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## ► To cite this version:

Joanny Moulin. On Hospitality, or "The Power to Rise above one's Life". Pázmány Papers, Journal of Languages and Cultures, 2023, 1 (1), pp.31-44. hal-04431016

HAL Id: hal-04431016

<https://hal.science/hal-04431016>

Submitted on 1 Feb 2024

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# On Hospitality, or “The Power to Rise above one’s Life”

Joanny Moulin<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

What habitat does the notion of hospitality find in the philosophy of life? First terminological snag: “philosophy of life” is a vocable silted up in history, for one hears *Lebensphilosophie*, vitalism, Bergson, Simmel, Dilthey, etc. Further upstream, of course, Hegel, his distinction between the life of nature and the life of spirit (from which were derived the *Geisteswissenschaften*, in the time of Wilhelm Dilthey, long before they became the human sciences, and what in several points of his oeuvre Derrida said about it, more particularly in *La vie la mort*, and twenty years later in *Hospitalité*. But from the very start, even before any reference to what anyone may have said about it, life demands hospitality in some place, to live is to inhabit, and in this uniqueness, this identity of the living and of the inhabiting we understand, immediately, the ambivalence of the notion that Derrida signals by the portmanteau word ‘hostipitalité’, that he links to the notion of enclave ‘that a general typology of the enclave must organize any theory of ipseity as hospitality or hostipitality’. Naturally, ‘enclave’ must be understood in the sense of inclusion, but while remembering that etymologically *enclave* derives from the Latin *inclavatus*, locked up, under lock and key.

## Keywords

hospitality, Jacques Derrida, enclave, Bergson, life, Lebensphilosophie, Husserl, Heidegger, Hegel, Aufhebung, Freud, Plato, Maine de Biran, Bataille

hat habitat does the notion of hospitality find in the philosophy of life? First terminological issue: ‘philosophy of life’ is a vocable silted up with history, for one hears *Lebensphilosophie*, vitalism, Bergson, Simmel, Dilthey, etc. Further upstream, of course, Hegel, his distinction between the life of nature and the life of spirit (from which were derived the *Geisteswissenschaften*, as the first German translator of John Stuart Mill’s

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*System of Logic* chose to render the notion of ‘moral sciences’<sup>2</sup>, in the days of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), long before they became the human sciences, humanities, social sciences), and what in several points of his oeuvre Derrida said about it, more particularly in *La vie la mort*, the seminar of the academic year 1975–1976, twenty years exactly before *Hospitalité* (vol. 1, séminaire 1995–1996). But from the very start, even before any reference to what anyone may have said about it, life demands hospitality in some place, for to live is to inhabit, and in this uniqueness, this identity of the living and of the inhabiting, we understand, immediately, the ambivalence of the notion that Derrida signals by the portmanteau word ‘hostipitalité’, which he links to the notion of enclave /’enkleiv/ (*enclave* /en’kla:v/) – ‘that a general typology of the enclave must organize any theory of ipseity as hospitality or hostipitality’<sup>3</sup>. Naturally, ‘enclave’ must be understood in the sense of inclusion, but while remembering that etymologically *enclave* derives from the Latin *inclusus*: locked up, under lock and key.

The relevance to life is doubly blatant, because, on the one hand, life can only be *comprehended* as an enclave in the sense that is by definition comprised in a place–milieu, *Lebenswelt*, life-world, world that comprises it—and because, on the other hand, all life is under lock and key, coded, enclaved in the sense of encoded, by a genetic code that, for most living beings, can only be comprehended as comprising alterity (otherness) within its own identity: this is par excellence the principle of sexual reproduction, but this can also be demonstrated of other modes of the proliferation of life, as in the case of viruses, quasi-living quasi-beings that can be defined as continually metamorphosing codes. Is it not, in sum, what Derrida is saying when he asserts that ‘a general typology of the enclave must organize any theory of ipseity as hospitality or hostipitality’? There is no *ipseity*, there is no *living subject* (*sujet vivant*) that is not enclaved, enclaving, and that therefore cannot be theorized in terms of hospitality, *hostipitality*. This ambivalence proves crucial for the whole of the 1995–1996 seminar, admirably figured by this neologism (hostipitality) that mutually enclaves hospitality and hostility into one another. The first word derives from the Latin *hospes*, *hospitis*. The host in English is someone who receives and accommodates another person in his or her own home, and until the 15<sup>th</sup> century a host was also a hostel, a place of hosting. In French, since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, *hôte* is a

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Book VI On the Logic of the Moral sciences’, John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence, and Methods of Scientific Investigation*, vol. 2, London, J.W. Parker, 1843, 649 p. « 6. Buch. Von der Logik der Geisteswissenschaften oder moralischen Wissenschaften », John Stuart Mill, *System der deduktiven und induktiven Logik*, trad. J. Schiel, 1868, Braunschweig, 1868.

<sup>3</sup> [...] qu’une topologie générale de l’enclave doit organiser toute théorie de l’ipseité comme hospitalité ou hostipitalité” Jacques Derrida, *Hospitalité*, Séminaire (1995–1996), vol. 1, Paris, Seuil, 2021, p. 252–253.

middle-voice word, for *l'hôte* designates the one who receives as well as the one who is received, the enclaving as well as the enclaved, with or without an ‘h’, *hôte*, *hoste*, *oste*. Drop the final ‘e’ and you have *l'ost*, that is to say the army, which is the root meaning of the word *host* in English. The word *ost* is pronounced \ɔst\ in modern French, but it used to be pronounced \ot\, exactly like *hôte*. The other meanings of the word *host* in English are the hostel, i.e. the place of hosting, up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the *host* as consecrated bread, *hostie* \ɔs.ti\ in French, deriving from the Latin *hostia*, the object of a sacrifice. As for the host as army on the march, you can receive it as you wish, in barracks, or with an exchange of blows on the battlefield, host against host, as a force of liberation, or even with submission.

The other, naturally hostile host, derives from the Latin etymon *hostis*, the foe, the foreigner, but also the token, the pawn in the strategy game *ludus latrunculorum*, in which the pawns or pieces were called *hostes*, because as adversaries, as opponents, they host one another. The *ludus latrunculorum*, also called *latrunculi*, or *latrones*, or even ‘game of brigands’ or ‘game of soldiers’, was an ancient Roman ancestor of the games of chess, and of draughts, whose pieces host one another, enclose one another on the chessboard. War is a kind of *hostipitality*: the enemy penetrates your homeland with its hosts, and then you see if you wish to collaborate, or if you resist, and if you will get over it and how, but what is certain, independently of the question of knowing if and how you will get out of the situation, what is certain is that you have been thrown out of your home, out of your *Lebenswelt*, in the sense that the arrival of the other as host has irrevocably changed your life. But *that is life*, as the saying goes in expressing a certain popular fatalism, but also in the sense that what we comprehend as life is no other than this movement, this ‘evolution’, of action and reaction relatively to negativity as *hostipitality*, or in other words as entrance, as hosting, of an alterity by definition altering and hostile. At this juncture, two remarks are called for: the one on *La vie la mort*, and the other on Bergson.

Firstly, *La vie la mort*: two decades before the seminar on *Hospitalité*, Derrida had sustained a thesis that could be translated today (after having read the 1995–1996 seminar in particular) by the proposition that life hosts death that hosts life; life enclaves death that enclaves life, or, in other words, that the relationship between the two is a rapport of hospitality (*hostipitality*).

So that by saying, with the blank of a pause or the invisible dash of a beyond, ‘life death’ (*la vie la mort*), I neither oppose nor equate life to death—neither and (*et*) nor is (*est*)—let us say that I neutralize both the opposition and the equation, to signal the possibility, not of another logics, an opposite logics of life and death,

but of another topics, if you wish, from which we could read at last the whole program of the and, and of the is, of positionality and of the presence of being, both remaining always effects of ‘life death’<sup>4</sup>.

Three key words, three words enclaved, encoded in this citation, typical of the argumentation of this particular seminar: ‘logics, topics, program’. It is clearly not indifferent that the first two advance armed with the *other*—‘another logics, an opposite logics’, ‘another topics, if you wish’—and it is well known that Derrida’s point, in that particular seminar, was to criticize François Jacob’s biologism dominated by the notion of program, especially in the genetic sense of the term. In the present argumentation, this amounts to a contradiction of the fatalist’s ‘that’s life’ by examining a programmer God, a Great Programmer of the Universe, who, ultimately, has written all destinies in advance. Against the fatalistic and fixistic notions of a program stands the notion of game and gamble (the two words have the same etymology and the French word *jeu* translates both), and game implies strategy, be it only to create the conditions of possibility in which one can seize the *kairos* to triumph in the end.

Secondly, Bergson: it is difficult not to perceive, in this respect, the echo, or rather the ghost of Bergson haunting Derrida’s thought, and more particularly the theses Bergson developed in *Creative Evolution* and *The Creative Mind* (*Lévolution créatrice & La pensée et le mouvant*)<sup>5</sup>. It is impossible not to hear the echo of Bergson’s *élan vital* in this notion of the *escape* of writing from the program. One must insist on this notion of *escape*, *scapes* or moving, changing faces of the world, which, for the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), who was a disciple of John Duns Scotus (c.1265–1308), converged towards an inaccessible *inshape* of the Platonic idea, or of the *quidditas* of the thing *in se*. On the contrary, we are interested here in these *scapes*, or in these *escapes* of Derrida’s text, who at this point is principally working on Kant’s notion of ‘cosmopolitic right’:

The point is here, as you have probably guessed, in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, of the famous *Third Definitive Article in view of Perpetual Peace* (*Dritter Definitivartikel zum ewigen Frieden*), whose title is: ‘Das Weltbürgerrecht soll auf Bedingungen der allgemeinen

<sup>4</sup> ‘Si bien qu’en disant, avec le blanc d’une pause ou le trait invisible d’un au-delà, “la vie la mort”, je n’oppose ni n’identifie la vie à la mort (ni et ni est), disons que je neutralise et l’opposition et l’identification, pour faire signe non pas vers une autre logique, une logique opposée de la vie et la mort, mais vers une autre topique, si vous voulez, depuis laquelle se donnerait à lire, au moins tout le programme du et et du est, de la positionnalité et de la présence de l’être, les deux restant des effets de “la vie la mort”.’ Jacques Derrida, *La vie la mort* (*Séminaire 1975–1976*), ed. P.-A. Brault et P. Kamuf, Paris, Seuil, 2019, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Henri Bergson, *Lévolution créatrice*, Félix Alcan, 1910; *Creative Evolution*, tr. A. Mitchell, ed. I. Edman, 1911, New York, Random House (The Modern Library), 1944. Henri Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant, Essais et conférences*, 1941, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950, Engl. trans.: *The Creative Mind*, tr. M. L. Andison, New York, Philosophical Library, 1934.

Hospitalität eingeschränkt sein? ‘Cosmopolitic Right must limit itself to the conditions of universal hospitality<sup>6</sup>.

Here, the focus of attention is the restriction, *die Einschränkung – ‘das Weltbürgerrecht soll [...] eingeschränkt sein’* – the paradox of a cosmopolitan right that must be restrained and restricted to the universal – *auf Bedingungen der allgemeinen Hospitalität* –, as well as the corollary reduction of the reciprocity of hospitality, *Hospitalität*, to the univocity of the quasi-synonym *Wirtbarkeit*<sup>7</sup>, which is the hospitality of the host – *der Wirt*, the innkeeper. The strong argument of the criticism Derrida addresses to Kant on the question of hospitality bears precisely on this notion of imperative, and consists in saying that ‘this unconditional law of hospitality, if one can think that, is a law without any imperative, without any order or duty. For if I practice hospitality as a duty, it is no longer an absolute hospitality given, presented to the other’<sup>8</sup>. He adds that he is saying so ‘under erasure or under *epoché*’ (*sous nature ou sous epokhē*). And it is once again to Husserl that Derrida returns in the fifth session of the seminar on *Hospitality* (of 17 January 1996), where the *escape* that is interpellating us here happens; Husserl, who was, as we know, one of Derrida’s decisive *philosophical hosts*, when he elaborated certain key notions of his own philosophy in the ambit of his reading of the philosophy of Husserl, in his long introduction to Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*<sup>9</sup>, in 1962. A *philosophical host*, in the sense that Derrida the translator hosts Husserl’s voice inside his own, and by doing so he invests Husserl’s thinking with his own thinking, to such a point that neither the one nor the other remains unaffected: after this ‘Introduction to Husserl’s Geometry’, neither Husserl nor Derrida can ever be the same as before. But in this fifth session of the seminar on *Hospitality*, Derrida notices, in filigree, a similitude, a shift of the Kantian imperative ‘*soll*’, the ‘*must*’ of Husserlian *epoché* as ‘power’, as ‘I-can’. That is where the *escape*, the *departure*, happens: a swerve from Husserl, whom Derrida situates on the side of ‘the whole of transcendental philosophy’ (*toute la philosophie transcendantale*).

The first examples of proper names could just as well reconduct to all the theories of the faculties, that is to say to the powers [*Vermögen*] that underlie every transcendental

<sup>6</sup> ‘Il s’agit, comme vous l’avez sans doute déjà deviné, dans Vers la paix perpétuelle, du fameux Troisième Article définitif en vue de la paix perpétuelle (Dritter Definitivartikel zum ewigen Frieden), dont le titre est : “Das Weltbürgerrecht soll auf Bedingungen der allgemeinen Hospitalität eingeschränkt sein” : “Le droit cosmopolitique doit se restreindre aux conditions de l’hospitalité universelle”’ Derrida, *Hospitalité*, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> cf. *Ibidem*, p. 21-24.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Cette loi inconditionnelle de l’hospitalité, si on peut penser cela, est une loi sans impératif, sans ordre et sans devoir. Car si je pratique l’hospitalité par devoir, ce n’est plus une hospitalité absolue donnée, offerte à l’autre’, *Ibidem*, p. 147-148.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Introduction’, in Edmund Husserl. *L’origine de la géométrie*, 1962, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (Épiméthée), 2010, p. 3-172; *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry, an Introduction*, trans. J. P. JR Leavey, 1978, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

philosophy, in its larger tradition, from the Cartesian *cogito* and the Kantian ‘I think’—that implicitly links possibility to faculty as power, and sometimes in the legal form—and the Husserlian *cogito*, which, while questioning Kant’s transcendental psychologism as a theory of faculties, supposes nevertheless a power, an ‘I can’, for instance, I can bracket off the existence of the world in phenomenological reduction; I can suspend, in the free conversion of the outlook that is transcendental *epoché*, every life and every existence—the immense power of liberty that seems subtle and ethereal, even speculative, but leads back in fact, this power, to the recapture of a pure transcendental ego, of a pure self, as if from this power that is stronger than the very existence of the world and that life, the *psyche* itself [develop: above life<sup>21</sup>]<sup>10</sup>

It is this addendum in parentheses that interpellates us here, not to say this *enclave*: ‘[develop: above life<sup>21</sup>]’, augmented with a footnote by the editors of the volume: note n° 21. Hospitality of the text, that hosts in this case a thinking as yet absent, oral guest of a written host, writing inhabited by a speech as yet unformulated. This addendum is like a door in the text that opens out onto another *stanza*, another room, which is inhabited, we are told, and which we are invited to visit later. But what are these ‘powers [...] that underlie every transcendental philosophy, in its larger tradition’, and which are clearly here the object of Derrida’s criticism, a criticism by which he distinguishes himself from that kind of philosophy? These are the powers of reduction, of *Einschränkung*, of *epoché*—in short, the powers of abstraction; an ‘I can’, for instance: ‘I can bracket off the existence of the world in phenomenal reduction, I can suspend, in the free conversion of an outlook that is transcendental *epoché*, every life and every existence’. Or else: ‘immense power of liberty [...] that leads back, in fact, this power, to the recapture of a pure transcendental ego, of a pure self, as if from this power that is stronger than the very existence of the world and that life’. And what are these ‘powers’ blamed for? Their powerlessness, their capacity for illusion and mistake, and the projection they operate ‘of a pure transcendental ego, a pure self’, and ipseity without hospitality, which would be the host of nothing else, which would be pure in this sense that it would host nothing else, and would be hosted by nothing else. And in a manner rather surprising in Derrida’s expression, we

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Les premiers exemples ou noms propres pourraient aussi bien reconduire vers toutes les théories des facultés, c'est-à-dire des pouvoirs [Vermögen] qui sous-tendent toute la philosophie transcendante, dans sa plus large tradition, depuis le cogito cartésien et le je pense kantien – qui lie explicitement la possibilité à la faculté comme pouvoir, et parfois dans la forme juridique – et le cogito husserlien, qui tout en mettant en question le psychologisme transcendantal de Kant comme théorie des facultés n’en suppose pas moins un pouvoir, un «je peux», par exemple, je peux mettre l’existence du monde entre parenthèses dans la réduction phénoménologique, je peux suspendre, dans la libre conversion du regard qu’est l’epoché transcendantale, toute vie et toute existence – pouvoir inouï de la liberté qui paraît subtil et éthéré, voire spéculatif, mais qui reconduit, par ce pouvoir, à la ressaisie d’un ego transcendantal pur, d’un soi-même pur, comme et à partir de ce pouvoir plus fort que l’existence même du monde et que la vie, que la psyché même [développer : au-dessus de la vie<sup>21</sup>]', Derrida, *Hospitalité*, op. cit., p. 69.

hear in this passage an irritated tone, a certain exasperation perhaps, concerning the ‘phenomenological reduction’, the Husserlian *epoché*, or the Kantian *Einschränkung*, for the reason that it is a power, characteristic of ‘the whole of transcendental philosophy’, an ‘I can bracket off the existence of the world’, an ‘I can suspend [...] all life and all existence’, a ‘power [...] that leads back [...] to the recapture of a pure transcendental ego, a pure self’, a ‘power stronger than the very existence of the world and of life, of the psyche itself’. And it is precisely here, at this very significative moment of the text, that the addendum ‘[develop: above life21]’ is inserted.

What is so interpellating in this moment of the seminar? First interpellation: it is one of the rare moments when Derrida comes close to a form of axiology in which transcendental philosophy is criticized on the grounds that it impedes *life*, that it brackets it off, that it suspends it, excludes it, in short that it does not host it, that it does not tolerate it any more, does not make room for it, that it extracts itself from it. The philosophical *agon* that we recognize here recoups the *departure*, the *escape*, that occurs in the introduction to *The Origin of Geometry*, where the *clinamen*, the swerve of Derrida’s thought takes place relatively to Husserl’s taken as a paragon of transcendental philosophy. Hospitality is the middle voice, both active and passive, inscription, enclave, encoding of the other into oneself, and of oneself into the other, and even more of the other to come, of the other as futurity: hospitality thus understood is the paroxysm of *differance* and of writing.

Second interpellation: it is crucial that this should occur incidentally, but by a principal contingency, ‘a pure transcendental ego, a pure self’, that is the problem that must be resolved in any attempt to theorize biography as a literary genre, or a historiographical genre, that generally projects a ‘Self’, a pure self, a pure ego—and to say ‘pure’ amounts to saying ‘transcendental’ – postulated as independent from the contingencies of the existence and of the life of the subject. The whole problem is precisely to find how to resist this power of abstraction, ‘stronger than life’, this power ‘above life’ in this sense that it is a power *over* life. How can one enable thinking to resist this power instead of collaborating with it? How can one enable thinking *not to host* this power?

Third interpellation: what the text of this passage pits against reduction as the power that is characteristic of transcendental philosophy is *life and existence*, ‘any life and any existence’, and through this equation of life and existence can be heard one of the translations of the *Dasein*, and hence the *escape* produces itself towards Heidegger’s criticism of metaphysics as the *Leitfrage*, or ‘guiding question’, of Western philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche: what is designated here by the vocable

‘transcendental philosophy’. But the text repeats itself, it proceeds by iteration, and at the second go, at the second return of the same, it hosts two new lexical guests: ‘any existence and any life’ becomes ‘[...] the very existence of the world and of life, [...] the *psyche* itself’. The world enters the stage on the same plane as life – ‘existence and life’ become ‘the existence of the world and of life’, and it is true that no life can exist but in the hospitality of the world. But finally the escape remains towards Heidegger and the creative rapport to the world, the *weltbildend* relation to the world of the human *Dasein* (but that is a pleonasm).

Most remarkable is the invitation of the *psyche* into this context: ‘this power stronger than even the existence of the world, stronger than life, stronger than the *psyche* even [develop: above life21]’. Derrida’s text becomes the host of new notions in increasing number. Opposite transcendental philosophy and its reduction that produces the pure ego: existence, the world, life, the *psyche*. The resistance coalition grows. But most of all the *psyche* is integrated as an extension of life – ‘[stronger than] life, [stronger than] the *psyche* itself’. What emerges then in Derrida’s text, with this triad of the world, life and the *psyche*, is another horizon that is the horizon of Hegel’s thought, which, by the ‘Phoenician movement’, of which Derrida speaks in *La vie la mort*, describes the passage from ‘the life of nature’ to ‘the life of spirit’. This passage, this transformation, is an *Aufhebung*, that Derrida translated by ‘*relève*’, and which is conceived of, at least at first, as an elevation, a rise. From then on, the addendum, ‘[develop: above life21]’, coming, moreover, immediately after the addition of the *psyche*, evokes the life of the spirit *above* the life of nature.

Thus, at this stage of the text two interpretations become possible, or rather we find ourselves not so much before a fork in the road as before a doubling up of interpretations, corresponding to two ways of thinking, that can be followed either separately or simultaneously. The one considers that the *above life* is the power *over* life that transcendental philosophy arrogates to itself by the transcendental reduction that suspends existence, the world, life, and the *psyche*. The other interpretation construes the *above life* as designating the *life above life*, the ‘life of the spirit’ above the ‘life of nature’. Two other textual hospitalities, two other philosophical hosts, so to speak, can be detected here. Besides the presence of Hegel, here can be felt, on the one hand, the presence of Freud, of whom we know that it is by the integration and the analysis of ‘A Note Upon the “Mystic Writing-Pad”’ (1924) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

that historically Derrida discovered the North-West passage of his own thinking<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, and at the same time, this ‘[develop: above life21]’ understood as the choice of a philosophy that turns away from transcendental reduction because of its incapacity to account for life and the *above life* inevitably invokes the manes of Bergson, and makes the echoes of pages like this one resonate in the background:

Plato was the first to set up the theory that to know the real consists in finding its Idea, that is to say, in forcing it into a pre-existing frame already at our disposal—as if we implicitly possessed universal knowledge. But this belief is natural to the human intellect, always engaged as it is in determining under what former heading it shall catalogue any new object; and it may be said that, in a certain sense, we are all born Platonists. Nowhere is the [inadequacy] *powerlessness* of this method so obvious as in theories of life. If, in evolving in the direction of the vertebrates in general, of man and intellect in particular, life has had to abandon by the way many elements incompatible with this particular mode of organization and to consign them, as we shall show, to other lines of development, it is the totality of these elements that [we must find again and rejoin to] *we shall have to search for and blend with* the intellect proper, in order to grasp the true nature of vital activity. And we shall probably be aided in this by the fringe of [vague intuition] *confused representation* that surrounds our distinct—that is, intellectual—representation. For what can this useless fringe be, if not that part of the evolving principle which has not shrunk to the peculiar form of our organization, [but has settled around it unasked for, unwanted] *but has been smuggled along?* It is there, accordingly, that we must look for hints to expand the intellectual form of our thought; from there shall we derive the impetus necessary to [lift us] *rise (soar, lift ourselves)* above ourselves. To form an idea of the whole of life cannot consist in combining simple ideas that have been left behind in us by life itself

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Freud et la scène de l’écriture’, in *L’écriture et la différence*, Paris, Seuil (Tel Quel), 1997, p. 293–340. ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, in *Writing and Difference*, tr. A. Bass, London, Routledge, 1978, p. 246–91. Jacques Derrida, ‘Spéculer – sur “Freud”’, in *La carte postale de Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Paris: Flammarion (La philosophie en effet), 1999, p. 275–437. ‘To Speculate – on “Freud”’, in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, tr. A. Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 257–409.

in the course of its evolution. How could the part be equivalent to the whole, the content to the container, a by-product of the vital operation to the operation itself?<sup>12</sup>

The same constatation of the ‘inadequacy’ (but ‘*impuissance*’ is rather ‘powerlessness’) of transcendental philosophy to account for ‘the whole of life’ (*l’ensemble de la vie*) – ‘every life and every existence’ (*toute existence et toute vie*) – the same lassitude in front of the *shrinking* operated by the *epoché*, or phenomenological reduction, condemning itself *not to see* ‘that part of the evolving principle which has not shrunk to the peculiar form of our organization’. One cannot but see that, at least in this fifth session of the *Hospitality* seminar, Derrida’s thinking is inhabited, haunted, by a certain criticism, and even a philosophical stance, which is akin to Bergson’s vitalism. For it is this second reading that is favored by Derrida’s main text. But it is the first one that is briefly developed in note 21 transcribing a spoken addendum:

21. During the session, Jacques Derrida comments: ‘Husserl’s transcendental ego, one reaches it via a phenomenological reduction that suspends even the psychic life of the ego, which is only the parallel to transcendental life, therefore above life, power to rise above life. One could then find many such examples<sup>13</sup>.

Derrida’s expression ‘*s’élèver au-dessus de la vie*’, ‘to rise above life’, echoes (with a difference as echoes will do) Bergson’s ‘*nous hausser au-dessus de nous-mêmes*’, which Arthur Mitchell has rendered as ‘to lift us above ourselves’, a translation that unfortunately loses the sense of the reflexive pronominal verbe ‘*se hausser*’ – ‘*c’est là que nous puiserons l’elan nécessaire pour nous hausser au-dessus de nous-mêmes*’ – ‘from there shall we derive the impetus necessary to lift *ourselves (to rise)* above ourselves’. The syntactic necessity of a pronoun is occasioned by the opting for the transitive verb ‘to lift’. By contrast,

<sup>12</sup> From *Creative Evolution*, tr. A. Mitchell, p. 55–56, with our modifications in italics. ‘Platon fut le premier à ériger en théorie que connaître le réel consiste à lui trouver son Idée, c'est-à-dire à le faire entrer dans un cadre préexistant qui serait déjà à notre disposition, – comme si nous possédions implicitement la science universelle. Mais cette croyance est naturelle à l'intelligence humaine, toujours préoccupée de savoir sous quelle ancienne rubrique elle cataloguera n'importe quel objet nouveau, et l'on pourrait dire, en un certain sens, que nous naissions tous platoniciens. Nulle part l'*impuissance* de cette méthode ne s'étale aussi manifestement que dans les théories de la vie. Si, en évoluant dans la direction des Vertébrés en général, de l'homme et de l'intelligence en particulier, la vie a dû abandonner en route bien des éléments incompatibles avec ce mode particulier d'organisation et les confier, comme nous le montrerons, à d'autres lignes de développement, c'est la totalité de ces éléments que nous devrons rechercher et *fondre avec* l'intelligence proprement dite, pour ressaïsir la vraie nature de l'activité vitale. Nous y serons sans doute aidés, d'ailleurs, par la frange de *représentation* confuse qui entoure notre représentation distincte, je veux dire intellectuelle : que peut être cette frange inutile, en effet, sinon la partie du principe évoluant qui ne s'est pas rétréci à la forme spéciale de notre organisation et *qui a passé en contrebande*? C'est donc là que nous devrons aller chercher des indications pour dilater la forme intellectuelle de notre pensée ; c'est là que nous puiserons l'elan nécessaire pour *nous hausser au-dessus de nous-mêmes*. Se représenter l'ensemble de la vie ne peut pas consister à combiner entre elles des idées simples déposées en nous par la vie elle-même au cours de son évolution : comment la partie équivaudrait-elle au tout, le contenu au contenant, un résidu de l'opération vitale à l'opération elle-même?’ (*L'évolution créatrice*, op. cit., p. 52–53). Italics added.

<sup>13</sup> 21. Lors de la séance, Jacques Derrida commente : « L’ego transcendental chez Husserl, on y accède dans une réduction phénoménologique qui suspend même jusqu'à la vie psychique de l’ego, qui n'est que le parallèle de la vie transcendante, donc au-dessus de la vie, pouvoir de s’élèver au-dessus de la vie. On pourrait après multiplier ces exemples ». Jacques Derrida, op. cit., p. 79. Our translation.

Derrida's choice to use the *infinitive* form of the pronominal verb 's'élèver' has the additional consequence of detaching the action from the human subject. Therefore, a faithful translation of these texts into English requires an intransitive verb like 'to rise', for both Bergson and Derrida are speaking of a rising impetus, or a rising power, that is thought of as inherent to life. The 'above', *l'au-dessus*, is precisely not the 'beyond', *l'au-delà*. Derrida puts it clearly, by writing that the 'above life' ('au-dessus de la vie'), the 'power to rise above life' ('pouvoir de s'élever au-dessus de la vie') that he has in mind is 'the psychic life of the ego, which is only the parallel to transcendental life' ('la vie psychique de l'ego, qui n'est que le parallèle de la vie transcendante'). For the Bergson of *Creative Evolution* (*L'Évolution créatrice*), the source of this 'impetus to rise', this '*élan vital*', is 'that part of the evolving principle which has not shrunk to the special form of our organization' ('la partie du principe évoluant qui ne s'est pas rétrécie à la forme spéciale de notre organisation'): It is therefore, by definition, what is occulted by the shrinking act of Husserlian *epoché* or transcendental reduction, and which '*we shall have to search for and blend with the intellect proper*' ('que nous devrons rechercher et fondre avec l'intelligence proprement dite') – 'fondre avec' could also be translated by the verb 'to alloy with', or 'to melt with', to maintain the metallurgical simile – the notion being clearly one of assimilation, or, in other words, of accomplished hosting, as Bergson envisages the possibility that the (precise, distinct) intellect and its (confused, indistinct) other shall be *melted* together.

In Derrida's thinking, the first acceptation of the expression 'above life', 'power to rise above life', as defining the attitude of transcendental philosophy is soon abandoned in favor of the second, which construes 'pouvoir de s'élever au-dessus de la vie' as 'power of life to rise above', the rising power of life, the rising power that we call life. This other acceptation, this other direction of thinking is the one Derrida's discourse welcomes to the point of letting itself be invaded by it:

Another tradition could be Maine de Biran's, who deduces the sense of intimacy, the relationship to oneself, from an 'I can'. In yet another way, the *Dasein* that constitutes the theme of Heidegger's existential analytics, and which is said to be, beyond the egological forms of subjectivity, always, every time, nevertheless *jemeinig*, mine, is explicitly described as 'possibilization', 'can-be' [*Seinkönnen*]; the whole *Eigentlichkeit* is linked to the can-be, and even to the can-be as a whole, or to the can-be for death. Being, as being-there, is an original 'can-be': *Sein und Zeit* can be read

as a book on the possibility as possibilization and as a displacement of the classical concept of possibility and of force or of power [*Kraft, Macht, Könnem, Möglichkeit*, etc.]<sup>14</sup>.

This ‘displacement of the classical concept of possibility and of force or of power’, that is also to say the description do *Dasein* as ‘possibilization’, ‘can-be’, etc. should be reconsidered as another definition of ‘biopower’<sup>15</sup>, distinct from Foucault’s without contradicting it, that is to say of life as power to rise, or rising power. It is pleonastic to add ‘above life’ or ‘above itself’, because life rises by definition, above itself by definition. This ascending movement, this ascension defines life, and it is a hospitality, possibly a hostipitality, because the living subject is such only by the symbiosis by which it hosts the other, by the desiring, symbiotic opening up to the other as futurity, as ‘can-be’. Reciprocally, that is the reason why the *epoché* or transcendental reduction is a *Holzweg*, a blind alley.

The following step of Derrida’s reflection in this fifth session is to introduce us to a great host whom we had recognized long ago in the crowd of guests to this party: ‘If I keep the reference to Hegel for the end – non chronological [...] it is indeed the Hegel of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and of the master-slave dialectic [...]’<sup>16</sup>. Incidentally, master and slave are also in a relationship of hospitality, of hostipitality, the one living upon the other and reciprocally, in a dialectic that is bound by its own impetus to reverse itself, and which is the turnstile of the middle voice: the vortex of the host’s host, of the master as the slave’s slave, and of the slave as the master’s master.

Without entering into the analysis of this complex process, one can retain at least this characteristic: lordship ensures self-consciousness by the intermediary of the recognition by the slave and of the slave’s labor [...] and even if the master, therefore the power of domination [of *Herrschaft*] depends on the slave’s work and at a certain moment makes the master the slave’s slave, self-consciousness demands the moment of lordship or domination, that is to say *the power to risk death by rising above life*, of which the master is by definition capable, since it is this power over the other that is his lordship, that ensures lordship. To be able to say ‘me’ is to have the power over the

<sup>14</sup> ‘Une autre tradition pourrait être celle de Maine de Biran, qui déduit le sens intime, le rapport à soi, d’un « je peux ». D’une autre manière, le *Dasein* qui forme le thème de l’analytique existentielle de Heidegger et qui est dit, au-delà des formes égologiques de la subjectivité, toujours, chaque fois, néanmoins *jemeinig*, le mien, est explicitement décrit comme « possibilisation », « pouvoir-être » [*Seinkönnen*] ; toute l’*Eigentlichkeit* est liée au pouvoir-être et même au pouvoir-être en totalité ou au pouvoir-être pour la mort. L’être, comme être-là, est un « pouvoir-être » original. *Sein und Zeit* peut être lu comme un livre sur la possibilité comme possibilisation et comme un déplacement du concept classique de possibilité et de force ou de pouvoir [*Kraft, Macht, Können, Möglichkeit*, etc.]’. *Ibidem*, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> See Joanny Moulin “Derrida, Foucault, Agamben, and the Thinking of the Beginning”, *Malices, The Journal of Literatures and Cultures in the Digital Era*, 13|2022, *Derrida 2021 – Biopolitique et déconstruction*, <https://cielam.univ-amu.fr/malice/articles/derrida-foucault-agamben-and-the-thinking-of-the-beginning>.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Si je garde la référence à Hegel pour la fin – non chronologique [...] c’est bien le Hegel de *La Phénoménologie de l’esprit* et de ce qu’on y appelle la dialectique du maître et de l’esclave [...].’ *Ibidem*, p. 69-70.

other by having the power *to rise above one's own life, to risk one's own life [while preserving it, of course]*, you know that this is the whole problem, the comedy that Bataille noticed<sup>22</sup>]<sup>17</sup>

Note 22 indicates a text of 1962, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve', in *Writing and Difference*. In brief, the master characteristically risks his life, exposing it to the possibility of death, without incurring the pure and simple destruction of his natural life, which Hegel called 'abstract negativity', but while asserting his power to survive the 'negation of consciousness', '*die Negation des Bewusstseins*', and it is by this welcoming of death into life, this hospitality granted to one's death in one's life, that enables him to rise above (his) life, by the 'sovereign operation' that Hegel called *Aufhebung*, and which Derrida translated by 'relève': a *reboot* or *delete-restore*, so to speak. In sum, the master hosts himself. Derrida speaks of Hegel's *Aufhebung* as a 'sovereign operation' in a text where he understands Georges Bataille's 'burst of laughter' as a metaphor of the point at which life rises. This is another phrasing of what, in *La vie la mort*, Derrida called the 'Phoenician movement' or 'Phoenician motif'<sup>18</sup>, by which the life of the spirit rises above natural life. In the earlier text the image was that of the *welding* (*la soudure*) of one life with the other. It is the apparent aporia inherent in the Hegelian *Aufhebung* that makes Bataille burst out laughing, but this laughter is itself a metaphor and an expression of the *rise* by which the master wins his life by losing it.

This life is not natural life, the biological existence put at stake in lordship, but *an essential life that is welded to the first one*, holding it back, making it work for the constitution of self-consciousness, truth, and meaning. *Such is the truth of life*. Through this recourse to the *Aufhebung*, which conserves the stakes, remains in control of the play, limiting it and elaborating it by giving it form and meaning (*Die Arbeit... bildet*), this economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction as the reproduction of meaning; henceforth, everything covered by the name lordship collapses into comedy. The independence of self-consciousness becomes laughable at the moment when it liberates itself by enslaving itself, when it starts to *work*, that is, when it enters into dialectics. Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician:

<sup>17</sup> 'Sans entrer dans l'analyse de ce processus complexe, on peut en retenir au moins ce trait : la maîtrise assure la conscience de soi par la médiation de la reconnaissance par l'esclave et le travail de l'esclave [...] et même si le maître, donc, le pouvoir de domination [de Herrschaft] [...] dépend du travail de l'esclave et fait à un certain moment du maître l'esclave de l'esclave, la conscience de soi passe par le moment de maîtrise ou de domination, c'est-à-dire par le pouvoir de risquer la mort en s'élevant au-dessus de la vie, ce dont le maître est par définition capable, puisque c'est ce pouvoir qui est sa maîtrise, qui lui assure la maîtrise. Pouvoir dire « moi », c'est avoir le pouvoir sur l'autre en ayant le pouvoir de s'élever au-dessus de sa vie, de risquer sa vie [en la gardant, bien sûr, vous savez que c'est tout le problème, le comique que relèvent Bataille<sup>22</sup>]. *Ibidem*, p. 70-71. Italics added.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La vie la mort: Séminaire (1975–1976)*, ed. P.-A. Brault and P. Kamuf, Paris, Seuil, 2019, p. 20, 67; et cf. Joanny Moulin, "Life as Writing in Derrida's *La vie la mort*", *Malice, The Journal of Literatures and Cultures in the Digital Era*, juillet 2020, <https://cielam.univ-amu.fr/malice/articles/life-as-writing-in-derridas-vie-mort>.

it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, *an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls abstract negativity*. A negativity that never takes place, that never presents itself, because in doing so it would start to work again. A laughter that literally never appears, because it exceeds phenomenality in general, the absolute possibility of meaning. And the word ‘laughter’ itself must be read in a burst, as its nucleus of meaning bursts in the direction of the system of *the sovereign operation [...]*<sup>19</sup>.

Bataille’s laughter would be an idiot’s laughter if it manifested the belief that a logical contradiction had been found in Hegel’s *Aufhebung*. But not if it is Nietzsche’s laughter of the ‘yes to life’, which detects in the *Aufhebung* the ‘blind spot of Hegelianism’ that thinks it can systematize the sovereign operation, whereas ‘the sovereign operation, the point of *nonreserve*, is neither positive nor negative. It cannot be inscribed in discourse, except by crossing out predicates or by practicing a contradictory superimpression that then exceeds the logic of philosophy<sup>20</sup>’. The ‘contradictory superimposition’, which consists in accommodating various contradictory discourses as one accommodates different guests, is on the whole a philosophical hospitality that hosts diverse other philosophies without necessarily trying to reconcile them or attune them to one another, but that laughs at the inevitable and ceaseless polemic, the risk-taking and the unavoidable gambling that is the runway of the life of the spirit.

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve’, *Writing and Difference*, tr. A. Bass, London, Routledge, 1978, p. 317-350, p. 323. ‘*Cette vie n'est pas la vie naturelle, l'existence biologique mise en jeu dans la maîtrise, mais une vie essentielle qui se soude à la première, la retient, la fait œuvrer à la constitution de la conscience de soi, de la vérité et du sens*. Telle est la vérité de la vie. Par ce recours à l'*Aufhebung* qui conserve la mise, reste maîtresse du jeu, le limite, le travaille en lui donnant forme et sens (*Die Arbeit... bildet*), cette économie de la vie se restreint à la conservation, à la circulation et à la reproduction de soi, comme du sens ; dès lors tout ce que courre le nom de maîtrise s'effondre dans la comédie. L'indépendance de la conscience de soi devient visible au moment où elle se libère en s'asservissant, où elle entre en travail, c'est-à-dire en dialectique. Le rire seul excède la dialectique et le dialecticien : il n'éclate que depuis le renoncement absolu au sens, depuis le risque absolu de la mort, depuis ce que Hegel appelle négativité abstraite. Négativité qui n'a jamais lieu, qui ne se présente jamais puisqu'à la faire elle réamorcerait le travail. Rire qui à la lettre n'apparaît jamais puisqu'il excède la phénoménalité en général, la possibilité absolue du sens. Et le mot “rire” lui-même doit se lire dans l'éclat, dans l'éclatement aussi de son noyau de sens vers le système de l'*opération souveraine* [...]’. Jacques Derrida, ‘De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale. Un hégelianisme sans réserve’, in *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 369-408, p. 376. Italics added.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, op. cit., p. 327, et cf. ‘La tache aveugle de l'hégelianisme [...] l'*opération souveraine*, le point de non-réserve n'est ni positif ni négatif. On ne peut l'inscrire dans le discours qu'en biffant les prédictifs ou en pratiquant une surimpression contradictoire qui excède alors la logique de la philosophie’. Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, op. cit., p. 380.