Res(is)tance of Remains

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On the reste that is not but which nonetheless remains

In this article, my aim is to approach the artwork’s being, taking as my starting point Jacques Derrida’s quasi-concept the reste (remains), and the neologism he derived from it, restance – especially as he discusses them in a number of his works. The essay consists of my reading of Derrida’s essay Athens, Still Remains (2010) (Demeure, Athènes, 2009), which Derrida wrote to accompany the photographs Jean-François Bonhomme had taken in Athens. But, to start, let us take a look at a modest, unsigned painting lying in storage at the Sinebrychoff Art Museum: a tiny painting from a series of four, depicting a dancer. A great deal of its paint has fallen off, which gives it a certain charm. It is as if the dancer is dancing in the middle of the ruins – or is it, rather, that she remains motionless while the blanks around her dance? This is a strange pas de deux. One has the impression she is just about to disappear, any time now. But the dancer seems to resist her total disappearance, just as the painting, even in its present, pitifully fragile and fragmentary state, as I claim, resists its complete downfall. I would like to suggest that both the dancer’s and the painting’s mode of being is not subsistence but rather restance – or, to use another word Derrida was fond of: demeurance/demourance (‘abidance’). In its current condition, the painting could be described as a ruin – however, it must be emphasised that it is not a reste, as the reste is not, whereas the artwork as a physical artefact undeniably is.

The reste is comparable to another ‘undecidable’, logically indefinable quasi-concept of Derrida’s – le trace (‘trace’) – which, just like the other ‘infrastructures’ (Rodolphe Gasché’s term) deconstructs the ‘metaphysics of presence’ prevalent in classical ontology. The trace


is ‘always deferring’, it is ‘never presented as such’. Nevertheless, there are (il y a) traces, as there are (il y a) restes (‘remains’), as there are (il y a) cendres (‘cinders’ or ‘ashes’). Just like the trace, the reste refers to something that erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself.  

Thus, as for the reste, we can only ‘know’ ‘it’ through its effects. Therefore, we cannot know what ‘it’ ‘is’ as such – ‘it’ resists the ontological question of ti esti? (‘What is it?’). We just have to trust that there is ‘something’ that remains in remaining – some ‘thing’ (lat. res) that is, however, nothing ontical (therefore we should avoid our temptation to ontologise it) – and which remains only as long as ‘it’, namely the reste, remains.

Reflection on this aporia brings with it also the question of conservation and preservation as specific modes of safekeeping, especially: how to keep what (eventually) cannot be kept? How to keep the reste(e)? The spelling of the title of my essay is deliberate. I have chosen it to underline, again in a Derridean manner, that the reste, or remain(s), is closely linked to resistance – however, the resistance that is a priori and structural, not empirical. So, first there is resistance, then there is (is) restance, which vacillates between the passive and the active, like the better-known Derridean quasi-concept of différence (due to its suffix -ance). Jean-François Bonhomme has taken his photographs amid the ruins of the ancient city. However, Athens, which is in ruins, nevertheless, still remains – as does the painting I am talking about.

The reste gathers together specific states of mind, such as melancholy and (impossible) mourning, triggered by the experience of standing before the imminent loss – standing before the reste – as well as specific bodily states inherent in the reste. The reste has also its distinct temporality, linked to the modality of imminence, to the reste(e) of time, delay or suspension (retard; moratorium) and abidance (demeurance/demourance), as well as its ‘other’ materiality to which we may refer using the substantive without substance that is la cendre (which Derrida favoured as a substitute for the trace): a materiality irreducible to extensity and physical tangibility. Finally, I pose the question, can the reste be seen as the epitome of our essential and existential fragility, a finitude which we share with Being, as well as beings? Because, even if the reste is not, it is something we share and create between ourselves: the reste(e) to come.

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8 However, in this article I will not deal with issues related to conservation, especially in connection with the aforementioned painting.
10 It should be noted that in this particular article it is not my intention to address the medium-specific differences between photography and painting. I have written some years ago a long article, ‘Vastauska annettuuden kutsuun: taideoiksen ilmeneminen toisen asteen reprezentatoioissa’ (in Finnish), in which I examined ‘second-order representations’ such as documentary photographs, reproductive graphics and ekphrases of visual artworks. The article was republished in my doctoral thesis entitled Huoli kuvasta – merkitys, mieli, materiaalisuus (Care for the Image: Meaning, Sense, Materiality). Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2017.
Le reste – the untranslatable

In Derrida’s philosophical oeuvre the reste, and the neologism restance derived from it, belong to the infrastructural chain he called ‘quasi-transcendentals’. To be able to conceive what Derrida means by the reste we have to forget the usual meaning of this word. In 2002, he wrote an essay ‘Remain(s) – The Master, or the Supplement of Infinity’, which was based on his critical analyses of the works of the French ethnologist and historian of religions Charles Malamoud, dealing with the hierarchy of sharing and sacrifice of remains in Indian and western cultures.13 Derrida mentions four instances of ‘remains’ in our daily lives (here I use Kas Saghafi’s formulations). First, remains are what remains and subsists and survives through time. Secondly, they are dinner leftovers, which one cannot or should not eat, which one must either leave or give away. Thirdly, mortal remains, corpses which remain after the breath and soul have left them, and fourthly, there are mathematical remains, the residues of calculations. There is, however, yet a fifth meaning, the one that is irreducible to a substantial permanence: the reste that transcends and is beyond ontology, but simultaneously creates its condition. This excess is, however, ‘saturated and sutured’, or sacrificed by ontology – since it is regarded as inessential to the Greco-European philosophy, metaphysics, and oppositional logic, it is left to pass by and to decompose.13 Remains are generally understood to be something one abandons or leaves behind, either intentionally or haphazardly,14 that which has no importance, being almost nothing, but which nonetheless remains. Nevertheless, paradoxically, exactly that which passes away and decomposes, also remains.15 Derrida remarks that ‘instead of a system of unstable limits, it would be better to speak of the essential instability of these limits and their constant transgression’. However, this instability should not be understood solely as a simple chaos in contrast to the logical order. It is another logic.16

What comes to the composite term restance? Its origin lies in the controversy between Derrida and the speech act theorist John Searle concerning the role of intentionality in communication. For Searle, knowing the intention of the author, which he held to be permanent, is necessary for understanding the meaning of his or her message. Contrary to that, Derrida claimed that any form of communication, whether written or oral, should be seen as immediately divided, so that it belongs neither to its author nor to itself. Instead, it belongs from the very start, structurally, to another context in which it will be quoted or drafted. The mark the author leaves ‘cuts itself from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions […] even after his death.’17 Therefore, the meaning of any text is never permanent or fully present at any actual moment, but restant.

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14 As Derrida points out, even the verb ‘to leave’, laisser, can be understood as either passive or active, being therefore as undecidable as the reste. Derrida, ‘Rester – le maître ou le supplément d’infini’, 57. I suggest that the verb laisser (‘to leave’) has a somewhat similar function in Derrida’s œuvre as the verb suivre (‘to follow’), they both hesitate undecidably between the active and the passive. On the latter verb, see especially Derrida’s ‘The Animal That Therefore I am’. Trans. David Wills, Critical Inquiry, 28, (2), 369–418.
15 Saghafi, ‘The Master Trembles: Sacrifice, Hierarchy, and Ontology in Derrida’s “Remain(s)”’, 128.
Derrida has another quasi-transcendental concept that comes very close to le trace and the reste, which is la cendre, ‘cinder’ or ‘ash’. For him, ash was the ‘figure of annihilation without remainder, without memory, or without a readable or decipherable archive’. Just like remainders, the ash is not and has never been, therefore, in accordance with the phrase il y a la cendre (‘cinders, there are’), il y a des restes (‘remains, there are’), but the reste is not – nevertheless, it remains. Ned Lukacher urges us in hearing the saying, ‘cinders there are’ to hear it as ‘it has cinders’, ‘it gives [Es gibt; Il y a] cinders’, or ‘cinders persist’. Remainders (des restes) in their singularity can only be spoken of in plural form. We are never short of them, the reste is always in excess, it is a surplus, it overflows. It is an endless process, one
without finitude, as transitive as intransitive, disrupting the opposition of active and passive – Derrida uses the neologism ‘passactivity’. All the above mentioned words, are undecidables, which, as Franck Salaün notes, break up ‘not only the metaphysics of presence, but as well the distinction between literal and figural (or metaphorical) meanings’. Pleshette DeArmitt adds: ‘While remainders, by falling outside of that which is proper, appear to allow for secure demarcations between inside and outside, proper and improper, pure and impure, they also destabilise the very same borders they make possible.’ Salaün specifies that even if a remainder is not – it is not a substance, therefore we should be alert not to reify or ontologise it – the verb ‘to remain’ remains nonetheless ‘logically and ontologically associated with the verb “to be”’. However, its relation to being is slippery: it tends to slip between its verbal and substantive forms. According to Salaün, Derrida tried to reflect the reste outside the horizon of being and outside the thinking of being in a way that makes the verb ‘to be’ inoperative.

Of course, there is still another concept in Derrida’s vocabulary which comes close to le reste: la ruine, the ruin, which Joana Masó sees just as ‘another name for ashes and remains’. Suzanne Lafont, however, finds the reste ontologically distinct from the concept of ruin. She argues that one should draw an exact boundary between the concept of ruin and the reste, including its cognates such as waste, relic, and fetish, which, according to her, all ‘reduce its potential power by assimilating it to a tangible material’. Instead, she challenges us to think of the reste ‘as a process open to a future to come (à-venir), and not as a residue turned to an immutably frozen past’. Her argument, however, can be criticised on the basis of what Derrida wrote about the ruin: ‘[It] does not come after the work but remains produced, already from the origin, by the advent and structure of the work.’ Because, ‘in the beginning, at the origin, there was ruin’. [The ruin] does not supervene like an accident upon a monument that was intact only yesterday.’ In short, the ruin is in the gaze – it is that which ruins the narcissistic ego.

The examination of the ontological difference between le reste and la ruine must therefore start from another basis. To begin with, I would argue that la ruine, in turn, cannot be considered a philosophical concept in Derrida’s oeuvre. Secondly, la ruine does not have a temporal and processual character, it is rather a primordial formal structure. Although the reste is not in time either, it has a specific relation to time: it manifests itself temporally as remainder-effects, as restances. The reste is inseparable from restance, its mode of being, to the extent that they can be used reciprocally. Iterability is Derrida’s other name for restance. According to him, ‘iterability allows one to take into account [...] the phenomena of anomaly, accident, the marginal, and the parasitic’ – in other words, that which resists analysis. Therefore, restance as iterability also entails a certain resistance, and a certain materiality or reality, which the ruin as a formal structure lacks.

Keeping what cannot be kept

However, the reste also has a strange connection to another word, ‘delay’, le retard – to the extent that they can be considered interchangeable. Le retard can be considered to be...
another name for the reste; delay is the rest(e) of time. Derrida’s essay, entitled Athens, Still Remains (Demeure, Athènes), is wholly devoted to this word pair. Its subject is the city of Athens that is, as Derrida says, ‘undying’, in abeyance (en demeure/ demeurnaire), and that ‘bears the signature of someone keeping vigil and bearing more than one mourning’31. This travel-type style of Derrida’s essay brings to mind its obvious predecessors, Sigmund Freud’s A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis (1936) and Théophile Gautier’s Arria Marcella (1852)32. It deals with a certain type of keeping – we could call it main-tenance33 – and the impossibility of keeping safe that which is eventually due to be lost: the ‘irresistible singularity’ of the referent.34 It should be remembered (as the translators of the essay Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas point out in their introduction) that the ‘original French title, Demeure, Athènes, can be understood in at least three different ways: as an imperative, “Stay, Athens!”’, as a description, ‘Athens stays’ or ‘Athens remains’, or as a formulation typically found on official documents to refer to one’s place of residence. The word demeure can thus be heard alternatively as a noun, meaning house, dwelling, or residence, or as a verb, meaning to remain, stay, or reside. Finally, they recall the original meaning of the word demeure: ‘to defer’ or ‘to delay’.35

Derrida was asked to write on the photographs Jean-François Bonhomme had taken in Athens, while strolling through its ruins, ancient and modern. By following in his footsteps, Derrida has a similar experience to the one he had earlier when following in the footsteps of Gravida, in Wilhelm Jensen’s essay, which he dreamt of bringing back to life.36 In that case, he dreamt of reliving the singular pressure or impression that Gravida’s foot must have left in the Vesuvian ashes. He dreamt of the ‘irreplaceable place, the very ashes, where the singular imprint, like a signature, barely distinguishable itself from the impression, [...] the unique instant where they are not yet distinguished the one from the other, forming in an instant a single body of Gravida’s step, of her gait, of her pace [...], and of the ground which carries them’.37 However, there is never a coincidence of the impression with the imprint, due to the immanent divisibility of the trace at its origin. There is a play of contact and distance in each singular imprint, as Georges Didi-Huberman has convincingly demonstrated.38 Gravida’s foot generates simultaneously an imprint and a gap, écart39 – restance, which, as being nothing, nonetheless, intrigues the mind, enables one to follow her trail, and creates a phantasy of the perfect match.

Is it not so that when we are trying to preserve something that cannot be preserved – to exercise our archontic and consignatory power on something that is not archivable,
that is, collectable without residue, and then identifiable, unifiable, classifiable to form a corpus\(^\text{40}\) – we are in a certain mood in which we bear in advance the mourning of the object that will be lost to us, an archontic melancholy? Derrida notices that following the trail of the photographer (the collector of images, who comes always too late to ‘catch’ the image) and thus exposing himself to the repetition compulsion inherent in mourning and archivisation in this place called Athens, he is bearing in advance – ‘the name [...] is in advance “in memory of”\(^\text{41}\) – the death of Athens. It is a city owed to death, a city due for death, and a city that has to die several times, rather than just once (Derrida writes elsewhere that ‘the name alone makes possible the plurality of deaths’\(^\text{42}\)). There are several deaths in various times and time modes and works of mourning, each of which has their specific relation to the lost object. Each interiorised, iterated ‘Athens’ stands in its own specific way before its imminent non-being: ‘mourning for the ancient, archaeological, or mythical Athens’, as well as ‘mourning for an Athens that is gone and that shows the body of its ruins’. Also, ‘mourning for an Athens that he [Bonhomme] knows, as he is photographing it in the present of his snapshots, will be gone or will disappear tomorrow, an Athens that is already condemned to pass away’. Finally, the third anticipated mourning (that is, of course, impossible) – he knows that other photographs have captured sights that, though still visible today, at the present


time (Derrida takes advantage of the tense of future anterior – a tense of archivation) ‘will have [devront] to be destroyed tomorrow’.33 Death is inscribed in the structure of the city – just as it is inscribed in any artwork, which therefore is not wholly present at any time but reistant.

**Bearing the reste**

Derrida sees photographs taken in Athens as the original supplement of its, from the very start, divided origin: Derrida urges us to reflect upon this ‘invasion of photography – a technical prosthesis causing an “absolute mutation” – into the history of the city’.44 By entering the city secretly as a parasite, the photography has become host and we have turned into its hostages.45 For Derrida, photograph as a medium represents ‘photoengraved safekeeping’, which ‘keep[s] what one loses’ and keeps its kept without taking hold of it.46 Let us keep in mind that in psychoanalytical terms, to keep something safe equals incorporating and keeping the lost libidinal object in a sort of a psychic crypt, where it continues to inhabit the keeper’s psyche, but as kept, is turned into a stranger.47 Derrida dedicates the first pages of *Athens, Still Remains* to the seriality that is ‘in mourning or bears mourning’, which consists of ‘interruption, separation, repetition and survival’.

Derrida specifies the meaning of *tragen* (‘to carry’ or ‘to bear’ in German) in reference to Paul Celan: first of all it refers to the experience of carrying a child prior to its birth. At this stage, the symbiosis between mother and child generates a ‘shared solitude’ in which the surrounding world disappears. However, *tragen* can also be addressed to the dead […] in an experience that consists in carrying the other in the self, as one bears mourning – and melancholy’. In this bearing ‘the dialogue continues, following its course in the survivor. He believes he is keeping the other in himself (he did so already while the other was alive), but now the survivor lets the other speak inside himself. He does so perhaps better than ever, and that is a terrifying hypothesis. But survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision. Interruption multiplies itself, one interruption affecting another, in abyssal repetition, more *unheimlich*, uncanny, than ever.’48 Naturally, christening, name giving, already prepares the person named for his or her death. Once a person is named, he or she must carry his or her proper name – a name he or she cannot keep. Therefore, to carry one’s proper name is to carry out a work of mourning, to bear a burden that is not solely psychical but physical, as well. The name is the reste. It remains once the person named no longer is. It bears the name of someone who has been. One cannot appropriate a person named, because a person dies, whereas his or her name survives – carved in a tombstone, for instance – in the mode of *restance*.

The polysemic meanings of the word ‘safe’ (French for ‘safe’, *sauv*, follows the undecidable logic meaning simultaneously ‘safe’ and ‘except’) in his ‘negative theology’, should be taken into account. As John Caputo writes, ‘saving (*sauver*) the name of God by keeping it safe (*sauv*), sacrificing the name of God precisely in order to save it. Sacrifice everything, save or except (*sauv*) the name of God […]. The thing itself slips away, leaving

nothing behind, save the name. [...] Souf plays a saving game [...].”50 Now what is this ‘saving game’ of souf, leaving the reste(e) in order to save it?51 It is a fantasy of incorporation, a failed introjection, what Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok explained as ‘results from those losses that for some reason cannot be acknowledged as such’. In incorporation one is in a (mental) state in which he or she denies the traumatic loss, the gap, which he or she then attempts to swallow and preserve within him or herself, by incorporating it within the psyche. This is a secret tomb or a crypt inside the subject in which the ‘objectal correlative of the loss is buried alive’.52 DeArmitt emphasises that as we begin to talk about the remains we immediately enter the space in which ‘eating as interiorizing, assimilating, taking remains within oneself is inseparable from eating the other in the experience of mourning’.53 Here we encounter the paradox: ‘the more the self keeps the foreign element inside itself, the more it excludes it’ – this is the paradox of souf, as well.54 Here we come to the ethical question of how to preserve that which is absolutely and infinitely exterior to ourselves. In art museums, one comes across another double bind concerning the question of whether we should preserve artworks or exhibit them – but on the other hand, artworks can be saved as artworks only by exposing them, every now and then. Eventually, the mourning – perhaps even preservation – is going to fail and turn out to be impossible, to which Demeure, Athènes testifies.

Standing before the reste

When standing before the reste, something is about to happen, at any time now, which makes us almost hold our breath. This expectation is not only mental, we live it through in our bodies. When something is imminent and standing before us, we have an obligation to act. This Beforestand, as Derrida says, is ‘pressing me without pressuring me’, – it is the duty to save that which is imminently disappearing. This is, he says, a ‘law of imminence’.55 It must be emphasised, however, that the logic of imminence, which is aporetic in its nature, does not necessarily mean ‘inevitable’. Imminence is an interruption in the course of events – the imminence is a ‘zone of deep ambiguity in which anything can happen’, as Johan van der Walt underlines.56 Derrida reflects on its cognates in his On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy (2005): ‘[the French words] tôt (“early”, “soon”), bientôt (“soon”, “soon enough”), [and] aussitôt (“at once”, “all too soon”) – they all seem to signify an advance.’ Derrida is uncertain if tôt gives any ‘time

51 Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida, 43. This idiom follows the same paradoxical ‘logic’ as the idiom ‘giving what cannot be given’ – the latter brings with it the complex problem of the gift and the debt. The reste(e) can neither be kept nor given, since if it is kept or given, it vanishes to ‘be’ the reste(e). In a similar vein, in the apophatic negative theology, in order to save the faith in the unknowable God, one does not leave him anything else except (sauf) his name. Jacques Derrida. ‘Sauf le nom (Post-Scriptum)’. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., in Thomas Dutoit (ed.), On the Name. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995 (1993), 35–82.
53 DeArmitt, ‘Cascade of Remainders’, 102.
54 Derrida, ‘Fors’, 72.
55 Derrida, Athens, Still Remains, 7. This is the Kantian moral obligation, to which he dedicated his second critique, Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (1788). Although we have a duty to follow this maxim, we have, nevertheless, our free will to make a decision between the good and the bad. When the physical existence of the artwork is endangered, and its destruction is imminent, so that it ‘presses at every instant’, one is obliged to act. However, here we are on the verge of the ‘abyss of freedom’: the obligation does not prescribe what to do. Jacques Derrida & Maurizio Ferraris. A Taste for the Secret. Trans. Giacomo Donis. Cambridge: Polity, 2002 [1997], 23–24; Jean-Luc Nancy. The Experience of Freedom. Trans. Bridget McDonald. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993 [1988], 121–41.
for something to come or occur in the near future’ — although it is regarded as an adverb of time, ‘it gives so little time, almost none’ that he suspects it to be the ‘time’s other’.57 I suggest we can approach this topic by taking the Heideggerian Noch-nicht (the ‘not-yet’) as our starting point. With this idiom, Heidegger referred to the specific temporality of ‘being-in-the-world’, or Dasein. To illustrate this, he took a ripening fruit as his example: ‘when, for instance, a fruit is unripe, it “goes towards” its ripeness — such a bringing of itself is characteristic of the specific kind of Being as a fruit.’ The ‘not-yet’ is not something accidental or contingent in relation to a fruit — the ‘not-yet’ belongs to its very Being as a constitutive feature. Correspondingly, as long as any Dasein is, it too is already its ‘not-yet’.

However, as Derrida makes clear in his Aporias (1993), one must make a sharp distinction between the ‘immaturity of the human who is dying’ and a fruit which is unripe. The fully matured fruit has reached its limit, whereas a human being as Dasein surpasses such a borderline: ‘Ontologically, the Heideggerian “not-yet” is “not the anticipation of a completion or accomplishment”’. According to Derrida, the Noch-nicht ‘partakes at the same time of the “delay”, the remainder, which indeed is an example of it, the “remaining in waiting” [...], the “excess” [...] and the “still outstanding” [...]’. This “remaining”, this “lack as remaining” [...] remains, in sum, to be lived, like [...] the part that is still absent from a whole to be completed, a “sum” in sum’ — on the other hand, the rest(e) of time left to be lived is nothing, as Derrida points out.58 Furthermore, Giorgio Agamben remarks that there is also the Pauline rest of the messiah, contracting or shrinking time, il tempo che resta, that is left before the second coming of the messiah at the end of time.60 Correspondingly, we have two distinct ‘not-yets’: what one can wait for, count on, expect as a remainder to be lived, is of a wholly other order than the “not-yet” of Dasein.61 The specific ‘not-yet’ in which we live our lives in constant relation to our deaths, is incalculable and without any measure.62 Nevertheless, it seems to be that this is the very thing Derrida is referring to when he is talking about retard, a delay that is not in time but that opens up time — a delay, as well, is a (quasi)transcendental.

I suggest that this ‘not-yet’, as well as imminence, can be encountered in painting, also — by us, who have ‘dreamed of a painting without reste’. Georges Didi-Huberman writes in his La Peinture incarnée (1985): ‘because if the “not” [pas] is the “not-yet” [le pas-encore] (imminence, delay, hysteresis) or no more [déjà-plus] (the après-coup of memory), it means that in its very violence, in its effect of presence and shock’ — what he calls le pan — ‘would name the efficiency, on the plane, of an invisibility. But an invisibility which, as in any symptom, erupts abruptly, forming an interruption, an event, a surprise.’ Didi-Huberman characterises the event using the term præsens — this is a reference to the linguist Émile Benveniste, who wrote that ‘præsens is not quite what is there but what is before me, therefore imminent, urgent’.64 Didi-Huberman adds that le pan (a word as untranslatably singular as le reste) is the ‘imminence of the hallucinatory moment in painting (“the not”, le pas; “the not-yet”, le pas-encore)’ — that is, naturally, only a quasi-hallucination: what the pan accomplishes is only a quasi-metamorphosis: a painting remains a painting, albeit tense to the extreme — until suddenly it collapses, when the pan as the ‘pure symptom of the painting’ breaks violently in. This is tyranny of the pan: a painting has the means of its own

61 Derrida, Aporias, 69.
62 Derrida, Aporias, 26–27, 69.
63 Hysteresis, Greek for ‘lagging behind’.
destruction.65 This is also the verdict of the reality principle, from which Derrida writes, taking advantage of the German juridical expression of \textit{Verdikt}66 to designate the operation of the Reality as to the lost object: ‘whenever we remember the lost object, when the libido, which was attached to it, returns, the Reality emits its verdict (\textit{arrêt}) namely “that the object no longer exists”’.67 This \textit{arrêt}, or \textit{éclat}, caused by the painting, ‘when it comes forward, when it makes a front’, is the \textit{pan}. It is the moment in which ‘everything represented is at risk of collapse’. This is a compromise-formation between \textit{éclat} as the iconic, identifiable sign and \textit{éclat} as the \textit{pan} (‘the opposite of trompe-l’œil, a disaster in the visible order’).68

Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in his novel \textit{The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge} (1910) of another \textit{arrêt} or achronic moment of \textit{demeurance/demourance} between life and death: ‘I believe that sometimes when a great fire occurs you can get a moment of extreme tension: the water jets slacken off, the firemen no longer climb, nobody stirs. Soundlessly a black

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66 \textit{Verdikt} can be translated as ‘sentence’ or ‘judgment’, but in French also as \textit{arrêt}, ‘stop’, ‘suspend’, or ‘freeze’.


cornice edges forward up above; and a high wall, behind which flames are mounting, tilts, also without a sound. Everyone stands, shoulders hunched, tense, with the part of their faces above the eyes pressed into furrows, waiting for the awful crash.69 This is a sort of involuntary epoché,70 which suspends Dasein’s mundane immersion into the world, and absorption in the ‘they’, and confronts it with its own impossible possibility: of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there, creating in Dasein, whose habitat is language, an emotion that, as François Dastur maintains, ‘grabs at the throat and condemns to silence’ – Derrida writes that we ‘remain open-mouthed before the abyss’ – this chasm is the reste.71 This is standing before the imminent. We stand before this view, this chaos or bottomless ground, this reste, open-mouthed but voiceless, our gaping mouths ready to swallow or spit out this piece in our throats, unable to create anything but the unimaginable syllable ‘gl’ – a bit (mors) in our throat.72

In his reading of Maurice Blanchot’s short prose piece The Instant of My Death (1994), which tells the story of the sudden cancellation of the execution of the main character by Nazi soldiers, the ‘instantaneous seizure’ just before the intended execution brings to Derrida’s mind some paintings – Francisco de Goya’s The Third of May 1808, and a series of works by Édouard Manet, inspired by it, depicting the execution of the Emperor Maximilian (1867–69) – as ‘freeze-frame[s] in the unfolding of a film in a movie camera: the soldiers are there, they no longer move, neither does the young man, an eternal instant’.73 It brings to my mind the moment just before the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, 9/11, or the crash of Viollet-le-Duc’s spire when the Notre Dame cathedral burnt down in Paris. These events are preceded by moments of ‘deferred imminence’ – or, as Giorgio Agamben perhaps would put it, instances of pure potentiality. He writes (in reference to Aristotle’s De Anima): ‘to be potential means: to be one’s own lack, to be in relation to one’s own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own impotentiality […] They can be because they are in relation to their own non-Being.’ Only human beings, as being-in-the-world, have the capacity of being able no longer to be.74 In Athens, Still Remains, Derrida makes a reference to the chapters of Plato’s Crito, in which the entretemps between Socrates’s Verdict and its enforcement is narrated: Socrates facing death whose imminence was, however, deferred, his death sentence pending. Derrida sees this delayed action as a hallmark of photographic experience as such.75


70 Epoché is the first stage of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, in which the transcendental subject brackets the natural attitude and suspends the existence of the external world. The origin of involuntary epoché, on the other hand, is not in the ego – it is a ‘sort of performance on the part of being itself that is imposed upon me by an involuntary encounter [...]. I cannot perform this epoché myself, I cannot will it, I can only be open to it when it takes place.’ Levi R. Bryant. Difference and Givenness. Deleuze’s Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008, 77.


72 Derrida discusses the syllable ‘gl’ in his Glas, in which, as he writes: ‘[it] communicated the problem of the reste, of the dead and mourning, as well as that of glottis, tongue and mouth, introjected food, the glutony of milk: to drink and eat, to swallow and to talk.’ Derrida, Glas, 60–61, note 3. Charles Ramond emphasises that ‘gl’ indicates loss of control. It is a lump in our throats when we face an extreme threat, fear or anguish, when our throats are so tightened that we are no longer able to create articulated speech. On the other hand, Ramond associates this syllable with a return to the primitive, the animal, and the instinctive. Ramond, Dictionnaire Derrida, 104.


However, like the reste, the delay, le retard, says Derrida, does not exist. It is not but it ‘is’ something – as la cendre – what has been (fut).76 Giorgio Agamben associates the Aristotelian First Essence (prote ousia) with indicative demonstrative pronouns such as ‘this’ and ‘that’, whose function is the passage from indication to signification, or from showing to saying.77 Our being is determined by our finitude and mortality. In the phrase, Nous nous devons à la mort (‘We owe ourselves to death’), he finds this peculiar and specific relation to our finitude with which Heidegger was concerned – a non-relational relation, in which Dasein is ahead-of-itself. Derrida feels that in the sentence Nous nous devons à la mort, the word ‘devons’ ‘suspends’ its subjecthood – the first nous, taken to be the subject of the sentence, comes only after the second nous. Therefore, the first nous becomes a grammatical subject only through its detour passing through the second nous, which acts as an object of the sentence, ‘due or owed’: ‘we take ourselves in view as what is due [dû], taken by a debt or a duty that precedes us and institutes us.’78 We owe ourselves to death, since we have our lives only because there is finitude. But, on the other hand, Nous nous devons à la mort also in the sense that we will be taken by a sort of photography (the verdict has already been pronounced: the photographer has pressed the shutter button of his camera) in the sense that photography takes its subject without taking it.

The being of reste

Our finitude and existential fragility should not be seen only in negative terms. I would like to think that in our fragile restance our relation to death is somewhat similar to the relation of artefacts to their destruction. I argue that even as fragile an object as the Dancer – even on the verge of it shattering to pieces – resists its total annihilation. Recently the French philosopher and poet Jean-Louis Chrétien wrote a book on the concept of fragility (Fragilité, 2017). Even if an object is (considered to be) fragile, it does not mean, that it really is fragile, that is, easily breakable. A glass vessel has been for centuries a symbol of fragility – a fragility of the human condition as well. Saint Augustine already wondered, if there is anything more fragile than a glass bowl – which despite its fragility persists throughout the centuries. Chrétien reminds us, that not only from the phenomenological, but also from the physical standpoint, glass as a material is not fragile: ‘It is harder than bronze, even close to the strength of some steel alloys.’79 Chrétien mentions that glass is an amorphous material that is simultaneously hard and fragile. However, to be able to conceive that, one has to have carried out a sort of epoché, a suspension of judgment, which has bracketed the thesis of its vulnerability and made its being altogether problematic.80 This is the double bind of restance (which ‘cannot be assumed, one can only endure it in passion’).81 An artefact survives not despite its vulnerability but for the very reason that it has been taken to be fragile. Athens still remains because it has undergone changes during its long history. The Dancer continues to dance in the artwork precisely because the painting as a physical object has changed through ageing – to be able to remain, it had to do so.

Actually, we ourselves, in our being-towards-death, are more fragile than the glass goblets and beakers we use in our daily lives, to say nothing of the artefacts we especially try to preserve as parts of our cultural heritage. Jérôme de Gramont sees fragility belonging to the basic ontological structure disclosing the Being-in-the-world, which Heidegger called existentials. He thinks fragility is in the core of our finite existence, which (as Chrétien points

76 Derrida, Athens, Still Remains, 17.
78 Derrida, Athens, Still Remains, 61.
81 Derrida, Resistances of Psychoanalysis, 36.
out) manifests itself most highly in the human voice.\textsuperscript{82} Chrétien points out that ‘the fact that we can drink from the very same glass vessels to which our ancestors, who are now nothing but dust, have dipped their lips, gives us the experience of our own fragility’.\textsuperscript{83} An extreme example are the Japanese tea ceremonies that follow wabi aesthetics, in which one prefers to use ancient tea cups which, despite their signs of ageing, have survived for centuries.\textsuperscript{84}

We are much more fragile than the artefacts we use – from this derives the age-old allegorical figure of \textit{Homo bulla} symbolising \textit{Vanitas} and the transience of human life: a man is like a soap bubble that bursts from even the slightest breeze. Really, as Chrétien reminds us, a discreet crack – a \textit{fêlure} as revelation of a pre-existing fragility – forms a beginning of a visible fracture, and each material type has its own way of losing its integrity. The disintegration proceeds from the fault lines, belonging to the structure of the object itself, it constitutes fragility as a possibility, from which an almost unnoticeable crack is the first manifestation.\textsuperscript{85} However, it is this very cleavage that makes possible the \textit{restance} of the artwork.

The \textit{rest(e) to come}

I argue that the painting depicting a dancer I discussed at the beginning of this essay could be regarded as an epitome of \textit{restance}. When standing before the painting, we stand before the \textit{reste}. This should not be taken to mean that the painting itself is a \textit{reste}, a remainder – the \textit{reste} is \textit{not}, and the painting, as a physical object, irresistibly \textit{is}. It is stubborn in its \textit{restance}: even in facing its inevitable and imminent destruction, it resists turning into dust. This is the paradox of imminence – as well as the paradox of the \textit{reste}. They share the same irreducible tension.

I want to conclude this essay with a modified citation from Derrida’s \textit{Athens, Still Remains}: having to keep what it loses, namely the \textit{departed}, does not every act of conservation act in effect through the bereaved experience of such a proper name, through the irresistible singularity of its referent?\textsuperscript{86} This means standing before the \textit{reste} and mourning – bearing the \textit{reste} – that keeps within itself what it loses in its keeping. It is a question of \textit{main-tenance}: keeping what cannot be kept, or, the impossible possibility of preserving. I suggest, that ‘to preserve’, equals ‘to invent’, in the Derridean sense. Inventing, which only actualises an already existing possibility, is not inventing in the true sense of the word. If I have in my hands to invent what I want to invent, if I have the ability to do so, and therefore can invent what I want to invent, my invention only actualises the potentiality, which I already have, therefore my invention does not bring anything new – as Derrida remarks: ‘If I invent what I can invent, what is possible for me to invent, I’m not inventing.’ Since the invention is within the limits of existing possibilities, it cannot be considered an event. Because, ‘for there to be an invention event, the invention must appear impossible’. In the event, ‘what was not possible becomes possible. In other words, the only invention possible is the invention of the impossible. If there is invention, it is possible only on the condition of being impossible. The event’s eventuality depends on this experience of the impossible’\textsuperscript{87} – of keeping what cannot be kept: the \textit{rest(e) to come}.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{83} Chrétien, \textit{Fragilité}, 9, 58.
\bibitem{85} Chrétien, \textit{Fragilité}, 65–66.
\bibitem{86} Derrida, \textit{Athens, Still Remains}, 2.
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