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## Memory

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## 10. Acts of Memory and Mourning

### Derrida and the Fictions of Anteriority

Gerhard Richter

Of the two springs called Mnemosyne and Lethe, which is the right one for Narcissus? The other.

Jacques Derrida, *Memoires: For Paul de Man*

In a remarkable letter to Kätchen Schönkopf from December 12, 1769, the young Goethe records a description of her as she had appeared in his guilt-ridden dream the night before. Having failed to respond to her most recent missive for what suddenly seemed like an eternity, his sleep was fitful: “A dream last night reminded me that I owe you an answer. It is neither that I had forgotten entirely, nor that I never think of you; no, my friend, every day tells me something of you and of my debts.” Goethe continues: “But it is strange—and this is an experience with which you may be familiar—time does not erase our memory of absent ones but it does conceal them. Our life’s diversions, our making the acquaintance of new things, in short, every change in our condition, do to our heart what dust and smoke do to a painting; they render the subtle traits wholly unrecognizable and the strong ones less visible, all in a manner so unnoticeable that one does not even know how it comes about. A thousand things remind me of you, I see your image a thousand times, but so weakly and often with as little sentiment as if I were thinking of a stranger.”<sup>1</sup> Even the image of the beautiful head of Fräulein Schönkopf, whom Goethe privately referred to as his “first girl” and with whom he had ended his courtship almost two years earlier, proves no match for the effects of time on memory. While memory requires time to become what it is—no memory without time, no time without memory—time also hinders memory, veiling its specificities, blurring its details, accentuating too selectively and, in so doing, uncannily rendering the familiar strange while, at the same time, causing the

estranged gradually to appear more and more familiar. Like the painting whose original vibrancy is covered over time with the sediments of life, the image of the other in memory lives on, submerged beneath ever-thickening layers of temporality and finitude. These memories, however, cannot be delivered from their fate in the way that the colors of Michelangelo's frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel have been returned to their alleged sixteenth-century intensity, since memory cannot happen without the obscuring layers of time and dusty markers of mortality. To the extent that memory occurs—at least the kind of memory that is perceived as being “individual” or more experientially inflected than what in late modernity, perhaps too hastily, is called “collective” or “cultural” memory—this memory depends upon the very effects of time that also threaten its undoing.

The double movement by which memory is constructed and obscured, built and dismantled, offered and withheld is one of the multiple names—but not just any name—that Jacques Derrida bestows upon the project of deconstruction. Questions of memory, remembrance, recalling, living on, forgetting, retrieving, losing, saving, surviving, and mourning traverse his work, in heterogeneous modulations, from *Of Grammatology* in the late 1960s onward. In a conversation with Anne Berger, Derrida makes explicit the centrality of the trope and experience of memory for his entire project, explaining that “if there were an experience of loss at the heart of all this, the only loss for which I could never be consoled and that brings together all the others, I would call it loss of memory. The suffering at the origin of writing for me is the suffering from the loss of memory, not only forgetting or amnesia, but the effacement of traces. I would not need to write otherwise; my writing is not in the first place a philosophical writing or that of an artist, even if, in certain cases, it might look like that or take over from these other kinds of writing. My first desire is not to produce a philosophical work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory.” Therefore, he confesses, “I struggle against this loss, this loss of memory.”<sup>22</sup> Neither philosophy nor poetry, neither logic by itself nor rhetoric in isolation, Derrida's undertaking is touched by the stringent and ethical demands of each. He sees his writing both as an enactment of, and a self-conscious resistance to, the eradication of the trace, the very precondition of legibility and, by extension, the concept of meaning itself. Like a reader of Goethe's vanishing mnemonic image, Derrida conceptualizes his work, in all its multiplicities and refractions, as the attempt to preserve a memory and memory itself, even if that memory is but the faint trace of an absence, no more than a remnant of the ashen traces of a genocidal burning that he evokes, in all their melancholia but also in their potentially affirmative future-directedness, in his book *Cinders*. The trace of Derrida's itinerary always moves, as David Farrell Krell reminds us, from the buoyant phenomenological credo, *zu den Sachen selbst* (to the things themselves), toward the ashen remains of its anagrammatic version, *zu den Aschen selbst*.<sup>3</sup> The minute anagrammatic transposition of two letters announces deconstruction's epic theater. We could even say that the trace, ashen or otherwise, that for Derrida connects the material practice of his work with

its ethicopolitical impetus is inscribed by the transition from the Greek sense of *philosophia*, the love of wisdom, to a certain *mnemophilia*, the love of memory. The practice of *mnemophilia* constitutes a striving to come to terms with the threat of a potentially inconsolable loss, a relation to the object of memory without which writing's ethical, historical, political, and personal commitments would be erased.

But can a kind of thinking be imagined that strives to retain its speculative rigor while answering first to the stringent demands of its mnemonic commitment rather than to the classical labor of the concept? As Nietzsche warns us in *Human, All Too Human*, "many do not become thinkers merely because their memory is too good."<sup>4</sup> He may have had in mind, among other things, paragraph 464 of the *Encyclopedia*, where Hegel remarks that it is no accident that, while youth possesses a better memory than older people, this is so in part "because it does not yet behave in a thinking manner" (*sich noch nicht nachdenklich verhält*).<sup>5</sup> In this view, thinking and remembering are at odds with each other such that an overly acute memory stands in the way of rigorous and self-reflexive thought that would clear the stage of the mnemonic debris that holds back its striving in new directions. Nietzsche seems to suggest, *pace* Hegel, that the very thing Derrida wishes to preserve, memory, stands in the way of true thinking—also perhaps understood in the Heideggerean sense even before Heidegger, as a kind of innovative movement of thought that is not at all confined to the limits of conventional and institutionalized philosophizing, but that instead accepts the challenge of inventing its own methods each time it encounters a new object or question, that is to say, each time it allows itself to redefine what truly rigorous thinking is and calls for. Nietzsche's target, though, is the concept of memory that informs a nineteenth-century Germanic historicism whose unacknowledged aim frequently was the nationalistic endorsement of a history of linearity and continuity in the service of a largely affirmative, unquestioning engine of totalizing consciousness. This kind of memory prevents the actualization of a new thinking. Believing itself to know too much already, it is weighed down by the sheer facticity of its empirical attachments. Such memory cannot think the to-come of thinking because it is shackled by it in much the same way that Bill Murray's character in the film *Groundhog Day* is condemned to wake up, day after day, to the historical sameness of the identical day, without being able to change it.

Derrida's notion of memory, by contrast, does not simply reproduce what is assumed, or once was assumed, simply to be present, ready to be passed on to a new generation of heirs and epigones. Rather, encouraging himself and us to learn to accept an inheritance—as, for instance, the inheritance of Marx's oppositional spirit in *Specters of Marx*—Derrida's writing works to define and perpetually to redefine the meaning of inheriting without following, the meaning of accepting without repeating, the meaning of following even by betraying, and the meaning of setting to work an idea even while taking it in a different direction.<sup>6</sup> His work asks again and again how we can show ourselves responsible to a memory whose laws we have not fully understood, whose history escapes

us, and yet whose ethicopolitical requirements already have reached us, as though always already emanating from the transcendence of the wholly Other that his interlocutor Emmanuel Levinas so often evoked.

No overall summary of Derrida's "concept" of memory could responsibly reduce the multiple singularities of its iterations from *Of Grammatology* onward to a well-defined, single meaning. As Rodolphe Gasché reminds us, Derrida's "singular reworking of traditional forms of thinking . . . always escapes for essential reasons any essentialist determination"; instead, readers are enjoined to "seek in his writings precisely those structures that singularize, extend, and overflow any totalization" in a way that also renders these texts stages upon which "an ever incalculable and unpredictable response" may be performed.<sup>7</sup> It is no different with the vexed and elusive question of memory. With these caveats in mind, which are also always promises, we may turn to two specific texts in which Derrida further inflects the multiple relationships of memory to his project of thinking and writing: the series of 1984 lectures entitled *Memoires: For Paul de Man* and the 2001 collection *The Work of Mourning*, which gathers essays, addresses, and meditations written shortly after the death of a friend or colleague over a period of some twenty years. A perpetual and obsessive engagement with the uncontainable logic of memory itself is performed in language each time memory is evoked as though we already knew what the word meant:

What is memory? If the essence of memory maneuvers between Being and the law, what sense does it make to wonder about the being and the law of memory? These are questions that cannot be posed outside language, questions that cannot be formulated without entrusting them to transference and translation, above the abyss. For they require, from one language to another, impossible passageways: the fragile resistance of a span. What is the meaning of the word "mémoire(s)" in French, in its masculine and feminine forms (*un mémoire, une mémoire*); and in its singular and plural forms (*un mémoire, une mémoire, des mémoires*). If there is no meaning outside memory, there will always be something paradoxical about interrogating "mémoire" as a unit of meaning, as that which links memory to narrative or to all the uses of the word "histoire" (story, history, *Historie, Geschichte*, etc.).<sup>8</sup>

The figurative and allegorical investments of memory in its various articulations preclude any totalization; memory always will have been that whose pastness, present claims, and future-oriented commitments pull it elsewhere, to a different time and space, a different language, a different nation, a different politics.

Meditating, inconsolably, on the passing of his friend Paul de Man, Derrida in the *Memoires* places memory and mourning into philosophical and experiential relation. While there can be "no singular memory" (*Memoires*, 14), no mnemonic act or object that would once and for all shuck the traces of its multiple contingencies, the uncontainable memories that bear upon us, traverse and haunt us, are nevertheless connected by a

double affirmation, the “yes, yes.” The double affirmation works to authorize itself in that the second affirmation, the second “yes,” always seconds the first yes, sanctioning it, giving it legitimacy. The validity of the first “yes,” its structure as a promise, can only be confirmed and countersigned by another “yes” that remains to come, that is, it must defer its validation to a future act that remains bound in the promise of its very first utterance. The second affirmation of the “yes, yes” acts to “preserve memory; it must commit itself to keeping its own memory; it must promise itself to itself; it must bind itself to memory for memory, if anything is ever to come from the future” (*Memoires*, 20). What Derrida names the “alliance between memory and the seal of the ‘yes, yes’” can be said to reside, in different formulations and manifestations, “at the heart of deconstruction” (*Memoires*, 20). The inscription of the initial “yes,” whether in written or spoken form, or in texts and situations of any kind, must carry within itself the ashen trace of its erasability; not that it will be erased of necessity, nor that it will survive intact, but rather that its very performance is contingent upon its possible disappearance. When he says that we “cannot write what we do not wish to erase, we can only promise it in terms of what can always be erased,” and that “otherwise, there would be neither memory nor promise,” Derrida shows us that the very person or thing that is to be remembered, by virtue of the awareness of mortality upon which existence is predicated, carries its own memory within itself (*Memoires*, 123).

One of the central wagers of *Memoires: For Paul de Man* is that this alliance between the doubly affirmative memory and the work of deconstructive thought is inextricably bound up with the experience of an impossible mourning. Derrida argues that we can enter a friendship—and, by extension, meditate on it in memory—only to the extent that we acknowledge our own finitude and the finitude of the friend. The two friends encounter each other as mortal beings, as bearers of a signature that one day will have been signed in a prosopopoeiac gesture from beyond the grave. As he writes:

If there is a finitude of memory, it is because there is something of the other, and of memory as a memory of the other, which comes from the other and comes back to the other. It defies any totalization, and directs us to a scene of allegory, to prosopopeia, that is, to tropologies of mourning: to the memory of mourning and to the mourning for memory. This is why there can be no true mourning, even if truth and lucidity always presuppose it, and in truth, take place only as the truth of mourning. (*Memoires*, 29)

Like the mourning that memory evokes in us, the memory that mourning leaves behind for us resists the imposition of closure and the stability of a relation defined once and for all. Instead, the mourning of memory and the memory of mourning require of us an impossible affirmation, one that cannot any more be spelled out in advance than it can

proceed according to the curriculum of a described sequence or be implemented in accordance with an eye toward full transparency. It is the thought of the mortal other that I bear within me, and whose bearing within me exhibits me to myself as an other who is linked to other others in his mortality, whose memory always will have been that of the one who can die and who is capable of being entrusted with an other's memory of his or her mortality.

The poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, texts to which both Derrida and de Man, like Hegel and Heidegger before them, often return, is in many ways a sustained engagement with this memory of the other's mortality. In the poem "Die Titanen" (1802–6), the lyrical voice submits: "It is good to rely upon others [or, "orient oneself toward others"]. For no one bears [or carries] life alone" (*Gut ist es, an andern sich/Zu halten. Denn keiner trägt das Leben allein*).<sup>9</sup> Derrida himself cites the second of these lines in the final sentence of his 2003 memorial lecture for Hans-Georg Gadamer on dialogue and poetry at the University of Heidelberg.<sup>10</sup> The responsible memory of the friend, never responsible enough and always too responsible for its own good, propels us to interrogate this Hölderlinian concept of bearing or carrying. What does it mean to bear life not alone but always together, through, and jointly with an other, even an otherness? What is this being-with, the "with-ness" and witness of life, of bearing life that attaches us to the other and his memory? But Hölderlin's line "For no one bears life alone," can also be read to mean that no one carries within himself only life (*das Leben allein*, in the sense of *nur das Leben*), which is to say that we always also carry death within us and among us as friends. Our relation to the other, to the memory of the friend, is thus always characterized by a communal bearing or a mutual carrying *and* by the prospects or memory of sadness, finitude, and mourning.

Derrida reflects on these questions both theoretically in his philosophical writings devoted to finitude and mourning and experientially in his more personally inflected texts devoted to recently deceased friends and colleagues in *The Work of Mourning*. These include eulogies and meditations on such dead friends as Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Sarah Kofman, Gilles Deleuze, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-François Lyotard. More recently, these texts were joined by texts on Heiner Müller and on Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>11</sup> There are also meditations on the losses of family members, such as Derrida's reflections on his experience of the dying and eventual death of his mother in "Circumfession," a text printed in the lower margins of a book about Derrida written by a friend, Geoffrey Bennington—where the reader is confronted with two competing and supplementary texts on each page, the one explicating Derrida, the other written by Derrida himself, embracing, affirming, protesting, clarifying, supplementing, and memorializing the voice of the friend.<sup>12</sup> Leaving the word to someone else—*jemandem das Wort überlassen*, as one says in German—letting the other speak instead of oneself, and yet continuing to think and write with and for that other is the act of memory and mourning par excellence.

If the law of friendship is the law of mourning and memory, there can be no friendship without the permanent possibility and threat of mourning. One cannot die together with the friend—two can die at the same time, but not really, in the deepest sense, together, as in Kafka’s melancholic diction, in “The Judgment,” where a son and a father are described as eating their meal simultaneously (*gleichzeitig*) rather than together (*zusammen*). Our friendships will always have been conditioned by the future absence of the other, even of the self in the other, and by the fact that one of us inevitably will be left behind to bury, to mourn, to commemorate the other, situated among the friends who have been left behind, the survivors who are now left to walk all alone, in memory of the other. While Derrida works to formulate a series of axioms and laws that respond to the structures of friendship as mourning and finitude, he also reminds us that each death of a friend is singular, each time, as he puts it, the end of the world. Our friends, whether dead or alive, are thus both absolutely singular and unique, and at the same time connected to each other through the possibility and prospect of their and our shared finitude, a finitude that sooner or later will give rise to the tear of memory, of mourning, and of commemoration.

This tear of mourning and of memory flows in a passage from a text written in 1990 on the occasion of the death of Derrida’s friend Jean-Marie Benoist, “The Taste of Tears.” There, we read:

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. One of us, each says to himself, the day will come when one of the two of us will see himself no longer seeing the other and so will carry the other within him a while longer, his eyes following without seeing, the world suspended by some unique tear, each time unique, through which everything from then on, through which the world itself—and this day will come—will come to be reflected quivering, reflecting disappearance itself: the world, the whole world, the world itself, for death takes from us not only some particular life within the world, some moment that belongs to us, but, each time, without limit, someone through whom the world, and first of all our own world, will have opened up in a both finite and infinite—mortally infinite—way. That is the blurred and transparent testimony borne by this tear, this small, infinitely small, tear, which the mourning of friends passes through and endures even before death, and always singularly so, always irreplaceably.<sup>13</sup>

The questions toward which Derrida asks us to open up revolve around the memory and mourning that the tear, this time not an ashen but a translucent trace, inscribes in our relation to the other and his or her mortality. The tear, veiling the eye and withdrawing vision, is the forbidden taste of passing. What will the relation between the tear and the

memory of the friend have signified? The tear of mourning forms even before the empirical death of the friend because, from the beginning, the relation to that friend was touched by finitude and mortality. The memory and mourning of the friend passes through the tear, and the tear, as that which binds all friends in a community without community, is always already both singular and universal. If one must never taste a tear because the act of tasting the tear is an attempt to reappropriate or reannex the other, the tear also is the very figure of that which, within me, was always already other, an otherness that makes me who I am.

The potential reappropriation or reannexation of the other in mourning is inflected by the ways in which the very process of memory is conceptualized. In *Memoires*, Derrida therefore reminds us of de Man's interest in the distinction between two types of memory that worry Hegel in paragraphs 460–64 of the *Encyclopedia*. In German, there are two different words for memory, *die Erinnerung* and *das Gedächtnis*. *Erinnerung*, in that its etymology has evolved from the phrase “er innert,” which literally means “he inners” or “he interiorizes,” bespeaks a kind of interiorizing or incorporative memory, a memory that emphasizes an experiential relation of the self to the object of its mnemonic act, an act that works through annexation and psychic appropriation. *Gedächtnis*, by contrast, is a thinking kind of memory, as the term's relation to *denken* (thinking) and *der Gedanke* (thought) suggests. (Elsewhere, Heidegger points to the significance of the relation between *denken* and *danken* (thanking) that propel both *der Gedanke* and, by extension, *das Gedächtnis*). As Hegel writes, “*das Gedächtnis* in this way is the transition into the activity of thought [*Tätigkeit des Gedankens*].”<sup>14</sup> *Die Erinnerung* is the kind of memory that touches me as a form of emotional experience, but it is pre-reflexive, pre-critical; *das Gedächtnis* is the memory that sponsors reflection, that is, calls for thinking about both its object and the very logic by which that thinking occurs as a mnemonic act. *Die Erinnerung* always already has posited a self's relation to its memory and to the object of its mnemonic act: it propels the self to incorporate the object of the mnemonic act so that it becomes coextensive with it. *Das Gedächtnis* is always ahead of itself, in search of a new relation, always in need of articulating, through the labor of the concept, just *how* it should relate to the object of its mnemonic act, a relation that, as a form of perpetual reflection, it cannot take for granted once and for all.

Bracketing the question as to whether de Man's reading of this structure ultimately gets the distinction right as it is set to work in Hegel and leaving open the question of whether Derrida gets de Man's reading of Hegel right, what should interest us here is what Derrida understands Hegel's and de Man's interest in the distinction between *die Erinnerung* and *das Gedächtnis* to imply for the twin projects of memory and deconstruction.<sup>15</sup> Here, Derrida reminds us that, based on de Man's understanding, the “relation between *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*, between memory and interiorizing recollection, is not ‘dialectical,’ as Hegelian interpretations and Hegel's interpretation would have it, but

one of rupture, heterogeneity, disjunction” (*Memoires*, 56). As Derrida therefore emphasizes, we can read the failure of memory’s “apparent negativity, its very finitude, what affects its experience of discontinuity and distance, as a power, as the very opening of difference” (*Memoires*, 58). This view leads him to the suggestion that if “art is a thing of the past, this comes from its link, through writing, the sign, *tekhnè*, with that thinking memory, that memory without memory, with that power of *Gedächtnis* without *Erinnerung*. This power, we now know, is *pre-occupied* by a past which has never been present and will never allow itself to be reanimated in the interiority of consciousness” (*Memoires*, 65). We see in Derrida’s argument his insistence on the way in which memory is not a form of recuperation or restoration of a past that once was assumed to be present or even of a past, imagined or not, that claims our attention for its own sake. Rather, just as *das Gedächtnis*, never able to benefit from the comforts of interiorization, perpetually must revisit and reformulate its own relationality to the object of its mnemonic thinking and even to thinking itself, memory as a radical form of *Gedächtnis* is directed toward the future. To recognize that its “proper” form always remains still to come also is to acknowledge that memory is not simply a form of afterness but rather an elusive encounter between the “after” of something that never was present and a futurity that has not yet been thought.

The Hegelian distinction between *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung* as it figures in de Man provides Derrida with the occasion to interrogate memory’s temporality or genealogy as it occupies, of necessity, any discourse on memory. One might inquire into the status of the mnemonic object or idea in relation to a thinking and recollecting self—but who will this self have been if not the Hölderlinian bearer of the other?—that, in spite of its acknowledgement of the concept of a present that is not really present or accessible in any transparent or lucid fashion, nevertheless wonders about the other-directedness of its mnemonic investments. Here, the reality of the mnemonic subject cannot be reduced to the perception of its presence. The recollecting self, the self that exists to the extent that it remembers, always also is invested elsewhere, in a complex network of overlapping and only sporadically conscious commitments. Psychoanalysis, as the study of decentered consciousness, of a lost self-mastery one never possessed, speaks of nothing else. We may recall the rather kitschy 1999 film *The Story of Us*, which is redeemed by one brief and brilliant scene. The two protagonists, a constantly warring husband and wife couple portrayed by Bruce Willis and Michelle Pfeiffer, are shown sitting next to each other in bed, engaged in yet another of their frequent arguments. After we see the couple quarrelling in a medium close-up, the camera dollies out to show that next to both Willis and Pfeiffer sit their parents in bed with them, arguing along. We realize that these parents are not really sitting in bed with the fighting couple—though, from the empirical standpoint of the rolling camera, they are—but rather that their otherwise unacknowledged influence

over their respective children, their attitudes, wishes, and complaints, continues to determine the lives of these now-adult children in uncontrollable and ghostly ways. The “reality” and “presence” of the bickering husband and wife is overdetermined by the ghostly order of discourses that are not present as such but are nevertheless real. The intricate and elusive memories of a childhood long in the past tense, mostly unconscious, continue to structure a reality that believes itself to have declared its independence from them.

Yet while even our mainstream cultural consciousness appears prepared to concede that our historical and psychological reality cannot be reduced to presence in the sense of a reality structured by visibility and concreteness, we may be more reluctant to follow Derrida’s challenge to the metaphysics of presence in the other direction, that is, toward the past. As he writes in his reading of de Man, the “memory we are considering here is not essentially oriented toward the past, toward a past present deemed to have really and previously existed. Memory stays with traces, in order to ‘preserve’ them, but traces of a past that has never been present, traces which themselves never occupy the form of presence and always remain, as it were, to come.” Therefore, Derrida continues, “resurrection, which is always the formal element of ‘truth,’ a recurrent difference between a present and its presence, does not resuscitate a past which had been present; it engages the future” (*Memoires*, 58). According to this logic, then, the act and object of memory is not recuperation of something that once was because this would presuppose that, even though the present is not fully present in the present, it once was present to itself as presence, in the past. This view, a kind of inverted eschatology of the mnemonic, would view the past presentness of the present with a nostalgic longing for the resurrection of a lost presence, a present that once granted access to presence in a way that the current present, to the extent that it no longer is coextensive with the past, has forgotten or unlearned.

What might be named the afterness of memory, then, would have to come to terms with the difficult double movement by which it is both imbricated with the past and simultaneously divorced from it. That is to say, the “after” of the afterness of memory cannot view itself in terms of a relation to a former presence that it now claims to follow. This is why “there is only memory but, strictly speaking, the past does not exist,” which is to say that it “will never have existed in the present, never been present” (*Memoires*, 58–59.)<sup>16</sup> The afterness of memory, rigorously conceived, then would have to divorce itself from a certain “fiction of anteriority” with an eye toward accepting its uneasy relation to what is to come, to the futurity of its trajectory (*Memoires*, 59).

We may recall here Heidegger’s remark, transcribed in his recently published 1936–37 seminar on Schiller’s *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, that the purpose of the seminar is not “to find the appropriate place of Schiller in intellectual history” nor to read his texts with a “general historical intention that aims to know what happened *back then*, but rather to ask for ourselves and that means for the *future* [*sondern wir fragen für uns und d.h. für die*

Zukunft].”<sup>17</sup> To ask for ourselves—“*wir fragen für uns*”—does not mean shunning historical knowledge or genealogical insight for the sake of an aggressive and ill-informed presentism that knows no historical awareness or has no *Geschichtssinn*, or historical sensibility, as German eighteenth-century writers like to say. Rather, Heidegger suggests that the act of reading in the present, that is, carefully and with a rigorous eye, is an act for the future; “*für uns, d.h. die Zukunft*,” to read for oneself, to think, recollect, mourn, understand, write, create, affirm, protect, criticize, or love something or someone now, for us, here, is to affirm a future, insofar as all these acts remain promises that will need to be reaffirmed always one more time, always in memory of what is still to come. Like Heidegger’s remark—“*für uns, d.h. die Zukunft*”—Derrida’s understanding of the act of memory cannot be thought in isolation from the ways in which it will not turn its back on the future, even when it seems to face the past through a series of fictions of anteriority.

The mnemonic act, thus conceived, resides in an afterness that has as its object the futurity with which it is not yet familiar, a time that remains open and, of necessity, to come. An analysis of the fiction of anteriority as it inflects memory and its various concepts would strive to articulate the ways in which remembrance, recollection, memorializing, and recalling are eminently future-directed, that is, performed not for their own sake, nor for the comforting resurrection of an assumed past presence or presenced past, but rather in the name of something else, something that by definition cannot have been articulated yet, cannot yet have assumed the promise and burden of a proper name. The afterness of memory, then, is really the open futurity that our acts of mourning and remembrance so often consider, even with the best of intentions, merely to belong to the presence of the past. Here, in mourning the afterness of the mnemonic “after,” the ethical implications of a deconstructive politics of memory may begin to assume form: the future of memory and the memory that there is a future—that is, for us.