

Mimesis, Posthumanism, and “the absolute antecedent”: Some Thoughts on Jacques Derrida’s “Advances”

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Jacques Derrida’s “Advances” is a consequential text for thinking through the relation between the mimetic and the posthuman. This chapter offers some thoughts on how and why that consequentiality arises. It does so with a touch of unorthodoxy in its structure and style. This is not an affectation or an indulgence. The mode is, it could be said, inevitable. It is hard for any commentary on “Advances” not to find itself coming over all imitative of the singular pitch and tones of that essay, or at least patterned by them, even if only to a degree and in inevitable inadequacy in the comparison. Perhaps the patterning is also entirely fitting. “Advances” is, after all, as will be shown, about “the absolute antecedent,” in relation to which everything cannot but be “after” (in the sense not only of subsequence but also of being “in the manner—or in the cast—of”).

But first, some context, which will take up almost all of this opening section. A key point to flag at the outset is that “Advances” is one of Derrida’s most *compact* essays. In the 2017 English translation by Philippe Lynes, published by the University of Minnesota Press under the Univocal imprint, the essay takes up just over 50 pages of the small sextodecimo-sized volume, itself called *Advances*, of which it forms the second part. It is barely longer than Lynes’s important introduction, strikingly titled “Auparadvances.” Two years later Lynes translated, also with Univocal, Serge Margel’s *The Tomb of the Artisan God*, which is an extended commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*.¹ The original of that, *Le tombeau du dieu artisan*, was published in 1995 by Editions de Minuit, and it was there, as an introduction to Margel’s book, that the French original of Derrida’s essay, “Avances,” first appeared.²

1 Serge Margel, *The Tomb of the Artisan God: On Plato’s Timaeus*, trans. Philip Lynes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

2 Jacques Derrida, “Avances,” in Serge Margel, *Le tombeau du dieu artisan, précédé par Avances de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1995), 7–43.

Needless to say, it is not in the length of the essay that the compactness of "Advances," cast in a style of elliptical yet peculiarly lyrical philosophical commentary, is strongest. The greater compactness lies in how, just like "*Khōra*"—the better-known essay by Derrida on *Timaeus*,³ whose first version was published in 1993 with the English translation appearing in *On the Name* in 1995—"Advances" compresses considerations on "the first act of the world," or on what "*Khōra*" had referred to as "the anachrony of being."⁴ "Advances," then, is a text of packed portentousness, which Derrida's opening to the essay is not hesitant to foreground. There is, right at the start, an intimation of "an immemorial tremor, an architectonic trembling" (A, 3). Possibly even more than "*Khōra*," "Advances" is therefore about everything and nothing. More than once, in fact, it repeats the old question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" (A, 17). In that echoing, "Advances" will be an essay "Running the risk—the beautiful risk—of thinking an anachronic earthquake: like an aftershock from the absolute prehistory of the world, nothing less" (A, 3). In the risking and the thinking, the focus will be on *Timaeus* as "this old book of humanity's, which also says the origin of the human, this book of pure archaeology [which] is also a monument of the Humanities," and which is "a kind of Bible before its time" (A, 3–4).

The discomfiting sense in the face of all that "everything" is of unavoidable inadequacy, even absurdity, in attempting to respond in one short book chapter to Derrida's compact thoughts on anachronies at the beginning of things, to which philosophy and religion are "countertimes" (A, 23 and *passim*). And indeed, *where to begin?* How, possibly, can anything on the anachrony of being, on "the absolute *antecedent*" that "would precede even ... provenance" itself, be begun (A, 4; emphasis in the original)? Especially in relation to a text on speculativeness, on beginnings and creditings and prospects ("advances" as a term also has that connotation; see A, 5)? One might as well assay nothing.

To make things more awkward and incongruous still, there is going to be a situational irony in any attempt to closely read "Advances." It arises because this English translation of a text that was prefatory to another's study, Margel's, is out of (its) place (and not only because a translation can never

3 *Timaeus* is in some commentaries prefaced by the definite article, so that it is referred to as "the *Timaeus*." That convention is not followed in this chapter.

4 Jacques Derrida, "Advances," in *Advances*, trans. Philip Lynes (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), 1–54, 6; Jacques Derrida, "*Khōra*," in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, James P. Leavey, Jr, and Ian McLeod (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 87–127, 94. Page references to these two works, which will be abbreviated as A and K respectively, are hereafter given within parentheses in the main text.

be in place just in time). The essay was originally written to be placed *before* Margel's text: "before," in various slippery senses of that word that are themselves invoked by Derrida throughout and that are also studied to repointed effect by Stefan Herbrechter in *Before Humanity*, a book in the same series as this current volume and one that brings posthumanism into conceptualizing dialogue with prehumanism, prehistory, the time before time that also exercises "Advances."⁵ But the English publication of "Advances" occurs in detachment from Margel's *The Tomb of the Artisan God*: that is, the English translation that, unlike the French original, does not carry Derrida's essay. In the original, "Advances" came before Margel's text; in the English translation, it is separated from Margel, given a small book to itself in which it comes after Lynes's re-placing introduction, which is marked by ample and admirable referencing rigor. Consequently, the question of how to proceed, in what order, is not merely rhetorical. For what tidying, rationalizing line is to be laid on the sequence and inter-embeddings of these texts, with their background in prehistory, in "a prechronological time" (A, 22) of absolute antecedence?

Perhaps the most readily logical line of argument for the Anglophone reader and commentator might run with rereading *Timaeus* first; then "*Khōra*," Derrida's prior engagement with Plato's work; then Margel's commentary on *Timaeus*, to which "Advances" is prefatory *and* consequent; then Lynes on "Advances," for the scholarly contextualization; then "Advances" itself. That would be one way to do it. Or not, because there will always have been vexing differences and (in)determinations in and over translation(s); other precedences of, advances on, any commentary, in the long and never-ending tradition of reception and interpretation of *Timaeus*. In reading "Advances," there would always be something to do first: *before*. As a result and as will be indicated in later sections, to meaningfully do anything with this (inter)text that opens onto everything can have implications for reflection on mimetic relation, or modeling relating—and hence for (p)(re)thinking the posthuman.

It might therefore be best to set the frame in a decontextualizing way: narrowly, omittingly. It will never be possible to provide enough context to everything anyway, not when the context is, literally, everything. This chapter will in contrast be rather breezier, rather more liberties-taking. It will look "only" at "Advances": not entirely without reference to *Timaeus* or "*Khōra*," but almost as if Derrida's essay were a self-contained commentary (which it isn't, quite) on the former. Admittedly, this is a little suspect, possibly unfair, in

5 See Stefan Herbrechter, *Before Humanity: Posthumanism and Ancestrality* (Amsterdam and New York: Brill, 2022).

relation to Margel's work. A little expediently excluding, too, even if the move is prefigured in the presentation and framing of the English-language publication of "Advances" alluded to above. But the move is hopefully justifiable because it frees space for a different focus, allowing attention to bear upon the relevance to the theme of this volume: posthuman mimesis.

In grounding that relevance, this chapter does nothing more ambitious than pulling from the text of "Advances," with "*Khōra*" alongside, just a few observations of Derrida's that weigh upon the theme of posthuman mimesis, offering some initial reflections. To do more—for instance, building on the reading line anticipated above—would need a much longer study. There is some decorum in keeping things tight instead: *compact*, emulating Derrida's essay. The imitating carries through to the structure. "Advances" has seven sections, running from 0—the digit signifying nothing or the unbegun—to 6. The reflections in this chapter's own imitatively numbered and irregularly sized sections (this current section, in imitation, would need to be numbered "0") will be fragmentary, unresolved (somewhat like those in Derrida's, it is perhaps not unseemly to say, though there the incompleteness is of a different key and import altogether). It is all that can be offered in a chapter of this kind: bitty reflections on what Plato and thence Derrida speculatively advance on the beginning of everything.

1

The (non-)space for posthuman mimesis lies *there*: in the prehuman fashioning, with and without the assurance of model, of what Plato terms "the universe."

To proceed a little more conventionally, it is helpful to recall from *Timaeus* at least some passages in which mimetic energy is in play—or decried. The first involves, yet again, a suspicion of poets and poetry. Socrates tells Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates:

I don't mean any disrespect to poets in general, but it's obvious to everyone that while imitators as a breed have the greatest facility and expertise at reproducing things they've been brought up on, none of them finds it easy to reproduce on stage anything that falls outside his experience, and they find it even less easy to put such a thing into words.⁶

6 Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Robin Waterfield, introduction and notes Andrew Gregory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–99, 6 (19d–19e). Further page references to *Timaeus* (abbreviated as "T") are provided in the main text.

In a different context, it would be good to probe and problematize this view, but here it is the preaffinity, with the perspective on an engendering possibility of imitation, modeling, *mimesis* that calls for attention, and that is now expressed by Timaeus.

What is it that always is, but never comes to be, and what is it that comes to be but never is? ... anything created is necessarily created by some cause, because nothing can possibly come to be without there being something that is responsible for its coming to be. Also, whenever a craftsman takes something consistent as his model, and reproduces its form and properties, the result is bound in every case to be a thing of beauty, but if he takes as his model something that has been created, the product is bound to be imperfect.

T, 16, 28a

Here, then and again, is the atavistic disdain for imitation. And there is more, too familiar and involved to summarize or revisit at any length here, except that some of the culminating conclusions do need to be recalled:

What we have to ask is, again, which of ... two kinds of model the creator was using as he constructed the universe. Was he looking at what is consistent and permanent or at what has been created? Well, if this universe of ours is beautiful and if its craftsman was good, it evidently follows that he was looking at an eternal model, while he was looking at a created model if the opposite is the case— though it's blasphemous even to think of it. It's perfectly clear, then, that he used an eternal model, because nothing in creation is more beautiful than the world and no cause is better than its maker. The craftsman of this universe, then, took as his model that which is grasped by reason and intelligence and is consistent, and it necessarily follows from these premises that this world of ours is an image of something.

T, 17, 29a–29b

Those “ifs” and “thens” are all supposedly steeped in “perfect clarity”: It is likely that contemporary response will not quail from contrariety in regard to the points in question in quite the same manner as the uninterupting Critias, Hermocrates, or Socrates himself. (It is Timaeus who flows on with the discourse of the Demiurge.) But the overriding point is that “likeness,” “model,” “similarity,” “dissimilarity”—recurrent terms in *Timaeus* (reflecting the potentiation of *mimesis*, one might say)—all bear upon humanly perceivable and livable time:

The father-creator ... determined to make his creation resemble its model even more closely. ... But the being that served as the model was eternal, and it was impossible for him to make this altogether an attribute of any created object. Nevertheless, he determined to make it a kind of moving likeness of eternity, and so in the very act of ordering the universe he created a likeness of eternity, a likeness that progresses eternally through the sequence of numbers, while eternity abides in oneness.

This image of eternity is what we have to come to call time.

T, 25, 37d

It thereby follows that "the model exists *for all eternity*, while the universe was and is and always will be for all time" (*T*, 26, 38b).

In the beginning, then, was mimesis.

It is in fact possible to go through *Timaeus* constructing an inventory of its archaeo-poetics of the mimetic. There would be value and utility in that exercise, but here it is more immediately useful to revisit the two ideas that are at the core of "Advances" and "*Khōra*." The first concerns the demiurge, the mimesis-dynamic craftsman-god, and the second concerns "*khōra*" itself. Here, about the demiurge, is the context usefully offered by *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

In the *Timaeus* Plato presents an elaborately wrought account of the formation of the universe and an explanation of its impressive order and beauty. The universe, he proposes, is the product of rational, purposive, and beneficent agency. It is the handiwork of a divine Craftsman ("Demiurge," *dēmiourgos*, 28a6) who, imitating an unchanging and eternal model, imposes mathematical order on a preexistent chaos to generate the ordered universe (*kosmos*). The governing explanatory principle of the account is teleological: the universe as a whole as well as its various parts are so arranged as to produce a vast array of good effects. For Plato, this arrangement is not fortuitous, but the outcome of the deliberate intent of Intellect (*nous*), anthropomorphically represented by the figure of the Craftsman who plans and constructs a world that is as excellent as its nature permits it to be.⁷

⁷ Donald Zeyl and Barbara Sattler, "Plato's *Timaeus*," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2022 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/plato-timaeus>.

What Derrida does on the basis of his reading of Margel's *The Tomb of the Artisan God* is to unsettle this rather irenic understanding of the *Timaeus*. The Demiurge is Margel's artisan god. His tomb is the Earth, to which he gave being but from which he withdrew. Or, in Derrida's words:

The Demiurge would be, from the beginning, a sort of survivor, thus a dying being who writes the world in the instance of his death, his own or the world's. He haunts a memory, but the memory of a promise. The last will of a testament opens the chance of the future.

A, 11

For Derrida, Margel's Demiurge is "an inactive, finite subject, powerless and subjected to laws as contradictory as they are implacable, a central but also passive subject." He is fore-lorn, in "a silent dramaturgy *before* the first act of the world" (A, 6; emphasis in the original).

The second idea is the "*khōra*." As Lynes explains in his introduction to "Advances":

Khōra ... in Greek simply means "place," "place in general, the residence, the habitation, the place where we live, the country." In *Timaeus*'s fable of the Demiurge's creation of the sensible world, however, "*khōra*" for Derrida comes to designate the precise site of resistance to Platonic metaphysics as that which *gives place*, or as *spacing*. It ought already to be noted that *Timaeus*'s account belongs to no assured opposition between *logos* or *muthos*; it is rather a "bastard," "impure," or "hybrid" account, a preorigin to philosophical discourse. *Khōra* must likewise be grasped "as in a dream."⁸

And indeed, Derrida had already emphasized that *khōra* is a "mytheme" that is a "prephilosopheme," as he calls it (K, 100–1). It is "alien to the order of the paradigm," "genre beyond genre" (K, 90–91). If it can be described at all, its attributes are "two types of oscillation: the double exclusion (*neither/nor*) and the participation (*both this and that*)" (K, 91). "The thought of the *khōra* would trouble the very order of polarity, of polarity in general, whether dialectical or not" (K, 92); it "no longer belong[s] to the horizon of sense, nor to that of meaning as the meaning of being. It does not designate any of the known or

⁸ Philip Lynes, "Introduction: Auparadvances," in Jacques Derrida, *Advances*, trans. Philip Lynes (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), ix–xlvi, xxi–xxii.

recognized or, if you like, received types of existent, *received* by philosophical discourse, that is, by the *ontological* logos which lays down the law in the *Timaeus*: *khōra* is neither sensible nor intelligible" (*K*, 96). It is a "third genre" (*K*, 90).

Derrida follows *Timaeus*'—Plato's—discomfort at the obscure, unresolved nature of the concept. He fixes on Plato's recourse to metaphor, particularly to the image of a receptacle:

Khōra receives, so as to give place to them, all the determinations, but she/it does not possess any of them as her/its own. ... she is not the *subject* or *the present support* of all these interpretations, even though, nevertheless, she is not reducible to them.

K, 99

Derrida deconstructs Plato's metaphors for *khōra*. "Almost all the interpreters of the *Timaeus* gamble ... on the resources of rhetoric without ever wondering about them," he notes (*K*, 92). He sees *Timaeus*, interestingly, as "a narrative but it is a narrative of the going outside of narrative. It marks the end of narrative fiction" (*K*, 101).

With all this as a backdrop, the posthumanist affinities that emerge might be considered. And, it is important to stress, they trail, in turn, the mimetic. For *khōra* was always about imitation, copy, *molding*, and yet also about a hospitality to this dynamic that is so comprehending that it is, itself, lack itself, an absolute protean nonbeing, a nothing that is the condition of everything. That much appears here:

It never is anything other than what it is; it only ever acts as the receptacle for everything, and it never comes to resemble in any way whatsoever any of the things that enter it. Its nature is to act as the stuff from which everything is moulded ... And whatever enters it and leaves it is a copy of something that exists for ever, a copy formed in an indescribably wonderful fashion.

T, 42, 50c

The "moulding stuff" that is *khōra*, "if it is to be the receptacle of *all* kinds, ... must be *altogether* characterless." It is as if this cannot be emphasized sufficiently; hence, for good measure: "that which repeatedly has to accept, over its whole extent, all the copies of all intelligible and eternally existing things: if it is to do this well, it should in itself be characterless" (*T*, 43, 51a).

Well might it be said of this absolute antecedent to all mimesis that “It’s almost incomprehensible” (*T*, 43, 51b).

2

How does the above bear upon the posthuman?

In what follows, the posthuman is understood not in the key of the usual associations, many of which speculate (as in, *wager*) on urgent futurity. Instead, a little counter-intuitively, the posthuman is here seen as that which is before the human. “Before” is understood here in two senses. The first is of antecedence, echoing the phrase quoted in this chapter’s title. This opens up the idea of the prehuman—and of prehumanism, talk of which is not more glib than posthumanism’s predilection for critical rhetoric about what might be imminently impending or immanent. The second sense is that of “being in front of,” as when one says, “I stand before you.” Hamlet, he of “to be or not to be” fame, a homo mimeticus all too conscious of the figure and name of he who comes fatheringly before him, asserts this kind of being-before in the graveyard scene in Act V, an artist (more than artisan) prince coming out from behind the tombstone: “It is I, Hamlet the Dane.” To be before in this sense is to con-front and also, as with Hamlet, to seek to understand self and situation, thrownness and (non-)being: before the selfsame, before filiation, before others, before the Other. These and other senses of *before* and their import for posthumanist thinking are studied with greater expansiveness in Herbrechter’s *Before Humanity*, referred to earlier. Here, to keep things compact, the idea of ancestry developed by Quentin Meillassoux in *After Finitude* is pertinent. Meillassoux’s discussion of correlationism is here suppressed in order to draw attention to this passage:

What *is it* exactly that astrophysicists, geologists, paleontologists are talking about when they discuss the age of the universe, the date of the accretion of the earth, the date of the appearance of pre-human species, or the date of the emergence of humanity itself? How are we to grasp the *meaning* of scientific statements bearing explicitly upon a manifestation of the world that is posited as anterior to the emergence of thought and even of life—*posited, that is, as anterior to every form of human relation to the world?*

... I will call "ancestral" any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species—or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth.⁹

The pre-dis-position of this kind of questioning to all kinds of creation narratives, of which *Timaeus* is of course itself one, hardly needs pointing out. Or the pre-dis-position to theology. Derrida notes in "Advances" how the matters at issue hinge on "A question of what comes *before everything* [*avant tout*] (ante, abante), of the absolute *antecedent*, an ageless forbearer" (A, 4; emphasis added). And across "*Khōra*" and the *Timaeus*, this will always turn back to "the question of anthropomorphy," that there is everything rather than nothing, that there is the human in the midst. Also, to quote Christopher Fynsk, "that there is language."¹⁰ And that there is a pleasant game to be played when looking at any posthumanist inquiry. The game that asks, "How long into it will it be before the question, 'What does it mean to be human?' is asked—or before the question "What is 'man'?"

This is all quite posthumanist enough already.

3

But what about the mimetic—and thence, homo mimeticus? To reinforce what was anticipated above, here are just a few points that anchor the relevance, for thinking posthuman mimesis, of Derrida's re-encounter through Margel with *Timaeus*. Already, in "*Khōra*," Derrida had noted:

if Timaeus names it as receptacle (*dekhomenon*) or place (*khōra*), these names do not designate an essence, the stable being of an *eidos*, since *khōra* is neither of the order of the *eidos* nor of the order of mimemes, that is, of images of the *eidos* which come to imprint themselves in it.

K, 95

Interestingly, Derrida refers to the thought of *khōra* and the (im)possibility of moving outside it and its associations and extensions, including in "*politeia*," as "a mythomimeticographic dream" (K, 117–19). And if we understand mimesis

9 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 9–10 (emphasis in the original).

10 Christopher Fynsk, *Language and Relation: ... that there is language* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

in the simplest sense of fashioning after a model, here is then an example—dare we call it originary—from a time before time, with and without a model:

In the shadows, the Demiurge prepares an artifact, deep in a workshop or a back room. He always stays in the back, behind, and thus before [*avant et devant*] everything. Calculation and magic, ratiocinating alchemy, dangerous alliance of technology and occultism, indeed spiritism. ... At the origin of the world, or rather the order of our *cosmos*, before it, the Demiurge is especially not a creator God, some maintain, the Demiurge can only contemplate intelligible structures that have preceded him since forever, eternal paradigms. His gaze thus fixed *on the model before him in front of him*, this contemplator only has eyes for this model. With a draftsman's or sculptor's skill, however, he inscribes, he imprints directly upon the "site." Directly there on a support that is in no way substantial, in the impassive receptacle called *khōra*, he engraves, as if by hand, images or copies. But the artist-artisan has no more created the space within which this printer imprints images by means of "typography" than he has created or invented their models. Everything is *before* and *in front of* he who finds himself *before* [*devant*] his model, before what is to be done, before his judges and heirs: the immortal gods, the intelligible paradigms, the *khōra* and the representations he inscribes upon it—and us. The Demiurge is before [*devant*] these, already owing [*devant*] them everything, but also before and in front of us.

A, 13–14

A very different angel, or agent, of history then. And whatever the angel, or the angle or approach of reading, the relation is always one of mimesis, a be-fore and an owing, the current between an "*être avant*" and an "*être devant*" (A, 7).

4

None of this is inconsequential (how could it be?). Yet Lynes notes that "Advances," "despite serving as a frequent point of reference in Derrida's own work, remains rarely studied in English-speaking deconstructive scholarship."¹¹ Clearly, this is anomalous. As Lynes writes, "Advances" can "importantly contribute not only to Derridean scholarship, particularly regarding

¹¹ Lynes, "Introduction: Auparadvances," xi–xii.

Greek philosophy and time, but also to current debates in new materialism, speculative realism, and biopolitical thought, as well as the emerging field of eco-deconstruction."¹²

Safely addable to that list is posthumanism—indeed, posthuman mimesis. A posthumanist reading of mimesis will find, as the previous sections will have intimated, inexhaustible pertinence in "Advances" and the texts it positions itself before, *devant*. As well as discussing and elaborating evident posthumanist motifs in texts contemporaneous with the paradigm, a posthumanist reading can tease out crypto- and proto-posthumanist concerns in canonical works. The intention would not be merely to show how earlier texts, including those from antiquity, have amenabilities to posthumanist capture. That is already interesting, but the work of rereading and reinterpretation becomes more critical when it is discovered that the text in question may offer ground for posthumanism—indeed, for ideas on posthuman mimesis, in this case—to look back at themselves, to re-theorize on that basis. To reaffirm the opening of this chapter: What Derrida's "Advances" rediscovers is that few texts may be as consequential or revealing in that effort as Plato's *Timaeus*.

There has been, as is well known, excellent work done on, for instance, medieval posthumanisms and Renaissance posthumanisms. If the *Timaeus* ought to be central to any work on posthumanism in antiquity—on Ancient posthumanisms—it is because, in Derrida's words, it is "the Greek book on which we have no doubt written the most since there has been philosophy" (*A*, 18). *Timaeus*, Derrida writes, is "a book anterior and undoubtedly foreign to every Bible" (*A*, 18). It stands us, indeed, before time. Posthumanist reading will henceforth know where to (re)start.

5

We have seen already how Derrida speaks of "khora as *pandekhes*," "khora as receptacle," and, crucially for posthumanist discourse, as "beyond all anthropomorphy" (*K*, 111). But it does not take long—and this is revealing for posthumanism, for posthuman mimesis—for anthropocentrism to reassert itself in *Timaeus*. For, Derrida writes on the basis of his critique of *Timaeus*, "in order to think *khōra*, it is necessary to go back to a beginning, namely, the birth of the cosmos, just as the origin of the Athenians must be recalled to them from beyond their own memory" (*K*, 126). Inheriting the Earth, *the tomb*

12 Lynes, "Introduction: Auparadvances," xvii–xviii.

of the artisan god, brings ethico-politico-juridical responsibility. *Art, politics, technics*: the three entities that are emblazoned in the subtitle to this volume find themselves co-involved atavistically there. And indeed, there is a fair bit in “*Khōra*” on the ways in which *Timaeus* discourses on “the fictive model of an ideal city” (*K*, 117). It is striking that in a context of such philosophical speculation and “advances,” the political irresistibly and necessarily supervenes: eco-cosmopolitically, even, it could be said. For this is in preamble to Derrida’s then-evolved reflection, in “Advances,” one there is not the space to rehearse fully here, on the first-person plural, on what is at stake when saying “we” or “us,” on the problematic of the “before-first persons,” as he calls it (*A*, 41). And as what is at stake turns on the affairs of “men”—in effect, of homo mimeticus—here is, in keeping with extinction studies, a statement on responsibility arising therein:

a finite promise *of* the world, as world: it is up to “us” to make the world survive; and we cannot say this question is not urgently important today; it always is and always will have been, any time it can be a matter—or not—of giving oneself death; it is thus up to “us” to make what “we” inadequately call the earth survive, an earth that we know is finite, that it can and must exhaust itself in an end.

A, 47–48

Anthropocentric, true. Human exceptionalism, that too. But perhaps politics is always so, ineluctably, even when and in the very act of professing to place the nonhuman other more centrally in the frame.

6

As was said at the start, “Advances” contrives to be one of the most compact essays Derrida ever wrote, even while being an essay on cosmogony, comprehending everything in its beginning, open to the “paradoxopoetic anachrony,” as Derrida calls it, of the promise (*A*, 51). The advances are of and on the promise of another figure of the posthuman that this compact, open essay holds out: “In order for something to come and that the future of the promise remains open, the horizon itself, in the figure of its end, must be lacking” (*A*, 50). In what could almost serve as a definition of posthumanism, in that openness “there is only calculation, program, anticipation, providence, foresight, prognostic: everything will have happened, *everything is beforehand* [*auparavant*]” (*A*, 52; emphasis in the original). “Everything,” then, is appropriately the

last word of *Advances*. The last sentence—gnomic, elliptical, mysterious—reads: "Only receiving instead of everything" (A, 54).

It would need more than the space available here for even the start of an adequate reading of the "everything" paradoxopoetically gestured toward there, which could again only poorly imitate Derrida. But, one final thought, a provocation that proffers itself, is irresistible. Grand and grandiose, magnificent and ridiculous, responsible and overreaching, intent on beginning and ends, on deep space and deep time, on entanglings with animal, plant, mineral, on being beyond the human, *posthumanism*—which has an ethics, a politics, arguably an aesthetics—risks becoming a theory of everything. It *advances* on everything in conjunction with *Timaeus*-referencing mimetology, unsettling "any theory, any *knowledge of what is*, any ontical, ontological, anthropological, or theological science" (A, 37; emphasis in the original), to appropriate Derrida's words as he compares the promise of the Christian God, which is "keepable—or rather ... not unkeepable," and that of the Demiurge, which is "unkeepable" (A, 37–38). And we see what Derrida said, in "Advances," when he set to deconstruct some first and last-ing words on everything. He cannot help himself, he cannot resist writing more than once: "What the hell!" (A, 3, *passim*). Posthuman mimesis: imprecation-occasioning, inscrutable, (trans-) earthly, apprehending and apprehensive of the (un)doing of the human, of the being of homo mimeticus, even as it advances the inimitable, mythomimeticographic absolute.

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