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The Image of Mourning: on Melancholic Militancy and Remembrance[1]

Abstract

In this article, I present Jacques Derrida's reflections on melancholy in the context of his thought of mourning and juxtapose them with ethical dilemmas regarding the image of the (dead) other by focusing on the mournsome character of photography. By adopting Derrida's conclusion that the work of mourning cannot be successful and melancholy always marks both its teleological failure and structural impossibility, I demonstrate why melancholy as an abnormal yet necessary condition of egoic life should presuppose originary non-presence of the (dead) other. Furthermore, I argue why melancholy, rather than being treated solely as a pathological condition, must be thought of in terms of survival, ethical revolt, and a militant challenge to memory.

Keywords

Mourning, Deconstruction, Spectrality, Melancholy, Survival

> It will always be necessary that still living mortals bury the already dead living.
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> Derrida 2006, 143

> We are already specters of a "televised."
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> Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 117

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> My first desire is not to produce a philosophical work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory.
>
> Derrida 1995, 143

To begin with, I wish to write about an image. A particular kind of image: a photograph. Not just any photograph, one among many, but probably the first one. The first photograph in which I saw Jacques Derrida's face. For the very first time, long after his death, I saw him sitting in a chair, wearing a black shirt, his collar unbuttoned, his eyes—eyes of someone playing a tragedy or of an actor in a French neo-noir film—fixed on the place behind the camera, the "out of sight" place, always occupied by photographers and spectators. It was a black and white photograph in which his white hair and his skin a few tones less light stood in sharp contrast with the darkness of the room's interior. Now, I cannot find this image anywhere but in my memory. Yet, since it haunts my memory, am I to infer that I mourn Jacques Derrida?

In his essay "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" (Derrida 2001, 49), which was also a farewell and a homage to his late friend, Jacques Derrida describes three possible types of relation to the "author" whom we "read," whom we sometimes admire, or write about. The first type involves an author who is not only a person whose work we read but also someone we have met, loved, or still love: someone with whom we have been or are involved in a personal relationship, someone who has departed or is still alive. In the second type, the "author" can be someone we know only through their work but who is alive, and we still have a chance of meeting them, a chance to create a personal bond. The third kind of relationship is that with an "author" who had died before we read their work or became acquainted with their ideas or views. Nonetheless, in some "hybrid" cases, we may have an opportunity to hear the "author's" recorded voice, look at their published photos, or meet them "by proxy": via someone who knew them personally. The list of such eventualities may go on, yet, interestingly, none of those situations seems to exclude the possibility of mourning the "author." In fact—mourning becomes a necessity since we are implicated in it. Why is it then possible—and even inevitable?

I am aware that such a statement might open a lengthy discussion on signature, idiom, and name, which is beyond the scope of this text. However, suppose we follow Derrida in assuming that the "author" (whom we know by name or whose image we have seen) is given to death when his singularity or uniqueness is mediated in language or repeated in an image. In that case, we will observe that the name or the photograph points the "author" out, thus reasserting its capacity to function in a structure of repetitions and mutual references of signifiers—of generalities that can denote this particular, unique "author" *in absentia*. Even if they are still alive, this name or photograph "bears" their death because it will probably survive after their passing, and therefore it lends itself to being grafted in(to) any context or used in any situation: "[...] his name can survive him and already survives him; the name begins during his life to get along without him [...]" (Derrida 1989, 49). That is why Derrida argues that naming already involves "a foreshadowing of mourning," which implies "[...] something like the knowledge of being mortal and even the feeling that one is dying. To have already died of being promised to death: dying" (Derrida 2008, 20). Consequently, when the "author" is looking at their name written on a sheet of paper, or at a photograph of themselves, in a way they are experiencing their own death—or even deaths since names or images have their reproductive and spectral powers. "The name alone makes possible the plurality of deaths" (Derrida 2001, 46), Derrida writes.

In a sense, they experience a "micro-version" of their death in each such situation. Derrida links this experience not only with the uncanny character of name or image (which both are different kinds of *archi-écriture* and essentially are traces left behind) but also with the condition of an irresistible and impossible urge to write, to leave behind him some trace of a life once lived:

> The trace I leave signifies to me at once my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the hope that this trace survives me. This is not a striving for immortality; it's something structural. I leave a piece of paper behind, I go away, I die: it is impossible to escape this structure, it is the unchanging form of my life. Each time I let something go, each time some trace leaves me, "proceeds" from me, unable to be reappropriated, I live my death in writing. It's the ultimate test: one expropriates oneself without knowing exactly who is being entrusted with what is left behind. Who is going to inherit, and how? Will there even be any heirs? (Derrida 2007b, 32-33)

The Power of the Image

While looking at a photograph, a disturbing absence of someone either dead or out of sight confronts me. Yet, the image simultaneously points to the absent other—and out to nowhere. It renders their absence both present and multiplied—haunting and unsettling. Because this bygone instant has been captured in black and white, now it can be represented apart from itself as an image, maybe in more than just one copy, reproduced (and sometimes circulated) just like that photograph of Derrida, available not only for one pair of eyes. Such an image is a field of mediation between the secrecy of the singular other and the generality of signs, figures, language, lights, and shadows.[2] By trying to express the exceptionality, the photograph turns the idiomaticity of its referent into something perceptible yet impalpable, something that allows us to share and repeat this absent origin of gazing upon us and the world, a unique source of phenomenality. Nonetheless, this absolute singularity resists complete appropriation. It "[...] punctures the surface of the reproduction—and even the production—of analogies, likenesses, and codes. It pierces, strikes me, wounds me, bruises me, and, first of all, seems to concern only me" (Derrida 2001, 39). The referent addressing themselves through reference—or rather something less graspable and direct… something like sending off, a referral or simply a *renvoi*—demands the attention of the spectator, at the same moment imposing themselves, escaping complete perception and appropriation, drawing the spectator into mourning.

> But it is always the singularity of the other insofar as it comes to me without being directed towards me, without being present to me; and the other can even be "me," me having been or having had to be, me already dead in the future anterior and past anterior of my photograph (Derrida 2001, 39).

A few pages later, Derrida goes on:

> Contrapuntal theory or a procession of stigmata: a wound no doubt comes in (the) place of the point signed by singularity, in (the) place of its very instant (*stigmē*), at its point, its tip. But in (the) place of this event, place is given over, for the same wound, to substitution, which repeats itself there, retaining of the irreplaceable only a past desire (Derrida 2001, 67).

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[2] There is another strikingly odd thing about the image of the other, which also, paradoxically, pulls us into mourning. The image, or at least a face in the image, does not get old. It shows no signs of wearing away. Yet, undoubtedly, it marks a place of absence, and despite its resistance to the passage of time, its immutability only exacerbates the sense of mortality. That is why Susan Sontag calls photography "the inventory of mortality": "For us, the more interesting abrasions are not of stone but of flesh. Through photographs we follow in the most intimate, troubling way the reality of how people age. [...] Photographs show people being so irrefutably *there* and at a specific age in their lives [...]. Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people" (Sontag 2007, 54-55).

Thus, by pointing at the singularity of the other, we are no longer pointing at some instance of pure presence, at something once fully present and now lost, at something once purely present and therefore—at least potentially—retrievable or appropriable. Singularity, as Derrida puts it, "is announced in a paradoxical experience" (Derrida 1992, 68) that never allows one to comprehend what it manifests fully. What passes for the present in such an experience has to be divisible for the archive to be constituted, to remain, to survive, and refer to "a non-reproductible referent, an irreplaceable place" (Derrida 2010b, 3). The image or the double splits what it represents to the point that any speculation about the simple origin has to be suspended. Consequently, the reliance of presentation on representation and iterability turns a simple source of presence into a difference and forgetting of the simple origin (Derrida 1997, 36-37). As Derrida stresses in his meditations on *gramme* and *stigmē*, "[p]resence, then, far from being, as is commonly thought, what the sign signifies, what a trace refers to, presence, then, is the trace of the trace, the trace of the erasure of the trace" (Derrida 1984, 66). Thus, the *stigma*

> [...] not only is divided, but has to divide and repeat itself, authenticity is exposed to the technical [*la technique*]. Here, however, the technical is not a threat to authenticity, not a negative accident, but rather the condition of the effect of authenticity (Derrida, Ferraris 2001, 72).

Derrida means that the other's appearance relies on the movement of iteration and technology in the broadest sense. Rather than being externally added to presence, technology constitutes it, at the same time generating spectrality. From that point of view, one can never establish a simple origin of reproduction or iteration: there is no pure presence as the source of appearance but only a chain of apparitions of something that cannot ever appear as such. "There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed" (Derrida 2006, 5), Derrida argues, adding in *Echographies of Television* that specter is something visible that is not present in flesh and body: "[i]t is a night visibility. As soon as there is a technology of the image, visibility brings night. It incarnates in a night body, it radiates a night light" (Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 115). There, he also gives a genuinely moving example of this spectral effect, a testimony to his intimate work of mourning. In 1982, Derrida appeared in an experimental film *Ghost Dance*. He played himself in a couple of scenes shared with a young French actress Pascale Ogier, who died tragically just two years later. In a conversation on spectrality, Derrida remembers when he was asked to watch the movie again a couple of years after Ogier's death:

> Suddenly I saw Pascale's face, which I knew was a dead woman's face, come onto the screen. She answered my question: "Do you believe in ghosts?" Practically looking me in the eye, she said to me again, on the big screen: "Yes, now I do, yes." Which now? Years later in Texas. I had the unnerving sense of the return of her specter, the specter of her specter coming back to say to me—to me here, now: "Now… now… now, that is to say, in this dark room on another continent, in another world, here, now, yes, believe me, I believe in ghosts."
>
> But at the same time, I know that the first time Pascale said this, already, when she repeated this in my office, already, this spectrality was at work. It was already there, she was already saying this, and she knew, just as we know, that even if she hadn't died in the interval, one day, it would be a dead woman who said, "I am dead," or "I am dead, I know what I'm talking about from where I am, and I'm watching you," and this gaze remained dissymmetrical, exchanged beyond all possible exchange, eye-line without eye-line, the eye-line of a gaze that fixes and looks for the other, its other, its counterpart [*vis-à-vis*], the other gaze met, in an infinite night (Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 120).

Thus, every moment—from meeting somebody's eye to looking at their image—is marked by spectrality and melancholic mourning. Furthermore, one can never avoid the necessity that, from the outset, taints every encounter with death and absence, delivering the other to the iterable trace. Nothing and nobody can therefore appear in full light. As Derrida states in *The Post Card*, "[t]here, there is only twilight and mid-mourning" (Derrida 1987, 195). The image is, therefore, a form of *skiagraphia*, shadow writing—which Derrida mentions in *Memoires of the Blind*—that calls for blindness and requires the technics of memory within every act of perception (Derrida 1993b, 51), depriving the latter of its autonomy, synchrony or adequacy and submitting it to melancholy as a condition rooted in the experience of irrecoverable loss: of something that is committed to loss and has to be kept as lost (which as such is a task of impossible fidelity). A photograph, an image, a play of shadow and light that captures and "immortalizes" some instant at the same time passes a death sentence: "This will have to die, the *mise en demeure* is underway" (Derrida 2010a, 27). That is why, in contrast to mere personal nostalgia, melancholy "marks a certain essence of historical experience or, if you prefer, the meaning or sense for history" (Derrida 2010a, 39). In this experience, the role of photography must appear as exceptional. As John Berger observes, "[p]hotography, because it preserves the appearance of an event or a person, has always been closely associated with the idea of the historical" (Berger 1980, 47).

Hence, a difference between shadow and light, a difference in light, as Derrida argues, is "perhaps the first possibility of the trace" (Derrida 2010b, 16), which makes its movement "a priori photographic" (Derrida 2010b, 17).

Furthermore, the essential reliance on the "prosthetic" iterability of the trace means that the relation between passivity and activity in the "act" of perception has to be complicated, and once technics are involved, both activity and passivity cannot be thought of conventionally: "In perception there are already operations of selection, of exposure time, of filtering, of development; the psychic apparatus functions also *like*, or *as*, an apparatus of inscription and of the photographic archive" (Derrida 2010b, 15).[3]

This entire principle holds even in the case of the self-portrait. Derrida argues that an effort of the painter to recapture himself is already an act of memory. What the painter thereby faces is a specter, a ruin of himself, already fleeting away. "All symmetry is interrupted between him and himself, between him, the spectacle, and the spectator who he also is. There are now only specters" (Derrida 1993b, 68). In other words, the appearance of the spectacle is conditioned by its originary absence, it relies on the technological supplement, which is anything but merely subservient to memory. The same argument can be found in *Of Grammatology*:

> [t]he duplication of the thing in the painting, and already in the brilliance of the phenomenon where it is present, guarded and regarded, maintained, however slightly, facing the regard and under the regard, opens appearance as the absence of the thing in its self-sameness [*propre*] and its truth. There is never a painting of the thing itself and first of all because there is no thing itself. [...] The original possibility of the image is the supplement; which adds itself without adding anything to fill an emptiness which, within fullness, begs to be replaced (Derrida 1997, 292).

Therefore, as Derrida claims, every portrait, particularly the self-portrait, is already a portrait of ruins.

> The failure to recapture the presence of the gaze outside of the abyss into which it is sinking is not an accident or weakness; it illustrates or rather figures the very chance of the work, the specter of the invisible that the work lets be seen without ever presenting. [...] The ruin does not supervene like an accident upon a monument that was intact only yesterday. In the beginning there is ruin. Ruin is that which happens to the image from the moment of the first gaze (Derrida 1993b, 68).

If preservation or maintenance relies structurally on the iterability of the trace, then what is preserved or maintained is essentially precarious; it is already mortal and given to infinite mourning (*cf.* Derrida 2002, 278). That is why Derrida describes the love of ruins, namely, of something fragile and mortal, love between mortal beings, inscribed in the structure of survival—the only love possible—as "a priori melancholic": "[b]ecause it is love of something or someone one knows one will lose, whether the other dies or I die" (Derrida 2017, 158).

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[3] It would make the photographic mechanism (the mechanism of the delay without return) a metonymy for the whole psychical apparatus, the functioning of which Derrida describes already in 1966, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," with the help of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.

Thus, when we look at a photograph, especially of the dead other, we experience this strange logic of the spectral re-appearance of someone who watches or concerns us without reciprocity. Consequently, Derrida avers that the power of the image cannot stem from ontology and the ontological tradition of the question "What is?" (Derrida 2001, 145). In his words of adieu to Louis Marin, he emphasizes the role of mourning, "which takes its place in advance" and "can open up this space of absolute *dynamis*: force, virtue, the possible as such, without which one understands nothing of the power of the image" (Derrida 2001, 146). There is, therefore, something much more compelling or haunting at work in the image than the simple presence or its reproduction, something that requires "another organization of space and of visibility, of the gazing and the gazed upon" (Derrida 2001, 159): a spectral asymmetry that puts us before the absent other as the origin of the law, imposing on us an infinite demand for justice and confronting us with what Derrida calls "the unbearable paradox of fidelity" (Derrida 2001, 159).

Moreover, being reduced to a mere image, the other—at the same time—resists such a reduction. Derrida emphasizes that we are thus entrusted with the task of encompassing someone who is incomprehensible. We are destined to keep with us only "a memory that consists of visible scenes that are no longer anything but images" (Derrida 2001, 159) of someone who disappeared, who is out of our sight, but who still concerns and watches us: "[u]pon the death of the other we are given to memory, and thus to interiorization, since the other, outside us, is now nothing. And with the dark light of this nothing, we learn that the other resists the closure of our interiorizing memory" (Derrida 1989, 34). That is why Derrida speaks of the gaze of the other, the gaze that is "[f]ar away in us. In us, there where this power of the image comes to open the being-far-away" (Derrida 2001, 161).

Now, seeing that we cannot treat the other as either a fully integrated part of ourselves or a binary opposition to our egoic life, realizing that we cannot immunize ourselves against this spectral intrusion or adopt some teleological end to it, and assuming affirmation rather than a negation of the other, Derrida argues that spectrality ultimately escapes full dialectization. Therefore, we are dealing with an undialectical return of the dead: a return of the uniqueness that indeed must have been here a while ago but was never truly present. Furthermore, it is, for example, through the photograph that the uniqueness of the other comes to be mediated, repeated, and reproduced. Derrida points out that "[t]he photographic technique fulfills even more powerfully the pictorial vocation, namely, to seize the dead and transfigure them—to resuscitate as having been the one who (singularly, he or she) will have been" (Derrida 2001, 156).

> Here is death, then, there where the image annuls its representative presence, there where, more precisely, the non-re-productive intensity of the re- of representation gains in power what the present that it represents loses in presence. [...] Representation is here no longer a simple reproductive re-presentation; it is such a regaining of presence, such a recrudescence or resurgence of presence thereby intensified, that it allows lack to be thought, the default of presence or the mourning that had hollowed out in advance the so-called primitive or originary presence, the presence that is represented, the so-called living presence (Derrida 2001, 148-149).

In this unwitting, spectral resurgence, one becomes truly a hostage to a ghost—we may even say a ghostage—bursting in, although never properly present, disturbing the peace of the living presence, forcing one to bear the departed's death, to live this death—and to outlive, but never outrun it. This spectral effect goes beyond any polarity, such as presence–absence or inside–outside. Although death, as Roland Barthes has it in *Camera Lucida*, is undialectical, we are involved once and forever in the work of mourning that we perform to retain, master, or tame death in a dialectical manner, to put it in its "proper" place: keeping it expelled from life or fully domesticated. We pretend that it will never actually happen to us: marking the end of life, it cannot haunt us, and therefore it does not concern us in any other way than as an external accident. In other words, we assume that we will not experience the undialecticality of death and are protected from the haunting of the departed. In dealing with a death, we attempt to convince ourselves of the possibility of interiorization and reduction of the dead to an image to avoid being a ghostage of their return and to take advantage of it by claiming a privileged position. Nevertheless, such a task is impossible, as I will later show.

Melancholic Revolt

Derrida's discussion on the work of mourning reverberates with the echo of Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." For Freud, mourning is a process of the interiorization—and introjection—of the dead. It always aims for success thanks to its work of appropriating the other in an idealized image present to me, just like the dead were once, assumedly, present to me before their departure. In the healing process, this idealization absorbs the other, making their projection a good part of their egoic life. Therefore mourning is a healthy response to loss, and when the process is completed, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud 1964, 245). If, however, one develops an abnormal, morbid, melancholic reaction to the death of a loved one, one is interminably haunted by the ghosts of the departed, failing to come to terms with the loved one's death. In Freud's eyes, such a condition stands in marked opposition to the proper work of dealing with loss.

For Derrida, mourning cannot be considered separately from melancholy: mourning is always melancholic. In his view, completing the task of mourning with the ultimate interiorization of the other would not be possible and should not be desirable. If considered successful, mourning would become consistent with notions of full autonomy, potentiality and actuality, the authority of the subject, sovereign might, determination of the future, teleology, epistemic violence, and predominance of the rigid economy over what remains incalculable. Moreover, it would indicate a lack of fidelity to—or responsibility for—the other's secrecy: their singular uniqueness. Grief and melancholy experienced after somebody's death cannot be overcome, as one can never escape one's relation to death, particularly to the death of the other.

In contrast to Freud, who presupposes successful interiorization of the dead, Derrida postulates the originarity of unbounded mourning, which is the very condition of life. "I mourn therefore I am," he professes, adding that since mourning always involves the other, it would be more originary even than my being for death (Derrida 1995, 322). To live means to mourn—my own and the other's life, always with death, which I cannot forget, and which incessantly inhabits my life. Just as one has to take photographs to be a photographer, in a similar manner, to be alive means to be in mourning for the other and, by the same token, for oneself; that is why melancholy must revolt against regular mourning—not only for structural but also ethical reasons (*cf.* Royle 2009, 138). Out of fidelity to the other, which is impossible to meet,

> [t]his melancholy must never resign itself to idealizing introjection. It must rise up against what Freud says of it with such assurance, as if to confirm the norm of normality. The "norm" is nothing other than the good conscience of amnesia. It allows us to forget that to keep the other within the self, as oneself, is already to forget the other. Forgetting begins there. Melancholy is therefore necessary. At this point, the suffering of a certain pathology dictates the law [...]. (Derrida 2005c, 160).

For Derrida, melancholy is intrinsically connected with this constraint and obligation of mourning, ultimately leading to an experience of fidelity. Melancholy intensifies and complicates this experience.[4] Consequently, the relationship between mourning and fidelity is far from straightforward. On the one hand, mourning consists in an interiorization of the dead other, but on the other, it has to resist such a process. So, it paradoxically adopts two contradictory attitudes: a willingness and a refusal to mourn.

> I cannot complete my mourning for everything I lose, because I want to keep it, and at the same time, what I do best is to mourn, is to lose it, be cause by mourning, I keep it inside me. [...] The psychoanalytic discourse, despite its subtlety and necessity, does not go into this fatality, this necessity: the double constraint of mourning (Derrida 1995, 152).

Thus failing to go through the successful work of mourning is a sign not necessarily of paralysis, but first and foremost of fidelity and protestation. In *Camera Lucida*, returning to us like a specter, Roland Barthes writes: "[i]t is said that mourning, by its gradual labor, slowly erases pain; I could not, I cannot believe this; because for me, Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest, everything has remained motionless" (Barthes 1981, 75). Therefore, the work of mourning remains impossible. It un-works itself in its aporetic movement since mourning cannot and should not be "properly" achieved. One cannot even fully describe this work that happens in the obscurity of transgressions between life and death. Derrida argues that there cannot be any "metalanguage for the language in which a work of mourning is at work" (Derrida 2001, 143). Working on the work of mourning, making it our subject, we inevitably perform this work and become its object. Therefore we cannot thoroughly examine it. We cannot adopt a secure position on or in relation to mourning; we are incapable of saying anything decisive about it, yet trying to do so—trying to speak or write about it—we experience it.

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[4] Geoffrey Bennington argues that melancholy is not seen by Derrida as a pathological condition but as "a kind of ethics of death" (Bennington, 2001: xi). However, we could argue that it may as well be treated as an ethics of life or rather of living on, which is, according to Derrida, "the most intense life possible" (Derrida 2007b, 52). This ethical protest against normal mourning related to Derrida's emphasis on incompleteness of what he dubs "half-mourning" or "mid-mourning" [*demi-deuil*] is what Bennington calls "militant melancholy" (Bennington 2001, xii, 8, 39). However, my claim is that there is much more to be said about melancholic militancy, which nevertheless finds its conditions of possibility within the "framework" of impossible and infinite mourning.

Moreover, since mourning is originary, its work is not just one among others, but it is general work, work itself, under which every work is a work of mourning (*cf.* Derrida 1995, 48; 2001, 142; 2006, 121; Derrida, Roudinesco 2004, 78). This generality leaves no door open: no chance of freeing oneself from the burden. Because death is not only something promised, guaranteed, or threatening, it awaits us before our lives begin: we cannot exit before death. We must surrender to death the minute we are born and, therefore, surrender to mourning, which opens the question of fidelity to the other.

> *Il faut*, one must: it is the law, that law of the (necessary) relation of Being to law. We can only live this experience in the form of an aporia: the aporia of mourning and of prosopopeia, where the possible remains impossible. Where success fails. And where faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a part of us, between us—and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him in us, like an unborn child, like a future. And inversely, the failure succeeds: an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us (Derrida 1989, 35).

The fidelity problem also concerns whether one should speak in the face of the other's death or rather remain silent instead. Since the image, for structural reasons, cannot be faithful to the singularity of the other, and the failure of interiorization is a sign of respect to the departed one, their death is unbearable and unthinkable. It is unspeakable. Words cannot do justice to this singularity. However, amidst the impossibility of speaking, we are called upon to step outside the limits of ineffability. We offer our words: not so much of consolation (since the loss is irreversible and irreparable—and because language always carries a burden of the speaker's narcissism), but, above all, words of testimony.

As one of the last representatives of "his generation," Derrida strove not to remain silent, not to shy away from his work of impossible mourning, both after his friends' deaths and during their lifetimes. For Derrida, being a survivor became an inexhaustible philosophical theme and a task of responsibility and memory. After all, memory qua the faculty of inheritance and reaffirmation through interpretation, translation, filtration, selection, and change, which could offer hospitable mourning to the remains and traces of others (*cf.* Derrida, Roudinesco 2004, 3-4; Naas 2015; Miller 2009, 75-79), should be treated as a domain of ethical and political struggle. The photographic image may perfectly exemplify what seems to be essentially a mnemotechnical issue (there is no perception without technical intervention,[5] just as there is no perception from the point of view of what does not require such supplementation or what Berger calls "a supernatural eye"—perception is always finite, limited, fragmented). As Susan Sontag explains:

> [...] the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace (not a construction made out of disparate photographic traces), cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude (Sontag 2004, 46).

Furthermore, Berger concludes that "[m]emory implies a certain act of redemption. What is remembered has been saved from nothingness. What is forgotten has been abandoned" (Berger 1980, 54). In this regard, the ethical character of committing something to memory is undeniable. Interestingly, Sontag makes a similar point and ties it to the question of mourning:

> Remembering *is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead. So the belief that remembering is an ethical act is deep in our natures as humans, who know we are going to die, and who mourn those who in the normal course of things die before us—grandparents, parents, teachers, and older friends. Heartlessness and amnesia seem to go together (Sontag 2004, 115).

On the one hand, however, Derrida reminds us that forgetting is not accidental when it comes to the work of memory. Ultimately, the latter, as a failed attempt at internalizing the unreachable dead other, is a process tainted with melancholy. On the other, this imperfect remembrance has vital strategic consequences that deserve serious consideration. One not only has to know what and how to remember, but—as Sontag claims—faulty and limited memory, constantly threatened by amnesia, is necessary for peace and reconciliation since there is too much injustice and suffering to remember. There is an unavoidable risk of memory breeding grievances, especially in the "much longer span of a collective history" (Sontag 2004, 115). This case may be valid to a certain extent, but in that passage, Sontag seems to ignore that memory is essentially faulty and limited: the point of remembrance is to fail well. Moreover, any reconciliation or forgiveness requires the work of memory and some strategy of perception and remembrance. This approach has to involve awareness that to combat deliberate and manufactured amnesia, which is one of the most pervasive forms of political violence,[6] one has to rebel against the norm that can be imposed through the work of morning.

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[5] Already in his early essay on Freud, Derrida argues that writing as the complication of presence and representation introduces technics within the psychical apparatus and enables the analogy between psyche and machine: "Writing, here, is *technē* as the relation between life and death, between present and representation, between the two apparatuses. It opens up the question of technics: of the apparatus in general and of the analogy between the psychical apparatus and the nonpsychical apparatus. In this sense writing is the stage of history [...]" (Derrida 2005d, 287).

Of course, any strategy of perception and remembrance may also be subjected to political critique. For example, in *Frames of War*, Judith Butler explores how "the norms that govern which lives will be regarded as human enter into the frames through which discourse and visual representation proceed, and how […] these in turn delimit or orchestrate our ethical responsiveness to suffering" (Butler 2009, 77). Inasmuch as the frame is being constituted within the movement of iterability, it "constantly breaks from its context" (Butler 2009, 10) and therefore becomes susceptible to thematization, manipulation or instrumentalization. Furthermore, Butler argues that, depending on the framing, some lives may be considered unworthy of mourning and undeserving of care, protection, and remembrance. Such lives become unrecognizable and ungrievable. Still, for Derrida, the ethical reflection in its radical sense begins precisely with the unrecognizability and dissimilarity of mortal and precarious others (Derrida 2009, 108).

Moreover, according to Enzo Traverso, we should not focus ultimately on the remembrance of victims as a part of the culture of humanitarianism that sacralizes their memory. Instead, he proposes rediscovering a melancholic vision of history that would not involve retreating "into a closed universe of suffering and remembering" (Traverso 2016, xiv). Rather, regarded in the context of left-wing struggles, this approach would return the historical agency, the commitments, and the hopes back to those from whom we inherit and who we mourn. Traverso explains that "left melancholy has always focused on the vanquished. It perceives the tragedies and the lost battles of the past as a burden and a debt, which are also a promise of redemption" (Traverso 2016, xv). Hence, by emphasizing its affirmative side, Traverso can simultaneously bring melancholy's militant or revolutionary character to the fore.

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[6] For example, in his book *Washington Bullets*, Vijay Prashad describes the effort of the Western colonial powers to erase the memory of revolutionary struggles for decolonization: „It was not forgotten due to the passage of time. A condition of amnesia was produced by the corporate media and the profession of history-writing, both of whom became stenographers of power" (Prashad 2020, 56).

From Melancholy to Affirmation

One of the last words *signe* Derrida appeared in an interview published in *Le Monde* just a few weeks before his death. Anticipating the losing battle with his illness, the philosopher focused his discussion on the experience of surviving and the structure of survival.[7] However, already in his *Politics of Friendship* he stated blatantly that surviving "[...] is the other name of a mourning whose possibility is never to be awaited. For one does not survive without mourning" (Derrida 2005b, 13). He found it structurally constitutive for the living being in its originary referral to the other (*cf.* Derrida 2007b, 26). His work on friendship is marked: it abounds with reflections concerning the relation of survival between friends, who must be aware that one of them will outlive the other, bury the other, surviving the other. Friends cannot be thoroughly contemporary: an anachrony of sorts stands between them. They never arrive together at this rendezvous, Derrida notes in *Aporias*, adding that "[i]n order to wait for the other at this meeting place, one must, on the contrary, arrive there late, not early" (Derrida 1993a, 65-66).

Nevertheless, death always comes too soon, even before the actual moment of departure, and it disrupts the integrity of the living presence (as both self-presence and co-presence). Derrida calls this a "melancholic certainty" (Derrida 2005c, 140), and in "Rams," which is another text permeated by mourning, he describes melancholy as the very condition in which two friends come to understand that one of them will live on after the other's death, namely, after the ultimate separation, which affects their lives and their relationship from the very beginning, interrupting any sense of cohesion or contemporariness: "[...] survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision. Interruption multiplies itself, one interruption affecting another, in abyssal repetition, more *unheimlich* than ever" (Derrida 2005c, 139).

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[7] This notion of survival would occupy Derrida's mind long before. *Politics of Friendship* (based on his seminars from 1988–1989) was published almost a decade before his death, about the time a series of interviews gathered in *A Taste for the Secret* was conducted. This particular statement is from 1995: "I think about nothing but death, I think about it all the time, ten seconds don't go by without the imminence of the thing being there. I never stop analyzing the phenomenon of 'survival' as the structure of surviving, it's really the only thing that interest me, but precisely insofar as I do not believe that one lives on post mortem" (Derrida, Ferraris 2001, 88). Survival [*survie*] can initiate a rich network of etymological affinities and connections or resemblances. For example, the one referring us to *savoir-vivre*—knowing how to live—which led Derrida to the urgent question of learning how to live [*apprendre à vivre*]: "But I remain uneducable when it comes to any kind of wisdom about knowing-how-to-die or, if you prefer, knowing-how-to-live. I still have not learned or picked up anything on this subject. The time of the reprieve is rapidly running out. Not just because I am, along with others, the heir of so many things, some good, some quite terrible: but since most of the thinkers with whom I have been associated are now dead, I am referred to more and more often as a survivor—the last, the final representative of a 'generation,' that is, roughly speaking, the sixties generation. Without being strictly speaking true, this provokes in me not only objections but feelings of a somewhat melancholic revolt" (Derrida 2007b, 25-26).

Still, Derrida's survival terminology affirms life: in the mentioned interview, he states that deconstruction is interested in saying "yes" to life. In this sense, there is a place both for melancholy and "a discourse against mourning and against melancholy" (Derrida 2017, 185) in deconstruction. He would depart from interpretations situating his thoughts on the side of death, although, as he would argue, it is by death that the thought must be constantly haunted. Mourning, after all, is surviving.

> This surviving is life beyond life, life more than life, and my discourse is not a discourse of death, but, on the contrary, the affirmation of a living being who prefers living and thus surviving to death, because survival is not simply that which remains but the most intense life possible. I am never more haunted by the necessity of dying than in moments of happiness and joy. To feel joy and to weep over the death that awaits are for me the same thing (Derrida 2007b, 52).

What survives the dead, after all? What remains of the dead but memory? We are doomed to forget, and forgetting is what anachrony practices and promises (Derrida 2006, 139). This anachronic fate emerges as an impossible death-struggle—a task of reducing the irreducible and then trying not to forget—and a death knell. Yet, despite that, or perhaps because of that, we—the survivors—are endowed with responsibility for what we inherit by incurring a debt to those we mourn. The call for militant melancholy begins with the heterogeneity of this "promise of the other in oneself" (Derrida 2013, 20).

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