



Call for Papers

In a programmatic and almost testamentary work, *The University Without Condition* (2001), Jacques Derrida points out the “*comme si*” (as if) as an issue in its own right for his thought. Already implied in the structure and function of the “supplement” (*Of Grammatology*, 1967), the role of the “as if” gets more and more defined along the years and texts (“*Économimesis*”, 1975; “*Préjugés: Before the Law*”, 1985; “As If It Were Possible”, 1998), up to Derrida’s very last seminars belonging to the “Questions of Responsibility” cycle.

The “as if” is not a name, nor a concept. It is a juncture of discourse, a syncategoreme. It does not have a proper signification or referent. This is, perhaps, what grants it a certain privilege in relation to nearby notions such as metaphor or simulacrum. Associated in common usage to the domain of comparison and of fiction, Derrida aims to stress the potentially radical impact of the “as if” as a philosophical device. He thus underlines its function in Kant’s thought, where the “as if” depends on analogy, while attributing it a very particular weight. Exceeding the opposition between nature and freedom, which is operational in Kant’s Criticism, the “as if” (*als ob*) would harbour the potency of a “deconstructive ferment”: by overthrowing such fundamental opposition, the “as if” would destabilise the organisation of all the “fundamental concepts” and of all the oppositions that concur to determine the “humanity of man” and the field of the so-called Humanities[1].

Thus, radicalising it, if not taking it to the letter, Derrida’s reading imparts a supplementary fold to the Kantian reflection. The “as if” locates for Derrida a lever susceptible of disquieting the classical limits of the philosophical field, so much so that the key concepts that philosophy operates with, such as “subject”, “object”, and even “world”, or “presence”, would be just so many “as ifs”: veritable regulative fictions, as ungrounded as they are necessary to think and act on what is “real”.

This is why the Derridian “as if” differs from Hans Vaihinger’s, the Post-Kantian philosopher who signed *The Philosophy of “As If”* (1910), and from Sigmund Freud’s, who refers to Vaihinger’s book in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927). If for Vaihinger the “as if” is a means of discovery, working at the service of scientific truth, for Freud it is a means of interpreting religious beliefs, favouring the conservation of society. Nevertheless, for both of them the use of the “as if” is based on a more or less sharp distinction between



truth and fiction. Their respective pragmatisms consist in using fiction as a heuristic operator in view of a truth that one would not be able to discover directly (Vaihinger), or from which one shall protect oneself (Freud). For Derrida, the “as if” could not be at the service of a transcendental reality or legality. It is rather a “logical-rhetorical fiction” that inscribes fictionality, spectrality, phantasmaticity, not only in the structure of all language, but of all experience[2]. It is therefore the matrix of a structural poeticity that is at work in every gesture of thought.

Now, everything happens as if today, in our world, a number of powerful transformations (techno-scientific, socio-political, economic, and even cognitive and perceptive ones) were questioning a great many fundamental concepts and traditional oppositions, and first of all the separation between the real and the fictive. How, therefore, can the “as if” help to think, to address, and to intervene in this general trembling that renders so many acknowledged categories obsolete? Faced with this lack of stable ground, many discourses advocate a return to some foundation: neorealist, neospeculative, neoontological, neomaterialistic, anticorrelationist, a number of philosophical currents seem to consider the generalisation of a structural fictionality as the cause of the crisis of our times, or as its most patent symptom.

Derrida would adopt the opposite strategy, and suggest the elements to resist such reactions. While signalling that “one should not give way to an inflation of the simulacrum and neutralize every threat in what might be called the delusion of the delusion, the denial of the event”[3], he also indicated the necessity to think anew the relation between the virtual and the actual, as well as the relation between the possible and the impossible:

“‘Quasi’ or ‘as if’, ‘perhaps’, ‘spectrality’ of the *phantasma* (which also means ghost): these are the components of another thinking of the virtual, of a virtuality that is no longer organized according to the traditional notion of the possible (*dynamis*, *potentia*, *possibilitas*). When the impossible makes itself possible, the event takes place (possibility of the impossible).”[4]

We invite interested scholars to send us at revue000@gmail.com an abstract of about 1000 signs, by June 23rd 2021 (in view, in case of a positive response, of an essay of at



most 30.000 signs, by December 30th 2021). The abstract is to be rendered anonymous; all contact and affiliation information must be included in a separated file.

We wish to interrogate the modalities of the “as if” from various perspectives. You will find below some questions that might serve as suggestions:

- What are the consequences of the fact, which is decisive according to Derrida, that the structure of this “logical-rhetorical fiction” plays a key role in the constitution of authority, in the exertion of power, in the performativity of law codes, in every process of legitimation, in the structure of every contract?

- How can one think the modality of the “as if” in its relation to the growing virtualisation of communication and information technologies? How can one think the fictional constitution of actuality, the contamination of actuality by fiction, storytelling, etc., without giving way to the most optimistic diagnoses or else to the moralising criticisms with regard to what is sometimes called post-truth?

- To what extent and how do scientific methodologies meet with a thought of virtuality compelling them to take into account literature-based procedures? What does one designate by the name of “scientific literature”? According to the modality of the “as if”, does science-fiction not influence the developments of research by proposing new challenges to it?

- The modality of the “as if” is traditionally associated with the structure of the works of art. How can certain devices – plastic, literary, poetic, cinematographic, architectural, musical, choreographic... – exemplarily account for the work of the “as if” as it operates, more generally, in every symbolic production, and more generally still, in every production whatsoever?

- If deconstruction is a “quasi-foundationalist” thought, what does this imply? How can one elaborate the Derridian question of the “quasi-transcendental”, while taking into account the proximity between the “as if” (*comme si*) and the *quasi*? – What genealogy, what future can there be for the “as if”, between Kant and Derrida, and beyond?



« Tout se passe comme si... »

[1] “The University Without Condition”, in *Without Alibi*, p. 211..

[2] “As If It Were Possible, ‘Within Such Limits’...”, in *Negotiations. Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, p. 353-4.

[3] *Echographies of Television*, p. 5-6.

[4] “As If It Were Possible”, p. 360.

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