The time of friendship: mourning, survival, spectrality

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Part II
Echoes

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Introduction

'O my friends, there is no friend.' Many chapters in *Politics of Friendship* commence with this paradoxical phrase that has been attributed to Aristotle by different thinkers within the philosophical tradition. According to Derrida, the two elements are the 'two disjoined members of the same sentence' (*PF*, 1).[1] Disjoined, indeed, because we find a reference to two different times; hence, we are not dealing with a straightforward contradiction. While the first element calls on the friends who were, or the friends who will be (the performative part summons them or remembers them – this is the time of the future and of the past), the following element is tied to the present in the sense that at this very moment, there is no friend. It is the aim of this short essay to trace this double temporality of friendship as articulated in the first chapter, 'Oligarchies: Naming, Enumerating, Counting', of *Politics of Friendship*. I seek to demonstrate how the temporality of interruption and disjunction indicates that friendship always already involves a type of mourning, and, thereby, survival. The second aim consists in showing how the notion of survival and its corresponding temporality might raise the suspicion that Derrida offers an interpretation of time as a transcendental condition of being, but must rather be read as an anachronous thinking of history.

The first two steps of my argument address the first aim: I begin by clarifying how Derrida's *survie* and the 'grieved act of loving' function as the condition of possibility of friendship, which means that the time of surviving *gives* the time of friendship. In this manner, Derrida offers a temporality of withdrawing, which takes place through a constant self-effacing. It implies that the present presents itself from within a light that comes from neither presence nor the self, and thus manifests itself as a mode of spectrality. Second,

I elaborate on the notion of spectrality and clarify how this enigmatic term shows that any determination is haunted by what it excludes. The final step addresses the second aim of this essay and consists in showing how spectrality reveals that Derrida must not be understood as a transcendentalist, but as offering a novel way of thinking about the movement of history.

Friendship as Loss and Mourning

'O my friends, there is no friend.' In this phrase, two different times, gathered to appear in one sentence in the present, in presence, call for a meditation on the notion of the *contretemps*. This term, poorly translated into English as 'accident', signifies the counter-logic to what can be repeated, iterated or programmed, insofar as the possibilities of repetition or representation are anticipated to secure both time and space into the present and the future.[2] In other words: the *contretemps* refers to a temporal dislocation that conditions all temporality. In so doing, it disturbs and interrupts the foundation of temporal linearisation and teleology and introduces a certain untimeliness into friendship, breaking it open and making it possible. More precisely, the *contretemps*, as the interruption of a single and organised temporality, 'delivers up the truth of friendship', because it disjoins the presence of the present; here, 'the present presents itself there only from within a source of phenomenal light' (14). Friendship is always torn between these two different temporal orders: it can never be fully and completely present, since it is haunted by both the temporality of stability and order, as well as by the future.

But how precisely? According to Derrida, friendship must stand the test of time; there is no friend without time, because it is only through and with time that confidence can be tested. Friendship implies duration, stability and a permanence, that always 'survives the living present' (15).[3] Yet, since the act of friendship is not an automatic movement, it also amounts to a gesture of faith, decision and responsibility as response, of which there is no friendship without. In this way, faith inscribes a temporal diachrony into the essence of friendship, by pointing towards a future that refers to terms put forward by Derrida such as the 'messianic' and the 'to come' of the *avenir*. This future to come is, for Derrida, always already the future of she who survives the friend. He writes: 'I do not survive the friend, I cannot and must not survive him, except to the extent which he already bears my death and inherits it as the last survivor' (13). This 'testamentary wisdom' means that my friend bears my death, and as such, in a certain way, the 'ownness' of my death has been 'expropriated in advance' (13). Therefore, the future to come is always already the future of the survivor.

Derrida notes that, in this way, friendship is always already bound up with loss and mourning, because it is impossible to survive without mourning. The very element in which friendship is constituted and can grow is mourning itself. Derrida will later write in one of the essays in *The Work of Mourning*: 'To have a friend, to look at him, to follow him with your eyes, to admire him in friendship, is to know in a more intense way, already injured, always insistent, and more and more unforgettable, that one of the two of you will inevitably see the other die.'[4] Mourning for a friend will be continued and repeated long after her death, and it has already begun long before it. As Derrida notes elsewhere: 'the melancholic certainty of which I am speaking begins, as always, in the friends' lifetime'.[5] This paradoxical suggestion makes us wonder what exactly we are mourning before mourning. As well as the future death of the friend, it seems that time is what mourning is about; not in the sense that we grieve about the passing of time, but in the sense that we always already mourn the future, because it is the future that brings loss, grief and death, thereby opening the question of survival.

In 'Living On/Borderlines', Derrida investigates the different meanings and interpretations of the term 'survival'. Referring to Shelley, Blanchot and Benjamin, he discusses survival as a certain 'seeing beyond: if we appeal [. . .] from *vie* to *vision*, we can speak here of *sur-vie*, of living on in a life-after-death, as survision, "seeing on" in a vision beyond vision' and in this sense, a seeing that is more than living.[6] But further on in the text, in his discussion of the term *arrêt*, Derrida also indicates that survival is an adjournment of death and dying. The discussion of the term *survivance* in the last seminar, titled *The Beast and the Sovereign*, is illuminating in clarifying the double meaning of the term. Here, Derrida investigates death, dying and survival by referring to Robinson Crusoe. It is noted that Crusoe kept a journal and might have wished that this journal would survive him. This survival, Derrida remarks, belongs to the 'living dead', because a book, as a trace, is both alive and dead. He writes, 'it begins with survival'. Derrida elaborates on an originary survival, as *survivance*, that dislocates each and every origin, order, foundation, identity and ground. Note that Derrida prefers the middle voice here. As Kas Saghafi remarks in his article 'Dying Alive', since the 'Différance' essay, Derrida has shown a preference for the -ance ending (like *différance*, *revenance*, *restance*), which remains suspended between the active and the passive voice.[7] In this way, '*survivance*' captures the fact that to survive does not mean to escape from death, or to continue living after life, but rather to die alive. As such, *survivance* is different from life, or death; a certain abyssal foundation from which we are opposed to what we think we can determine in the name of life and death. By noting that 'it' begins with

survival, Derrida not only problematises common ideas regarding life and death; he also calls into question the stable and linear temporality these conceptions presuppose. Furthermore, he questions any identity of that which is supposed to possess a 'beginning' and 'end'. In other words: stating that 'it begins with survival' reveals that *survivance* is not something that happens at the end of life, or at the end of friendship, commencing only after the passing of the other, but instead renders life and death inextricably intertwined, conditioning each other in an aporia in which each identity always remains at the mercy of a difference that cannot be reduced to this very identity.

As such, the end is always and already there from the beginning: mourning is inextricably intertwined with any friendship at and in the present and thus, curiously, the notion of survival implies that the event of friendship can only take place when its temporalisation is haunted by a future that is still to come. It must be noted that this 'haunting' is a modality of mourning that reminds us of Levinas, because it was Levinas who remarked that we mourn the death of the other before the actual death; he stated, famously, that the death of the other is always the first. However, it is Derrida, and not Levinas, who discusses not only friendship, but any relation to alterity in terms of an 'originary mourning'. Derrida himself comments on this fact; in *Aporias*, he notes that neither Heidegger, nor Freud, nor Levinas speaks of mourning in this way, which, he adds, is his first and foremost concern.[8] As Derrida notes, survival, the 'grieved act of loving', is simultaneously the essence, origin and the condition of possibility of friendship; what is mourned is the interruption of time, meaning that friendship is never fully given, but must be re-performed and reiterated. As such**,** the temporality of friendship implies that friendship only succeeds in effacing itself, according to the different modalities of the *contretemps*.

Contretemps as Transcendentalism?

Deconstruction can be traced back to Heidegger's *Destruktion* of the history of philosophy as a metaphysics of presence. (According to Derrida, all the names that have been used for fundamental principles within this tradition refer to presence, namely: 'eidos, arché, telos, energeia, ousia, aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness or conscience, God, man, and so forth'.[9]) Nevertheless, Derrida, in 'Ousia and Grammē' and in *Of Spirit*, will call into question Heidegger's distinction between the 'vulgar', metaphysical and 'authentic' accounts of time. Yet, while he proposes that it is impossible to think a notion of time different from this one, he describes the *contretemps* as interrupting the time of the present. There are moments in Derrida's writ-

ing, where we, as readers, are left wondering whether, and if so, how, this interpretation of time as interruption serves as a ground or condition from which to think our present. Derrida's account of the *contretemps* and mourning in 'Oligarchies: Naming, Enumerating, Counting' is one such instant, since here he remarks that '*philia* begins with the possibility of survival' (13). This phrase seems to indicate that the aporia of time establishes an ontological necessity that would problematise any philosophy of mediation, recall or recovery. Or, in other words, the phrase '*philia* begins with the possibility of survival' might raise the suspicion that the aporia of the time of friendship constitutes a transcendental paradigm from out of which to think friendship. The question whether this is a correct suspicion amounts to asking whether Derrida, despite renouncing Heidegger's distinction between vulgar and authentic temporality, falls prey to the same logic.[10]

The text 'Ethics and Politics Today' is helpful in this regard. Here, Derrida comments on the strategy of deconstruction; he finds that deconstruction is 'pre-ethical-political' in that it does have a 'pre' as a preliminary prescription.[11] However, he adds that it is, precisely in this sense, 'perhaps' ethical-political, since the preliminary 'pre' that has to go together with each responsible decision (or determination) that could be called responsible, is emphasised. The problem, then, revolves around the question whether we see ourselves confronted with a normativity which, in a paradoxical manner, grants a privilege to a transcendentalism that would condition and structure presence itself, or whether this prescription is tied to a condition of possibility *as* condition of impossibility. If it is the former option, as suggested by Charles Deakin in his paper 'Derrida, Friendship and the Transcendental Priority of the Untimely', he can, as Deakin notes, be classified as having fallen prey to a 'Husserlian pathology'.[12] This means that Derrida would find himself in the same crisis that Husserl had diagnosed in the *Crisis of the European Sciences*. Here, Husserl writes that Europe is sick, in the sense that within its history it has engaged in the kind of thinking that had admitted a *telos* into the *eidos* beforehand. Derrida, in his writings on Husserl, calls this a 'transcendental pathology'. If it is the case that the *contretemps* referring to a temporality that is not present serves as the transcendental condition for the event of friendship, Derrida would have fallen prey to the same logic that Husserl had identified in Europe.[13] The alternative would be a different schema, in which the contretemps interrupts the present time while simultaneously holding on to it. This question warrants a closer look at the signification of the spectre and spectrality in Derrida's work.

Spectre and Spectrality

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida remarks that the French *hantise* is similar to the English *haunting*, but with the added difference that the French also expresses the *return* of spectres, ghosts, spirits (or, in French, the *revenants*).[14] As a noun, *hantise* designates the place that is inhabited by the spirits, spectres, ghosts that keep coming back, and also points to a fear or obsession, or continuous and repetitive acts.[15] *Hantise* furthermore refers to movement, and unfixed passages between time and space, that do not lead to comfort or complacency, but to 'disadjustment of the contemporary' instead.[16] Derrida uses Hamlet's famous phrase 'the time is out of joint' to further clarify how different temporalities remain perpetually dislocated and haunted by each other: past events returning to our present as belonging to the future, and future events arriving into our present that cannot be relegated to the past, and thus do not cease to interrupt the present. All these connotations are combined into the mercurial and ephemeral notion of spectrality, which fragments all totalising aspects of ontology, history, metaphysics and presence. Thus, spectrality does not refer to the idea that the past is alive and working within the living present. Rather, as Fredric Jameson notes in *Ghostly Demarcations*, the 'living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be', implying that we should not count on its 'density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us'.[17]

In tandem with spectrality, Derrida introduces the portmanteau and neologism of 'hauntology' to call into question the limits of what exists: the living and the dead, past and present, and those not yet born. Because the 'h' is silent in French, hauntology and ontology are homophones. In tandem with *différance*, hauntology can be read as another gesture in the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, because Derrida emphasises with this neologism that any ontology is always already hauntology, trembling at the limits of ontological signification, linearity and certainty. Spectrality and hauntology reveal that what has taken place can never be simply relegated to the past, nor can the future be thought in terms of a present. The perspective of the spectre reveals that survival is always exposed to the returns of past deaths and lives to come. Here, we find an experience that is an exposure to the reiteration the aporia of time and thus history, and it is therefore impossible to commit to any transcendental foundation, whether in terms of presence or non-presence, from which a temporal horizon could be determined. To think otherwise, and to commit to an interpretation of the aporia as a condition for presence, would be a gesture of projecting a *telos* onto the undecidable, double movement of survival and, thus, spectrality.

Instead, spectrality reveals how the contretemps is tied to the double movement of condition of possibility as condition of impossibility in the sense that the present can only be thought in terms of its continuous interruption, which means that we are and remain confronted with what Derrida elsewhere calls the 'plural logic of the aporia', since hauntology, and its corresponding spectrality, open an interpretation of time and history that can only be understood in terms of its self-difference to itself.[18] As a consequence, it is impossible to commit to a presence, identity and telos wherein this difference remains gathered. In other words: time cannot be saturated, and therefore cannot be totalised.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997); Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié: suivi de L'Oreille de Heidegger* (Paris: Galilée, 1994). Hereafter, page references to the English translation are given in the text (*PF*).
2. Jacques Derrida, 'Aphorism Countertime', trans. Derek Attridge, in Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 137–42.
3. Just before, Derrida notes that 'there is no friendship without confidence (pístis), and no confidence which does not measure up to some chronology, to the trial of a sensible duration of time'.
4. Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Pascale Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 106.
5. Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 140.
6. Jacques Derrida, 'Living On/Borderlines', in Derrida, *Parages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 103–91 (p. 91).
7. Kas Saghafi, 'Dying Alive', *Mosaic*, 48.3 (2015), 15–26 (p. 21).
8. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 39.
9. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in Human Sciences', in *The Languages of Criticism and The Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), pp. 247–64 (p. 249).
10. A point made by Charles Deakin, 'Derrida, Friendship and the Transcendental Priority of the Untimely', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 36.6 (2010), 663–76 (p. 664); but also by Jack Reynolds, in 'Time out of Joint: Between Phenomenology and Poststructuralism', *Parrhesia*, 9

(2010), 55–64 (p. 57). Reynolds is concerned that, too often, a transcendental critique of vulgar time, and 'other such "chronopathologies"', negotiate on 'claims of necessity that are either speculative' in the sense that such a claim is put forward as necessary, but is, in reality, a weak substitute for a better explanation; or, alternatively, such a critique depends on a 'moral and political tenor' that is associated with it – a situation that Reynolds also characterises as 'an empirico-romanticism' with dogmatist tendencies.

11. Jacques Derrida, 'Ethics and Politics Today', trans. Elisabeth Rottenberg, in Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 295–314 (p. 300).
12. Deakin, 'Derrida, Friendship and the Transcendental Priority of the Untimely', p. 366.
13. See Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 80. Later, in *Rogues*, Derrida will refer to Husserl's statement that even before the Greek explosion of 'infinite telos of scientific and philosophical rationality', and even before the infinite idea in the Kantian sense, and the corresponding universal scientific reason that produces objectivity, there was a form of speculative knowing that had to make people immune to sickness, distress and death. See Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 125.
14. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 11.
15. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 177.
16. Ibid. pp. 99, 101.
17. Fredric Jameson, *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (New York: Verso, 1999), p. 39.
18. Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 20.