coming from him and not really coming from outside him, but existing instead in a space where the distinction between inside and outside loses meaning. For those who believe, as I do, that the "rigor" of studying value theory components in isolation from each other is a false one, believing instead that a critical analysis is better conducted when the links between ethics, politics, and aesthetics are foregrounded, this book offers a great deal of food for thought.

TRACEY NICHOLLS, Lewis University

H. C. for life, That Is to Say ...

JACQUES DERRIDA
Trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter

Jacques Derrida situates his tribute to Hélène Cixous, H. C. for life, That is to Say..., within the literary tradition of the palinode—and indeed this text is best read as a work that resonates and performs like a poem. When read through this form, a poem in all its musicality (ode, "song") defined by retraction and repetition (palin, "again"), Derrida's autobiographical anecdotes, philosophical close-readings, and more general assertions about the monumental importance of Cixous's project have an apparent, thematizable structure—a beautiful but also necessary attribute, for this piece has no chapters, no subtitles, no explicit divisions. The palinodic structure is thematizable because of its double movement: contained in recantation is a withdrawal aligned with death, and the grace of another beginning, for what was said can be miraculously replaced with other words, another direction, new life. Such a meaningful structure is continuous with Derrida's premise in a work that takes its place as yet another rich conversation with his close friend of over three decades: an exploration of the differences between the two thinkers's conceptions of death (and life). While previous conversations can be overheard in works such as Voiles (1998) and Rêve, je te dis (2003), this piece is an important contribution to scholarship on Cixous's literary achievements. Derrida attends in particular to Le Prénom de Dieu (1967), the novel to which he had originally planned to limit his address, in addition to Les Commencements (1970), Ananké (1979), Jours de l'an (1990), and OR, les lettres de mon père (1997), while he also makes reference to La Baleine de Jonas (1970), Le Troisième Corps (1970), La (1979), Illa (1980), Mémoires d'aveugle : L'autoportrait et autres ruines (1990), L'Ange au secret (1991), Beethoven à jamais ou l'existence de
Dieu (1993), the play L’Histoire (1994), La Fiancée juive—de la tentation (1995), and Messie (1996). Derrida does of course refer to various theoretical works, including Cixous’s dissertation, L’Exil de James Joyce ou l’art de remplacement (1968) and Entre l’écriture (1986), but the emphasis is on her remarkable contributions to the literary arts.

Derrida's lecture shows how seemingly solid origins or beginnings liquefy upon recollective contact. Beginnings multiply, replace each other, until a beginning becomes structural only, with no substantial content as "the" beginning. Derrida names these withdrawing reassertions (palinodic) "rebeginnings"; his text characteristically defers definition, prefers opening gestures to closing ones. Such fluid movement of assertion and retraction delivers the rhythm of this piece—a performative tribute to the life in Cixous’s work. Certainly, Laurent Milesi’s translation is in itself a rebeginning. The piece was originally the inaugural lecture for a Cixous conference at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1998, then published in Hélène Cixous: Croisées d’une œuvre, and finally translated into English in 2004, a project that bears the interruptive force of Derrida’s passing on October 8 of that year. In his moving "Translator’s Preface," Milesi reflects on the experience of this loss, and how it shadows not only the work of translation but also the way in which we perceive Derrida’s assertions about his relationship with death. Yet his lecture is full of life: the tangential reflections of Derrida’s address, especially his anecdotal reaching for the origins of his friendship with Cixous, are open and intimate. Just as Derrida touches upon the inception of their friendship, a postcard received from Cixous followed by a face-to-face meeting, this beginning dissolves as such into yet another origin—one of which Derrida was unaware until many years later when Cixous told him of the event.

Seven years before the postcard was sent, she sat behind him during his address at Cerisy on the topic of death, and the proximity of the two thinkers would have been recognized only by those in the audience, perhaps one man in particular:

Maurice de Gandillac ... could claim to have seen us together, virtually, to have caught us in his field of vision and seen us both coming, facing him, whereas we did not know each other and had never seen or heard each other face-to-face yet. I am sure [his] mind was elsewhere; he was probably thinking of something else and he missed that (6).

This pre-originary encounter, then—the "true" beginning of the relation—dissolves just as it is reached. Only retrospectively does this event gather meaning; they are within the same "frame," Cixous and Derrida, even before they willfully connect. Derrida also reflects upon other co-
incidental resonances between them—and the delight he takes in these gifts is palpable—such as the co-incidence of their parents’ names. While Cixous the author is “the daughter of the dead-fathers” (her father George having died from tuberculosis when she was eleven years old) and aligns herself, her ambiguous “I,” on the side of her living mother, Derrida’s father was Haim Aimé, meaning “Life loved,” and his mother was named Georgette, thereby forming “a perfect chiasmus” (57). Such improbabilities—of their first meeting, of the mirroring of their parents’s names that reflect their respective identifications with the sides of life and death—mark for Derrida the possibility and the truth of their intersecting lives:

I always ask myself how we managed to meet, to read and write each other. Unless, turning this encounter between two people as different as we were into such an improbable, unpredictable, and unbelievable chance, this difference in rhythm might be the veritable essence of this encounter (64).

This is a beautiful account of a relation that precedes and exceeds intention or will, and speaks to Derrida’s later approach towards what he calls “the letting/making come” of Cixous’s performative poetics (67). One of the central, implicit concerns of this book is the inadequacy of current approaches to Cixous’s literary endeavors. Less than a decade ago, Mireille Calle-Grueber drew attention to the relative absence of scholarly works Cixous’s fiction (Rootprints, 1999); here Derrida demonstrates, suggests, and questions what worthy readings might resemble. Repeatedly pointing out the limitations of the time given him (assertions that resonate with his reflections on death), Derrida includes several analyses or, as he calls them, “experiments” of excerpts while also asserting infinite possibilities for future studies (on telephones, animals, and punctuation in Cixous’s literature, for a start). Extending from his interpretations are seemingly endless possibilities for readings of Cixous; certainly, according to Derrida, the majority of the work on her fiction has yet to be accomplished. True readings, Derrida implies, begin at the border of the untranslatable, just as true belief is an “impossible faith in the impossible” (4) and “the only true questions are the impossible ones” (27). He writes of the process of translation not only conventionally, taking note for example of untranslatable puns, homonyms, or expressions in French, but also accounts for the process of reading in general as an act of translation; it is as if the poetic event is undergone only through the experience of near-unreadability. Derrida reads such poetic events with a particular appreciation of specific novels, such as OR. Much literary (and thematic) significance is given to the sentence, “Je vis des
letters,” because of the homonymy present here, the untranslatable collapse of “I saw letters” and “I live by letters/literature” (see Milesi and Herbrechter’s note 65). Derrida sees in this sentence Cixous’s performative pronunciation of life, vision, and velocity; the words say and “do” simultaneously. He also reads her use in the novel of the word “salut,” with its double implication of an address or call and salvation. Most powerful and pertinent to the book as a whole, however, is Derrida’s analysis of the word “might” (puisse), and the role in general of the subjunctive in Cixous’s poetics. Might is the conflation of powerlessness and strength, impossibility and possibility, passivity and willfulness:

[Derrida's analysis of the word “might” (puisse),...]

Derrida thinks through the uniqueness of Cixous’s grammar; he demonstrates the necessity of reading slowly—following his own dynamics, adagio and lento, asserted at the beginning of the lecture—because her writing moves so quickly, defying Chronos, with homonyms, seemingly simple proclamations, declarations of wishes, longings that simultaneously call the world into being like magic. This magical dimension is not at odds with reason, skill, the technical according to Derrida, and he explores the limits of conventional notions of the magical in order to heighten an appreciation of Cixous’s project, its possibilities. Despite the vitality and innovation of her language, death remains very real; Cixous’s father did in fact die, and any amount of verbal summoning cannot bring him back. Yet Derrida insists that hers is not a naïve denial of the fact of death; she knows death well, “better than anybody,” but does not
believe in it. Indeed, her father “is saved, saved from death ... only by saving his uniqueness through substitution” (25), through regenerative saying. Derrida leaves readers with an aporia: the difficulty he undergoes in his attempt to believe Cixous is paradoxically necessary for belief to be a meaningful event. To believe her, he must come to the limit of his ability to believe. Is this aporia a truth or an evasion? It is difficult to decide.

The theme of belief brings Derrida to an insightful discussion of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, in which he reaches across the limits of the psychoanalyst’s exposition on “the omnipotence of thought” and into the beyond that opens with Cixous’s “letters of omnipotence.” According to Derrida, Freud (called with affection and resistance by Cixous, “Uncle Freud”) misunderstands the poetic dimension of art, art that makes-lets things happen. In his “evolutionist” theory where Freud draws parallels between the advancement of humankind and the psychic development of the child into maturity, animism is accorded with narcissism, religion with object choice and attachment, and science with the relinquishment of latter two ways of being, granting freedom from the narcissistic fantasy of omnipotence through an acceptance of death. Derrida writes that Freud neglects to explain why, if he accords art with animism, narcissism, the omnipotence of thought, art has survived despite the progression through these stages; the psychoanalyst limits himself to thinking through representational art (where art exists “as if” it depicts something external or real in the world). Derrida insightfully points out that it is an odd failure, for “the poietic dimension of art—is ... in the order of psychoanalysis ... where performative power [is] ... at once rational, technical and magical. The effect, both affective and effective ... is always magical in appearance” (112). Similar to the operations of language in psychonalysis, Cixous’s poetics, her magic, does not exclude the technical and scientific dimensions of composition and thought. Such omnipotence of thought need not be disdained with the label of narcissism, according to Derrida. Instead her writing “experiments” the prer-originary force traced by Freud, referred to as “animatism” or Belebheit; this is a force for life that precedes any cultural determination, and thus escapes the evolutionary logic set up by Freud. Cixous’ Belebheit is indeed narcissistic, according to Derrida, but he draws a useful and important distinction between “petty narcissism” that is blind to the other and a prior, essential narcissism in which “life lets itself be lived and outlived,” for “the mightier narcissism is, the more it loves the other” (115). In other words, art’s narcissism is to be celebrated as integral to its engagement of or openness to the other. The acknowledgment of death, the stage that marks in Freud psychic and collective maturity, is likewise problematized. Here, Derrida examines the denial implicit to
acknowledgment (of death, for example); acceptance can be a form of avoidance. This analysis gives rise to a rich analysis of passages from Cixous’s *Anankê* in which a reader can see how Cixous’s poetics challenge Freud’s claims by exposing the way in which denial of death contains its affirmation, while explicit acknowledgment of it may signal a veritable blindness to its reality.

The next-to-last rebeginning is the most straightforward movement of Derrida’s text, at which point he passionately expounds upon Cixous’s valuable works and with what they (and she), despite obvious international fame, must contend in order to become fully appreciated and disseminated. He even confesses to his own reaction of confusion, awe, and fear when he read Cixous’s draft of the yet-unnamed *Le Prenom de Dieu*, three and a half decades before: “What on earth is happening here?; What am I going to do with this?”; “What on earth is this type, this new type of raving and sublime autobiography?” (147). He feared that the novel would not be accepted by the world; it was that revolutionary to the revolutionary philosopher. Such intimate descriptions of self-doubt are demonstrative of what Derrida characterizes as true reading: if we are shaken we are open—and how else is there to practice reading? If anything this work affirms reading and writing as serious activities with much at stake. Cixous herself, according to Derrida, is in a precarious position. He elaborates upon four “traps or tests” faced by Cixous, namely, “the armed force of misogyny or of phallogocentrism,” (136), internal resistances to the scope of her work, manifested in scholarly works that ghettoize her “among the great-French-women-theorists-of-the feminine” (140). Acknowledging Cixous’s feminism, Derrida points out that she exceeds the reductive weight of categorization that hides behind an appearance of celebration or support in the academy. The third test is subtle and internal to Cixous’s life-work—for he warns against the avoidance that is implicit to recognition. In other words, on one level affirmation can result in a kind of evasion rather than a full affirmation that contains or is open to negation. Finally, Derrida writes that Cixous will face the test of the tension between the resistance to and necessity of a metalanguage; surely as a totalizing force it may threaten to absorb singularities but it is required “to get the truth out of the well. The truth of the essence, what one says and when one says it/that is [c’est], is only an agency in the differential of the intensities of power” (143). This is a tantalizing gesture towards examining the problem of totality and singularity that might interest scholars who are evaluating poststructuralism. On the whole, then, the text’s value is in its powerful assertion that it is time to begin again to read Cixous. If Derrida is not entirely convinced, and cannot take Cixous’s side, he shows an unquestionable conviction in the greatness of her literature: how many
other writers can claim that Derrida began a sentence about them with, “I know no other writer who ...”? One of Derrida’s greatest tributes is his assertion that he and Cixous are so very different. He writes with such authority—by virtue of his humility and open self-doubt, and exploration of his own limits—that hopefully readers will believe him, and recognize that anyone who argues that Cixous is at all “derivative” of Derrida is simply exposing an ignorance or misreading of her work. At the very least, readers can take from Derrida’s reflections a very few simple statements carried so gracefully by the palinode that structures them: “it is always necessary to begin again with her” (78); “read and reread everything yourselves, that is a job for life...” (94).

ALEXIA HANNIS, European Graduate School

Zizek!
ASTRA TAYLOR
Zeitgeist Video, 2005; 71 minutes.

Si les départements de cinéma s’intéressent depuis longtemps à l’analyse politique, ceux de science sociale se soucient encore peu du cinéma. Pourtant, plusieurs penseurs ont commencé à relier ces disciplines et Slavoj Žižek, philosophe à l’Institut des sciences sociales de l’Université de Ljubljana (Slovénie), devenu un incontournable des cultural studies aux États-Unis, en a fait une des particularités de sa pensée. La situation est devenue paradoxale au point où Slavoj Žižek—qui tente une réinterprétation politique de Jacques Lacan—est plus connu et étudié dans les départements de communication que dans ceux de science politique. C’est que tous ses livres sont remplis de référence au cinéma, du plus petit exemple pris dans le détour d’une argumentation logique, à l’analyse cinématographique rigoureuse d’une scène ou d’une image : le cinéma parfois appuie le propos sociologique, d’autres fois c’est la situation sociale qui porte le discours esthétique. Cette posture académique— entre la science sociale et le cinéma—est propice au traitement cinématographique de la pensée d’un auteur et le documentaire Žižek! d’Astra Taylor—dont c’est le premier film—permet de joindre les deux lignes que sont l’étude cinématographique de la pensée politique et l’étude politique du cinéma. Si le documentaire dévoile un Slavoj Žižek intéressé par le cinéma, ce que ces livres présentaient déjà, il permet en outre d’avoir un regard cinématographique sur Žižek.

Le documentaire de Taylor se veut une présentation de la pensée de Slavoj Žižek. En le suivant dans ses conférences, on fait le tour de sa