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Book review
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Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy

Madeleine Fagan, Ludovic Glorieux, Indira Hašimbegović and Marie Suetsugo (eds.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, April 2007, vii, 246 pages, £18.99, ISBN 9780748625475.

As a medium for reflecting on the significance of a life recently deceased, the obituary is, by its very nature, an unjust evaluation of the richness of a lived life. But especially in the case of Derrida, whose work tirelessly sought to display the instability of settled interpretations, the flood of obituaries and commentaries which sought to decide the significance of the philosopher's work following his death on 8 October 2004 seemed especially misplaced. In an effort to combat the premature closing down of the significance of Derrida's work, *Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy* was explicitly organised to reinvigorate discussion surrounding Derrida's work and defer final judgment of Derrida's legacy to a future to come (*a-venir*). Taking the death of Derrida as point of entry, not only to explore the continued relevance of Derridean thought to contemporary politics and philosophy, but also recognising it as an opportunity to more generally talk about the concepts of legacy, closure and responsibility, this collection marks an important opening to a much broader discussion within philosophical and political thought.

Organised as a multidisciplinary effort following a conference of the Post-international Group at the University of Wales, 6-8 January 2005, the edited collection contains diverse and original contributions from some of the leading figures in continental political thought within the UK and beyond. The articles contained within the collection concentrate more heavily on the themes taken up in Derrida's later work, which are applied almost exclusively to the fields of philosophy and politics. While this somewhat compromises the inter-disciplinarity of the collection promised within the introduction, it has the benefit of allowing the collection to gain from a more sustained focus on a number of key debates, within a collection that could quite easily spread itself too thin to adequately facilitate any form of 'negotiation.'

The text is divided into three sections, framed within challenging introduction and conclusion chapters that serve to locate and elucidate the themes covered within its body. The initial section, entitled 'Future of Deconstruction', most explicitly deals with the concepts of closure and openness that motivated the establishment of this collection, and permeate the rest of the entries. A discussion between Beardsworth, Norris and Thomson (with Bulley and Thomassen entering the debate much later in the book) displays the difficult relationship between deconstruction and the determination of alterity. This challenging discussion of closure, openness and decision unravels the political themes at the heart of Derridean thought and effectively sets the stage for the subsequent two sections.

Concluding the initial section is a powerful piece by Mick Dillon, which applies these themes within an examination of the late messianic turn in Derrida's thought. Here Dillon problematises the Western division between politics and religion to shed light onto the techno-militaristic messianism of advanced liberal societies.

The second section, entitled 'Interrupting the Same', focuses on both the political possibilities arising from the impossibility of closure as well as the repercussions that stem from attempts to sideline particular aporias by traditional political discourses. Here Maya Zehfuss' chapter concerning how the appropriation of 'settled' narratives taken from the second world war have foreclosed the range of opportunities with which to respond within the contemporary war on terror is an illuminating example of the danger, but also impossibility (and thus opportunity) of any closure. April Biccum's contribution similarly explores the question of closure by innovatively drawing on her experience as a Diversity Training Officer and employs Derridean inspired post-colonial theory to reflect on the obstacles present in confronting colonial discourses within British institutions.

The final section, entitled 'Following and Breaking', seeks to draw Derridean thought one step further by placing it in contrast to the ideas of a selection of other contemporary philosophers. The strongest articles in this section demonstrate the continued relevance of Derridean thought through its application to contemporary problem spaces. The article by Edkins in particular provides a moving examination of the politics of representation built around a comparative analysis of portrait photography and concentration camp 'mug-shots' that innovatively draws on the thought of Derrida and Nancy. In contrast, the submissions of Howells and Watt, despite their academic rigor, run a bit dry as they disengage from contemporary political problematic to focus on particular intellectual debates of specialised interest. Howells' contribution is narrowly focused on comparing and contrasting Sartre with Derrida, and maintains a historical focus rather than using the comparison to compel Derridean thought towards political futures to come. Watt, on the other hand, contributes an interesting chapter commenting on the fragment as a literary genre exploited by Derrida as a destabilising technique, however without placing much emphasis on how this makes Derrida any more relevant to contemporary political or philosophical problems.

The tensions and concessions that exist between, and no doubt within, the chapters comprising this collection are a testament to the impossibility of generating a static homogenisation of Derrida's 'oeuvre.' Rather, the negotiations which comprise this collection successfully guide the reader through the complexity that makes Derridean thought so rich. Fighting to keep these tensions from being marginalised, the best contributions within this collection display how this complexity is productive, by using it to engage with contemporary political problematics. In doing so the question of Derrida's legacy is left open, deferring decision on Derrida's legacy to a future to come (*a-venir*).