12 On Time, and Temporisation; On temporalisation and history

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1. Mode of analysis/modes of givenness

Derrida’s analyses and enquiries always take place inscribed within and between the texts of his predecessors, and interlocutors. It is thus exceptionally difficult to determine where his thinking begins and ends, and where the thought of the other arrives. This holds with especial force in the domain of a thinking about time, where an inarticulable time of the unconscious, a time before the genesis of conscious life, is a precondition for, and repressed component of conscious thought. Derrida thus sets up one kind of text as the placeholder for the unrecognised and unrecognisable conditions of possibility for another kind of text whereby a temporality, which cannot be acknowledged in the one, is articulated in the other. This procedure is especially in evidence in Of Grammatology (1967) and in The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and beyond (1980), for which time and its temporisation are key concerns. The connection between time, and its temporisation, in modes of givenness, conscious and unconscious, is very much a theme for phenomenological enquiry, one which Derrida puts in question by indicating that in advance of any thesis, there must already be available a system, or systems, of formulation and presentation, of inscription, and transmission, providing a prosthetic enablement, in which to register and communicate any such thesis about time, and its temporisation. This notion of an originary prosthesis comes to the fore in Derrida’s biographical text, The Monolingualism of the Other: Of the Original Prosthesis (1997), but is detected by Bernard Stiegler, in his extended study Technics and Time (2001) as at work already in Of Grammatology (1967).

Temporalisation and history, by contrast, arrive in the modes of publicly given time, and of collective experience, to which institutions and nations bear witness. This is a time of community and intersubjectivity, with the possibility of conflicting accounts and structures, of
an originary *polemos* concerning time and being. Here already an originary prosthesis comes into contact with an originary *polemos*, and both are held in place, or suspended, between meaning and meaninglessness by the question concerning the meaning of time. Derrida’s discussions of time and of history are thus held in place by the play between these various forces, as complicated by Martin Heidegger’s intervention concerning being and time. In *Being and Time* (1927) Heidegger describes how a failure to provide an adequate analysis of time leads to a forgetting of the question concerning the meaning of being, from which philosophy begins. As a result, metaphysics takes its fixed form, attempting to provide an atemporal and omnitemporal specification of what there is: being, as the mode of givenness of what there is, gets covered over again. By doubling the questioning of time by a questioning of its mode of givenness (*temporisation*), and by doubling this question about temporisation by questioning temporalisations (the modes of givenness of history, which include all the forms of writing and inscription, archaeology and decryption), it is possible to open up a form of enquiry in which this forgetting can be thematised, without eroding its status as forgetting, opening it up for discussion and analysis. This Derrida achieves by respecting an autonomy for literary, for psychoanalytical and for political economic descriptions alongside the supposedly master discourses of the philosophers, or encyclopaedists. Derrida can thus read Kant and Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, Freud and Levinas alongside each other, without reducing the terms of the one to the terms of the other. These are the strategies adopted to provide modes of analysis which can respect a many layered structure of time, with alternating and conflicting modes of grasping what time is, rather than imposing a single systematic structure.

Temporalisation provides motivations for the framing of histories, and their participants, as falling into certain phases; history frames the passage of time by marking up certain events and processes for attention. Thus, attention to temporalisation and to history draws attention to ways of breaking up the otherwise even flow of a passage of time into certain phases or epochs; palaeolithic and neolithic, Greek and Roman, Christian and Moslem. The obviously political register of the latter recedes in the attention to the detail of conscious processes in the former; by implication, the play of forces (which make some voices more powerful than others) is relegated to the margin. Derrida underlines the manner in which a certain history of philosophy covers over its own political heritage, in a disavowal of political heritage. The prosthetic moment of enablement privileges the transmissions of one set of texts and enquiries, in one set of languages, under the apparently neutral
description, the love of wisdom. He also points out how this history and transmission has repeatedly been rescued from immobilisation and irrelevance, by opening itself up to the disruptive forces once excluded from it. He reads the possibility of his own inclusion within that history and transmission as evidence both for the possibility of such opening, and of the strength of the forces that continually seek to resist such opening. This is the context for his reflections on time and history, and on the distinct play of forces in temporisation: the arrivals, delays, and de-synchronisations of time, and in temporalisation, the assigning of meaning to time, in the construction of historical frameworks. The phenomenology of Edmund Husserl can be seen to attend more to the constitution of time through the processes of temporisation; that of Hegel to the constitution of history through the attending and giving meaning to the processes of framing temporalisations.

2. Twentieth-Century Context

Derrida attends to a series of responses to the presentations, and representations of time provided by Hegel and by Kant, and to thematisations of time offered in phenomenology, starting with the close study of genesis in Husserl’s phenomenology. For some versions of these, those not informed by a transcendental turn, there is a privilege granted to the immediate contents of consciousness, and a presumption that at some level all such consciousness is alike. The challenge posed to this last presumption, under the various titles of otherness, alterity and post-coloniality reveals the hidden political stakes of the Derridean discussion of time. These two modes of registering time, as presentation and as representation are explored by Kant and by Hegel, and the history of twentieth-century philosophy may be inscribed in the gap which opens up between them, into which the Husserlian notion of the epoche (bracketing taken-for-granted evidences), the Heideggerian Ereignis (the turning in which determinate order and meaning arrives), the Levinasian trace and Derridean difference arrive to complicate any sense that there is some choice to be made here. Neither the monumentalising of a definitive Darstellung (of presentation), nor the serial self-modifications of corrigible Vorstellung (or representation), can do justice to the workings of time, nor yet to the manner in which the entire framework within which time is conceived rotates in the course of the twentieth century, from a renunciation of any special status for the Christian inheritance in thinking about time at the beginning of the century, to a recognition in the last years of the century that there is an inheritance here to be discussed. This provides the backdrop for Derrida’s discussions with
Jean-Luc Marion on the gift, and with Jean-Luc Nancy on touching, and makes possible an opening up to a non-European, non-Christian, non-metaphysical exteriority. It is this movement of opening to which Derrida attends in his patient readings of the texts of the tradition.

3. Early Moves

There are three key early texts which provide an orientation for Derrida’s discussions of time, temporisation, temporalisation and history: the lectures “Différance”, and “The Ends of Man”, delivered in January and April, 1968, respectively, and the long essay “Ousia and gramme: Note on a Note in Being and Time”, also first appearing in 1968, all of which are subsequently published in Margins of Philosophy, the collection of essays and lectures from 1972, which arrived in English in 1982. The essay, “Ousia and gramme” is especially noteworthy since it inserts, into a footnote in Heidegger’s Being and Time, a discussion of Heidegger’s attempt to frame an entire history of thinking, into the passage between Aristotle and Hegel. “Ousia”, meaning unchanging properties, and gramme, the letter of Of Grammatology (1967) are juxtaposed by Derrida to suggest that while thinking may seek to reiterate the one true thinking of substance, as ousia, arriving in a “now” of comprehension and formulation, the gramme (point, line, trace, or letter) of its formulation or presentation introduces an irresistible slippage of meaning, marking up a passage of time. The essay thus draws attention to the paradox, or aporia, of presupposing a privilege to this “now” time of time, in order to provide a non-restricted account of time. From a possible thinking of time as the source of meaning, time is reduced first to a ready-to-hand resource, and then to a present-at-hand marker of position. While discussions of the contrasting analyses of time and of history provided by G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) and of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) are of course pivotal here, the trajectory of Derrida’s thinking makes sense only if set into the wider frame of the subsequent discussions of memory and mourning, of the pre-discursive “thing” and “real” of psychoanalytical observation, and in relation to the writings of Maurice Blanchot, and Paul de Man. Derrida develops analyses of the disputed givenness of time, death, and meaning, in the trio of texts, Donner le temps (Given Time: 1: Counterfeit Money) (1990), Donner la mort (The Gift of Death) (1991, 1999) and Aporias: Dying-awaiting (one another at) the limits of truth (1993); and he invokes the anticipatory structure of the a-venir, as early as the essay: “Of an apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy”, a title citing a remark of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). This last was delivered by Derrida at the conference

These discussions of time and temporisation, temporalisation and history also need to be placed back into the ongoing encounter with Husserl’s phenomenology, starting in 1954, which Derrida states in his thesis defence, “Time of the Thesis; Punctuations” (1980), had never ceased to be important for him. This encounter returns to inform his response to Jean-Luc Nancy in On Touching: Jean Luc Nancy (2000), as it does his discussions with Jean-Luc Marion, of the donation and the gift of time/death and with Bernard Stiegler, concerning technicity, as originary prosthesis. The implication that every thesis, or noesis (as lived experience or mental content), grounding themes and meanings, is preceded by an implied and unexamined prosthesis, or pre-predicative impression is plain. In the background there is also an important dispute concerning the status of Marx’s writings, as political analysis, and of Marxism, as an account of history. Derrida adopts a certain distance to Marx and the various available versions of “Actually Existing Socialism” and of Communism available before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the dissolution of Soviet Russian, adopting a more direct engagement after 1989, notably in Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International (1993). There Derrida analyses the claim that Marxism has not yet happened, with a circulation of debt and exchange to be displaced in favour of an analysis of an undischarged work of mourning, anticipating a new dawn, in the New Internationalism of the title. The key here is to situate Derrida’s interventions in a conjuncture of this thinking of time, of mourning and memory, in the unconscious, or pre-conscious modes of registration, as pursued by Freud, Husserl, and indeed Levinas, with disputes concerning the status of a concept of history, which arrives more emphatically in the context of the writings of de Man, Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy.

There are three distinct logics through which the discussion of time is pursued by Derrida: a logic of beginnings and ends; a logic of the gift; and their impossible conjugation in a logic of that which happens, the “a-venir”, of a messianic time without messianism. This articulates an inherited disjunction between a thinking of time, as pure moment, and a thinking of history, as pure event. The cumulative effect of Derrida’s encounters with these various other thinkers, of his writings and of his enquiries more generally, is to reveal that what happens is the impossible future reconciliation of the contrary forces of a breaking open of time, in which meaning arrives, with a history of the continuities in which meaning is embalmed. There now follow two sections exploring in more detail a logic of morning and evening, beginning and end, first and last,
as analysed in these three earlier texts; and a logic of the gift: on time, death, mourning, which, as Derrida remarks in the Foreword to *Given Time: 1: Counterfeit Money*, comes to the forefront of his thinking in the course of the seventies.

### 4. Morning and Evening, Beginning and End, First and Last

The lecture “*Différance*”, 1968, introduced the neologism, which cannot be heard, but can be detected only when written. This device invited its audience to consider the manner in which an understanding of what has been said arrives only with a lapse of time, and, in this case, only when the written version becomes available, such that the acoustic ambiguity can be resolved. “The Ends of Man” was delivered to a conference in the United States, in April, 1968, and it invites a thinking of the contrast between two notions of ending: the end as completion, in a Hegelian teleology of concepts; as opposed to an end, as break up of continuity, in a triumph of global technology, envisioned in Heidegger’s analyses of a movement of nihilism. These contrasting notions of ends are twinned by a fleeting invocation, at the end of the lecture, of contrasting notions of *la veille*, the vigil, night watch, wake, or day before, in which there arrives either the completed Hegelian concept, at the flight at dusk of Minerva’s owl; or the new day of a Nietzschean self-overcoming; or, implicitly, the day of days, the last judgment, *jungste Gericht*, of the Book of Revelations. The implied reading of Heidegger is split between these two notions of end, as completion, or end, as inauguration, or indeed as both together, for Derrida emphasises that there can be no question of choosing between them. For Heidegger, in the mode of *Gelassenheit* (an abandonment of entities by the being from which they spring) there is an end of philosophy and completion of metaphysics, which marks a new inception, in an “other beginning”.

These contrasting concepts of beginnings and ends, the temporising of philosophy, are then complicated by Derrida’s questioning of the temporality of concepts: are they given in time, are they marked by the passage of time, or are they immune to time’s transformative effects? Plato’s concept of *psyche* works as a device ensuring a moment of eternity in human reasoning, giving human beings access to timeless truths. Freud’s re-theorisation of the temporality and constitution of *psyche* thus acquires philosophical significance, once it is granted that the processes through which concepts acquire determinacy are themselves in process of acquiring determinacy. This doubling of the question of the temporalisation to which concepts and meaning, reasoning and understanding are prone, is addressed in one way by Hegel (1770–1831) and in
another by Husserl (1859–1938). The central contestation of “The Ends of Man” is then to reveal an implicit appeal to the finite time of human lives, in a covert humanism, at work in the phenomenologies of Hegel, of Husserl and even of Heidegger, and which is then put in dispute by a confrontation between the analyses of Jean Paul Sartre (1905–80), as humanist Marxist, and of Michel Foucault (1930–84), as genealogist of the present, whose Les Mots et les Choses (The Order of Things) appeared in 1966. Thus the lecture “The Ends of Man” provides a reading of these competing strands of phenomenology into which it is possible to place the discussion of time and meaning provided for a more specialist audience in the earlier lecture: “Différance”. A non-finite time of conceptual determinacy, it is suggested, is covertly derived from, or dependent on a finite time, of the temporising of human existing, and the temporalities of human histories.

“The Ends of Man” also sets up contrasting readings of Immanuel Kant’s account of the status of moral concepts and imperatives: whether or not conceptual determinacy in these matters is available to human beings in history, or whether it is available only at the level of the stance of eternity. Out of the dynamic generated by these contrasting readings of Kant, Derrida subsequently derives his distinctive logic of impossible conditions of possibility: for beings in time, such as human beings, only what falls into time is available as determinable objects of thought, but such objects of thought are transient, not fixed and determinate, and are thus not determinable objects of thought. In “The Ends of Man” Derrida frames the discussion by putting into play the contrasting readings of Kant and of theorisings of time, of temporality and of history offered by Sartrean Marxism, and by Foucauldian genealogy; it invokes the contrasting notions of endings and beginnings, in play in the writings of, at least, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Kant, Nietzsche, Sartre and Foucault. However, this list of authorities in dispute is complicated in advance by the alternate list provided in the first published version of the lecture “Différance”, which offers an implicit genealogy for the concept of that in which this thinking is formulated, the gramme, or “trace”, which prompts the inauguration of this term, ‘neither a word, nor a concept’, différance. In the preface to that lecture, published, but not pronounced, in the original 1968 version Derrida invokes the writings of Nietzsche and Freud, de Saussure and Levinas, and Heidegger; he then goes on, in both the published version and in the lecture as delivered, to contrast the two senses of the Latin term differre, as a slippage of meaning within a given temporal structure, and as a slippage in the temporal structure itself, where a time lapse is constitutive of the effect or meaning in question. The emphasis on the “A” of différance functions as a marker
of an ambiguity, which cannot be heard, but which must be read to be understood. This difference within *differre* operates from the start: that is, from the beginning of the very system of inscription, the alphabet. This beginning however is restricted from the start to those systems of meaning that make use of the Latin, Greek and Hebrew scripts, with the letters “α”, alpha, aleph.

For Kant, temporal ordering has the markers of simultaneity, succession and co-existence, rendering it linear and disambiguated. According to the Derridean reception of the notion of the trace, this temporal ordering is to be complicated by allowing for the workings of chance, of delay and of a necessary incompletion. He challenges the Kantian notion of time as the form of inner sense: he surmises that the temporisations of understanding, as a series of impressions, are already spatialised in a way that threatens the linearity, both of time, and of the results of the working of the understanding. Derrida shows that the orderliness of these results is secured and maintained only when they are committed to writing, with the added implication that the processes of formulation as written record contributes substantively to that ordering, and to setting up the resulting marks of consistency and completeness. In the place of time and space, as the forms of inner and outer sense, securing and ordering the results of the workings of the understanding, Derrida substitutes the temporisation of those processes, in which an inheritance of claims to knowledge is preserved, transmitted and received only in the writings to which their inventors have consigned them. Those results are then subject to the vagaries of the adequacy of their formulation, the stability of the meanings of the terms in which they are formulated and the capacity of the inheritors to understand what is transmitted. This then is the originary prosthesis that permits time to appear linear and ordered.

Derrida marks up a link in the writings of Freud between processes of inscription and those of a delayed impact (*Nachtraeglichkeit*), conveyed in the dreamwork and in writing as the transmission of meaning. These considerations then provide a context for responding to the third source, the essay “*Ousia and gramme: Note on a Note in Being and Time*”. The note in question is from the closing pages of *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger’s incomplete treatise under that title. In the reception of Greek thought, as organised through the Christian reception, *ousia* (which may remain concealed), is standardly contrasted to a notion of *parousia*, used to capture the distinctiveness of the coming of Christ, in which the Godhead is revealed as flesh. In *parousia*, what might remain concealed in the mode of *ousia* is made evident in an actual appearing. Here, the temporising of philosophy is marked up in a Christian retrieval of a
Greek term, in the newly forged context of Christian faith. This then introduces the notion of the modes of givenness of time, and of being, which constitutes the main preoccupation of the various phenomenologies of the last century. While these various phenomenologies pay attention to the manner in which distinct modes of temporisation inflect the workings of consciousness and the formation of meaning, the analysis of literary activity, by Blanchot and by de Man, reveals how time is captured in the formulations of the literary text. This meaning then acquires the contrary status of a fixity and determinacy, by contrast to the fluidity distinctive of the processes of its initial formulation. The move from unfixed, to a fixing of meaning is to be contrasted to a move from a fixity of self-evidence about the passing and constitution of time, to a dissolution of such fixity in Husserl’s texts. This unfixing leads into the radical disruption of all thinking, in the aporetics of time, as traced out by Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida. These contrary movements are powerfully at work in Derrida’s texts on the gift, on death and on mourning.

5. The Debt/Gift: on time, death, mourning

In Given Time 1: Counterfeit Money, there is a discussion of the logic of the gift as marked from the beginning by the distinction between restricted and general economy, and by the inflections on the notion of the “es” in the Heideggerian phrase “es gibt” (“it gives” or “there is”). Derrida refers back to his own essay on ousia and gramme, and explores how this logic binds together the analyses of Heidegger on time and being to the reflections of Georges Bataille and of Freud on a distinction between self-preserving restricted economies, and self-abandoning general economies in which an initiating ‘es’ is not preserved. The economy of an exchange of value, in which the gift is returned, and a potlatch economy, in which what is given is dispersed, ties the analysis up to Marx’s analyses and disputes concerning the functioning of capitalism: whether it functions through exchanges of value, supported by the extraction of surplus value, or through a willingness to push the system to the point of the destruction of value. These three strands, that of Marx, those of Freud and Bataille on the death drive that annihilates its bearer, and the logic of life, requiring a complete emptying out of energy, leading not to death but to an end of life itself, and that of Heidegger place the enquiry on the level of one about the very viability of humanity and its history. This suggests that there is no guarantee of a continuation of time and of history, in which conflict and meaning may work themselves out. This context is then complicated in The Gift of
Death by the arrival of a dispute between Judaism and Christianity on how to understand Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, at the behest of his God. A singular status is claimed by Kierkegaard in his analyses in Fear and Trembling (1844) for this sacrificial dedication of all creation to its creator, in which a religion is founded, and it then also marks the possibility of a re-founding of religion, a re-dedication of creation to its creator, in the New Covenant of Christianity.

This singular status, and its possible repetition, is distributed by Derrida across all experience, under the gnomic phrase: tout autre est tout autre: all otherness is wholly other, the title of the fourth section of The Gift of Death. There is no commonality, least of all a shared time of experience; there is no common moment of a founding sacrifice. Religious bonds are revealed to be contingent, not binding. This is then underlined by the logic of mourning, where one always predeceases the other, subverting the sense that there is at least some co-existing in time. The dispute would then be whether to read Aporias (1993), or Specters of Marx as the third text in the triad, or whether rather to read them in conjunction. For Aporias revisits Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein, from Being and Time, and seeks to demarcate a difference between a metaphysics of death, reading death as that which might determine an essence of Dasein, and Heidegger’s own delimitation of the existential analytic by marking up Dasein’s relation to itself as determinately thrown projection, stretched out between birth and death. Specters of Marx opens up the horizon of Marx and Marxism, not as piece of history, a nineteenth-century contribution to political economy, and a twentieth-century reinvention of revolution, but as a promise of another kind of futurity. Thus in Specters a messianic time of transformation, without the messianism of either Judaism or of the various available Christianities, is marked up as the contribution to an innovation in thinking time, which might form a commonality between Marxism, those of both Marx and Lenin, Engels and Stalin, and phenomenology, that of both Husserl and Heidegger, of Nancy and Marion. Derrida situates a thinking of time on the edge of the known conjuncture between limited modes of enquiry and given forms writing: the literary, and the psychoanalytic, the political, and the economic, the religious, and the philosophical. There is thus for Derrida no concept of time; there are texts in which the traces of a possible futurity are to be marked in tenses which have not yet been inscribed within received systems of conjugation.
When it comes to mourning, it is always tempting to want to begin at the end, as if mourning began only right after or perhaps just before the death or disappearance of the one we love, cherish, or admire. Unable myself to resist this temptation, let me begin this brief essay with some of Derrida’s reflections from right near the end of his life, on the threshold, so to speak, of death, when the question of mourning appears to have been foremost in his thoughts. In a public discussion with Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in Strasbourg on 9 June 2004, that is, just four months before his death, Derrida speaks of inheritance, survival, and, thus, mourning from the perspective of someone who seems to have known that the end was near.

In my anticipation of death, in my relation to a death to come, a death that I know will completely annihilate me and leave nothing of me behind, there is just below the surface a testamentary desire, a desire that something survive, get left behind or passed on—an inheritance or something that I myself can lay no claim to, that will not return to me, but that will, perhaps, remain. …

(D2 93: my translation)

Nothing would seem to be less extraordinary, more ordinary, than this desire to be remembered and, thus, mourned by means of the traces or memories we leave behind. Though keenly aware that what will be remembered and mourned will not be him exactly, since death, as he says, will annihilate the self to whom such memories could ever again be attached, Derrida nonetheless desires to leave traces behind him, traces and, thus, heirs to inherit and to mourn. These traces would of course include his many books, articles, and interviews, the many marks he will have left on the history of philosophy, but also, Derrida goes on to say, “ordinary or everyday gestures,” anything that