

OF HOSPITALITY

*Anne Dufourmantelle*

*invites*

*Jacques Derrida*

*to respond*

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Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*—

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*These different reflections raise the question of the necessity of exile in order for "oneself as another," in Paul Ricoeur's fine expression, to come into being. Only what does a way of thinking become when it is cut off from its roots from the outset, without there even having been the transmission of a meaning? And what do human beings become when dispossessed, not of their things nor even of their house, but of what links them to interiority? If burial is inseparable from language, as Derrida thinks, because we always take with us our*

as he sees him coming, the master will hasten to call out to him:

"Enter quickly, as I am afraid of my happiness."

Last time, in a slightly strange way, we displaced the question of the foreigner by inverting the order or the direction—really the very meaning—of the question. Letting ourselves be guided by outline rereadings of texts by Plato (*Crito*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, the *Apology of Socrates*) or Sophocles (*Oedipus at Colonus*), we let ourselves be interrogated by certain figures of the foreigner. They reminded us of a previous one: before the question of the foreigner as a theme, the title of a problem, program of research, before assuming in this way that we already know *what* the foreigner *is*, what the foreigner *means*, and *who* the foreigner is, even before that, there was of course, again, the question of the foreigner as the question-demand addressed to the foreigner (who are you? where do you come from? what do you want? do you want to come? or what are you getting at? etc.); but above all, even earlier, the question of the foreigner as question *come from* abroad. And thus of response or responsibility. How should one respond *to* all these questions? How be responsible *for* them? How answer for oneself when faced with them? When faced with questions that are so many demands, and even prayers? In what language can the foreigner address his or her question? Receive ours? In what language can he or she be interrogated?

"Language"—let us understand this word in both a narrow sense and a broad sense. One of the numerous difficulties before us, as with settling the ex-

*words and our dead, what becomes of burials when they are moved nearer the hospital; when birth and death, secret and inalienable spaces of pain and of peace, are exiled away from "home"? These are some of the questions broached by these movements or passages.*

*These movements to the limit, or rather outside limits, hyperbolic as they are, teach us as much as thinking itself. They show us the shock of discovery. The written text undoes the breaks and dissonances of discourse, focusing on the continuous unwinding of its thread, but*

tension of the concept of hospitality or the concept of foreigner, is that of this difference but also this more or less strict adherence, this stricture between what is called a broad sense and what is called a narrow sense.) In the broad sense, the language in which the foreigner is addressed or in which he is heard, if he is, is the ensemble of culture, it is the values, the norms, the meanings that inhabit the language. Speaking the same language is not only a linguistic operation. It's a matter of *ethos* generally. A passing remark: without speaking the same national language, someone can be less "foreign" to me if he shares a culture with me, for instance, a way of life linked to a degree of wealth, etc., than some fellow citizen or compatriot who belongs to what used to be called (but this language shouldn't be abandoned too quickly, even if it does demand critical vigilance) another "social class." In some respects at least, I have more in common with a Palestinian bourgeois intellectual whose language I don't speak than with some French person who, for this or that reason, social, economic, or something else, will be more foreign to me in some kinds of connection. Conversely, if we take language in the strict sense, which doesn't include nationality, a bourgeois Israeli intellectual will be more foreign to me than a Swiss worker, a Belgian farm laborer, a boxer from Quebec, or a French detective. This question of language, in the sense we are calling narrow—namely, the discursive idiom that is not coextensive with citizenship (French and Québécois, or English and American people can basically speak the same language)—we would always find implicated, in endless ways, in the experience of hospitality. Inviting, re-

*speech exposes them. We do not inhabit a text in the way that one is enveloped by speech. When Derrida starts in a seminar with an obvious point like the one granted by Arendt's statement—"All the same the German language didn't go mad!"—he does so only immediately to begin the work of making this ground fall in, of dislocating the tranquillity of the obvious. What he incites us toward is a progressive desertion of the world attested by a sovereign reason, like Kierkegaard when he isolated the paradox of murder as an act*

ceiving, asylum, lodging, go by way of the language or the address to the other. As Levinas says from another point of view, language is hospitality. Nevertheless, we have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address to the other. Shouldn't we also submit to a sort of holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, what her name is, where he comes from, etc.? Shouldn't we abstain from asking another these questions, which herald so many required conditions, and thus limits, to a hospitality thereby constrained and thereby confined into a law and a duty? And so into the economy of a circle? We will always be threatened by this dilemma between, on the one hand, unconditional hospitality that dispenses with law, duty, or even politics, and, on the other, hospitality circumscribed by law and duty. One of them can always corrupt the other, and this capacity for perversion remains irreducible. It *must* remain so. It is true that this abstention ("come, enter, stop at my place, I don't ask your name, nor even to be responsible, nor where you come from or where you are going") seems more worthy of the absolute hospitality that offers the gift without reservations; and some might also recognize there a possibility of language. Keeping silent is already a modality of possible speaking. We will have to negotiate constantly between these two extensions of the concept of hospitality as well as of language. We will also come back to the two regimes of a law of hospitality: the unconditional or hyperbolic on the one hand, and the conditional and juridico-political, even the eth-

*of faith, for instance in Fear and Trembling. In the movement of "deconstruction" that we are getting used to through Derrida, one sometimes forgets this drilling movement that gets to the uncanny at the heart of the most familiar, there where "all we had seen was fire."*

*In the final example of taking to the limit that I would like to cite, the obvious thing from which Derrida begins is almost amusing. It is contained in these words: "Human beings offer hospitality only to*

ical, on the other: ethics in fact straddling the two, depending on whether the living environment is governed wholly by fixed principles of respect and donation, or by exchange, proportion, a norm, etc. With regard to the two extensions of language, let me just rapidly set up *two* lines of research, two programs or two problematics. They are both restricted to language "in the narrow sense," to the natural or national language drawn on by discourse, utterance, elocution.

1. The auto-mobile of this "language we carry with us," as we were saying a little while ago, is not separate from all the technological prostheses whose refinements and complication are in principle unlimited (the mobile phone is only a figure for this), or, on the other side, if we can put it like that, from the aforementioned auto-affection of which the consensus is that it belongs, as its particular possibility, to the auto-mobility of the living thing in general. Is there hospitality without at least the fantasy of this auto-nomy? of this auto-mobile auto-affection of which language's hearing-oneself-speak is the privileged figure?

2. If the proper name does not belong to language, to the ordinary functioning of language, although that is dependent on it; if, as I tried to demonstrate elsewhere, a proper name cannot be translated like another word in the language ("Peter" is not the *translation* of "Pierre"), what consequences can we draw from this about hospitality? This assumes both the calling on and recalling of the proper name in its pure possibility (it's to you, yourself, that I say "come," "enter," "whoever you are and whatever your name, your language, your