



## A Passage toward the Other: The Legacy of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

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~ ERIC WHITE ~

Derrida: ‘In general, I try to distinguish between what one calls the future and ‘*l’avenir*.’ The future is that which—tomorrow, later, next century—will be. There’s a future that is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, *l’avenir* (to come), which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future beyond the other known future, it’s *l’avenir* in that it’s the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival.’<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing remarks, spoken at the very beginning of the recent documentary film *Derrida*, may be glossed with reference to the case of Derrida himself. Who could have anticipated the arrival of Jacques Derrida on the intellectual scene more than four decades ago? Who can predict what the future of his thought may be now that he has departed? Memorably characterized by Geoffrey Hartman as the “most inventive of a generation of inventive French thinkers,” Derrida ranged widely across the disciplines over the course of his career as he pursued a philosophic project that was never simply the recurrence of Pyrrhonian skepticism for which it was sometimes mistaken, however important the struggle with dogmatism and idolatrous fixation may have been for him.<sup>2</sup> As he put it himself, deconstruction must be “inventive or it is nothing at all,” must facilitate a way out of the impasse of the present toward the unforeseeable future signified by *l’avenir*. Derrida therefore proposed to practice deconstruction as a form of writing “liable to the other, opened to and by the other, to the work of the other; it is writing working at not letting itself be enclosed or dominated by [the] economy of the same,” that allows “the adventure or the event of the entirely other to come.”<sup>3</sup>

The metaphorical significance of “otherness” will no doubt vary depending upon the context of its application, but Derrida attaches a quite specific attribute to this term when he goes on to stipulate that the “call of the other is a call to come, and that happens only in multiple voices.” We might interpret Derrida’s proviso here as the programmatic affirmation of precisely the sort of dialogical engagement with his writings that this special issue of *The European Legacy* hopes to promote. The current issue on the legacy of Jacques Derrida assembles a distinguished company of scholars from diverse disciplines



who present their own unforeseeably various responses to Derrida's work as they reflect upon the significance of his oeuvre for the respective fields of learning in which they are most active. We hope in this way to contribute to a renewed engagement on the part of the international intellectual community with the multifarious implications of Derridean thought for contemporary cultural life. Herewith, then, a "passage toward the other" in multiple voices: a sampling of assessments, extrapolations and appropriations attesting to the extraordinary breadth of Derrida's legacy as it pertains to manifold areas of study, from philosophy, literature, and religion, to ethics and political theory, to science and technology.<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, *Derrida: Screenplay and Essays on the Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 53.
2. *Ibid.*, 9.
3. Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 42, 61.
4. *Ibid.*, 62, 60.