deconstructed” (“Force” 243) and on and on. One can indeed find in Derrida sentential claims for all time—and there are many of them. But Derrida needs to be read, to be followed through the intricacies of his readings, to enter into the web of his thought, to activate the spaces that he is able so adroitly to identify, to marginalize, and to situate between binary pairs.

Early on (in the 1970s), Newton Garver wrote, in his preface to David Allison’s translation of *Speech and Phenomena*, that there are two traditions in philosophy—a logical tradition and a rhetorical tradition. Garver identifies Derrida as firmly within the rhetorical tradition that follows from the Sophists, Cicero, Nietzsche, and the later Wittgenstein, while the logical tradition is able to make postulates that are logically valid and true (not just rhetorically effective). It would be so much easier if these kinds of binary oppositions could hold against one another, if one could say that Derrida is only rhetorical and that Aristotle, Kant, Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein are only logical. But as Derrida himself has so often and persistently demonstrated, any binary pair carries a dominant and a less-privileged side. If one can go to the under-privileged side—from that which is favoured within the tradition, that which calls itself “mainstream,” then one can ask what is happening in-between—in-between the mainstream and the marginal. Only by giving weight to the marginalized can one think the place between. If everyone thinks that the logical tradition has precedence, Derrida’s persistent attempts to think the rhetorical—figures of speech, rhetorical devices, textual strategies—against the logical—propositions, arguments, validations—sets the two traditions apart from one another. In this way he is able to bring out what is happening in the place between these two traditions—in effect, to operate between them.

Does this thinking “the rhetorical” against “the logical” make Derrida’s writings, his strategies, his philosophizing more or less rhetorical, more or less logical? Derrida is often concerned with the question of truth—the truth as *aletheia* (in Heidegger’s persistent attempts at distinguishing “truth as disclosure” from, for instance, correspondence or coherence theories of truth). Truth, for Derrida, in his reading of Nietzsche’s styles, was a way to inquire into the relations between sexual difference, writing, and style. How to write difference is, for Derrida, a question of writing the truth, for truth is disclosed (according to Heidegger) in the ontico-ontological difference, in the open, out of the abyss (*Ab-grund*). That Derrida connects this notion of truth as happening in the ontico-ontological difference with the difference between rhetorical writing styles (often associated with Nietzsche) and the persistent pursuit

of truth in Heidegger opens up another difference—the difference between writing and style. The problem is that Derrida is constantly seeking to articulate differences. And each time that he remarks on a difference, it is never quite on the side of rhetoric nor on the side of logic and truth.

So does his work belong on the side of rhetoric or on the side of logic? The difficulty is that thinking differences side-steps both of these determinations. Yes, there is an element of truth-telling (rhetoric) and there is an element of telling the truth (logic). Of course, these distinctions are so tenuous that they keep breaking apart—as they have for centuries. But Derrida's contribution—his legacy, in part—is to demonstrate how to think differences without constituting fixed, circumscribed, delimited, contained determinations. Thinking differences deconstructively (already we have something like a path of thinking or a set of procedures for philosophizing or for writing critically) interrupts and overflows any of these determinations. Thinking differences deconstructively opens up spaces for further consideration—as opposed to closing them down forever, or at least for any future deliberation. The “very idea of” following Derrida, along these lines of thinking/writing, keeps on opening up new spaces, overturning new stones, marking the places where determinations are superseded . . .

**C**an Derrida be saved? This is another way of asking whether there is a space outside the frame in which his work—authorized by him—constitutes a limit. The limit is set by that which circumscribes the whole text—that which would be called “the writings of Jacques Derrida.” While he was still alive and with us, this text could continue to be augmented, supplemented, filled out, expanded, reshaped . . . But now, at the margins of the text of Derrida, there will not have been more that will be provided by his own authority and authorship. Of course, there will be more texts that will appear—just as Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* continues to appear year after year. There is surely enterprise upon enterprise designed to fill in spaces that were provided during Jacques Derrida's lifetime. Much editorial work, careful bibliographical research, detailed examinations of published and unpublished writings—in effect, work with his *Nachlass* (his legacy—as handed down, the remains of what he left for those who come after)—are certainly called for. There will have been archive upon archive of his writings—study upon study of texts that were left in Irvine or in Paris or in the hands of friends and colleagues from lectures and presentations. There will be societies formed, conferences devoted to elucidating the whereabouts of texts, constituting the gaps in the Derrida text, the Derrida corpus, the Derrida archive, layer upon layer of textualities . . .

But the question remains: can Derrida be saved? These many documents, texts, contributions will surely be saved, preserved, and published, then studied, commented

upon, and interpreted. But can Derrida be saved? Save all these documents, texts, and contributions that Jacques Derrida offered during his lifetime, what is it that remains after all is said and done, after the texts have been published, after the contributions are made available, after the gifts that he left behind for us have been brought to light? Except for these texts and documents, the question of legacy concerns that which will remain, that which is outside the frame of these contributions. What remains? What is the supplement, as Derrida would say, that pertains to the future of the Derridean text, what is the textuality of this remainder, or remainders? What carries on—beyond—the limits of what Derrida himself was able to contribute? How can “we”—whoever this “we” may be—enter into this space—outside the Derrida text, the Derrida *corpus*, in a way that will mark and re-mark on the Derrida text and its textualities? In what way is this re-marking not only an ek-static moment—outside of what is included in Derrida’s writings—but also an in-scribing of what is both there and not there, what is said and not said, what needs to be said and has not been stated, what supplements without repetition, reiteration, restatement?

There will be legions of studies attempting to clarify what the Derrida texts say, what the contribution has been, and how the Derrida texts differ from other texts with a similar project. There will be legions of dissertations—as there have already been—of studies on some aspect of Derrida’s writings—much in the way in which there are still commentaries on Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and so many other figures in the history of philosophy. So is this to say that Derrida now belongs to the “history of philosophy” and the “history of critical theory” and the “history of cultural, political, aesthetic, and social theory”? Well, in a certain sense, of course, Derrida has been part of this “history” for many years now—along with figures such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, and on and on. And now that the book is closed—“the end of the book and the beginning of writing”—it could be said that Derrida is now definitively part of this “history of philosophical writing.” But this demarcation will not “save” Derrida. As a piece of the history of philosophy, the Derrida text will have achieved its rightful place in the Hall of Philosophical Fame . . . But “our” question concerns his “legacy.” What is it that his writings—the Derrida text, or what is sometimes called “his thought”—will have opened up for further textualizing, further thinking, additional modes of writing that are linked or tied to the Derrida text but that do not simply repeat or comment upon it? Indeed the very question of legacy is inscribed in Derrida’s own writings such that they mark the place outside his writings—in the place of his legacy.

Saving Derrida means leaving aside what there is of Derrida that remains to be thought, textualized, augmented, written. Writing Derrida is the very challenge of those

who “follow him”—who “come after” him—who will be writing Derrida otherwise . . . This writing afterward is the challenge of the legacy, the demand—and the responsibility—that Derrida placed upon himself—took upon himself—in his writing. So our question will be: in what way is Derrida responsible for his legacy? How does his responsibility carry beyond his death, beyond himself, beyond the limits set by his living and writing?

In *Aporias*, Derrida distinguishes between “dying,” “perishing,” and “deceasing”—suggesting that what is translated as “deceasing/demising” happens between what Heidegger calls “*Sterben*” and “*Ableben*” (51). Derrida will have died but his writings will not have perished. His writings are not perishable—in the sense that a can of fruit is perishable. Derrida’s writings persist. He will have died or perished, but in that he is deceased/demising, he continues beyond, beyond the limits set by his life. And this place of de-ceasing (not ceasing) and not perishing is where the Derrida text will come alive, reanimated by those writings that will have come after. Coming after—part of the coming to, the “to come” (the *a-venir*)—that which will not know how to stop, to cease and desist, will return (like those ghosts or phantoms that populate Derrida’s writings). Derrida’s legacy will have been a *Dopplegänger*—a kind of ghost that will not go away, that continues to plague those who know Derrida’s writings, and those who will come to know his writings in the future. In other words, Derrida’s Ghost is of the order of Hamlet’s father’s Ghost. He will be there even for those generations who did not know him. Like a Haunted House, the domain of textuality will find traces of Derrida everywhere—in nooks and crannies of thought, of writing, of theorizing, of reading. Indeed, will it even be possible to read—in the days and years “to come”—without being haunted by the Derrida text? It’s not that “we” are called to “save” Derrida, the question is rather how can we be saved from Derrida, for his writings will continue to haunt the academy of writing in ways that will not always be evident (but in ways that are not yet inscribed in the canons of the history of philosophy). Will it even make sense to read (and write on)—in the absence of deconstruction—in the gaps where there will be no difference, where thinking differences cannot be? As we return to our modern identities, we will continue to be haunted by Derridean differences—whether we know it or not. What is saved, what will have been saved, will be what saves readers—after Derrida—from not thinking differences . . .

**S**urviving Derrida will surely be one of the most significant philosophical tasks of our century. Derrida lives on (*sur-vivre*)—as he called it—by going beyond the very line that is delimited by his departure in October 2004. But *sur-vivre* also means “to live on” such as “on the line”—at the very place of limit or border (as he so carefully showed in

“Living On/Border Lines” in the late 1970s [63]). In order to go beyond, that is, to go outside the frame set by a delimitation, it must be clear where the demarcation lies, what separates, what is on this side and what is on the other side. In order to “live on,” the line—between life and death—would have to be noted, as in the medical sense of “flatlining” or in some theological sense of the line between this life and an afterlife or in some theoretical sense of a line between being and non-being.

It would be far too simple to say that when Derrida ceased (died or perished), what comes after cannot be the same as what came before. Of course, it would have been frightful to say this while he was still alive. Many of us would have thought that he would “live on forever,” that he would continue to write, to give seminars and lectures, to write and speak about major philosophical and cultural issues of our time. The shock and sadness of his passing then raises the question of “end” and the corresponding question of “beginning”—or “regeneration” (as Catherine Malabou would call it). The space known as the period of Derrida’s writing—from his earliest master’s thesis on Husserl’s notion of genesis to some of his latest writings on hospitality and testimony—is enframed in a certain sense by his hegemony. There is the respect in which the text of Derrida is definitively enframed and in which there will be no more writings written under the authorship of Jacques Derrida—unless of course he can be re-generated (or cloned) in some way – beyond the line that encircles his “*corpus*,” “his *oeuvre*,” “his *écrits*.” But to the extent that he survives his own end, Derrida goes far beyond the limits of his own life and even beyond his own writings . . .

On many occasions, Derrida had himself addressed these issues—among them his discussion of Heidegger’s notion of “being-towards-Death.” In *Aporias (Apories)*—published in 1992 (twelve years before his own death)—Derrida focuses on what he calls “the aporias of death.” By another reading of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, as already noted, Derrida distinguishes between dying (*Sterben/mourir*), perishing (*Verenden/perir* or *crever*), and deceasing (“demising” in the English translation) (*Ableben/déceder*):

Once one has distinguished between these two ways of *ending*—*dying* and *perishing*—one must take into consideration what Heidegger calls an intermediate phenomenon (*Zwischenphenomenon*): the *demise*, the *Ableben*, which all the French translators agree to translate as *deces*. *Ab-leben*, to leave life, to go away from life, to walk out of life, to take a step away from life, to pass life, to trespass upon death [*trépasser*], to cross the threshold of death, thus means *de-cedere*. Already in Cicero’s Latin, this figure of straying while walking [*écart fait en marchant*] signified *dying*. This *écart* reminds us that the moment of the ultimate separation, the partition that separates from life, *involves a certain step/not* [*il y va d’un certain pas*]. (*Aporias* 37/*Apories* 72)

Derrida points out that *Dasein* does not cease or perish. It “lives on.” *Dasein* is being-towards-death and cannot be otherwise than always “towards death.” Hence this means that it must once again be there in order for it to be “towards death.” *Dasein* is its possibilities. Although Derrida may have died/perished, through his writings he “lives on” and therefore cannot come to an end. The Derridean text is the image of Heidegger’s *Dasein* that extends far beyond Derrida’s mortality, that survives even Derrida.

**D**ifferences are the ghosts of identity thinking. A politics of identity will be haunted by differences. Surviving Derrida will require thinking beyond identities—national identities, personal identities, aesthetic identities, and any other identity one could think of. In this, Derrida is as responsible as anyone else. One can call upon the responsibility of an identity, an agent, an individual. Politicians “take full responsibility” for acts about which they may be embarrassed. They check themselves into some health facility so that they can work out their difficulty (alcoholism, sexual depravity, degenerate behaviours)—for which they ask to take full responsibility—but in such a way that there is hardly any danger of having to be held accountable—to account for their “difficulty.”

Each of us can be called upon to “take” responsibility for acts committed, for the good and the bad . . . However, there is another sense of responsibility that goes beyond individual, personal, agencies, or identities. Levinas claims, as Derrida reminds us, that one is responsible for the other in that the other is mortal. But this just transposes the weight of responsibility from the subject to another subject, namely, the other . . . Levinas’s other is an identity just as much as anyone else. So what is this responsibility that does not reside with a single agent? In what sense can there be—as Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested—a responsibility “between us” (5)?

What is between us is a space of difference. But the differences between us—that is a chiasm/chiasm worthy of the task of thinking (as Heidegger would call it). If Derrida has indicated how to think differences, how to deconstruct relations—whether they be matters of friendship, hospitality, perjury, witnessing, or the like—the concern here is with what happens between identities, between agents, between subjects. It is not that the subjects themselves become empty signifiers, but rather that what separates them and brings them together is the place of their difference, and their place of difference is the event of responsibility, the *Er-eignis* or happening of being responsible, of responding in place of a response.

What is “between us” is what is left over, the supplement, that which cannot be other than that which happens in the interstices of our inter-connectedness. Thinking

supplements as differences, as remainders, as the very fabric of our interactions, is to think the web of responsibilities that go beyond any particular life, and yet that links nothing but particular lives . . . The web of responsibility is a supplement that carries on—between us.

The everyday sense of responsibility calls for individuals to take responsibility for their acts—as in each and every one of us is responsible for carrying on Derrida's legacy. Responsibility cannot be universal in that it cannot follow from a rule or a concept. Responsibility cannot be derived from a maxim or universal law. We cannot feel compelled either to follow Derrida nor to pass beyond the line in order to establish his legacy. Heidegger spoke of being compelled to follow in the circle—in the circling of the circle, when he demonstrated how the hermeneutic circle takes place. Responsibility is in the responding—the *Verantwortung* or *Verantwortlichkeit*—the answerability—not in the individual responses or actions of individuals. As Jacques Derrida commented to me (at a dinner when he was teaching at Stony Brook) a couple of years before his death, his major preoccupation in those years had been the “question of responsibility.” But Jacques Derrida could not be responsible for us, for this session, for what we do together as we write about, meet to talk about, share our view about his corpus, his body of work—as it lays extended before us. Similarly, none of us can be responsible for carrying on his work, studying the intricacies of his enormous contribution to philosophy, critical study, cultural theory.

Responsibility can only happen in the between, in the spaces and gaps, in the chisms and chasms that link us and separate us. As individuals, we may not feel compelled to be responsible either for what we do or for the other since responsibility does not belong to any one of us, and yet responsibility calls for a compelling, calls to be compelling. Hence, if there is to be a legacy, there will need to be a place for the responsibility that compels it. Such a place would be an interstitial place that does not belong to anyone in particular, but that nevertheless links everyone in the community in question in a web of responsibility, an enframing that encircles without being a circle, a context in which responding happens between interlocutors and members of the society—and not one built on a bundle of singularities. Such a community would be a singular plural (to cite Jean-Luc Nancy—one of those “between us” who follows Derrida)—“a community of those who have nothing in common but Derrida”—a *Derrida Un-Limited* (DU) society—whose response-ability resides between us . . .

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