

EXORDIUM

Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally.*

Finally but why?

To learn to live: a strange watchword. Who would learn? From whom? To teach to live, but to whom? Will we ever know? Will we ever know how to live and first of all what “to learn to live” means? And why “finally”

By itself, out of context—but a context, always, remains open, thus fallible and insufficient—this watchword forms an almost unintelligible syntagm. Just how far can its idiom be translated moreover?¹

A magisterial locution, all the same—or for that very reason. For from the lips of a master this watch word would always say something about violence. It vibrates like an arrow in the course of an irreversible and asymmetrical address, the one that goes most often from father to son, master to disciple, or master to slave (“I’m going to teach you to live”). Such an address hestitates, therefore: between address as *experience* (is not learning to

live experience itself?), address as *education*, and address as *taming* or *training* [dressage].

But to learn to live, to learn it from oneself and by oneself, all alone, to teach oneself to live (“I would like to learn to live finally”), is that not impossible for a living being? Is it not what logic itself forbids? To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death.

And yet nothing is more necessary than this wisdom. It is ethics itself: to learn to live—alone, from oneself, by oneself. Life does not know how to live otherwise. And does one ever do anything else but learn to live, alone, from oneself, by oneself? This is, therefore, a strange commitment, both impossible and necessary, for a living being supposed to be alive: “I would like to learn to live.” It has no sense and cannot be just unless it comes to terms with death.² Mine as (well as) that of the other. Between life and death, then, this is indeed the place of a sententious injunction that always feigns to speak like the just.

What follows advances like an essay in the night—into the unknown of that which must remain to come—a simple attempt, therefore, to analyze with some consistency such an exordium: “I would like to learn to live. Finally.” Finally what.

If it—learning to live—remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death alone. What happens between two, and between all the “two’s” one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost [s’entretenir de quelque fantôme]. So it would be necessary to learn spirits. Even and especially if this, the spectral, is not. Even and especially if this, which is neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, is never present as such. The time of the “learning to live, a time without tutelary present, would amount to this, to which the exordium is leading us: to learn to

live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But with them. No *being-with* the other, no *socius* without this with that makes *being-with* in general more enigmatic than ever for us. And this *being-with* specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.

If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of justice. Of justice where it is not yet, not yet *there*, where it is no longer, let us understand where it is no longer *present*, and where it will never be, no more than the law, reducible to laws or rights.³ It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. No justice—let us not say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws⁴—seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. Without this *non-contemporaneity* with itself of the living present, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not *there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?”

This question arrives, if it arrives, it questions with regard to what will come in the future-to-come.⁵ Turned toward the future, going toward it, it also comes from it, it proceeds from [provient de] the future. It must therefore exceed any presence as presence to itself. At least it has to make this presence possible only on the basis of the movement of some disjoining, disjunction, or disproportion: in the inadequation to self. Now, if this question, from the moment it comes to us, can clearly come only from the future (whither? where will we go tomorrow? where, for example, is Marxism going? where are we going with it?), what stands in front of it must also precede it like its origin: before it. Even if the future is its provenance, it must be, like any provenance, absolutely and irreversibly past. "Experience" of the past as to come, the one and the other absolutely absolute, beyond all modification of any present whatever. If it is possible and if one must take it seriously, the possibility of the question, which is perhaps no longer a question and which we are calling here justice, must carry beyond present life, life as my life or our life. *In general*. For it will be the same thing for the "my life" or "our life" tomorrow," that is, for the life of others, as it was yesterday for other others: *beyond therefore the living present in general*.

To be just: beyond the living present in general—and beyond its simple negative reversal. A spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: "now," future present). We are questioning in this instant, we are asking ourselves about this instant that is not docile to time, at least to what we call time. Furtive and untimely, the apparition of the specter does not belong to that time, it does not give time, not that one: "Enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost" (*Hamlet*).

This resembles an axiom, more precisely an axiom concerning axiomatics itself, namely, concerning some supposedly undemonstrable obvious fact with regard to whatever has worth, value,

quality (*axia*). And even and especially dignity (for example man as example of a finite and reasonable being), that unconditional dignity (*Würdigkeit*) that Kant placed higher, precisely [justement], than any economy, any compared or comparable value, any market price (*Marktpreis*). This axiom may be shocking to some. And one does not have to wait for the objection: To whom, finally, would an obligation of justice ever entail a commitment, one will say, and even be it beyond law and beyond the norm, to whom and to what if not to the life of a living being? Is there ever justice, commitment of justice, or responsibility in general which has to answer for itself (for the living self) before anything other, in the last resort, than the life of a living being, whether one means by that natural life or the life of the spirit? Indeed. The objection seems irrefutable. But the irrefutable itself supposes that this justice carries life beyond present life or its actual being-there, its empirical or ontological actuality: not toward death but toward a living-on [*sur-vie*], namely, a trace of which life and death would themselves be but traces and traces of traces, a survival whose possibility in advance comes to disjoin or dis-adjust the identity to itself of the living present as well as of any effectivity. There is then *some spirit*. Spirits. And one must reckon with them. One cannot not have to, one must not not be able to reckon with them, which are more than one: the *more than one/no more one* [*le plus d'un*].