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List of Abbreviations

WORKS BY JACQUES DERRIDA

G  Glas (Paris: Galilée, 1974)
MA Le monolingualisme de l’autre, ou, la prothèse d’origine (Paris: Galilée, 1996)
OH The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe, trans. Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992)
PA Politiques de l’amitié (Paris: Galilée, 1994)
SdM Spectres de Marx (Paris: Galilée, 1994)
Introduction
The Day after Tomorrow...
or, The Deconstruction of the Future

Martin McQuillan

‘De quoi demain sera-t-il fait?’
Victor Hugo

Why should one read Derrida, tomorrow? The question, I think, is not asked prematurely. For some there were good ‘institutional’ reasons to read the work of Jacques Derrida in the 1980s as the ‘newness’ of the discourse inaugurated by Derrida opened up the arts and humanities. This, in itself, was not a good reason to read Derrida; deconstruction has never had faith in newness, especially its own. Such readers have moved on to other celebrity voices. That chase can only end in the cul-de-sac of disappointment. For others, there has been the constant insistence of a ‘must’ when it comes to reading Derrida. The precision and remarkable innovation of each Derrida text demanded to be read, they pressed themselves upon us and could not be ignored, moving from interest to interest with the breakneck speed of Derrida’s extraordinary mind. However, now that Derrida has penned his last text and left behind a finite, if astonishingly complex, corpus – his archive, as it were – why should we read him tomorrow?

By asking this question, one is not cutting short the work of mourning for the person Jacques Derrida; wishing him and his intolerable absence away. Rather, as part of that work, this question asks how deconstruction can go on without Derrida. One answer would be that deconstruction has always gone on before Derrida and in the complete absence of knowledge of Derrida and his writing. Fine, it will continue as such. However, more pertinently (if more parochially) how can the discourse of deconstruction as a commitment to a certain practice of reading continue as something other than a museum for our own bereavement? It depends very much on what one might mean by ‘without Derrida’. My guess is that the family of deconstruction, those who knew Derrida and knew one another through Derrida, will never come to terms with his loss. Nor
should they; when we stop missing Derrida it will be because we have forgotten Derrida and for some of us this will be plain impossible. My other guess is that having read Derrida so well and so closely for so long, the family of deconstruction, in thrall to and enthralled by the inaugurating discourse of Derrida, does not have the resources within it to go beyond Derrida and to innovate within a discourse which has been hitherto marked by its own singular innovation. Thus, deconstruction is in something of a bind. It always has been of course, but the drawing of a mortal limit across the life of Jacques Derrida has given this problem a massive legibility today. The originality of deconstruction must be its own undoing because such originality (i.e. singularity) pertains to and ends with its originator. The question is one of projection, what is the student of tomorrow to make of the text of Derrida, after the legacy conferences have been held, the biographies written and, with time, the anniversaries marked? This speculation is undoubtedly futile because of its dependence upon the sorts of chance and contingency which Derrida did so much to bring to our attention. However, its insistence remains; what shall those who only know Derrida's texts know of Derrida's texts? In other words, and this is why asking such questions is not a betrayal or curtailment of the work of mourning for Derrida, what is the future of Derrida? How will he live on? What form will his afterlife take and what will the deconstruction of the future look like?

While there will no doubt be multiple answers to these questions, I would like to pursue just one possibility here. While Derrida has been a reliable and consistent commentator on the political and politics for as long as any of us can remember (‘The Ends of Man’ for example is an essay about Vietnam) we are now entering into an epoch in which we will have to live without this commentary. He made sense of the fallout from the fall of communism and brought intelligence to bear upon the irrational events of 9/11, but he will not be making comment on the Israeli assault on Lebanon, or on the future career of Nicholas Sarkozy, the eventual and inevitable withdrawal of American forces from Iraq, the death of Bin Laden, the international trial of Donald Rumsfeld for the authorisation of torture, or any of the tomorrows in which his perspicacity and judgement will be so badly needed. This is not to say that the text of Derrida does not already contain long and detailed commentary on the politics of the Middle East or the future of international law. However, one day the events described in these texts will seem as distant to us as those discussed by Karl Marx or Tom Paine.
will retain an affiliation to this writing by Derrida but it will also stretch out beyond it, and, as Althusser knew, the future lasts a long, long time.

For deconstruction the future is not what it used to be. And it is precisely for this reason, I would like to venture, that we will read Derrida tomorrow. We will read Derrida because here we will find an account of the political and an account of how to account for accounts of the political that will provide us with the resources to engage with the unknowable of tomorrow. Derrida’s deconstruction of the political is important not because of the examples he chooses to engage with – there are many occasions in Derrida’s writing where he refuses the example, or the absolute exemplarity of any given example. Interesting and, indeed, comforting as Derrida’s political examples are (I obviously mean ‘comforting’ here in the sense that they are reassuringly ‘of the left’) the point of Derrida’s commentary on the political is that it takes on board the radical alterity of the future as constitutive of the political event as such. If the political event is a thing of the future (that is to say that as an event it is both already irremediably of the past and yet to arrive from the future) then there can be no politics of presence. That is not to say that there is no politics in the present. The point of, say, démocratie à venir would be that this is not a projection of a perfect future democracy but an insistence on democracy in the here and now which is made possible by the perfectibility of democracy as the promise of its future. Derrida’s politics is a politics of the future, one that is not given or pre-programmed according to any knowable model or theory. Rather, it is a performative and transformative critique which opens itself to the unpredictable and unknowable intervention of the future as the arrival of the other. Derrida’s future is open-ended and alive, it is always in process, without limit, telos or regulative principle. It is this imagining of the future which makes Derrida the philosopher of tomorrow, because this future is above all political. That is to say, this future has a future because it significantly opens itself to the very possibility of unknowability and the impossibility of discursive and material foreclosure. It gives chance a chance and gives the other its due by creating a space for its arrival, welcome or not, hospitable or not, ready or not. In expecting the unexpected, deconstruction raises the expectations of politics by opening politics onto a future beyond the traditional end of politics, namely, to secure the end of politics by the discursive misprision of any contestation through the hegemonic imposition of an agreed or enforced end or limit. In truth
this future is the very possibility of politics itself. There would be no politics, no contest, no polis, no polemos, no political economy or desire without this.

This is not to say that the future is bright for deconstruction. One can find suitably uplifting comments in ‘The Force of Law’ or *Spectres of Marx*, for example, concerning ‘justice’ as the undeconstructible condition of any deconstruction, i.e. the idea of futurity which structures the messianic without messianism as the historicity of political change is determined by an insistence at any given moment on the justness of the appeal of the other. However, the other in this sense is the arrival of an event of irreducible alterity. As such, this unpredictable and unknowable arrival need not be either welcome or progressive. We are entering into an epoch of new materialities for which we as yet have no theoretical vocabulary: unprecedented and perhaps irreversible climate change, the transformation of the globe by post-carbon technology and economies, the contestation over energy and resources which will shape the international relations of tomorrow, the globalisation of capital and media, the mutation of the institutions and domain of international law, the migration and displacement of the people of the world by military, climatic or economic forces, the proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons, the independent and inter-connected emergence of terroristic violences and proxy-wars of religion and race, the re-alignment of geo-political privilege with the development of new sovereignties and states, the dissemination and application of techno, genetic and nano-sciences, and so on. These are only the materialities of tomorrow whose horizons can be vaguely glimpsed today. Derrida knew some of them and has written at length on them. Others will require to be thought through after Derrida. Perhaps, as a constellation of possibilities, or, a historical conjuncture of possible tomorrows, this list is in fact an accurate description of today. Such would be the condition of the present. That as the present it is only ever the arrival or intervention of a possible tomorrow, while tomorrow as such never comes. Tomorrow lies ahead of us, beyond the knowable and predictable. It would no doubt be telling to revisit this text in five, ten or twenty years to reflect upon the concerns of this list, in contrast to the reality of the then ‘now’.

To be concerned with the future is to take finitude seriously and to give history a chance. It is the present which is rendered constitutively open by its own futurity. The here and now is not just the latest instance of a present which has always failed to materialise but
Introduction: The Day After Tomorrow...

is also the arrival of the future in the form of the other. When one speaks of the now, or the contemporary, one is always speaking of the future. As Derrida states in the interview with Giovanna Borradori, concerning the chronology and chrono-logic of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York:

We must rethink the temporalization of a traumatism if we want to comprehend in what way 'September 11' looks like a 'major event'. For the wound remains open by our terror before the future and not only the past. (You yourself, in fact, defined the event in relation to the future in your question; you were already anticipating by speaking of 'one of the most important historical events we will witness in our lifetime'). The ordeal of the event has as its tragic correlate not what is presently happening or what has happened in the past but the precursory signs of what threatens to happen. It is the future that determines the unappropriability of the event, not the present or the past. Or at least, if it is present or the past, it is only insofar as it bears on its body the terrible sign of what might or perhaps will take place, which will be worse than anything that has ever taken place.1

Derrida’s point here is that while what happened that day is in the past and will not happen again (it is over and done with, mourning is possible) the power of the meaning of that day is predicated on the possibility that this day heralds something even worse to come, an even worse repetition. In this situation no mourning is possible because such work can never be closed and has no possibility of completion. The materialities of tomorrow impinge upon us today because the landscape made up of these signs will be unlike any other. In the case of much of it, the scene will be worse than we have ever experienced before. The trauma that emerges from Iraq or Katrina is not curtailed by the occurrences themselves (Katrina has passed, one day the Iraq war will end). Rather, what gives them their resonance is the possibility of even worse to come: the further devastation to be wrought by irreversible climate change, or, future expanded, open-ended and uncontrollable ethno-religious energy wars. The two things are obviously connected within the political matrix of today, accumulatively they project the scenario of a possible tomorrow which is, in fact, the condition of our now.

This is a curious circumstance of deconstruction. One will frequently find in Derrida the assertion that the metaphysical conditions of the political, as they have been experienced throughout Modernity, are, in this epoch of tele-communication and globalised capital, in ‘mutation’, and this mutation is irreversible. Here we might think
of his comments on the state and the party or international law in *Spectres of Marx*. In this sense, it is the play of *différance* within historical meaning as a non-totalisable figure of auto-immunity which puts the historical, histories and the idea of history itself into deconstruction. These mutations, these deconstructions, continue unabated (it is irreversible, after all). The mutation of the institutions and circumstances of today takes place under the incessant pressure of the future. The mutation is predicated upon the arrival of what comes and further still, the possibility of what might come after it. The future, having arrived, we must always ask, what comes after it. Thus, the open-ended anteriority of the future is what makes history possible. It is the very chance and motor of history as a ground without stability, where any meaning, experience or figure may make itself possible. History is not a thing of the past, it is always a question of the future. It is for this reason that we might offer a couple of related propositions. Firstly, that the future of deconstruction will be guaranteed by the deconstruction of the future, that is, the figure of auto-immunity which makes itself legible as the future. Here, the future is *différance*, that which generates all generation, makes possible possibility itself, and is the condition of all and every significance. One might say that there can be no future without the future.

Secondly, and accordingly, the question of how to read Derrida will always be a matter of the future. Derrida is a philosopher of the future; not only one whose philosophy is thematically concerned with the future, but one who recognises the importance of the future to philosophy and philosophy to the future. As he notes in a late text:

I am incapable of knowing who today deserves the name philosopher (I would not simply accept certain professional or organizational criteria), I would be tempted to call philosophers those who, in the future, reflect in a responsible fashion on these questions [of international law] and demand accountability from those in charge of public discourse, those responsible for the language and institutions of international law. A ‘philosopher’ (actually I would prefer to say ‘philosopher-deconstructor’) would be someone who analyzes and then draws the practical and effective consequences of the relationship between our philosophical heritage and the structure of the still dominant juridico-political system that is so clearly undergoing mutation. A ‘philosopher’ would be one who seeks a new criteriology to distinguish between ‘comprehending’
and ‘justifying’. For one can describe, comprehend, and explain a certain chain
of events or series of associations that lead to ‘war’ or ‘terrorism’ without
justifying them in the least, while in fact condemning them and attempting to
invent other associations.2

The philosopher ‘would be’, in the future, the one who follows and
reflects upon the mutations of their now and draws ‘practical and
effective consequences’. Clearly, we might say that the very idea of
the philosopher is in mutation. Perhaps, the injunction of the ‘must’
which accompanies reading Derrida is precisely the way in which
the philosopher-reader of today is drawn towards reflection on the now
by the opening up of the present by the insistence of the future. The
student of tomorrow will read Derrida because she will also have a
future to reckon with. Deconstruction as an institution has a future
because it has a future. The deconstruction of the political will always
be a question of the future, which is to say that it is a question of
the here and now.

However, the task here is not to speculate endlessly on the nature
of our tomorrow. Some will say that this is the task of fiction not
philosophy, as if the two could be separated. Certainly, the point
should be ceded that what would be important for philosophy would
not be the facts of tomorrow, rather the understanding of what the
idea of tomorrow itself might be, not so much a question of what
the future holds for us but of how we conceive and shape an idea of
the future. Derrida comments on this in an early essay; let us recall
the opening lines of ‘Violence and Metaphysics’:

That philosophy died yesterday, since Hegel or Marx, Nietzsche or Heidegger
– and philosophy should still wander toward the meaning of its death – or that it
has always lived knowing itself to be dying (as is silently confessed in the shadow
of the very discourse which declared philosophia perennis); that philosophy died
one day, within history, or that it has always fed on its own agony, on the violent
way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and
its concern, its death and wellspring; that beyond the death, or dying nature,
of philosophy, perhaps even because of it, thought still has a future, or even,
as is said today, is still entirely to come because of what philosophy has held in
store; or, more strangely still, that the future itself has a future – all these are
unanswerable questions. By right of birth, and for one time at least, these are
problems philosophy cannot resolve.

It may even be that these questions are not philosophical, are not philosophy’s
questions. Nevertheless, these should be the only questions today capable
of founding the community, within the world, of those who are still called philosophers; and called such in remembrance, at very least, of the fact that these questions must be examined unrelentingly, despite the diaspora of institutes and languages, despite the publications and techniques that follow on each other, procreating and accumulating by themselves, like capital or poverty.3

That history or politics might be the other of philosophy, what Derrida refers to here as nonphilosophy, should not surprise us. That Derrida here seems to be following Heidegger in ‘The End of Thinking’ ['Zur Sache des Denkens'], when Heidegger notes that the future of philosophy will be the non-philosophical task of reflecting on thought itself, might surprise us. However, I think Derrida’s future is very different from that of Heidegger. Where for Heidegger there is no alternative or chance for philosophy, no rupture or hybridity on the way to its inevitable occupation, for Derrida the future might not even be philosophical. The paleonymic task of the name of philosophy for the philosopher-deconstructor, in the name of all that philosophy has made possible, in the name of all that deconstruction has made possible, will be to address and to participate in the ‘wellspring’ of history and nonphilosophy. While Jacques Derrida may have always been wandering towards his own death, the questions he asked (in particular those ones which question the divisions between philosophy and its others) are the ones which are today capable of enabling a deconstruction of the future. Deconstruction has a future because it has always been more than philosophy. Whether this future continues to take the form of a community, what I termed earlier ‘the family of deconstruction’ or ‘deconstruction as an institutional discourse’, I cannot say. Perhaps tomorrow calls for an altogether different invention of affiliation and solidarity, a new inauguration of questioning and examining in remembrance of what has been opened by deconstruction but beyond the name of deconstruction. However, it will still require affiliation and solidarity, as well as reading and reflection. A ‘community of the question’ as Derrida puts it in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, ‘the new international’ as he calls it in Spectres of Marx, ‘the freemasonry of the alert’ as Hélène Cixous has called it.

The work of mourning for Derrida will be finite because those who mourn his insuperable absence are also finite. The reader of tomorrow cannot miss what they never had, although psychoanalytically
speaking this is of course the only thing they can truly miss.
Deconstruction, however, is interminable. The politics and possibility
of tomorrow requires it to be so.

What then would it mean, beyond the most banal of platitudes, to say
that deconstruction ‘creates a space for the arrival of the other’? This
is necessarily a task of reading and thinking, which requires patience
and vigilance. The present collection of essays participates in this
undertaking. The essays herein are all responses to the later writings
of Jacques Derrida on politics. Given all that I have just ventured
above and its seeming urgency, there is an obvious temptation to
reach for the most dramatic and sensational of examples. However,
quoting examples is no guarantee of understanding them. The
essays in this book are reflections on the political (which is to say
that politics is always close to hand) but they are also reflections
on philosophy itself which understand, in Geoffrey Bennington’s
formulation, that philosophy cannot be held accountable to politics
because politics itself is a philosophical concept. Accordingly, they
seek to understand and so to effect the political as such, which, given
the size of this task, calls for due care and diligence. The significance
of these essays lies in the attention and precision their authors have
paid to the philosophical and the political – what Nicholas Royle
might call their radical patience. Only under these conditions can
one hope to produce the theoretical self-reflexivity which would
create the space for the arrival of the unforeseeable. These essays were
written between the summer of 1999 and the winter of 2000, when
in retrospect the world seemed a safer place. It has taken some time
to bring them to publication as a consequence of the institutional
accidents that we might laughingly refer to as my career. Only the
editor in his introduction has had the ‘benefit’ of writing under the
contemporary conditions of this so-called war and after the death
of Derrida. Accordingly, the authors should not be chastised for any
perceived failure to invoke a now fashionable vocabulary. Rather,
this collection of essays demonstrates an exemplary point in the
philosophical discussion of politics. Namely, that the demand to
address the urgency of a ‘today’, or even a tomorrow, can just as easily
screen out reflection on the very thing which makes this moment
significant, and on the contrary the loudest invocations of ‘the