Will we ever be done with Derrida’s burial rites? And ought we to have done with them? *Derrida From Now On*, a collection of eleven essays by Michael Naas, situates itself on the fault line between these two questions; it is a work both of “mourning” and of “celebration” (10). Consequently, each of the essays collected here is a kind of double response: both a scholarly or academic response to Derrida, to his work, to the texts which he has bequeathed to us, and a highly personal and affecting response to his death in 2004. In this sense, Naas’s book naturally forms part of a much larger corpus of reactions to Derrida’s life and death, a corpus whose *leitmotif* of mourning and melancholia remains as passioned and passionate as it was half a decade ago. We need only mention the titles of some recent responses to Derrida’s work - Nicholas Royle’s *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (University of Edinburgh Press, 2009), Geoffrey Bennington’s *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays of Jacques Derrida* (University of Edinburgh Press, 2010), and Peggy Kamuf’s *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida* (University of Edinburgh Press, 2010)—to grasp, at a glance, the elegiac state of current Derrida scholarship.

It is lucky, then, that deconstruction has always been a coming-to-terms with death. Born from Derrida’s early meditations on death and finitude in Husserl, notably in his *Edmund Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry”: An Introduction* (University of Nebraska Press, 1989), the death of deconstruction was declared at almost every stage of its protean evolution. Death too was at its theoretical heart: the death necessitated by an inexorable *espacement* or spacing always already at work in temporality. No one understood this figurative and non-figurative death better than Derrida himself, whom Naas quotes early in his introduction: “Each time I let something go, each time some trace leaves me, ‘proceeds from me, unable to be
reappropriated, I live my death in writing” (5).

If Derrida From Now On dramatises these tightly interwoven deaths, there is at least one more death at work in Naas’s text: the patricide which is interior to all patrimony, what Derrida once described in a lecture on Foucault (his former teacher) as the “unhappy consciousness” of the reluctant disciple. Eventually, observed Derrida, every disciple is called to answer back to “the master who speaks within him and before him” (Writing and Difference, Routledge, 36–7). This inherent and inheritory tension is legible in every essay of Naas’s collection, which exhibits on one hand a desire for fidelity, for the patient reading and exegesis of texts which have outlived their master, and on the other hand the desire, the drive to see these works transformed, transplanted, brought into violent collision with affairs that are both current and urgent.

The book’s third chapter, on “Derrida’s Laïcité”, seems traversed from either end by this simultaneous desire for fidelity and transformation. Naas’s goal here is to elaborate Derrida’s commitment to what the French term laïcité, “the protection of French institutions from religious dogma and authority” (62). Naas argues that Derrida’s version of laïcité rigorously thinks through the concept’s ideological underpinnings and ironic dogmatisms, offering in its stead a kind of deconstructed laïcité which emphasises its theologico-political origins and exposes not “a reason divorced from religion” (62) but a prior faith or belief underlying both scientific and religious discourses. What this chapter exemplifies quite clearly is Naas’s exegetical skill. His reading of Derrida’s texts, in this chapter as well as in the collection as a whole, can scarcely be faulted: it is a patient, subtle blend of the microscopic and the panoramic, demonstrating an impressive knowledge of Derrida’s extensive oeuvre while balancing an intimate and intricate command of his sometimes difficult and always evolving lexicon.

The chapter’s most interesting moment, however, and also its most short-lived, has nothing to do with theoretical explication. It comes towards the close of the essay, when Naas is led to stage a surprising confrontation between Derrida and Pope Benedict XVI.
This encounter concerns the opposition between faith and knowledge. Naas highlights a 2004 article in which the former Cardinal argued that, in a world where reason has become detached from God, “all that remains is reason’s dissolution, its deconstruction, as, for example, Jacques Derrida has set it out for us” (76). The reader is offered a tantalising yet elliptical sketch of the form a dialogue between Derrida and Benedict might have taken, one that is all the more timely today in light of Benedict’s assured pronouncements on social issues, and Derrida’s discussion (for instance) of the nuclear family, feminism, and gay marriage in For What Tomorrow (Stanford University Press, 2004). Given Naas’s stated explicative goal, his willingness to simply gesture towards future avenues of exploration is understandable. By necessity every burial ceremony involves a kind of stocktaking; and the reader anxious to set his sights on the future horizons of deconstructive thinking will first have to await its conclusion.

Certainly, the highlight of this stocktaking or analytic reading is the book’s second chapter, in which Naas proposes a reading of deconstruction as the deconstruction of the ‘as’. This short yet vivid account would function perfectly well as a stand-alone piece, even as an introduction to Derrida’s thought (albeit quite a sophisticated one), but it easily slots into the logic of the larger work as an ironic après-coup to the books opening chapter (“Alors, qui êtes vous?: Jacques Derrida and the Question of Hospitality”), which had painstakingly advanced a reading of deconstruction as hospitality. The chapter succeeds because of its willingness to nail deconstruction down to a pithy formula, and explore all ramifications thereon. Before it is anything else, Naas concludes, deconstruction is “a critique of the ‘as,’ the ‘as such,’ and the ‘as if’ that make all comparison and analogy possible” (37). Naas insists on the importance of Derrida’s discussion of analogy, in a reading which stretches from Derrida’s well-known early text, “Plato’s Pharmacy” (1972), to his much later analysis of reason and sovereignty post-9/11 in Rogues (2002).
The exemplary analogy occurs, for Derrida as for Naas, in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which the philosopher compares the Good to the realm of the sun, thereby implying a relation between “sensible visibility and intelligible visibility” (39). This comparison is seen to inaugurate “the sovereign reign of analogy” (38) in the Platonic and Western traditions. Naas’s reading demonstrates, quite compellingly and often surprisingly, that deconstruction is precisely the attempt to counter, or at the very least undermine, this analogical reign. There is a fundamental link, or so Naas concludes, between deconstruction and what he calls “anagrammatology” (45): a science of the “anagram”, or that which remains irreducible within each and every movement of analogical reasoning. Derrida’s reading would thus consist in seeking out the anagram within every apparently stable analogy. The classic example of this in Derrida’s writings would be, of course, the analogy between writing and *pharmakon* (meaning both remedy and poison) in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. It is because the meaning of the word *pharmakon* cannot be definitively stabilised or fixed that it is the “pivot point” between values which cannot be wholly neutralised or determined, and thus provides Derrida with a means of undermining the oppositional logic which appears to be upheld by the seemingly innocent analogy.

What is most remarkable about this piece is Naas’s willingness to state in quite clear and deliberate terms Derrida’s “method” of reading (often a dirty word in accounts of deconstruction). Furthermore, Naas takes these methodological conclusions—which stress deconstruction’s symbiotic relationship to analogy and metaphor—and uses them to conduct what can only be described as a séance in the sixth essay of this collection, “Derrida at the Wheel”. The essay is itself a kind of prosopopoeia, as Naas employs the same impressionistic, free-associative style so beloved, derided, and pastiched by Derrida’s supporters and naysayers. Ironically, it is at this moment when Naas seems closest to Derrida that he leaves behind his labour of exegesis and approaches an inventive, productive, and thoroughly deconstructive reading, as he explores a tradition of analogies involving pottery and urn-making from Genesis (where man is formed
from earth or clay), to Socrates love of the potter’s craft as “an image of the activity of education and, ultimately, of the philosopher” (115), to the poetry of John Keats and Wallace Stevens. For Naas, the analogy of the urn is always one of “storage and secrecy” (119), of simultaneous corporality and formality. When Naas describes, however, Derrida’s seminars at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (which Naas was fortunate enough to attend) in terms of a pottery-class, that is, each disciple gathered at the foot of the master’s pottery wheel “to learn at his hands” (113), the question is unavoidably begged: is the pot which Naas himself has produced his own? It is certainly unique for the ease with which it almost entirely dispenses with Derrida’s texts, instead conducting its own philosophical and cultural odyssey through the history of Western philosophy and culture.

On the other hand, Naas seems content to offer up his reading of craft-making analogies as “simply a shard of what might have been, just a bit of baked clay, a single ceramic tile to be added to the mosaic” (121). In this regard, Naas certainly privileges his more traditional and scholarly *explications* of Derrida’s texts above his own deconstructive forays (the book’s ninth chapter, “History’s Remains: Of Memory, Mourning, and the Event(s) of 9/11” occupies a kind of middle ground between these poles, as Naas here attempts to extend Derrida’s conclusions regarding private mourning to the public mourning of a nation-state, in this case the US). Yet the greatest worth of *Derrida From Now On* might be found less in its analysis of the content and underlying philosophical unity of Derrida’s texts, than in the way it reads Derrida reading: that is, its concern with the structure of his writings, with the form of his arguments and the consistency of its method. Naas is correct to emphasise the role of analogy, simile, and metaphor in Derrida: all these figural tropes are what induce legibility in the philosophical or non-philosophical text to be analysed. They ensure, like the symptom in Freud, that the repression which has failed—in all cases the repression of the unconditional condition of signification, *différence*—can be traced.
Given these analytic undertones, it is unfortunate that Freud is not given more pride of place in this collection, particularly given that Naas’s role as the translator of Derrida’s later text, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (Stanford University Press, 1998), would certainly have equipped him to do so. Nevertheless, Naas does make several isolated references to Freud, of which the most compelling and interesting occurs in the book’s seventh chapter, “‘One Nation . . . Indivisible’: Of Autoimmunity, Democracy, and the Nation-State”. Here Naas’s aim is to emphasise an often undervalued concept in Derrida’s writings, namely, autoimmunity, that “illogical logic” (in Derrida’s phrase) which turns something against itself precisely to uphold the very identity which it seems to threaten (the term becomes current in Derrida in light of his theorising of democracy, terrorism, and, in particular, anti-terrorist measures in the wake of 9/11).

The reference to Freud comes when Naas appeals to something like a congruity between Derrida’s concept of autoimmunity and Freud’s concept of the death drive (*Todestrieb*). Naas writes that autoimmunity, like deconstruction itself, “appears to name a process that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere”. This is because it is “like a death drive” (my emphasis), one which “comes to affect not only the bodies we call discourses or texts but psychic systems and political institutions, nation-states and national contexts, and perhaps even, though this is the most contentious, God himself” (124).

If, as we have just learned, there is no such thing as an innocent analogy, what are we to make of this “like a death drive”? Given the scope and shape of his essay, Naas quite rightly does not purse this analogy to its anagrammatical core, though he does signal towards the way in which the Freudian doctrine of the death drive might return or survive in the Derridean concept of autoimmunity, that is, life turning death against (life) itself, the essential suicide of all structurality which opens a wound legible only to deconstructive reading. This question is troubling precisely because of the problematic it opens: that of inheritance and patricide (this time not
Naas’s but Derrida’s). In a way, it serves Naas’s purpose, since it highlights the still fledgling state of Derrida scholarship - of which *Derrida From Now On* constitutes, to borrow an earlier metaphor, a valuable tile “added to the mosaic”. The purpose of this scholarship will be to answer the innumerable questions which this analogy raises: what was the extent of Derrida’s patricide, of his fidelity to past masters (Husserl, Heidegger, Freud, Levinas, among many others)? And what, moreover, was the extent of his disruptive originality? *Derrida From Now On* is situated at the confluence of all these questions, many of which it admirably attempts to answer. Yet as Naas seems aware, in all his gesturing towards future horizons, if there is to be a Derrida from now on it will, necessarily, only be through a deconstruction from now on. In other words, there must be patricide, a willingness, once we are through reading the way Derrida read, to leave his texts behind. If *Derrida From Now On* dramatises the anxiety of the disciple’s relation to his master, it also signals towards a future-to-come stripped of this very anxiety: a future which can only arrive when we have learned, at last, to separate Derrida from deconstruction.

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