

**The Death of the Other:
Paradoxes of Subjectivity in Derrida's
Autobiographical Thought**

Andrew Clark

The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth.

July, 2011

Abstract

This project analyses some of the key texts from Jacques Derrida's autobiographical thought and organizes these texts chronologically in terms of their relation to other figures who are part of the history of autobiographical thought itself. The five chapters of the main body consider Derrida's relation to five such figures: Augustine, Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. The central argument of this project is that Derrida's conceptualization of autobiography provokes the reconceptualization of human subjectivity. The central aim of this project is thus to set the groundwork for this reconceptualization. Derrida is known for inventing lots of new words (neologisms) as a way both of circumventing traditional philosophical problems and of renaming them by highlighting their fundamental gaps. One of the many neologisms that he invents around autobiography is 'heterothanatology'. Where autobiography designates the life of the self, in contrast heterothanatology designates the opposite: namely, the death of the other. In Derrida's thought more generally, it is characteristic of his deconstructive philosophy that an opposite of a metaphysical concept becomes that concept's condition of possibility. This juxtaposes the opposites in such a way that develops an undecidable impasse, thereby opening them up to the differences of degree between them. Hence, the introduction to this project, 'The Death of the Other', sets up heterothanatology as the condition of possibility of autobiography. After the analysis of the main body, the conclusion to this project, 'Paradoxes of Subjectivity', provides clues to the groundwork for the deconstructive reconceptualization of subjectivity. This occurs primarily by taking the opposites at work in the deconstruction of autobiography itself: that is, self/other and life/death. The central outcome of this project is a deconstructive deepening of the existential understanding of human subjectivity, based on the difficulties surrounding the actual experiences and events of people's lives. The overall contribution to knowledge is thus in the original interpretation of this project concerning the radical psychological insight that Derrida's thought possesses for the philosophical understanding of human subjectivity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my first Director of Studies, Simon Morgan Wortham, for seeing the potential in me to go through the PhD process successfully, for supervising me through the first couple of years, and for his understanding of Derrida's thought. I would also like to thank my second Director of Studies, Bran Nicol, for supervising me through the latter stages of the PhD process, and for his helpful advice on redrafting my thesis.

I would like to thank the external examiner of my *viva voce*, Arthur Bradley, for his insight into Derrida's thought, for seeing the potential in my research, and for his continuing support. I would also like to thank the internal examiner of my *viva voce*, Charlotte Boyce, for her perceptive questions and advice.

Other important figures in the University of Portsmouth I would like to thank, who have helped me in various ways while I was teaching here during my years as a PhD student, are: Tony Chafer, Gerd Knischewski, Rosamund Paice, Paraic Finnerty, and SLAS School Manager Elizabeth Clifford.

I would like to thank my family for helping me through the PhD process. And finally, I would like to give a special thank you to my girlfriend, Katherine Ross. Without her unconditional support, and the support of her family, I would not have managed to complete the process successfully.

Contents

Introduction	The Death of the Other	1
1. Confessing Truth: Augustine & Derrida		30
2. Confessing Desire: Rousseau & Derrida		55
3. Learning to Live: Marx & Derrida		81
4. Autobiographical Riddles: Nietzsche & Derrida		108
5. Autobiographical Speculation: Freud & Derrida		135
Conclusion	Paradoxes of Subjectivity	162
Bibliography		182

Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Dissemination

Clark, A., 2011. Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal. In: M. Ryan, ed. 2011. *The encyclopedia of literary and cultural theory*. Oxford & Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Clark, A., 2008. Review of Sean Gaston's *The impossible mourning of Jacques Derrida*. *Textual Practice*, 22 (4), pp.811-814.

Introduction

The Death of the Other

The purpose of the present study on Jacques Derrida's thought is twofold. First, to demonstrate how Derrida conceptualizes the word 'autobiography' in such a way that gives it a philosophical force and signification. And second, to argue that this conceptualization of autobiography is undertaken in order to provoke the reconceptualization of the more traditional philosophical concept of 'subjectivity'. The concept of subjectivity generally refers to an inner-psychical space whose topological form is given a particular conceptual series of mental contents: e.g., identity, consciousness, autonomy, rationality, volition, thought, feeling, understanding, perception, intuition, intention, etc. For Derrida, this mental content has become the basis of the vocabulary of philosophy in its logocentric organization as the metaphysics of self-presence. The conceptualization of autobiography in his thought thus offers a primordial complication of the boundary between inside and outside: where the autonomous inside of the self's mind becomes contaminated by the heteronomous outside of the self's life. This primordial complication provokes the reconceptualization of subjectivity by arguing the following: that each individual subject must be understood not via pre-given ideas of how the inner-psychical space is structured; but rather by alluding to the way in which the outer-life circumstances of each individual forms the underlying basis of their idiosyncratic responses to those very same circumstances. The purpose or end of the present study thus rests on an attempt to answer the question: In Derrida's thought, what is the nature of human subjectivity? The conceptualization of autobiography acts as the means to this end.

In such a rethinking of human subjectivity, it is not that each individual person has no subjective experience or inner thoughts and feelings; but rather, that such subjectivity is ultimately mediated by each individual's own idiosyncratic experience of the outer world around them. In Derrida's thought, this mediation involves the conceptualization of intermediary terms, such as autobiography, in which the very oppositions between inside and outside, subject and object, self and other, life and death, etc, become possible; and yet also impossible via the complication of their primordial contamination. In this way, more generally, Derridean deconstruction involves a process of textual intervention into the inherited conceptual oppositions of the metaphysical tradition by transforming absolute polar oppositions into differences of

degree. In arguing for the necessity of this intervention provided by the work of mediation, and by putting this work into practice in the conceptualization of intermediary terms, his thought aims to *resituate* human subjectivity. As he says in an interview entitled ‘Deconstruction and the Other’:

To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, ‘operations’ or ‘effects’ of subjectivity. This is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it says it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic substance or identity, some pure *cogito* of self-presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it (Derrida, in: Kearney, 1984, p.125).

What I will be arguing here is that, in Derrida’s thought, the so-called ‘deconstruction of the subject’ is inseparable from his thinking around the topic of the autobiographical; and this insight is radically new in terms of how both subjectivity and autobiography have thus far been considered in the context of the contemporary scholarship on his thought.

The scholarship on Derrida’s thought is typically divided between the philosophical and the literary strands of research. It is important to underline how this division between philosophy and literature affects the topic of autobiography directing the present study. As Derrida says in ‘That Strange Institution Called Literature’, autobiography acts as a strange sort of intermediary between philosophy and literature in his thought:

And since what interests me today is not strictly called either literature or philosophy, I’m amused by the idea that my adolescent desire – let’s call it that – should have directed me towards something in writing which was neither the one nor the other. What was it? ‘Autobiography’ is perhaps the least inadequate name, because it remains for me the most enigmatic, the most open, even today (in: Derrida, 1992, p.34).

This can be understood in different ways; and so far in the field of scholarship it has been understood in two different ways. First, and most importantly, via Robert Smith’s (1995) book, *Derrida and Autobiography*; and also Joseph G. Kronick’s (2000) essay, ‘Philosophy as Autobiography: The Confessions of Jacques Derrida’. Here, there has been a tendency to understand Derrida’s interest in autobiography in a literary-institutional sense: i.e., by arguing that the growing body of literature around so-called ‘autobiographical theory’ has so far concentrated on the ‘auto’ and the ‘bio’, but not the ‘graphy’, of autobiography. The dimension of writing has been excluded from autobiographical theory; and in the discipline of literary criticism, the discipline which

dominates the scholarship in Derrida's thought, this is given an institutional significance. This is mostly as a result of the work of Derrida's friend and colleague Paul de Man, which we will consider in more detail later on. And second, via Jill Robbins's (1995) essay, 'Circumcising Confession: Derrida, Autobiography, Judaism'; Gideon Ofrat's (2001) book, *The Jewish Derrida*; Hélène Cixous's (2004) book, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*; and the collection edited by Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Raphael Zagury-Orly (2007), under the title, *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*. Here, the autobiographical element of Derrida's thought has developed an interest in the details of Derrida's own life, in particular with regard to his religious upbringing as a Sephardic Jew. But the question either of the particularities of Derrida's own life history, or of the significance of his thought for Judaism, matters little to us here. In contrast, I will try to outline here a 'third way', so to speak, for the significance of autobiography to Derrida's thought.

As can be seen from the opening paragraph of this introduction, the argument of the present study offers a radical change of thematic terrain from this pre-existing work on Derrida's autobiographical thought. The interest is much more 'psychological'. Not in the institutional social science sense of the 'science of the mind', but rather in the colloquial sense (which in present times is undoubtedly psychotherapeutic) of how to go about 'understanding people'; or in more philosophical vocabulary, of how to go about understanding 'human subjectivity'. Undoubtedly, there would be a number of caveats to consider: e.g., the way in which the very terms 'human' and 'subjectivity' and 'understanding' and 'people' would all but put in quotation marks by Derrida to highlight some metaphysical problem or other contained within the traditional usages of their concepts. But in a way, this is not the concern here: for by doing this one would have to keep in mind that the vocabulary that one oneself uses without quotation marks – in order to complicate the vocabulary used in the present study without quotation marks – can just as easily have quotation marks put around it, thereby highlighting problems with it in its turn. All words and concepts are problematic. But in order to say something in a way it becomes necessary to delay the process of problematization (ironically delaying the work of deconstruction itself; deconstruction as self-delaying so as to never be absolutely completed) and actually use words that we know are problematic, because they are the only ones that we have available. Indeed, the very process of problematization will take certain words for granted in order to problematize

some other words. The question then becomes: *What is it* that you want to discuss? What theme or topic do you want to enquire into?

In the field of scholarship on Derrida's thought there is an implicit sense that one should avoid using words and phrases like 'psychology', 'metapsychology', and 'moral psychology', to characterize and classify it. But I think there are certain definitions of these terms in which his thought finds its most poignant point of application. Indeed, one scholar has argued that we should use the word 'emotion' rather than 'subject': Rei Terada in her book, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the "Death of the Subject"*, argues for the development of a 'poststructuralist emotion' (Terada, 2001, p.8) at the expense of the concept of the subject. In contrast, I would argue that there are no grounds to privilege the word 'emotion' over the word 'subject'; conceptually it is just as problematic – as is, equally, the word 'poststructuralist' (see: Culler, 1982, pp.17-30). Hence, the groundwork that must first be done is instead to rethink how human subjectivity is itself formed; only on the basis of this groundwork would a theory of emotion begin to make sense. For this groundwork to be done, we must take recourse in Derrida's emphasis around the concept and conceptualization of autobiography. Here, it is useful to remember that, although the autobiographical form is ancient, traditionally considered as originating in Augustine's *Confessions* (Augustine, 1961), the actual word 'autobiography' is a modern invention. Derrida's work alludes to this fact in that he himself invents so many neologisms around the word: 'otobiography' in *The Ear of the Other* (Derrida, 1988a); 'autothanatography' and 'heterothanography' in *The Post Card* (Derrida, 1987); 'autobioheterothanography' and 'circumfession' in 'Circumfession' (Derrida, 1993); 'autobiographicity' in 'I Have a Taste for the Secret' (Derrida, 2001); 'zootobiography' in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (Derrida, 2008); and so on.

In *Feeling in Theory*, Terada takes it for granted that the 'death of the subject' is an event that has actually occurred, instituted by poststructuralist theorists, and so the concept of the subject is one that we can leave behind us. In this, she might have taken a leaf out of Seán Burke's book, which was originally published in 1992, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Here, Burke argues more paradoxically that the thinkers who are credited with the popular statement of the 'death of the author' in literary criticism are the very same thinkers who subtly allow the author to return from the dead. In this way, Burke offers a critical reading of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, arguing that in effect they contradict

themselves on this point. But he also argues that the popular reception of their work has not caught up with the fact that they also institute the author's spectral return, and so their thought is much richer than some might give it credit for. Since the statement of the 'death of the author' concerns, in literary criticism, the issue of to what degree one allows the author's psychobiography to determine the meaning of their writing, Burke thus takes a passing interest in the theme of the autobiographical – although it rarely occurs in his three chapters that form the main body of his book (on Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida respectively). Here, his task is more a demonstration of how these three thinkers contradict themselves with regards to the 'death of the author', rather than any conceptualization of the autobiographical which might be relevant to a theory of subjectivity. For example, Burke's chapter on Derrida, 'Misread Intentions', is restricted to the question of the presence of authorial intention in relation to their work, as this question appears in Derrida's thought: i.e., 'that a text finally says quite the reverse of what its author intended' (Burke, 2008, p.119).

In contrast, I would argue that the question of authorial intention in the literary critical reading of the text can only ever offer a rather restricted philosophical interpretation of the nature of human subjectivity. Derrida's thought on subjectivity becomes much richer than this specific question when we account for his autobiographical thought – and does so in the particular way that the present study identifies. 'Misread Intentions' picks out Derrida's reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, and his reading of Plato in *Dissemination*, to show how his thought engages with the above principle of deconstructive literary critical reading. For instance, Burke's main criticism of Derrida's reading of Rousseau is that, in the entire history of logocentrism that Derrida identifies, he has offered no reasons for privileging Rousseau amongst others: 'no especial significance is accorded to Rousseau's text as such' (Burke, 2008, p.116). This is actually a misreading, as the reasons for picking Rousseau are given in Derrida's short 'Introduction to the "Age of Rousseau"' in *Of Grammatology*, where Rousseau is said to begin: 'from a new model of presence: the subject's self-presence within *consciousness* or *feeling*' (Derrida, 1976: p.98). By the end of 'Misread Intentions', Derrida's force is given by Burke as a literary critic rather than as a philosopher: 'If Derrida is to be remembered as a great philosopher, it will be as the individual in whom – for the first time – the philosopher becomes exclusively a reader-critic' (Burke, 2008, p.161). As I will show in this introduction, this also is a misreading. And in the end, Burke's chapter on Derrida is less concerned with the

problem of human subjectivity (as his subtitle suggests) and more concerned with the problem of how Derrida reads, or indeed misreads, other thinkers. However, the misread intentions are perhaps Burke's own.

Because of the dismissive approach to subjectivity that the statement of the 'death of the subject' implies, and the limited approach to subjectivity that the statement of the 'death of the author' implies, the present study aims instead to take a more direct approach to the question of individual subjectivity. However, in true Derridean style, this 'direct' approach is itself obliquely mediated by a proxy that presents us with another route into subjectivity: viz., the proxy of autobiography. The argument I would like to propose here is that, for Derrida, autobiography *supplements* subjectivity. Indeed, as we can see from the numerous neologisms that Derrida has invented around this word, clearly he thinks that by itself the word autobiography is paradoxically both important and inadequate. But these neologisms themselves also act as proxies or supplements to the concept of autobiography, which is itself here understood as a supplement to the more traditional philosophical concept of subjectivity. That is, as supplements, just as the concept of autobiography shows the concept of subjectivity to be fundamentally lacking, so Derrida's neologisms around the concept of autobiography show how it itself is also fundamentally lacking. The neologism that most interests us here is the one from *The Post Card: heterothanatology*. On a banal definition, the word autobiography refers to the *life of the self*. In contrast, this neologism of Derrida's refers to the *death of the other*. As such, heterothanatology therefore stands in a precise quasi-transcendental relation to autobiography: i.e., what autobiography most lacks is what it most excludes, which appears in the oppositions of life/death and self/other. The relation of life to death, and of self to other, is thus symbolic of the subject's interiority to what is radically exterior.

In Derrida's thought, the concept of autobiography is also shown to suffer from metaphysical saturation. Even though the concept of autobiography *prima facie* alludes to the exterior life of the self, thereby including what is exterior into the traditional interiority of human subjectivity, at the same time it alludes to this very exteriority *via* a hidden and more pervasive underlying metaphysical ideal of subjective interiority. Where the metaphysics within the concept of subjectivity is transparent, in contrast the metaphysics within the concept of autobiography is more opaque. As such, it is not a simple matter of taking the concept of autobiography toward the concept of subjectivity in order to undermine the latter's metaphysical biases, since the metaphysics of

subjectivity is already implicit within the concept of autobiography. Paradoxically, the concept of autobiography is both what will come to disrupt the metaphysics of subjectivity, and what shows this theoretical metaphysics in practice. Something more radically exterior than the life of the self must therefore act as the condition of possibility of human subjectivity, even though the life of the self offers the initial stage of exteriority to the radical interiority of the subject. With the neologism of heteroethanography, Derrida offers this radical exteriority by placing the death of the other as the condition of possibility of the life of the self. And yet, precisely because its opposite is its condition of possibility, it is also therefore, in quasi-transcendental manner, its condition of impossibility: i.e., since its opposite is its condition, it begins in a condition of impasse; a condition marked by a radical difficulty to make progress.

Derrida's quasi-transcendental style of argumentation affects his autobiographical thought by the invention of neologisms that become the very condition of possibility and impossibility of autobiography itself. His affirmation of autobiography is also a supplementation of what is lacking in its concept, and a putting into question of what is metaphysical in its concept. As such, it is also necessary to consider how autobiography has become significant to Derrida's philosophical thought more generally. In an interview in *Points* entitled 'There Is No *One* Narcissism (Autobiographies)', Derrida says: 'I am tempted to take a word from everyday language and then make it do some work as a philosophical concept, provoking thereby restructurations of philosophical discourse. That interests me' (Derrida, 1995b, p.210). Indeed, we could say that Derrida also takes words from literary language and makes them do some work as philosophical concepts. For our present purposes, whether the word 'autobiography' is first of all a word of everyday language or of literary language matters less than the work it does as a philosophical concept. Here, I would like to further distinguish my interpretation of Derrida from Smith and Kronick, who are less concerned with the work that the word 'autobiography' does as a philosophical concept and more concerned with what Derrida refers to as the 'restructurations of philosophical discourse'. This institutional significance is not here the concern. That is, what impact the conceptualization of autobiography has on the philosophical tradition as an institutional body of writing is not what interests me. What interests me is the work of conceptualization itself, the work of concept formation, and the way in which it provokes the reconceptualization of subjectivity.

On this point of concept formation, it is necessary to turn to Gasché's account of Derrida in *The Tain of the Mirror*. Gasché calls the fundamental concepts in Derrida's early work 'quasi-synthetic concepts' and 'infrastructures' (Gasché, 1986, p.7): i.e., the concepts of arche-writing, différance, trace, supplement, iterability, re-mark, etc. This is because they intermediate between the oppositional nature of a particular conceptual opposition – for example arche-writing between writing and speech – in such a way so as to act as the quasi-transcendental ground of that opposition, thereby synthesizing them up to a point through which they become not opposites but differences of degree (in the case of arche-writing, different modes of communication). Although I agree with Gasché up to a point, I would also like to take issue with him, so as to make clear how Derrida's work of concept formation is understood in the present study. I think there is a danger with Gasché's interpretation in which the concepts become just a little too abstracted from the context of their production. In his chapter 'A System Beyond Being', where he summarizes what he calls this 'infrastructural chain' of Derrida's concepts, in his account of the concept of re-mark, he says: 'As in our previous analyses, I shall discuss this infrastructure in abstraction from the rich context in which it is produced within Derrida's work' (p.218). However, this abstraction can sometimes miss the point. For instance, in his account of iterability, Gasché fails to show how the formation of the concept of iterability in 'Signature Event Context' (in: Derrida, 1988b) works to *counteract* certain features of Austin's concept of the performative in *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 1962). For this reason, in the present study, sometimes Derrida's concepts will be referred to as *counter-concepts*.

This notion of the counter-concept is particularly applicable with regard to his neologisms surrounding the concept of autobiography, as they could be perceived to be counteracting an implicit metaphysics within this concept. In his earlier chapter, 'Deconstructive Methodology', Gasché describes the way in which Derrida's thought demonstrates the fundamental gap between the concept formations of philosophical thought and the rhetorical structures of the texts within which those concepts are formed: 'Derrida's parallel inquiry into the formation of philosophical concepts and the argumentative, discursive, and textual structures of philosophy leads to the recognition of an essential nonhomogeneity between the concepts and philosophical texts or works themselves' (Gasché, 1986, p.128). Indeed, but surely it is precisely this paradox that makes it problematic to abstract the concepts to quite the degree that Gasché himself does in 'A System Beyond Being'. Perhaps this abstraction is symptomatic of Gasché's

placement of Derrida's philosophical thought firmly within the context of phenomenology (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger). Sometimes, because of the abstraction, the concrete point of reference is lost in some of the sentences that he constructs – which would seem to be an effect of phenomenological vocabulary more generally that Derrida's thought puts into question. And ironically, as much as Gasché distances Derrida's thought from 'the literary-critical enterprise' (p.1), in a way it can also mimic it because the abstract language of phenomenological vocabulary is equally as opaque as creative poetic writing. What it lacks in terms of opaque fragmentation it makes up for in terms of opaque abstraction. The emphasis here on the value of prose writing is thus a way of circumventing the obscurity that occurs in both camps of scholarship on Derrida's thought (philosophy and literature) where there is a tendency to sacrifice clarity for profundity.

This latter point can be demonstrated by considering the way in which subjectivity has been thought by scholars who, like Gasché, interpret Derrida's thought primarily as evolving out of the phenomenological context. Here, there are two books in the field, two edited collections, coming from this perspective: *Who Comes After the Subject?* (Cadava, Conner, and Nancy, 1991), and *Deconstructive Subjectivities* (Critchley and Dews, 1996a). While the essays in these two books are insightful for their accounts of the way in which the concept of subjectivity organizes the metaphysics of the philosophical tradition, what they do not do is offer a reconceptualization of subjectivity itself. Like the work of Smith and Kronick, they appear to be more concerned with the institutions within which they work more than the concepts that they are actually working with. Hence why, in the respective introductions to the edited collections, there appears to be more concern with reworking the philosophical tradition than with reworking the concept of subjectivity. Jean-Luc Nancy opens his 'Introduction' by saying: 'Philosophy, today, world-wide: what might this mean?' (Nancy, 1991, p.1). A little later, after having considered the problem of the idea of the self-identical 'philosophical community' (p.2), he wonders about his title: 'the question asks "who?" Which means that the question of essence – "What, existence?" – calls forth a "who" in response' (pp.6-7). The philosophy of the subject is grounded in an undecidable aporia between the 'who' (the internal subjectivity of the subject) and the 'what' (the subject understood as an external object). But also the problem of before and after: "'Before/after the subject": *who*' (p.7). Nancy's mode of articulation on this latter point is particularly confusing.

Nancy is quite clear when it comes to his problematization of the philosophical tradition near the beginning, but comparatively unclear when it comes to the depiction of the nature of human subjectivity from the deconstructive perspective – other than to enigmatically allude to a few basic distinctions. Ultimately he is more interested in the paradoxical problems posed by how we phrase the *question* of subjectivity in the first place. As Derrida's early work clarifies, the question 'What is...?' is *the* question of ontological essence. And yet, to ask 'Who am I?' is to ask who I am in my true self, my eternal essence; whereas to ask 'What am I?' is to ask what have I become in my worldly, temporal existence. On the one hand, the 'what' can pose the question of objective essence whereas the 'who' can pose the question of subjective perspective; but on the other hand, the 'who' can also pose the question of subjective essence and the 'what' can also pose the question of objective character traits. At any rate, in their 'Introduction' to *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, Simon Critchley and Peter Dews perhaps go one stage further than Nancy:

[W]hen the full range of what has been thought under the concept of the "subject" comes into view, and when the possibilities of *genuine* alternatives are addressed, then the subject may appear, in many of its guises, to be one of the driving forces behind – rather than the prime defense against – that unravelling of metaphysics which has come to be known, after Derrida, as "deconstruction" (Critchley and Dews, 1996b, p.1).

Here, like Nancy, they allude to the deconstructive work that must be done in relation to the 'unravelling of metaphysics'; i.e., in relation to the metaphysical tradition of thought. But they also keep in reserve behind this work the concept of subjectivity as one which must be returned to after a certain amount of unravelling of metaphysics has been undertaken.

However, if we take Critchley's own essay in *Deconstructive Subjectivities* as an exemplary example, 'Prolegomena to any Post-deconstructive Subjectivity', then we can begin to see some of the difficulties. The main problem to consider is the inadequately abstract nature of phenomenological vocabulary to explain the essence of human subjectivity. Here, there develops the concern that the descriptions surrounding subjectivity are too generalized to make sense; as if their abstractness carries some sort of profundity that is supposed to speak to us somehow. For example, on Heidegger, Critchley says: 'For the later Heidegger, the human is no longer a subjective master of entities but, rather, the shepherd of Being, and it exceeds metaphysics in its ecstatic

openness to the temporal donation of the truth of Being, the appropriative event of *das Ereignis*' (Critchley, 1996b, p20). On Levinas, he says: 'The ethical subject is an embodied being of flesh and blood, a being capable of hunger, who eats and enjoys eating' (p. 30). A little further on: 'what Levinas calls the "psyche," is structured in a relation of responsibility or responsivity to the other. The psyche is the other in the same, the other within me in spite of me, calling me to respond' (p.31). In three citations the point of reference in such examples is far too abstracted from the web of complex practicalities that form everyday life for my liking; and as such they actually say very little about their stated topic of subjectivity. Of course, philosophy can be written like that, but surely when it is about the human experience of everyday life one's ideas should have a certain pragmatic tangibility about them. It is tempting to cite Rorty's 'Response to Simon Critchley' in the edited collection, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*: 'I don't find Levinas's Other any more useful than Heidegger's Being – both strike me as gawky, awkward, and unenlightening' (Rorty, 1996, p.41).

The present study therefore not only performs a radical change of terrain in the scholarship on Derrida's autobiographical thought, but by arguing autobiography to supplement subjectivity, it also performs a radical change of direction in the scholarship on Derrida's thought on subjectivity itself. And of course, to draw on Rorty's name here is not to subscribe to everything he says. Rather, we do so to invoke a somewhat forgotten neologism of Derrida's: *pragmatology*. For example, in a footnote in 'Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion', in *Limited Inc*, Derrida says:

Grammatology has always been a sort of pragmatics, but the discipline which bears this name today involve too many presuppositions requiring deconstruction, very much like speech act theory, to be simply homogeneous with that which is announced in *De la grammatologie*. A pragmatology (to come) would articulate in a more fruitful and more rigorous manner these two discourses (Derrida, 1988b, p.159).

Pragmatism and pragmatics are perhaps not the same thing (the one an empirical philosophy concerning the understanding of abstract philosophical concepts in relation to the practicalities of existence; the other the empirical analysis of practical instances of language use), but it is not a far stretch to argue that they imply one another. Indeed, Derrida alludes here to presuppositions 'very much like speech act theory' contained within pragmatics. Perhaps it is unfair to use Rorty to criticize Critchley without allowing the latter some space also to respond to the former. In his essay,

‘Deconstruction and Pragmatism – Is Derrida a Private Ironist or a Public Liberal?’ (the essay that provokes Rorty’s ‘Response’), Critchley argues that Rorty’s celebration of the bourgeois liberal ‘can be read as a (re)descriptive apologetics for the inequality, intolerance, exploitation and disenfranchisement within actually existing liberal democracies’ (Critchley, 1996a, p.24). One general criticism of pragmatism from a deconstructive perspective could therefore be to pose the question of ‘who’: i.e., pragmatism concerns the practicalities of *whose* existence? If there is indeed a complex web of practicalities to account for, then around whose life circumstances are such practicalities formed? Presumably everybody’s – but in that case not just the bourgeois liberal. In the context of such critical questioning, it follows that pragmatics, like speech act theory, must also critically consider the broader relation to its underlying worldview regarding the nature of the world and its underlying psychology regarding the nature of the psyche.

For Derrida, such critical considerations begin with our underlying philosophy of language, in particular concerning the theoretical relation of language to worldly reality (outside) and to the human mind (inside). These considerations return us to our theme of autobiography, understood in a pragmatological manner. That is, autobiography in Derrida’s thought becomes a question of what links his concept of arche-writing to the complex web of practicalities, everybody’s practicalities, that forms the human experience of everyday life and language. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida distinguished writing in the narrow sense that we more commonly understand (as a specific form of communication which inscribes words onto surface material), from what he calls arche-writing. Arche-writing was intended not to make a point about writing *per se*; it was rather more directed at speech, and in particular at the way in which the idea of ‘hearing-oneself-speak’ is used by the metaphysical tradition to confirm to itself the self-proximity and self-presence of the subject. Arche-writing is therefore an umbrella term which is intended to cover the essential structure of *all* communicative language (writing, speech, gesture, etc), insofar as that structure involves the distance and absence which writing itself traditionally contains. Logically, this means the following: viz., that arche-writing involves a paradoxical sense of *writing without writing*. That is, even if one communicates without writing in the ‘narrow sense’ of the term, one still communicates with writing in the broader sense of arche-writing, in which one’s communication must still conform to the *structure* of writing

more generally. The question then becomes: How does this impinge upon our thinking regarding autobiography?

First of all, it is important to consider the following argument: viz., that the concept of autobiography is *hyperbolic*. That is, it overflows its intended point of reference. Autobiography is the story of ‘my life’, not yours; and yet, like the word ‘my’ the word ‘autobiography’ is deictic; in principle it can be utilized by anyone and everyone. Although autobiography is the story of my life, the singularity of my life represents the otherness of my life to everybody else. Hence, as Peggy Kamuf paradoxically notes in *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship*: ‘autobiography is always already the autobiography of the other’ (Kamuf, 1988, p.126). In order to write one’s own autobiography, one must refer to one’s relations with others: family members, friends, family friends, lovers, friends of friends, lovers of friends, lovers of family members, work colleagues, etc. But the moment one refers to others, one is touching upon the autobiography of others even though one is still discussing one’s own: the other’s autobiography is thus radically implicated in one’s own autobiography. What is more, from the perspective of the other’s autobiography, one’s own autobiography is counted as the other’s autobiography. As such, there is in a strange way no such thing as *one’s own* autobiography, for the ownership always already belongs to someone else, in part. Indeed, this part that belongs to the other is also partly what precludes the metaphysical access to the whole of one’s own life and self. If deconstruction is the demystification of the metaphysical ideal of *totality*, then this is not merely to do with the completeness of philosophical systems or cosmological accounts; it also applies itself to the understanding of life and self.

In which case, autobiography is not merely the autobiography of the other, but is also the autobiography of death. Derrida broadly subscribes to Nietzsche’s concepts of life-death and tragic affirmation: death is radically implicated in life, and we are left to affirm the inevitable hardships of life, of which death is the ultimate symbol, paradoxically with both a wry smile and with tears. Even if you were to live a financially comfortable and emotionally stable life, perhaps even with a fair share of life’s ecstatic and exciting experiences, death will still catch you up. Of course, such a ‘happy life’, a life that gives us that *joie de vivre*, is for the fortunate minority of the world. And with this question of life’s fortune, it becomes necessary to account for *the fate of the position of birth*: e.g., to be born into privilege or stillborn into squalor (or somewhere between). Generally, of course, to be born into privilege is considered

better; but there are cultural and psychological possibilities to account for. One can be born into privilege but be held back by a family who is unkind; or conversely, one can be born into squalor but have the kindest of families. But although there are possibilities, there are also probabilities to account for: e.g., although it is possible to be born into privilege and yet be held back in other ways, it is nonetheless probable that it is better to be born into privileged living conditions than it is to be born into squalor. Or although it is possible to be born into squalor and yet progress into privileged living conditions as life goes on, in all probability this is less likely to occur than it is if one is already born into privilege. This means that, in principle, one born into squalor is not only forced to work harder than one born into privilege, but also requires more luck than them, if one is to exist in privileged living conditions – as each individual *a priori* deserves.

In the field of scholarship on Derrida's thought concerning autobiography, this issue of touching base with actual living conditions or life circumstances, in all their complex web of practicalities, is strangely absent. Instead, there is more of a concern for the strange literary ironies that occur in the act of writing an autobiography. Undoubtedly, this is due to the influence of the main protagonist of deconstructive literary criticism, Paul de Man, whose essay 'Autobiography as De-facement' in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* offers a unique interpretation of the issues that are relevant to the theorization of autobiography. Broadly speaking, as Martin McQuillan notes in *Paul de Man*, de Man's book puts forward the way in which language is rhetorically organized by the dynamics of figuration and disfiguration: 'figuration (the power of texts to posit their own meanings) and disfiguration (the internal structure of a text that erases such meanings)' (McQuillan, 2001, p.69). For de Man, the epistemic or cognitive function of human experience is not found inside the human subject or psyche, but rather in rhetorical language; that is, in *all* language, insofar as all language is considered as rhetorical, figurative, tropological, etc. On de Man's interpretation, this figurative function gives language the power to hide (disfigure) what it simultaneously presents. As he succinctly puts it in his 'Criticism and Crisis', which opens his founding book *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*:

It is the distinctive privilege of language to be able to hide meaning behind a misleading sign, as when we hide rage or hatred behind a smile. But it is the distinctive curse of all language, as soon as any kind of

interpersonal relation is involved, that it is forced to act this way. The simplest of wishes cannot express itself without hiding behind a screen of language that constitutes a world of intricate intersubjective relationships, all of them potentially inauthentic. In the everyday language of communication, there is no a priori privileged position of sign over meaning or of meaning over sign; the act of interpretation will always again have to establish this relation for the particular case at hand. The interpretation of everyday language is a Sisyphean task, a task without end and without progress, for the other is always free to make what he wants differ from what he says he wants (De Man, 1983, p.11).

This citation is particularly apt here for it refers to ‘everyday language’ instead of ‘literary language’ or the ‘literary text’. That is, it is given a more generic pragmatic emphasis whose point of reference is to the ‘real world’ or ‘real life’, as distinct from the specific institutional emphasis of literature departments in educational systems (although the latter dominates in de Man’s work and in deconstructive literary criticism). But how does this paradoxical dynamic of simultaneous presentation and hiding, figuration and disfiguration, impinge on his autobiographical theory?

In ‘Autobiography as De-facement’, de Man is critical of the Romantic tendency to treat autobiography as if it were ideal grounds for complete self-knowledge. Indeed, this is a tendency he also reads as problematic within some authors in the growing discipline of autobiographical theory, and he briefly refers to the example of the works of Philippe Lejeune. But de Man’s stronger interest rests more in a reading of the English poet William Wordsworth, with particular reference to his short work, ‘Essay upon Epitaphs’ (in: Wordsworth, 1854). De Man cites Wordsworth to the effect that the latter denounces the workings of rhetorical language in order to save the goodness of the human soul: ‘The language so violently denounced [by Wordsworth] is in fact the language of metaphor, of prosopopeia and of tropes, the solar language of cognition that makes the unknown accessible to the mind and to the senses’ (De Man, 1984, p.80). This is expressed by de Man in a paradoxical tone (‘is in fact’) because he had earlier argued that Wordsworth appears, in his ‘Essay upon Epitaphs’, to propose prosopopeia as a characteristic feature of epitaphic or autobiographical discourse: ‘The dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse is, as we saw, the prosopopeia, the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave’ (p.77). McQuillan notes the etymology of the word ‘prosopopeia’: ‘The etymology of the word “prosopopeia” comes from the Greek *prospan poiēn*, to confer a mask or face (*prosopon*)’ (McQuillan, 2001, p.78). Prosopopeia is etymologically linked to the face, and so is linked to the rhetorical feature that de Man calls de-facement or disfigurement, for: ‘Interestingly in French the word “figure” can mean “form or shape” as well as “face”’ (p.69). Indeed, if we

transpose the point of reference from language to life, then ‘disfigurement’ applies itself in the first instance to the face; it is the deforming or blemishing of the facial features.

In his text ‘Mnemosyne’ in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida himself provides a reading of de Man’s ‘Autobiography as De-facement’. ‘Mnemosyne’, like another essay of Derrida’s on de Man, ‘Psyche: Invention of the Other’ (in: Derrida, 2007), was written soon after de Man’s death, and so acts as a *work of mourning* for his colleague and friend – Derrida borrows, and at times adjusts, this term from Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (in: Freud, 2001c). Derrida begins his reading of ‘Autobiography as De-facement’ by alluding to the way in which it begins, before it turns to the reading of Wordsworth and to the figure of prosopopeia. He succinctly summarizes the opening themes of the essay: ‘In this particular text, the problem of autobiography *seems* to elicit several concerns: that of *genre*, of *totalization*, and of the *performative* function’ (Derrida, 1989, p.23). The emphasis on ‘seems’ thus alludes to the way in which de Man’s more explicit focus is on the figure, or rather the disfigurement, of prosopopeia – even though it does not appear this way from the outset of his essay. The triadic structure that Derrida draws our attention to has a strange sort of quasi-dialectical feature to it, in which autobiography-as-genre is problematized by a performative element, mediated by the problem of totality. For the problem of genre, de Man argues that autobiographical theory has so far understood autobiography as a distinctive literary genre whose boundaries are identifiable. Derrida produces the following quotation from the opening page of de Man’s essay: ‘By making autobiography into a genre, one elevates it above the literary status of mere reportage, chronicle, or memoir and gives it a place, albeit a modest one, among the canonical hierarchies of the major literary genres’ (De Man, 1984, p.67). In his citation, Derrida italicizes the word ‘memoir’ (which in the text Derrida is working with is plural, *memoirs*, without the ‘e’ that Derrida uses in the title of his book, *Memoires for Paul De Man*), thus highlighting the strange connection between memoir and autobiography.

Derrida’s delicate adjustment of de Man (via his insertion of the ‘e’) also creates the space for a delicate transition – ‘prosopopeia is also the art of delicate transition’ (De Man, 1984, p.76) – from de Man’s style of deconstruction to his own, as I will show in a moment. But to continue with the triad: demarcating autobiography as a literary genre is highlighted as problematic by de Man when considering the performative function of literature or fiction. That is, on the one hand, autobiography is meant to be factual: ‘It seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, of

representation, and of diegesis' (p.68). But on the other hand, its rhetorical construction ironically undermines the access to its factuality: autobiography can never be merely about facts, for is also about desires, dreams, fantasies, likes, dislikes, hopes, fears, etc, in relation to which evidential access becomes impossible. We only have the author's own word; but as the author's life becomes mirrored in the autobiographical text, he/she becomes both the object and the subject of his/her own discourse. De Man refers to this strange performative self-division as the 'specular structure' (p.70) of autobiographical writing. With this performative dimension, not only does autobiography become taxonomically impossible to classify as a genre, but it also undermines the authority of the author as a guarantor of total and complete self-knowledge. In de Man's argument, the latter is sought after not only in Romantic autobiographies but also in more contemporary autobiographical theory: 'The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions' (p.71).

At this point, it is useful to consider the way in which de Man's argument about genre has been utilized by literary critical interpretations of Derrida's autobiographical thought. It must be remembered that much of de Man's thought, and much of the literary critical reception of his thought, has concerned the enigmatic institution of literary studies. Indeed, in 'Mnemosyne' Derrida himself notes this: 'De Manian criticism or deconstruction is always, also, an analysis of "resistances" and of the symptoms they produce (for example, the "resistance to theory" in literary studies)' (Derrida, 1989, p.31). Derrida himself is also the author of a notable essay contaminating literary genres, 'The Law of Genre' (in: Derrida, 1992). It is not, then, a far stretch for literary scholars working in the field to interpret Derrida's thought, in light of de Man's arguments, as impinging on autobiographical theory (although in this essay it is not autobiography but Derrida's concept of the *re-mark* which performs this primordial contamination). Indeed, the influence of Derrida's essay has been notable for subsequent scholars working on autobiography to help understand the problem from a poststructuralist perspective. For example, Laura Marcus, in her (1994) book *Auto/biographical Discourses: Criticism, Theory, Practice* entitles her penultimate chapter 'The Law of Genre'; and Linda Anderson, in her (2001) book *Autobiography* entitles the second section of her introduction 'The Law of Genre'. The argument that I would like to put across here is not that Derrida's thought does not make contact with

literary themes; it evidently does. It is rather that, where it is a major feature in de Man it is comparatively minor in Derrida. But because Derrida's thought has been given more space in literature than philosophy, this feature of his thought has been given a somewhat disproportionate consideration in relation to his more philosophical tendencies.

Indeed, such tendencies can be seen if we compare the two texts we are presently discussing: de Man's 'Autobiography as De-facement' and Derrida's 'Mnemosyne'. The latter is much more philosophically rich than the former in that de Man's thought is directed more to *literature* whereas Derrida's thought is directed more to *life*. It is not that de Man says nothing about life and Derrida says nothing about literature; but that what they each say about these things is comparatively less than their main focus and point of reference. What is a major thematic emphasis in de Man is in this case a comparatively minor one in Derrida, and *vice versa*. For example, in 'Autobiography as De-facement', memory is alluded to by de Man: 'For just as autobiographies, by their thematic insistence on the subject, on the proper name, on memory, on birth, eros, and death, and on the doubleness of specularity, openly declare their cognitive and tropological constitution, they are equally eager to escape from the coercions of this system' (De Man, 1984, p.71). In contrast, in 'Mnemosyne', autobiographical memory is Derrida's topic – given in its very title, which utilizes the name of the ancient Greek goddess of memory. Derrida also reproduces the above citation from de Man, and in doing so italicizes the word 'memory' just as he had done with the word 'memoirs'. A little later on he adjusts de Man's definition of prosopopeia from 'voice-from-beyond-the-grave' to '*memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*' (Derrida, 1989, p.29), thereby alluding to an impasse between *rhetoricity* (the rhetorical construction of the event) and *historicity* (the eventual contextualization of rhetoric) – an impasse between the rhetoric of temporality and the temporality of rhetoric.

For Derrida, deconstruction has multiple forms. In 'Mnemosyne' he says: 'If I had to risk a single definition of deconstruction, one as brief, elliptical, and economical as a password, I would say simply and without overstatement: *plus d'une langue* – both more than a language and no more of a language' (Derrida, 1989, p.15). A little later he continues: 'there is no sense in speaking of a deconstruction or simply deconstruction as if there were only one' (p.17). As such, perhaps the impasse between rhetoricity and historicity is at work more acutely in Derrida's concept of the work of mourning itself. For example, memory and mourning are etymologically linked; and Derrida alludes to

this when he considers what it is to speak ‘in memory of’ someone after their death; in his own case in the memory of de Man: ‘*In memory of him*: these words cloud sight and thought. What is said, what is done, what is desired through these words: *in memory of...?*’ (p.19). Derrida here poses a question – a very philosophical gesture in comparison with de Man who, in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, says: ‘To question is to forget’ (De Man, 1984, p.118). McQuillan succinctly expands on this point: ‘Asking a question closes off alternative ways of thinking and reiterates the structure of meaning we are attempting to interrogate’ (McQuillan, 2001, p.70). That is, to pose a question is to phrase it in a particular way, and so to close off alternative ways of posing the same question which would make it carry meaning or force from a slightly different perspective or angle; or even of posing a different question altogether. Indeed, this problem is the basis of Nancy’s hesitation between the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ that was discussed earlier. The paradoxical problem that Derrida poses is that, even so, it remains necessary to ask questions to facilitate the process of thinking – although furthering the impasse, of course this is not to say that Nancy and de Man ask no questions of their own, or that Derrida himself does not also pose the same problem of questioning.

In ‘Mnemosyne’, Derrida poses a paradox between the traditional notion of a successful memory, a memory without forgetting, and what he calls, from the opening page, ‘impossible mourning’ (Derrida, 1989, p.3). This is a paradox which is performed by the concept of the work of mourning. The work of mourning is a process in which, after the death of a loved one, the period in which we live *in memory of* them must gradually pass, and we must *learn to forget* them in order to get on with our lives *post hoc*. In other words, mourning is an impossible labour because it demands both that we live ‘in memory of’ someone and we simultaneously ‘learn to forget’ them. The *gap* (*écart*) between memory and forgetting in the work of mourning is therefore impossible to close, which is why Sean Gaston’s book *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida* allusively refers to: ‘an impossible mourning on the gap’ (Gaston, 2006, p.12). That is, the historical traces of memory in the work of mourning, and so in the work of mourning as an exemplary example of the work of memory itself (as we live ‘in memory of’ the dead), these traces have a paradoxical function: on the one hand, they make it impossible to forget; on the other hand, they inscribe gaps in our memory such that it is also impossible to remember. As Gaston puts it: ‘mourning is both unavoidable and impossible’ (p.vii). The paradox of simultaneous necessity and

impossibility is a characteristic feature of Derrida's thought: that which is impossible is also that which is most needed; meaning that which is most needed is that which is most difficult to acquire – not just in language (e.g., finding the right words), but also in life (e.g., finding the right words).

It is thus in the work of mourning that Derrida's rhetorical feature of the 'death of the other', conceptualized in his neologism *heterothanatology*, makes an explicit appearance in his thought. For example, Derrida uses this phrase notably in the final paragraph of 'Mnemosyne', in which he also alludes to his other essay on de Man, 'Psyche: Invention of the Other' (Psyche of course being another major ancient Greek figure; though not initially a goddess, she possessed a godlike beauty such that Eros himself fell in love with her):

In the strict and almost institutional domain of rhetoric, all figures, modes, or types – be they classifiable or unclassifiable – receive their (unclassifiable) possibility from these paradoxical structures: first, the inclusion in a set of a part that is greater than the set; second, a logic or an a-logic of which we can no longer say that it belongs to mourning in the current sense of the term, but which regulates (sometimes like mourning in the strict sense, but always like mourning in the sense of a general possibility) all our relations with the other as other, that is, as mortal for a mortal, with the one always capable of dying before the other. Our "own" mortality is not dissociated from, but rather also conditions this rhetoric of faithful memory, all of which serves to seal an alliance and to recall us to an affirmation of the other. The death of the other, if we can say this, is also situated on our side at the very moment when it comes to us from an altogether other side. Its Erinnerung becomes as inevitable as it is unliveable: it finds there its origin and its limit, its conditions of possibility and impossibility. In another context, I have called this Psyche: Psyche, the proper name of an allegory; Psyche, the common name for the soul; and Psyche, in French, the name of a revolving mirror. Today it is no longer Psyche, but apparently Mnemosyne (Derrida, 1989, pp.38-39).

'Apparently' Mnemosyne, then, because, as a 'revolving mirror', as Psyche twists its reflection back into itself, it is not its true self that it sees but another figure of itself. For example, regarding another person exterior to oneself whom one loves, before any actual 'relationship' occurs there is the prior knowledge of one another's mortality. Every meaningful relationship that one has is therefore structured in advance by the death of the other. This also implies that every relationship that one *wants to have* but is thus not within one's own autonomous control to *make happen* (for it heteronomously requires the other's consent), is also structured in advance by the death of the other: meaning that, although the relationship might happen, it also might not happen. Hence, the death of the other, and so impossible mourning, becomes applied as the *a priori* structure not only of every actual loving relationship, but also of any longed-for love

that is fantasized after but not achieved in actuality. They are Derrida's names for the impossibly difficult experiences of the heartbroken. The death of the other is the heartache of the life of the self. And although this heartache has a radically temporal phenomenon in the context of one's own life, it also something that, in its own way, is also impossible to date. Heartache is historicity without 'dating'.

Coming towards the conclusion to this introduction, let us consider the impact of this for distinguishing the present study from Robert Smith's *Derrida and Autobiography*. This book, with such a simple title, is very complex. In 'Philosophy as Autobiography: The Confessions of Jacques Derrida', Joseph G. Kronick says that *Derrida and Autobiography* is 'a straightforward title for an oddly circuitous work' (Kronick, 2000, p.1007). Indeed. So in the context of such circumlocutions, what is Smith's argument? Smith's book is divided into three parts: 'The Book of Esther', 'Clarifying Autobiography', and 'The Book of Zoë'. The first part builds itself up to an oblique reading of Derrida's semi-autobiographical text 'Circumfession', but does so via a strong emphasis on Hegel's philosophy. In 'Circumfession' Derrida himself provides a circumlocutionary reading of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, in which he abbreviates Saint Augustine's name into the acronym SA. He does this in order to make a parallel between the French term for 'absolute knowledge', *savoir absolu*, and in which his earlier book *Glas*, where he provides a reading of Hegel, he also uses the acronym SA to refer to the latter's concept of 'absolute knowledge' (Derrida, 1986). By turning Saint Augustine's name into the same acronym, Derrida makes an implicit connection between the theological thought of Augustine and Hegel. The first part of Smith's book depends on this implicit parallel, even though it is not a feature that Smith himself directly discusses. But in this way, Hegel becomes relevant to Derrida's own autobiographical text. As Smith moves into the first chapter of the second part, entitled 'Worstword Ho: Some Recent Theories', he clarifies the use of Hegel further in relation to 'the anxieties over method analysed above in relation to Hegel's protocol for philosophical enquiry' (Smith, 1995, p.52). That is, Hegel's self-consciousness trying to provide stable grounds for philosophical method mimic the self-consciousness of writers on autobiography trying to provide stable grounds for their own theoretical enquiries.

'Worstword Ho' is the key to understanding *Derrida and Autobiography* as a whole. The third part of the book, 'The Book of Zoë', contains three chapters that are formed of the three terms in the word autobiography: 'auto', 'bio', and 'graphy'. While

in one way this might appear like neat organization, in another way it is difficult to think what the point of it could be. This is where Smith's literary-critical influence becomes clearer, and 'Worstword Ho' clarifies the point further. As the subtitle of 'Worstword Ho' implies, the chapter offers an account of some recent autobiographical theories – and towards the end of the chapter Smith positions Derrida's thought in relation to them. Smith argues that autobiographical theory has been dominated by 'humanist-existentialist' (Smith, 1995, p.55) approaches in which the 'auto' and the 'bio' of autobiography is privileged, and the 'graphy' aspect is excluded. For Smith, this has contributed to autobiography becoming 'a watered-down, self-help, gospelised existentialism more or less concerned with claiming autobiography as a means of consumerist "self-realization," to which a value of truth, as wholesome sincerity, is often superadded' (p.55). He then compares these existential-humanists (notably Philippe Lejeune, James Olney, and Christophe Miething) with more deconstructive, and so what he considers to be less existential-humanist, thinkers (including de Man, Kamuf, and Nancy), as a prelude to the figure of Derrida himself. Here, the general criticism by the latter set of thinkers made against the former is that the autobiographical subject is thought to perform a 'form of (attempted) subjective self-closure' (p.67). While, with the existential-humanists, this attempt is thought to be successful in autobiographies; in contrast, the deconstructionists, with their emphasis more on the 'graphy' in relation to the institution of literary biography itself, argue this attempt to be radically unsuccessful.

In turning towards Derrida in this debate, Smith produces the following citation from *Signsponge*, furthering the deconstructive interpretation:

The academic conventions of literary biography presuppose at least one certainty – the one concerning the signature, the link between the text and the proper name of the person who retains the copyright. Literary biography begins after the contract, if one may put it like this, after the event of signature (Derrida, 1984, p.24).

For some reason Smith leaves out the word 'academic' from his citation (perhaps it is a typo). At any rate, not long after this citation, Smith says: 'The institution of literary biography, so entrenched for so long, suddenly looks very shaky' (Smith, 1995, p.70). We now have a better sense, then, of why Smith structures the third part of *Derrida and Autobiography*, 'The Book of Zoë', into the chapters 'auto', 'bio', and 'graphy'. It is, in effect, to give back to the institution of literary biography its very literariness; the

writing which is so excluded in its dominant existential-humanist interpretation. That is, it is so that writing gets the *last word* in deconstructive autobiographical theory – a theory which only begins, as Derrida notes above, ‘after the event of signature’ which opens the institution of literary biography itself. Indeed, this emphasis on signature, countersignature, proper name, etc, produces some curious literary ironies in relation to autobiography. For example, Smith notes that: ‘in autobiography the name takes on [a] titular status’ (p.71). In principle, the title of the autobiographical text is the name of the text’s very author. Along these lines perhaps we could say that the signature, as autograph, is what brings death to autobiography since life (*bio*) is what is absent from it.

So in what way is the present study different from Smith’s interpretation? To begin with, the strange ironies that might occur in the *act of writing* an autobiography are not the concern here. In effect, the present study extracts the word ‘autobiography’ from its literary-institutional context in order to conceptualize it philosophically. The reason for this is to provoke the reconceptualization of subjectivity. From the perspective of deconstructive philosophy, the conceptual oppositions at work in the concept of autobiography, life/death and self/other, offer a very economical initiation into what I will call the *paradoxes of subjectivity*: that is, where the essence of subjectivity, where that which enables us to understand subjectivity, must find its point of application in the complex and contradictory web of practicalities that form and transform each individual existence. Here, understanding subjectivity is about looking to each individual subject’s own life circumstances and life history. Of course, to say this is not to imply that such understanding is ever complete, just as it is not to imply that there is complete ‘self-closure’ for subjectivity itself. Deconstruction demonstrates the impossibility of totality; but this is only the first stage, for paradoxically, it is therefore what makes the idea of this totality necessary. Consider the etymology of the word ‘totality’. It is related to the words ‘health’ and ‘heal’; which are themselves related to the word ‘therapy’. This means that the paradoxes of subjectivity that are to be rethought in deconstructive philosophy must find their point of application in the idea of the promotion of a healthy mind, and therefore in the very meaning of the words *psychotherapy* and *psychiatry*. Smith himself might not like the fact that autobiography is used for a ‘watered-down self-help gospelised existentialism’; but I consider this to be one of its strengths, if it can be harnessed differently. But philosophically speaking,

there are some existentialisms, and some of what Hillis Miller (1991, p.ix) calls 'deconstructionisms', that have points of intersection.

The metaphysical philosophy of the subject presupposes the autonomy of the individual person. That is, it presupposes that the individual psyche pre-exists the individual's life. In contrast, the emphasis on the life circumstances of the individual point towards the radically heteronomous inscription of the subject into life itself: it is not that the psyche pre-exists the life, but that the life pre-exists the psyche. And if life pre-exists the psyche, then any psychological theory must be brought first and foremost before death and the other. So it follows that we then have to reverse the relation between writing, self, and life that appears in *Derrida and Autobiography*. It is not that writing gets the last word, but rather that it gets the first word. It is necessary to begin with Derrida's concept of writing, as arche-writing, in order to then return to questions of self and life. Here it becomes not a matter of moving from Derrida's concept of the signature to his autobiographical theory (as in *Derrida and Autobiography*), but rather of moving from his concept of autobiography to his theory of subjectivity. In this way, we also return to deconstruction its radically existential concerns. There might be metaphysical problems of 'humanist-existentialism' in literary-cum-autobiographical theory, but in the history of philosophy existentialism is precisely what begins to put into question the essentialism of metaphysical humanism. In this respect, deconstruction is a radical existentialism; and one of the aims of the present study is to demonstrate the way in which this occurs in Derrida's work.

But how do we begin with arche-writing, which inscribes *a priori* the relation to death and the other into all communication, and turn towards the life of the self? Remember that it was stated earlier that arche-writing is a kind of 'writing without writing' in relation to the other forms of communication that it structures. So the answer to this question brings us to what we meant when we said that autobiography is hyperbolic. Autobiography is hyperbolic not merely because of any strange ironies that might develop in the literary act of writing one. But rather because, whether written or not, the concept of autobiography carries with it the conceptual force of a potentially *universal* application to everyone in their *singular* existence; as a way not only of connecting with oneself but also with the autobiographies of others; as a way not only of connecting with the living conditions of life but also with the expectation of death. The conceptualization of autobiography applies itself to an understanding of the relation between specific and generic, self and other, life and death, in such a way that operates

as if everyone was writing their autobiography in the very act of living their lives. The paradoxes of subjectivity that are involved in Derrida's deconstruction of autobiography are grounded in the fact that, in living a life, one is writing one's autobiography. Living a life is *life-writing without life-writing*; it is *autobiography without autobiography*. One does not need to write down one's life in order to write an autobiography, because the very process of living a life, which fundamentally includes the process of dying a death (and in a strange way they are the same process), this very process is autobiographical; it is both autobiographical and heterothanatographical. Indeed, perhaps, then, it is also programmatological, insofar as, by connecting up with actual act of living life, it is what alludes to the complex web of practicalities that forms and transforms each of our lives.

Chapter Summary

The first chapter, 'Confessing Truth: Augustine & Derrida', picks out the relation primarily between Augustine's *Confessions* and Derrida's 'Circumfession'. Of particular interest is the concept that Derrida develops in 'Circumfession', *making truth*. Derrida's deconstructive approach to truth, in particular as it presupposes the ethics of alterity (in 'Circumfession' via the concept of 'pardon'), impinges on the theologies of confessional truth. In order to demonstrate this, a debate is set up between two works; each from a different scholar of Derrida's thought: John D. Caputo's *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* and Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism*. Here, Caputo and Hägglund offer opposing interpretations of Derrida's thought, particularly via 'Circumfession': Caputo rests on the 'negative theology' side and Hägglund rests on the 'radical atheism' side. Towards its end, the chapter therefore mediates between the two by offering its own interpretation of Derrida's thought via 'Circumfession': viz., that Derrida's thought proposes a form of *radical agnosticism*. This means, primarily, that agnosticism is not so much about the metaphysical problem of whether or not God exists, but is rather about an ethical mode of relation to the other which allows them the space to believe what they want. Consequently, the chapter develops the concept of *autobiographical agnosticism*, by which is meant that Derrida's autobiographical thought accounts for the singularity of the other's life according to each individual's own upbringing and characteristics. In 'Circumfession' Derrida argues that God is the origin of tears. Towards the end of the chapter this is interpreted as counteracting the Augustinian *cogito* by positioning the concept of feeling before that of thought. And

Derrida's interest in Augustine's moral psychology is reinterpreted via the distinction between confession as apology and as apologia.

The second chapter, 'Confessing Desire: Rousseau & Derrida', begins by picking up where the last chapter left off: i.e., with the thought/feeling polarity. Rousseau is invoked by Derrida in *Of Grammatology* as the main source of inspiration in the history of philosophy by which this polarity becomes reversed, but which, he argues, the priority of feeling nonetheless remains metaphysical. This chapter picks out the relation primarily between Rousseau's *Confessions* and Derrida's chapter in *Of Grammatology*, 'That Dangerous Supplement'. In 'That Dangerous Supplement' the autobiographical theme in Derrida's work regarding the relation between life and work is addressed. However, this relation is more often than not given a literary critical emphasis, and so this chapter picks out two critical readings of Derrida's reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*: Seán Burke's chapter on Derrida in *The Death and Return of the Author*, 'Misread Intentions'; and Paul de Man's essay on Derrida in *Blindness and Insight*, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau'. Against these two critics, this chapter argues that what tends to occur in the literary critical appropriation of Derrida's thought is the marginalization of his philosophical insight. In particular, that his concept of the *text* as structured by a potentially infinite number of *supplements* is not appreciated as itself a 'metaphysical' statement regarding the nature of the so-called subjective human experience of the objective real world. Towards the end of the chapter this insight is given an autobiographical emphasis in which his concept of supplement is shown to have radical implications for reconceptualizing the way in which feelings can be supplemented when they become unsatisfied.

The third chapter, 'Learning to Live: Marx & Derrida', begins by picking up on a dominant theme of the previous chapter: viz., Derrida's philosophical insight. It argues that, if Derrida's deconstruction can become a form of literary criticism, then it can also become a form of philosophical criticism. By the latter is meant, in particular, the calling into question of the very foundations or underlying premises of a discourse, an idea, or an argument; and on this point an alliance is made with Rodolphe Gasché – whose work offers a springboard for the idea of a deconstructive philosophical criticism. Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* is given as a case in point, of this philosophical criticism, in which he undermines the very moment of identification of the proletariat qua proletariat. As this identification is primarily a psychological one, it becomes a

dominant feature of Derrida's Rousseauian opening 'Exordium' regarding the autobiographical theme from *Émile* of 'learning to live' – a theme touched on in the previous chapter. On the one hand, since the emphasis is on Marx's philosophy rather than his political economy, the reading addresses primarily his early work such as *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, *The German Ideology*, and *The Communist Manifesto*. On the other hand, given the originality of the interpretation of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* given in this chapter, various secondary sources are drawn up so as both to consider the other themes in *Spectres of Marx* that are not considered and to demonstrate this originality in contradistinction to these secondary sources. These sources are: Simon Critchley's essay in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, 'The Hypothesis, the Context, the Messianic, the Political, the Economic, the Technological: On Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*'; a return to the religion-atheism-agnosticism problem via the two sources of Caputo and Häggglund; and a couple of chapters on *Spectres of Marx* in Peggy Kamuf's *Book of Addresses*, 'The Ghosts of Critique and Deconstruction' and 'The Haunts of Scholarship'. Towards the end of the chapter it is argued that Derrida's 'learning to live' watchword in *Spectres of Marx* positions Marx between Rousseau and Nietzsche, thus alluding to Nietzsche's existential concern with individuality in the following chapter.

The fourth chapter, 'Autobiographical Riddles: Nietzsche & Derrida', takes seriously the general impression in the field of scholarship that Derrida's thought is grounded in Nietzsche's – particularly with the critique of metaphysics that the latter offers. Where Nietzsche's thought offers the sceptic's affirmation of life's egocentrism, it is argued that Derrida's thought paradoxically offers a simultaneous adoption and supplementation of Nietzsche's thought. Derridean reaffirmation invokes the relation to death and the other in a way that is at once more melancholic and more ironic in tone even than Nietzschean tragic affirmation. The main texts up for discussion are Nietzsche's autobiographical *Ecce Homo*, and Derrida's section on it, 'Logic of the Living Feminine', in his essay 'Otobiographies' in *The Ear of the Other*. Here Derrida addresses a riddle that Nietzsche invents in 'Why I Am So Wise' concerning the strange relation to his mother and father. It is through this autobiographical riddle that this chapter is written, with particular emphasis on Nietzsche's notion of the 'free spirit' articulated in *Human, All Too Human*. The sources on Derrida utilized here are Christopher Norris's essay, 'Deconstruction Against Itself: Derrida and Nietzsche'; and Robert Smith's chapter in *Derrida and Autobiography* called 'Labyrinths'. Here it is

argued that Norris concentrates more on the political part of Derrida's 'Otobiographies' – the second half entitled 'The Otoph Sign of State' – and so is less concerned with the autobiographical part. This helps to highlight further the demarcation of the autobiographical theme as primarily a psychological rather than political one. In contrast, Smith's chapter, 'Labyrinths', is shown to be useful insofar as it addresses precisely this autobiographical riddle; however, his analysis of it is so brief, particularly regarding the temporal structure of the relation between life and death, that a deeper analysis is given of this structure in this chapter. The chapter ends by considering Nietzsche's psychological emphasis on self-defence, thereby returning to the distinction from the first chapter between apology and apologia. And it argues that Derrida's thought mediates between the 'who' and the 'what', invoked by Nietzsche, by emphasizing the 'how' – thus leading to Freud.

The fifth chapter, 'Autobiographical Speculation: Freud & Derrida', has a double concern: on the one hand, the relation of their two respective intellectual movements (psychoanalysis and deconstruction); and on the other hand, the specific concern with what, in his essay 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', Derrida calls autobiographical speculation. In this essay Derrida reads Freud's essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. It is argued in this chapter that Derrida reads 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in a similar manner to that in which, in his earlier essay 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', he read Freud's 'A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-pad"': viz., as symbolic of the need for the restructuration of psychoanalytic concepts. The difference between Derrida's two essays argued for in this chapter is thus that, where the first, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' calls the psychoanalytic concepts into question; the second, 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', begins the groundwork from which a new deconstructive metapsychology can be developed. This is so in particular because the relation between life and death becomes of heightened importance in Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. Regarding the general relation of deconstruction to psychoanalysis, towards the end of the chapter an important, but, it is argued, misguided essay by Geoffrey Bennington in *Interrupting Derrida*, 'Circanalysis', is drawn upon in order to develop a perspective on the issue. Bennington draws upon Derrida's 'Circumfession', arguing that it implicitly turns around Freudian themes and yet never explicitly mentions Freud's name. He concludes from this that the troubled history between psychoanalysis and deconstruction is grounded in the fact that the latter understands more than the former because it is attentive to its conceptual inheritance from the metaphysical

tradition. This chapter, however, argues that this cannot be the case, because in order to understand more than psychoanalysis deconstruction must think the psychoanalytic object (individual psychological development) better than psychoanalysis itself, whereas Bennington changes the topic of conversation between them. In arguing this, it is suggested that Derrida's conceptualization of autobiography offers the groundwork to rethink the psychoanalytic object.

And finally, the Conclusion, 'Paradoxes of Subjectivity', synthesizes the main insights from each chapter. From here it develops these insights towards the argument that Derrida's autobiographical thought offers the reconceptualization of subjectivity via an initial process of considering the paradoxes that the conceptualization of autobiography itself offered. In particular, the two oppositions of life/death and self/other culminate in the suggestion for the development of a future deconstructive metapsychology and moral psychology. This suggestion begins with the problem of language that Derrida's thought poses, particularly since it is concerned with mediating the boundary between objective reality and subjective experience. The relation of deconstruction to both existentialism and psychoanalysis is deepened in the context both of this problem, and of the themes of autobiography. Here, it is argued that Derrida utilizes existentialism against psychoanalysis in a bid to wager that adolescence is perhaps a more important stage than childhood in the development of psychological problems. The central argument of this research thus concludes by highlighting the way in which the deconstruction of autobiography undermines the metaphysics of the autonomous subject.

Confessing Truth: Augustine & Derrida

Introduction

In his semi-autobiographical text 'Circumfession' Derrida provides a reading of the *Confessions* of Augustine; a reading which is paradoxically both critical and friendly. For the most part, Derrida's reading of Augustine is oblique: there are citations from the *Confessions*, in the original Latin, in which Derrida barely provides an exegesis of what he is citing. On the one hand, the citations are there as a sort of friendly intertextual allusion to the debt that we all owe to Augustine's *Confessions*; since, traditionally speaking, it is understood to represent the historical origins of the autobiographical form and genre. Certain events of Augustine's life that are documented in *Confessions*, such as the death of his mother in the ninth book, are both emotionally touching and, perhaps for precisely this reason, do not conform to traditional standards of philosophical rationality. Indeed, this lack of conforming to philosophy is an issue which Derrida's thought more generally considers as philosophically important. For the events of life, and the complex web of practicalities that form these events, have their place in the formation and transformation of the very fabric of our personal identity. And so the *philosophical concept* of identity cannot therefore master the essence of human identity if it excludes certain essential features of our identity's very formation. Derrida is thus friendly towards those apparently non-philosophical moments of Augustine's *Confessions* in order to find in them a certain philosophical significance.

On the other hand, through these citations from Augustine's *Confessions*, Derrida highlights a particular concept that Augustine uses, near the beginning of the tenth book of the *Confessions*, of *making truth*. Augustine says: 'I wish to act in truth, making my confession both in my heart before you and in this book before the many who will read it' (Augustine, 1961, p.207). In 'Circumfession' Derrida makes a curious point about the relation between confession as the confession of truth or as a request for pardon (or forgiveness), and does so by invoking this above citation from Augustine which purports to *make truth*. Derrida says:

[M]aking *truth* no doubt has nothing to do with what you call truth, for in order to confess, it is not enough to *bring to knowledge*, to make *known what is*, for example to *inform* you that I have done to death, betrayed, blasphemed, perjured, it is not enough that *I present myself* to God or you, the presentation of what is or what I am, either by revelation or by adequate judgement, 'truth' then, having never given rise to avowal, to true avowal, the *essential* truth of avowal having therefore nothing to do

with truth, but consisting, if, that is, one is concerned that it consist and that there be any, in asked-for pardon (Derrida, 1993, p.48).

The work that Derrida demands this concept of *making truth* to perform is quite remarkable, and impinges on a number of themes which are critical of Augustine's thought more generally; but in particular his moral psychology. For the first principles of Augustine's metaphysical thought offer both the theological foundations of reality (by positioning God at the origin of the world), and the psychological foundations of ethics (by positioning the soul at the origin of humanity). In 'Circumfession' Derrida is critical of this metaphysical order of priority that is given by Augustine to the theological and psychological; and this can be seen in the way in which he utilizes the concept of *making truth*. Indeed, much like on other occasions in his work where he emphasizes an apparently passing word or comment in a text by another author, this 'concept' of *making truth* is undecidable between Augustine and Derrida: i.e., it is not clear between them who *owns* it as a concept. In a way it is Augustine's since it is contained within his text; and yet, because it is not contained in his text in such a way as to carry apparent conceptual force, while it does in Derrida's text, in this way it is as much Derrida's concept as it is Augustine's. In this chapter we will refer to it as Derrida's, since he is the one who puts the concept to work.

The overriding theme of this chapter is based on the following question: How does Derrida's concept of making truth not only deconstruct Augustine's metaphysical assumptions, particularly regarding his psychological theory, but also offer the groundwork to reconstruct them? In order to answer this question, we will have to go down certain roads that appear to centrifugally distance ourselves from our stated question, but in order to centripetally return back to it with a more knowledgeable answer. Indeed, the very meaning of Derrida's neologism of *circumfession* alludes to this centrifugal-centripetal dynamic as it puts into effect the rhetorical practice of periphrasis or circumlocution. 'Circumfession' is an experiment or an exercise – Derrida calls it a 'technical exercise' (Derrida, in: Caputo and Scanlon, 2005, p.88) – in wandering around the periphery of a confession rather than going straight to the heart or the centre of a confession. The neologism of circumfession refers to the idea of a *hesitant confession*: a confession which paradoxically confesses while holding something back and keeping something secret. It is therefore an experiment that explores the boundary between language and self, in order to see to what degree the

rhetorical opaqueness of language mediates between the assumed transparency that is traditionally perceived to exist (by metaphysics) between language and self. But although ‘Circumfession’ is an all too self-conscious literary or textual performance, at the same time there is a critique of the very concept of the performative that is at the heart of Derrida’s conception of making truth, and which fundamentally impinges on the said relation between language and self.

Augustine’s *Confessions* not only presents a powerful statement of the different stages of life that human beings go through at the biological level, but also at the level of the psychical capacity required of us in order to go through such stages. It is on these two levels that the autobiographical interpretation of Augustine will concentrate here. The discussion of Derrida’s relation to Augustine will pick up on two competing interpretations of Derrida’s text, by Caputo and Hägglund, in which the problem of religion and atheism will be addressed.

Confessing Truth

In the context of the history of philosophy before him, Augustine’s thought represented a remarkable inward turn, reflexively turning the human mind back into itself.

Augustine converted to Christianity in 387AD and published his *Confessions* a decade or so later. Between his conversion and his *Confessions* he authored some significant books which represent this inward turn. One of his books prior to writing *Confessions* is called *Soliloquies* – and just as the former represents the historical origins of the autobiographical genre, the latter represents the historical origins of the very word ‘soliloquy’. Augustine, like Derrida, was in his day an inventor of words, of neologisms. As a dialogue that one has with oneself in one’s mind (in short, talking to oneself), soliloquy is akin to what Derrida more generally calls ‘auto-affection’ or ‘hearing-oneself-speak’: it refers to the presence of the mind to itself in consciousness; to self-presence. Another of Augustine’s books prior to writing his *Confessions* is *On Free Choice of the Will* – which perhaps also marks the historical origins as the first book on free will. Like soliloquy, ‘free will’ also represents what Derrida more generally calls self-presence. In order for the will or the mind to be free, *absolutely* free, it must be free from the material constraints not only of the body which contains it (which in its fragility will eventually become disabled and die, if it is not born that way), but also of the constraining position of this body in relation to other bodies surrounding it (i.e., of the relation to other people). So before even writing *Confessions*,

Augustine was no stranger to the human mind; in many respects it was his overriding fascination.

Indeed, the *Confessions* itself gives its own powerful account of the human mind, not merely in the autobiographical narrative, but notably in the tenth and the eleventh books; which, after the narrative, provide a theoretical account of the nature of *memory* and *time* that such a narrative alludes to. Here, memory is the subjective human experience of objective time; and so the linking of these theoretical themes together is not out of place in a narrative which has been written from the memory of one's own life history and experience. The narrative itself tells the story of Augustine's reasons for conversion to Christianity, with the purpose or the moral of the story of course being that we should all convert to Christianity. In this way, the *Confessions* highlights Augustine's concept of 'original sin' (Augustine, 1961, p.102) – a concept that is based on the Biblical story of the Fall of mankind. As the *Confessions* documents his early years in the first and second books (his infancy, childhood, and adolescence) he presents an image of himself, as an example of humans generally, as born sinners; corrupted by temptation. Towards the end of the first book he depicts the childish immoral 'debasements' of his childhood:

I was blind to the whirlpool of debasement in which I had been plunged away from the sight of your eyes. For in your eyes nothing could be more debased than I was then, since I was even troublesome to the people whom I set out to please. Many and many a time I lied to my tutor, my masters, and my parents, and deceived them because I wanted to play games or watch some futile show or was impatient to imitate what I saw on the stage. I even stole from my parents' larder and from their table, either from greed or to get something to give to other boys in exchange for their favourite toys, which they were willing to barter with me. And in the games I played with them I often cheated in order to come off the better, simply because a vain desire to win had got the better of me. And yet there was nothing I could less easily endure, nothing that made me quarrel more bitterly, than to find others cheating me as I cheated them. All the same, if they found me out and blamed me for it, I would lose my temper rather than give in. Can this be the innocence of childhood? Far from it, O Lord! But I beg you to forgive it (p.39-40).

Augustine's picture of humanity is that we are ultimately born into a 'debased', animal-like existence. As such, life becomes a constant struggle to get out of the 'quarrels' that we get ourselves into in our morally corrupt state. In the sentence that follows the last one cited, he says: 'these same passions remain with us while one stage of life follows upon another' (p.40). In other words, in childhood we learn how to be morally corrupt without having much free choice in the matter; and as childhood moves into adolescence, and adolescence moves into adulthood, that which we have learned in

childhood forms habits of action within us that become very difficult to break out of. The problem is that the habits and the actions in question are bad ones, and as we get older we learn that they are bad, and so our soul begins to struggle between doing evil (which we are already in the habit of doing) and doing good (for which we need to struggle to retrain ourselves into new habits).

In particular, as we move into adolescence, the transformation of our bodily hormones gives us the desire for sex. This is a desire that Augustine was well aware continues into adulthood; and his depiction of ‘adolescent sex’ near the beginning of the second book is particularly poignant:

I cared for nothing but to love and to be loved. But my love went beyond the affection of one mind for another, beyond the arc of the bright beam of friendship. Bodily desire, like a morass, and adolescent sex welling up within me exuded mists which clouded over and obscured my heart, so that I could not distinguish the clear light of true love from the murk of lust. Love and lust together seethed within me. In my tender youth they swept me away over the precipice of my body’s appetites and plunged me into a whirlpool of sin (Augustine, 1961, p.43).

Adolescence is a period of life in which love and lust are confused: love is the caring connection between two minds, ‘the bright beam of friendship’; lust is the caring but ‘murky’ connection between two bodies. But Augustine’s depiction here of the sense of the *loss of control* over both his body and his mind highlights an important feature regarding the nature of adolescence more generally: viz., that the ‘exuded mists’ of ‘adolescent sex’ which ‘seethed within me’ invokes a confusing relation to oneself in the transformation of one’s own bodily desires. His depiction of course contains the value judgement that it is sinful to be like this; a value judgement against such bodily desires and the act of sex more generally. But nonetheless his characterization of *what it is* to be like this, to be an adolescent lost in lust, is quite powerful, and surprisingly refreshing coming from a Church Father writing in the fourth century. Doubtless, over the centuries and into the present day and beyond, the Church’s rulebook when it comes to the act of sex owes a certain debt to Augustine; but this should not stifle such candid portrayals of his youthful passion, for his point is that we all go through this stage of life. It is just that, for him, the point does not end there: for Augustine it follows that we all sin, or have a desire to sin, since the act of sex is exemplary in what counts as sinful insofar as it represents the love of the lower animal body rather than the love of the higher deified soul. Sex or lust is judged from the perspective of the love for the *summum bonum*.

Caught between the bodily desires which form ‘the sins of the flesh which defiled my soul’ (Augustine, 1961, p.43) on the one hand, and the spiritual desire ‘to cure all the diseases of my soul’ (p.234) on the other hand, Augustine portrays himself, and by extension all humans, as caught between *two wills*:

It is therefore no strange phenomenon partly to will to do something and partly to will not to do it. It is a disease of the mind, which does not wholly rise to the heights where it is lifted by the truth, because it is weighed down by habit. So there are two wills in us, because neither by itself is the whole will, and each possesses what the other lacks (p.172).

This is a curious thing to say coming from a thinker who had earlier written *On Free Choice of the Will*, where it is argued that: ‘God gave us free will’ (Augustine, 1993, p.30). How can we have two wills if God gave us free will? Rather than suggest some sort of radical inconsistency in Augustine’s argument for the ‘two wills’, let us instead hypothesize the following: for Augustine, the will is only free when we use it to turn our attention to the love of God and all that he represents as eternally Good and True. Before this happens, the will is divided between both love for temporal phenomena and love for eternal phenomena. This division between the temporal and the eternal we will come to in a moment. But first, there is another feature of love for temporal phenomena that is related to the will: viz., the continence or incontinence, the strength or weakness, of the individual will itself.

In the first book of *Confessions*, Augustine says: ‘if babies are innocent, it is not of lack of will to do harm, but for lack of strength’ (Augustine, 1961, p.28). His depiction of childhood and adolescence as where we begin to see ‘original sin’ form in the selfishness of our actions and passions cannot be thought in quite the same way in infancy, since infants do not have the strength to even will to do harm. But this does not mean that, if they did have the strength, then they would be pillars of continence – and the immature child is evidence of this. Therefore, even infants are barely innocent. But as we grow older, into the maturity of adulthood, we begin to feel guilty for the sins which we have already committed. We desire not to commit any more sins but do not quite know how to conjure up the strength within ourselves to do so:

Time was passing and I kept delaying my conversion to you, my God. Day after day I postponed living in you, but I never put off the death which I died each day in myself. I longed for a life of happiness but I was frightened to approach it in its own domain; and yet, while I fled from it, I still searched for it. I thought it would be too much for me to bear if I were to be deprived of a woman’s love. In your mercy

you have given us a remedy to cure this weakness, but I gave it no thought because I had never tried it for myself. I believed that continence was to be achieved by man's own power, which I knew that I did not possess (p.128).

As Augustine says here in the sixth book, God is the answer, the only answer, to our incontinence. By himself, mankind is simply not strong enough to overcome his incontinent emotions. The willpower required to live a continent life comes from God; and this divine willpower is the condition of possessing a goodwill, as Augustine says in the following book: 'when I asked myself what wickedness was, I saw that it was not a substance but perversion of the will when it turns aside from you, O God, who are the supreme substance, and turns towards things of the lower order, [...] becoming inflated with desire for things outside itself' (p.150). Willpower is the condition of continence, which in turn is the condition of goodwill; and man's willpower comes not from man himself, but from God Himself.

Not only that, but we can find God Himself by looking inside ourselves. For Augustine, mankind's problem is that all too often solutions to our problems are sought outside of oneself: e.g., when we blame others in order to avoid blaming ourselves. This we learn in the selfishness of our youth, where Augustine depicts us as guilty of the travesty of declaring our own innocence and another's guilt, even when the reverse is the case. Bad habits like this – denial of guilt when we are in fact to blame and falsely accusing someone else who is innocent – are formed in our actions and reactions which continue into our adulthood. And when we turn into ourselves to find out, what in the tenth book Augustine calls our 'true self' (Augustine, 1961, p.208), we might not like what we discover. This inward turn becomes the basis of the very distinction between the soul and the body as the division between the inside and outside of us: 'Then I turned to myself and asked, "Who are you?" "A man," I replied. But it is clear that I have both body and soul, the one the outer, the other the inner part of me' (p.212). This inward turn becomes the basis of the famous Augustinian *cogito*. Speaking of the plethora of facts which the human memory must assimilate, he says:

In other words, once they have been dispersed, I have to collect them again, and this is the derivation of the word *cogitare*, which means *to think* or *to collect one's thoughts*. For in Latin the word *cogo*, meaning *I assemble* or *I collect*, is related to *cogito*, which means *I think*, in the same way as *ago* is related to *agito* or *facio* or *factito*. But the word *cogito* is restricted to the function of the mind. It is correctly used only of what is assembled in the mind, not what is assembled elsewhere (pp.218-219).

Thought becomes the basis of mental content, ‘of what is assembled in the mind’; and as such, Augustine repeats his inheritance from the Platonic tradition in which the soul is said to exist *in itself*, radically separated from the embodied world and in contact with a more spiritual world.

In the tenth book of *Confessions* Augustine equates the mind with memory, arguing that if one cannot remember anything then one has no ability to retain mental content: ‘the mind and memory are one and the same’ (Augustine, 1961, p.220). He continues: ‘We might say that the memory is a sort of stomach for the mind, and that joy or sadness are like sweet or bitter food’ (p.220). He thereby has a close connection between thought and feeling; but thought, as memory, takes a certain logical priority:

My memory also contains my feelings, not in the same way as they are present to the mind when it experiences them, but in a quite different way that is in keeping with the special powers of the memory. For even when I am unhappy I can remember times when I was cheerful, and when I am cheerful I can remember past unhappiness. I can recall past fears and yet not feel afraid, and when I remember that I once wanted something, I can do so without wishing to have it now. Sometimes memory induces the opposite feeling, for I can be glad to remember sorrow that is over and done with and sorry to remember happiness that has come to an end (p.220).

Thought, as memory, ‘contains my feelings’. And it is perhaps relevant to note the way in which the *cogito* statement connects neatly with the first-person nature of autobiographical narrative (the deictic reference of the ‘I’), as it asks each and every one of us to make the same self-reflexive movement inwards in order to get in contact with the rational part of our minds. But although memory requires a certain mental presence of feelings, ‘present to the mind’, it also has the paradoxical feature of ‘inducing the opposite feeling’ to what one is presently feeling. For the memory is a memory of the past, not the present. It is a consequence of this paradoxical feature of memory’s experience of time that Augustine develops in the eleventh book of the *Confessions* on the nature of time.

In the eleventh book Augustine distinguishes between time and eternity: ‘eternity, which is forever still’ and ‘time, which is never still’ (p.261), as the present constantly moves into the past and future. He continues:

But in eternity nothing moves into the past: all is present. Time, on the other hand, is never all present at once. The past is always driven on by the future, the future always follows on the heels of the past, and both the past and the future have their beginning and their end in the eternal present (pp.261-262).

In order to distinguish time from eternity, Augustine says: ‘time is never present all at once’. Having distinguished them absolutely, he must then presuppose the existence of ‘the eternal present’ – which is a necessity in a worldview in which God Himself, and the immortal soul, is thought to exist. Indeed, this was the sole purpose of his earlier *Soliloquies*: ‘I desire to know God and the soul’ (Augustine, 1910, p.10). In *Soliloquies* Augustine writes himself in dialogue with Reason itself (*ergo*, his own reason), in which Reason takes him on a journey towards this knowledge of God and the soul. But, Reason says, if you truly want to know God and the soul, you have to get to that point ‘when all desire of mortal things is purged and far away’ (p.21). Similarly, then, with this distinction between the temporal and the eternal: it enables Augustine’s general worldview to be the following: on the one hand, the love of mortal and temporal things is the origin of sin; and on the other hand, the love of immortal and eternal things is the origin of saviour from sin. For, ‘a soul marred and diseased by lust’ (p.21), cannot but love temporal things more than eternal things.

But for Augustine, it is also the case that the existence of eternal presence impinges upon time’s own not being present all at once; and this, in turn, impinges upon how he conceptualizes memory. In the eleventh book of *Confessions* he says:

From what we have said it is abundantly clear that neither the future nor the past exist, and therefore it is not strictly correct to say that there are three times, past, present, and future. It might be correct to say that there are three times, a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things. Some such different times do exist in the mind, but nowhere else that I can see. The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception; and the present of future things is expectation (Augustine, 1961, p.269).

Eternal presence thereby infuses all times with presence; not only the present time, but the past and the future also. This impinges on memory by expanding our mental faculties in the following way: just as *memory* relates us to our past, so *perception* relates us to our present, and so *expectation* relates us to our future. The existence of spiritual substances saturate the world we live in with eternal presence; this eternal presence in turn saturates the temporality of the world with presence more generally, even in times not present; and this in turn saturates the human experience of this temporal world via our memory, where such self-presence becomes the basis of self-knowledge, which in turn is the route to knowing our ‘true self’. And the point of knowing our ‘true self’ is thus to cure our diseased soul: ‘Have pity on me, O Lord, in my misery! I do not hide my wounds from you. I am sick, and you are the physician’

(p.232). For Augustine, sickness of the soul is ultimately a *moral* sickness; the sickness of a debauched soul. But in his attempt to heal this sickness, Augustine gives us the classical metaphysical assumptions of the theological foundation of reality and the psychological foundation of ethics; assumptions that Derrida's thought radically puts into question. So let us now begin to put Augustine in dialogue with Derrida, by turning our attention more directly to 'Circumfession'.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida identifies logocentrism as the metaphysics of presence. Here, his critical objection is to the philosophical tradition in its three dominant modes of presence: *self-presence*, *temporal presence*, and *eternal presence*. In books ten and eleven of the *Confessions* Augustine gives a very concise account of all of these three forms of presence, as we have just seen from the extract in the previous paragraph. We might wonder, then, why in 'Circumfession' Derrida does not address, in a more direct manner, these three forms of presence. The answer is that 'Circumfession' is a rhetorical exercise in indirectness; in periphrasis or circumlocution. It is a question of what happens to the very concept of confession when periphrastic manoeuvres are inscribed *a priori* within it. Therefore, it is an exploration of the limit or boundary between language and selfhood; and yet, because it is an exercise in periphrasis, it is this exploration without directly saying that this is what it is; it is the *performance* of this exploration rather than the *statement* of this exploration. In a way, Derrida very much leaves it up to his readers to take or leave from his text what they will, in order to present their version of what it is he might be trying to say or confess; or indeed, trying not to say or not to confess. This has left some of his commentators disputing about the nature of his thought more generally, with 'Circumfession' as one of the main texts that the divided opinions hinge on. Most notably, this dispute regards whether or not Derrida's thought is religious or atheistic.

Here we will pick out two examples: John D. Caputo's *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, and Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. Caputo interprets the whole of Derrida's thought via the tradition of negative theology, the *via negativa*, in which a negative definition of God is attempted. The reasoning behind negative or 'apophatic' theology is that divine perfection is unnameable in human language, and so we must therefore use negative descriptions in order to manoeuvre around the imperfections of our positive characterizations of God (e.g., where we describe God *as* something, indeed as something undoubtedly positive or 'cataphatic': as 'love', as 'truth', as 'perfection', as

‘goodness’, etc). But although Caputo interprets the whole of Derrida’s thought from the perspective of negative theology, ‘Circumfession’ is specifically targeted as his main inspirational text: ‘All along I will have been clutching *Circonfession* close to my breast’ (Caputo, 1997, p.xxviii). Indeed, there is textual warrant in ‘Circumfession’ for Caputo’s interpretation: having had his upbringing in a Sephardic Jewish family, it should not be surprising for the reader of ‘Derrida’s autobiography’ (if this is what ‘Circumfession’ is supposed to be), that he alludes to his ambiguous personal relation not only to his Jewish identity but also to God. For example, in ‘Circumfession’ Derrida confesses that he still prays:

I am addressing myself here to God, the only one I take as a witness, without yet knowing what these sublime words mean, and this grammar, and *to*, and *witness*, and *God*, and *take*, take God, and not only do I pray, as I have never stopped doing all my life, and pray to him (Derrida, 1993, p.56).

What he calls, ‘so-called negative theology, the play with the names of God’ (p.44), does therefore appear to be pertinent to understanding ‘Circumfession’. But for Derrida, it seems less about proving or disproving God’s existence, and more about the rhetorical analysis of the language which surrounds God, including the multiplicity of God’s names.

In ‘Circumfession’ Derrida inserts documents from notebooks he had kept in which he had desired to write a book on the topic of circumcision. Always delayed in writing this book, he instead utilizes the opportunity of writing his ‘autobiography’ to insert some passages from these notebooks. ‘Circumfession’ is the book on circumcision that he never managed to write; and he introduces his notebooks on circumcision in an extremely allusive and fragmented manner:

[A]nd for years I have been going round in circles, trying to take as a witness not to see myself being seen but to re-member myself around a single event, I have been accumulating in the attic, my “sublime,” documents, iconography, notes, learned ones and naive ones, dream narratives or philosophical dissertations, applied transcription of encyclopedic, sociological, historical, psychoanalytic treatises that I’ll never do anything with, about circumcisions in the world, the Jewish and the Arab and the others, and excision, with a view to my circumcision alone, the circumcision of me, the unique one, that I know perfectly well took place, one time, they told me and I see it but I always suspect myself of having cultivated, because I am circumcised, *ergo* cultivated, a fantastical affabulation (pp.59-60).

I am still weaving the cloths of an affabulation that I have to date first from *Spurs*, 1972, the thing is named in it, from *Glas* especially, ’74, and the first notebook opens December 27, 1976, from *The Postcard* especially, from the second last words of *Envois*, “turn around,” so that, this is my theory at

least, I am beginning to weave the simulacrum of that cloth on the warp of four moments at least (pp.69-70).

In wanting to write a book about circumcision, and to do so 'with a view to my own circumcision', Derrida highlights his anxiety with regards to such a task when he says, 'for years I have been going round in circles'. The theme of circumcision is apparent in some of his earlier works, the earliest he himself dates as '*Spurs*, 1972'.

'Circumfession' is divided into fifty-nine sections, highlighting Derrida's age at the time of writing, which the subtitle calls 'fifty-nine periods and periphrases'. In the seventeenth period of 'Circumfession', a picture of the first of these notebooks is presented. Underneath the picture is the following description: 'Cover of the first of the notebooks preparatory to a book on circumcision, "The Book of Elijah," projected from 1976. End of the *Envois* section of *The Postcard* (1979): "I shall wonder what, from my birth or thereabouts, *to turn around* has meant"' (Derrida, 1993, p.89). There are a couple of things to note here. First, the reference to the Biblical figure of Elijah, who was the prophet appointed by God as the guardian of the covenant of circumcision (*bris milah*), overseeing each one. Elijah also had an eschatological significance concerning the 'last' state of humankind. Since *The Bible* tells the story of the creation of humankind from first things to last, this last, or *eschaton*, in which humans live without sin or evil, must be helped to be brought about by God's chosen prophets. Elijah was one of them. In 'Circumfession', both of these elements of Elijah are drawn upon – e.g., as well as the emphasis on circumcision, Derrida paradoxically says, 'I am the last of the eschatologists' (p.75) and 'the last of the Jews that I still am' (p.190) – and they are strangely tied in uniquely to Derrida's own Jewish identity in a convoluted manner. In particular, he alludes in his notebooks to the fact that while his family have Hebrew names inscribed on their birth certificates, he does not (and that Elijah is his Hebrew name): '*the fact that this forename was not inscribed [on my birth certificate, as were the Hebrew names of my family] (as though they wanted to hide it, still more than the other Hebrew names), was as though effaced, held back, signified several things mixed together*' (pp.88-90). In 'Circumfession', Derrida therefore utilizes his own Hebrew name, and the Hebrew names of some of his family members, particularly his mother (replacing her forename 'Georgette' with her Hebrew name 'Esther'), to act as proxies for their standard proper names, thereby, simultaneously *disguising* their identity while

nonetheless *disclosing* their secret in doing so: as he says, ‘my secret name, Elie [French for Elijah], around which the first notebooks from 1976 encircled’ (p.87).

The second thing to note about the description underneath the picture of the notebook is that it would seem that there is something about the meaning of ‘circumcision’ that, for Derrida, implies something about the meaning of ‘to turn around’. Perhaps the most obvious of which would be ‘transformation’ or ‘change’. The etymology of ‘circumcision’ is literally ‘to cut around’. In order ‘to cut around’ one must turn some corners; one must turn around in order to cut around; one must change direction – and perhaps the upshot here is that, for Derrida, *every change is a change of direction* (which is perhaps why it becomes impossibly difficult to stay on ‘the straight and narrow path’). And, to further Caputo’s interpretation of Derrida even more, Derrida refers to this change in the very fabric of his writing itself as hinging on the issue of religion:

That’s what my readers won’t have known about me, the comma of my breathing henceforward, without continuity but without a break, the changed time of my writing, graphic writing, through having lost its interrupted verticality, almost with every letter, to be bound better and better but be read less and less well over almost twenty years, like my religion about which nobody understands anything (Derrida, 1993, p.154).

Caputo says: ‘it is important to see that Derrida’s religion is more prophetic than apophatic, more in touch with Jewish prophets than with Christian Neoplatonists, more messianic and more eschatological than mystical’ (Caputo, 1997, p.xxiv). The reference to ‘Jewish prophets’ is to Elijah; and the reference to ‘Christian Neoplatonists’ is to Augustine. Caputo seems to be saying that Derrida utilizes the enigmatic figure of Elijah to aid in the deconstruction of Augustine. Perhaps, but we wonder whether Caputo has taken to heart Derrida’s concept of *making truth*, which at its initial inception in ‘Circumfession’ he prefaces with the following irresolvable juxtaposition between religion and literature: ‘*and make truth in this case that I’m not sure comes under any religion, for reason of literature, nor under any literature, for reason of religion*’ (Derrida, 1993, p.48). In other words, Derrida loves religious mythologies, and loves *the moral of the story* which tends to be the upshot of such mythology; but this does not mean that Derrida has religion with quite the same *ease* that Caputo would like to refer to ‘Derrida’s religion’. Derrida indeed says ‘my religion’: but to extract

this from the sentence it is in is perhaps misquotation as it leaves out the ‘like’, the ‘as if’, which prefaces it.

But it is perhaps because most followers of Derrida’s thought tended to assume a sort of generic atheism that Caputo’s interpretation becomes surprising: the task of the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence – the contamination of presence with absence, of purity with impurity, of proper with improper, etc – as a sort of implicit demonstration of the logical impossibility of God’s omnipresence. Although much of Caputo’s religious rhetoric will be disconcerting for this garden-variety secular reader of Derrida, it perhaps should not be dismissed with quite the force of Hägglund’s *Radical Atheism*. Hägglund says: ‘*The Prayers and Tears* has established Caputo as the most powerful proponent for the religious turn in Derrida scholarship’ (Hägglund, 2008, p.116). Hägglund picks up on the different tones of the narrative between Augustine’s *Confessions* and Derrida’s ‘Circumfession’ in order to show that, where the former writes in order to overcome mortal life in order to revel in the paradise of immortal life, the latter writes precisely in order to affirm mortal survival. This difference, he argues, is shown with regards to the opposing way in which they relate to the deaths of their respective mothers. For Hägglund, ‘[Derrida’s] relation to his mother also reinforces the passion for mortal survival that Augustine seeks to suppress and leave behind’ (p.148). This desire for mortal survival is therefore what, more generally, in his ‘Introduction’, Hägglund identifies as *radical atheism*: ‘by developing the logic of radical atheism, I argue that the so-called desire for immortality dissimulates a desire for survival that precedes it and contradicts it from within’ (p.1). Where Caputo interprets the general trajectory of Derrida’s thought, and ‘Circumfession’ in particular, as a form of negative theology, Hägglund instead interprets them as a form of radical atheism.

The death of Augustine’s mother, Saint Monica (who was pivotal to his own conversion to Christianity), is narrated in the ninth book of *Confessions*. And here, he articulates his attempt to restrain his tears at his mother’s death:

I closed her eyes, and a great wave of sorrow surged into my heart. It would have overflowed in tears if I had not made a strong effort of will and stemmed the flow, so that the tears dried in my eyes. What a terrible struggle it was to hold them back! As she breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus began to wail aloud and only ceased his cries when we all checked him. I, too, felt that I wanted to cry like a child, but a more mature voice within me, the voice of my heart, bade me keep my sobs in check, and I remained silent. For we did not think it right to mark my mother’s death with weeping and moaning, because such lamentations are the usual accompaniment of death when it is thought as a state of misery or as total extinction. But she had not died in misery nor had she wholly died. Of this we were certain, both

because we knew what a holy life she had led and also because our faith was real and we had sure reasons not to doubt it (Augustine, 1961, p.200).

Crying becomes a sign of immature childishness, like the way in which Augustine's own child Adeodatus cries at the death of his grandmother. And extracts like this work to confirm Hägglund's point: for Augustine, to cry at his mother's death would be a sign of the love for her mortal life, which would be a sign of loving mortal life more generally. This is why Augustine 'holds back' his tears: 'What a terrible struggle it was to hold them back!' Because of his real faith, 'our faith was real', Augustine believed that his mother was not even entirely dead, 'nor had she wholly died'. Indeed, in 'Circumfession' Derrida refers to Saint Augustine's held back tears: 'SA's immense and finite sponge pregnant like a memory with all the abandoned or held back tears of the *Confessions*, on the death of the friend, his friend, Paul or Koitchi, on the death of the mother, his mother' (Derrida, 1993, p.106). And it is true that, while in *Confessions* Augustine adheres to the value of holding back his tears, in contrast in 'Circumfession' Derrida allows his tears to flow, even to overflow, soaking them up with the help of a sponge.

In contrast to Augustine's narrative, in 'Circumfession' Derrida speaks of his mother's dying state rather than her dead state. As such, the arrival of her death can come along at any time to interrupt his writing. He begins the fourth period by highlighting his mother's failing memory:

Consign them here, but why I wonder, confide to the bottom of this book what were my mother's last more or less intelligible sentences, still alive at the moment I am writing this, but already incapable of memory, in any case of the memory of my name, a name become for her at the very least unpronounceable, and I am writing here at the moment when my mother no longer recognizes me, and at which, still capable of speaking or articulating, a little, she no longer calls me and for her and therefore for the rest of her life I no longer have a name (Derrida, 1993, p.22).

[F]or the reader will have understood that I am writing *for* my mother, perhaps even for a dead woman and so many ancient or recent analogies will come to the reader's mind even if, no, they don't hold, those analogies, none of them, for if I were here writing for my mother, it would be for a living mother who does not recognize her son, and I'm paraphrasing here for whomever no longer recognizes me (p.25).

Derrida is writing *for* his dying mother; but as Linda Anderson notes, so, in a way, is Augustine writing *for* his already-dead mother: 'Derrida draws attention to the fact that Augustine writes his confessions after the death of his mother, and like Derrida himself, could be writing *for* his mother' (Anderson, 2001, p.25). Suffering from Alzheimer's

disease, bedridden in hospital in Nice, Derrida's mother 'does not recognize her son'. But what is also curious about this is the way in which, at the end of the last extract Derrida says, 'and I'm paraphrasing here for whomever no longer recognizes me'. In other words, Derrida uses his mother's inability to recognize him as an analogy or proxy for the way in which certain readers of his work seem to have an inability to recognize what his thought is about – 'to be bound better and better but be read less and less well'. In 'Circumfession' Derrida attempts to interweave so many apparently unrelated strands of thought that are going on in the text, from his mother's inability to recognize him to his reader's inability to recognize him. But what readers? Derrida does not say, and so a Rousseau-inspired paranoia infects 'Circumfession'.

In meditating on his mother's pending death Derrida's fear of his own death becomes reignited. And yet the idea of his mother's death also highlights for him the way in which his fear of his own death is very much singularly experienced through his mother's fear of his death: 'my fear of death will only have reflected her own, I mean my death for her whose anxiety I perceived each time I was ill' (Derrida, 1993, p.211). His mother feared his death not only as a mother might more generally, but also because Derrida had two brothers who died young, Paul and Norbert, who get occasional mentions in 'Circumfession'. Paul was born and died before Derrida himself was born, and Norbert was born when Derrida was seven and died a couple of years later. In fearing his death each time Derrida got ill, because these other deaths heightened the fear, his mother 'carried' his own fear of death: 'and if my mother thus carried my fear of death, I fear dying from no longer being scared of death after her death' (p.212). For Derrida, this is an example of how emotions are not only things that exist in oneself, but are felt in the way in which others around us and close to us feel them. In 'Circumfession', Derrida presents his dying mother to his readers, but he presents little else of her other than that she used to play poker: 'a poker game, the passion of her life' (p.42); 'she who was playing poker and swimming three years ago' (p.138). In contrast to the memory of his mother's past passions, Derrida presents his mother in her present bedridden state, in which he has to listen to the euphemisms of the nurses: 'she does not move much on her bed, only her fingers, she looks without seeing, can scarcely hear and as "the analyses are good," as she "is eating and sleeping well," what future remains to her' (p.80). A moment later Derrida says: 'and this is therefore real life' (p.80) – the 'real life' of the scars of disability.

The concept of scar is an important one in ‘Circumfession’. Derrida plays on the fact that the French word for bedsore is *escarre*, which is etymologically linked to an entire multilingual genealogy of the word ‘scar’. This in turn is etymologically linked to the *eschaton* which Elijah represents, for instance, in the scar of circumcision: ‘I have made the eschaton into a coat of arms of my genealogy’ (Derrida, 1993, p.75). A whole series of allusions are made by Derrida in which the scars of life turn the experience of living into one of dying. This can be said in general, but also, in ‘Circumfession’, they take on the singular or autobiographical reference on Derrida’s part: of the *escarres* on his dying mother on the one hand; and the scar of his own circumcision on the other hand. After referring to ‘real life’, he continues:

[H]er life therefore reassures and worries the others, her nearest and dearest, at the only sign of evolution that still has the colour of desire, history or event, in other words blood, called by a name I am learning to learn, from head to toe, the *escarre* [bedsore], an archipelago of red and blackish volcanoes, enflamed wounds, crusts and craters, signifiers like wells several centimeters deep, opening here, closing there, on her heels, her hips and sacrum, the very flesh exhibited in its inside, no more secret, no more skin, but she seems not to be suffering, she does not see them as I do when the nurse says “they’re looking good” to mark the fact that their rawness, the not yet necrosed character of the tissue allows one to hope that they will scar over (pp.80-82).

As Derrida describes in almost candid detail (ironically for a periphrastic mode of writing) the composition of his mother’s bedsores, a certain strange paradox within the very concept of scar develops: on the one hand, the scar is a melancholic sign of a painful past; but on the other hand, it is not as presently painful as an open wound that still has to ‘scar over’. The scar is both the wound itself and its healing; and it therefore relates to both the pain of the past which marks our memory and the impossible hope for a future without such pain. The scar thus represents the uncertain position of the present in which we *do not know* whether or not the wound will scar over.

While a melancholic tone certainly dominates ‘Circumfession’, particularly as his dying mother haunts the entire text, Derrida nonetheless has his moments of deadpan humour – his friend Hélène Cixous calls him ‘*the dry-witted prince of the Jews*’ (Cixous, 2004, p.1) – and moments where he says how much he has enjoyed life. In the fiftieth period he says:

I have not met anyone, I have had in the history of humanity no idea of anyone, wait, wait, anyone who has been happier than I, and luckier, euphoric, this is a priori true, isn’t it?, drunk with uninterrupted enjoyment, [...] but that if, beyond any comparison, I have remained, me the counterexample of myself, as

constantly sad, deprived, destitute, disappointed, impatient, jealous, desperate, negative and neurotic, and that if in the end the two certainties do not exclude one another for I am sure they are as true as each other, simultaneously and from every angle, then I do not know how still to risk the slightest sentence without letting it fall to the ground in silence (Derrida, 1993, pp.268-270).

Both happy and sad impossibly at the same time, both enjoying life's pleasures and feeling its pains impossibly at the same time – perhaps because the memory *can* forget the temporality of our past experiences; because the line between pleasure and pain *can* be imperceptible; and because our expectation *cannot* foresee in advance whether our future life will turn out as we planned it to. Until life itself happens to us, we do not know. Unlike biography, which can be written after someone is dead, autobiography is written by its author when they are still alive, in which their lifetime is not yet over and they still have a future to come. Derrida is well aware that the unknowable future to come haunts us just as much as the past: ‘not that I love nonknowledge for itself, on the contrary, I am even ready to think like certain Muslims that “the ink of the learned is more sacred than the blood of martyrs,” but sacred, precisely, through something other than knowledge, sacred truth of this nonknowledge’ (pp.141-142). What we do not know has a certain power over us, and so the ‘nonknowledge’ of which Derrida here speaks demands a certain respect.

As Hågglund notes in *Radical Atheism*, against Augustine, one of the pleasures of which Derrida speaks in ‘Circumfession’ is around the issue of sex. But this is an issue that is intermingled with his discourse on circumcision (for, as Maimonides says, the reason why there is circumcision is to suppress the feeling of sex in man since he is too naturally weak to do so himself). In *Confessions* the Christian apologist Augustine, who gives all manner of apologia for Christianity, apologizes to God for the promiscuity of his past. But in ‘Circumfession’ Derrida gives an apologia of promiscuity itself, strangely weaved into what he articulates as his *broken alliance* with his Judaism and his Jewish identity, as he tries in his notebooks ‘to describe my sex throughout thousands of years of Judaism’:

“...the mixture on this incredible supper of the wine and blood, let people see it how I see it on my sex each time blood is mixed with sperm or the saliva of fellatio, describe my sex throughout thousands of years of Judaism, describe it (microscopy, photography, stereophototypy) until the paper breaks, make all the readers drool, wet lips, high and low, stretched out in their turn on the cushions, right on the knees of ‘godfather’ Elie – high mourning – leave nothing, if possible, in the dark of what related me to Judaism, alliance broken in every aspect (Karet), with perhaps a gluttonous interiorization, and in heterogeneous

modes: last of the Jews, what am I [...] the circumcised is the proper” (12-30-76) (Derrida, 1993, p.153-154).

Indeed, Derrida’s critique of the practice of ritual circumcision is confirmed when he refers to ‘my noncircumcised sons’ (p.62) – almost every time he mentions his sons is merely to refer to the fact that he did not circumcise them. At the same time, the violence of circumcision, as the violence of a certain form of incision (or excision, in French, ‘female circumcision’), via a strange manoeuvre of synecdoche, becomes representative of the act of cutting in general; perhaps more particularly as representative of the primordial division of oneself; of one’s name and identity: ‘the circumcised is the proper’, and deconstruction is the displacement of the metaphysics of the proper.

Caputo opens *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* by referring to Derrida’s broken alliance with Judaism, highlighting how the etymology of the concept of ‘alliance’ is related to ‘covenant’, and so to the ‘covenant of circumcision’. He goes on to say, both polemically and metaphorically, that deconstruction is circumcision: ‘I will say that for Derrida deconstruction *is* circumcision, where circumcision cuts open the same to the event of the other, thus constituting the breach that opens the way to the *tout autre*’ (Caputo, 1997, p.xxv). The scission of circumcision is the *a priori* division of selfsameness from itself, opening its way to the relation to the other, and so to the other’s otherness. But it is precisely in this relation between oneself and another that, not only ethics, but also emotion, becomes important. And in ‘Circumfession’ Derrida makes the following curious statement about God and emotion:

I’m mingling the name of God here with the origin of tears, the always puerile, weepy, and pusillanimous son that I was, the adolescent who basically only liked reading writers quick to tears, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Ponge, SA, and a few others, that child whom the grown-ups amused themselves by making cry for nothing, who was always to weep over himself with the tears of his mother: “I’m sorry for myself,” “I make myself unhappy,” “I’m crying for myself,” “I’m crying over myself” – but like another, another wept over by another weeper, I weep from my mother over the child whose substitute I am, whence the other, nongrammatical syntax that remains to be invented to speak of the name of God which is here neither that of the father nor that of the mother, nor of the son nor of the brother nor of the sister (Derrida, 1993, pp.118-119).

If God’s name is the origin of tears, which of course can be tears of joy as well as of pain, then this perhaps invokes a reversal of Augustine regarding the relation between thought and feeling – since of course, as we saw earlier, the Augustinian *cogito*

demands the primacy of thought. Derrida 'only liked reading writers quick to tears': this personal taste for tears on Derrida's part offers the illusion of a secure psychological basis for his argument; the illusion of psychologism which his general deconstructive thought stringently demystifies. But I would argue that 'psychology' is no longer a blasphemous word in deconstructive theory, so long as it is *without* 'psychologism', for here it does not refer to actual psychical substance since it is instead a *thematic* concern that circumscribes certain issues and arguments around a particular topic. Which kind of begs the question, precisely what is the argument of 'Circumfession'?

As we have tried to show, the actual argument of 'Circumfession' is unclear, and has divided Derrida's followers. Caputo interprets this statement by Derrida, of mingling God's name with the origin of tears, in a religious manner, as seems proper: 'we could say that "God" for him is given not in theological analysis but in religious experience' (Caputo, 1997, p.288). In contrast, Hägglund tries to pull off the more remarkable feat of arguing that this statement is evidence of Derrida's 'radical atheism': 'The origin of tears is thus the experience of mortal survival' (Hägglund, 2008, p.162). Hägglund can say this because of his earlier premise in which, for Derrida: 'The purported love for the immortal (the passion for "my God" as the one I love above all) is reinscribed as a love for the mortal' (p.147). For Hägglund, Derrida closes off all possible love for immortality and immortal beings; and circumcision is not even given a mention. Hägglund accuses Caputo of giving Derrida a partial reading, but the retort of *tu quo que* can be addressed to Hägglund. In 'Confessions and "Circumfession": A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida', Derrida says the following:

If you are a radical atheist, and you just mention the word *God*, that means you are supposed to understand what that word means, that you inherit the word in a culture that you are raised in, a culture in which the word *God* means something. For me, even if I say God doesn't exist, I would immediately say the opposite. God exists to the extent that people believe in God. There has been a history, and there are religions. For me, religions are the proof that God exists, even if God doesn't exist. That's the question. Even if I were able to demonstrate, against all the canonical proofs of the existence of God, that God doesn't exist, it wouldn't demonstrate that God doesn't exist, because religions exist, because people believe in God. They behave and organize their lives according to this belief. There have been not only some events attesting to the fact that people believe in God, but everything in humanity is organized according to this belief. So that's enough. That's God's existence to me. [...] God is the name of this pathogenic power that produces neurosis, psychosis, paranoia, wars, peace, love, and so on and so forth. Isn't that enough? God exists even if, and especially if, he doesn't exist, because how powerful this nonexistence should be to produce such extraordinary phenomena in what is called man (Derrida, in: Kearney, 2005, p.39).

Coming between Caputo and Hägglund, I understand this extract to be evidence of Derrida's *radical agnosticism*. An agnosticism in which the 'sacred truth of nonknowledge' rests: an agnosticism in which rests the paradoxical formulation from 'Circumfession': 'the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist' (Derrida, 1993, p.155). In all of these texts – by Derrida, by Caputo, by Hägglund, etc – the word 'agnosticism' (literally, 'without knowledge') has not been mentioned. But does it not seem to nicely fit in with the 'unknowable' of which Derrida speaks?

Perhaps we could even call it an *autobiographical agnosticism*: for it leaves open the relation to the other's otherness as it accounts for the space that relates us to everyone's *singular upbringing and characteristics*. And not only whether religious or atheist, but also whether happy or unhappy, prosperous or penniless, generous or miserly, kind or unkind, honest or deceptive, peaceful or aggressive, persuader or persuaded, bully or bullied, polite or rude, faithful or unfaithful, diligent or lazy, masculine or feminine, beautiful or ugly, healthy or unhealthy, able or disabled, fantasist or realist, unblemished or disfigured, erotic or nonerotic, heartbreaker or heartbroken, loved or hated, strong or weak, continent or incontinent, etc. Such qualities can of course combine in some contradictory or quasi-contradictory way in each individual person – which can of course depend not only on 'who you are' but also on *who you are around* (as we must account for both the unhelpful sabotage or neglect and the helpful support or teaching that occurs in everyday life, particularly everyday family life). Derrida's 'autobiographical agnosticism' leaves open the space for the relation to all character traits, all living conditions, and all forms of relationship, each with their singular causes and effects, whether positive or negative: '*Everybody's Autobiography*' (Derrida, 1993, p.311), he says, quoting Gertrude Stein (1993), with respect to the potentially conflicting *historical realities* of each individual's own personal experience. And yet, despite accounting for this space in theory, in practice one can still take it away from another, or have it taken away from oneself by another, even with the most minimal of gestures. In life, the other's otherness can easily be compromised; and so for Derrida, practically speaking, there nonetheless remains, for everyone, *the infinite responsibility to make the truth happen*. That is, in relation to both ourselves and others around us, we all have the responsibility to become more

aware of the negative causes and effects of our manner in order to turn them around into positive ones.

Conclusion

Against Hägglund, I would argue that in what Derrida receives from Augustine there is not necessarily a reversal between what we should and should not love (mortality or immortality), but rather is a complication of the boundary between what we give an *apology* for (defending another; loving another; preserving another) and what we give an *apologia* for (self-defence; self-love; self-preservation). For Derrida, autobiography is tied into the complex boundary between apology and apologia, and this in turn is worked into the concept of *making truth* by giving it an *ethical foundation*. Hägglund's book, devoid of all religious import into Derrida's thought, is devoid of all ethical import – he refers to 'an ethical or religious "turn"' (Hägglund, 2008, p.1) – and so he fundamentally misunderstands the concept of making truth. He says: 'Making the truth is for Derrida not a matter of devotion to God but of a singular *testimony* that is always open to the possibility of perjury and lying. Even in testifying to his singular life Derrida is liable to violate the truth of his life' (p.154). Perhaps, but Hägglund has also left out the fact that, for Derrida, making the truth requires an *asked-for pardon*. Like the concept of circumcision, the concept of pardon gets no mention in *Radical Atheism*. To put it bluntly, it would seem that, for Derrida, *moral truth*, perhaps contained in *the moral of the story*, comes before truth itself; and therefore comes before any sort of religious truth (which is why *The Prayers and Tears* of Caputo perhaps gets off on the wrong foot just as Hägglund does).

The problem with the idea of moral truth, as with the idea of the moral of the story, is that it is not God-given but rather is something that we have to make happen in our actions. We must perform moral truth in our actions; there is a performance of truth in our actions that can rightly be described as moral. And this concept of performativity, which has become so pervasive in our thinking particularly after Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 1962), is what Derrida has in mind with regards to the 'making' part of making truth. As he puts it in his essay 'Composing "Circumfession"':

It is this limit of the performativity that in fact draws the line we are now analyzing. The interest we are taking in speech act theory in the academy perhaps has to do with the illusion that, by using performative

utterances, we produce events, that we are mastering history. The event is absolutely unpredictable, that is, beyond any performativity. That's where a signature occurs. If I so much insist on circumcision in this text, it is because circumcision is precisely something which happens to a powerless child before he can speak, before he can sign, before he has a name. It is by this mark that he is inscribed in a community, whether he wants it or not. This happened to him and leaves a mark, a scar, a signature, on his body. This happened before him, so to speak. It's a heritage that he cannot deny, whatever he does or he doesn't do (Derrida, 2005, p.21).

The 'limit of the performativity' is thus the boundary between what we are capable of *making happen* and what *happens to us* regardless of our capabilities, and happens in such a way that instead emphasizes our inabilities and disabilities. That which we make happen is when we are 'mastering history', whereas that which happens to us ('circumcision is precisely something which happens to a powerless child') is when historical events master us, taking us by surprise in their unpredictability: 'It only happens to me' (Derrida, 1987, p.135; Derrida, 1993, p.305). In his essay 'Signature Event Context' Derrida invents the counter-concept of *iterability* in order to put into question Austin's concept of the performative – in which the heteronomy of historical context circumscribes the capabilities of any rhetorical performance. In 'Circumfession', it is circumcision that performs this task: the 'covenant' of circumcision acts as the '*heteronomic alliance*' (Derrida, 1993, p.136) – a heteronomy that overpowers the capable autonomy that can, with ease, make something happen. Circumfession is a hesitant confession precisely because it is an uneasy confession.

Derrida's essay 'Composing "Circumfession"' was delivered as a paper at a conference in Villanova in 2001, not long after the September 11th attack on the World Trade Centre. In his summary of what he means by *making truth*, he alludes to the attack:

When I ask, when I confess, I'm not reporting a fact. I can kill someone. I can hijack a plane and then report; it's not a confession. It becomes a confession only when I ask for forgiveness and, according to the tradition, when I promise to repent, that is, to improve, to love, to transform my hatred into love, to transform myself, and to do so out of love. It's not a matter of knowledge. It's not a matter of making the other know what happened, but a matter of changing oneself, of transforming oneself. That's what perhaps Augustine calls "to make the truth." Not to *tell* the truth, not to inform – God knows everything – but to *make* the truth, to produce the truth (Derrida, 2005, p.23).

One can detect the moral psychological tone that the concept of making truth carries: it is 'a matter of changing oneself, of transforming oneself'. Earlier we saw that Derrida wonders what 'to turn around' means: viz., to change or transform. And in the context

of the concept of making truth it becomes a matter of turning around into oneself; an impossibly inward turn. An ‘autobiographical’ turn, for in ‘Circumfession’ Derrida says: ‘I owe it to autobiography to say that I have spent my life teaching so as to return in the end to what mixes prayer and tears with blood’ (Derrida, 1993, p.20). This debt to autobiography that Derrida confesses early on in ‘Circumfession’ itself later on becomes transformed into the more monstrous sounding counter-concept: ‘*autobiothanatoheterographical*’ (p.213). The life of the self implies within it, radically within it in this counter-concept, the death of the other; for example the death of the mother. Life changes us because its very lifetime changes itself *without our control*. As such, Derrida counters Augustine’s notion of original sin by claiming, instead, ‘the original sin against me’ (Derrida, 1993, p.74). The problem of morality is therefore not merely a matter of *moral action*, but is also a matter of *moral judgement* with regards to those circumstances when something has heteronomously happened to someone that was not of their own autonomous doing, not of their own ‘free will’. The *autobiothanatoheterographical* acts as the quasi-transcendental condition of possibility and impossibility of the very boundary between apology and apologia. To make the truth happen is to give it back to those from whom we might have taken it: to give it back with an apology or to take it back with an apologia, for justice precedes truth – so long as the pleas do not fall on deaf ears, in which case perhaps the time has come to go separate ways, to break the alliance or to sever completely the already-broken alliance.

Derrida’s concept of making truth is therefore distinguished from the theological concept of absolute truth, or absolute knowledge – in French, *savoir absolu* (which is what Derrida alludes to in abbreviating Saint Augustine’s name as ‘SA’). *Making truth* is not *absolute truth* because it does not rest in some eternal divine presence; but neither is it *making knowledge* for it is not about the mere reportage of an event. Instead, it is about the trial of making right a wrong, and so it is about making a future event happen; which is impossible because this has to happen against the grain of the run of events that *happen to us*, and which form the life circumstances of our actions. And in such circumstances, if God’s name becomes synonymous with the origin of tears, then *feeling precedes thinking*. Derrida’s neologism of the *autobiothanatoheterographical* is not only the condition of the apology/apologia opposition, but also, for example, of the opposition between the tragic and the comic. But what are the direct implications of this reversal of Augustine for the metaphysics behind his moral psychology? This question is too big for the space we have here to give a point by point analysis, for

Derrida's exercise in indirectness has postponed a direct answer. But in the chapter that follows, we will see that although Derrida's autobiographical thought begins by apparently reversing the logical order of priority between thought and feeling, at the same time he also puts into question the very self-presence of feeling itself.

Confessing Desire: Rousseau & Derrida

Introduction

Feeling precedes thinking. Rousseau himself says so in the second chapter of his ‘Essay on the origin of languages’: ‘One does not begin by reasoning, but by feeling’ (Rousseau, 1966, p.11). Rousseau’s ‘Essay’ is the text that Derrida famously chose to give an extended deconstructive reading of in the second part of *Of Grammatology*, ‘Nature, Culture, Writing’. Before Derrida turns to his reading of Rousseau’s ‘Essay’, he offers two preparatory chapters, the first entitled, ‘The Violence of the Letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau’; and the second entitled, ‘That Dangerous Supplement’. But it in his short opening ‘Introduction to the “Age of Rousseau”’ – and it is perhaps notable that Derrida borrows this phrase ‘age of Rousseau’ from Nietzsche (1997, p.17) – that he proffers his choice of Rousseau over and above any other philosopher: for Derrida, Rousseau ‘starts from a new model of presence: the subject’s self-presence within consciousness or feeling’ (Derrida, 1976, p.98). Having in the first part of *Of Grammatology*, ‘Writing Before the Letter’, outlined how deconstruction targets, and works to undermine without destroying completely, the phono-logocentric prejudices of the metaphysical tradition, it becomes necessary for Derrida to justify the usage of Rousseau as his main point of inspiration, amongst other thinkers. For Derrida, Rousseau is a transitory figure in the history of metaphysics, on the boundary between metaphysics and its deconstruction. Indeed, it is precisely because of Rousseau’s reversal of the relation between feeling and thinking, and the consequences of this reversal, that places him on this boundary.

In this chapter, the aim is not to document the twists and turns of Derrida’s lengthy reading of Rousseau’s ‘Essay’. Rather, drawing on Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s *Confessions* and *Émile* in ‘That Dangerous Supplement’, the aim of this chapter is to show the way in which Derrida’s conception of the supplement applies itself to the understanding of life and self. But it should also be noted that Derrida’s choice of Rousseau’s ‘Essay’ is important also because the ‘Essay’s’ title, regarding the ‘origin of languages’, names Derrida’s own central concern – not only in *Of Grammatology* but in what he calls ‘deconstruction’ more generally. That is, the concepts that form the vocabulary of Derrida’s own philosophical thought find their initial point of application in the question that Rousseau poses regarding the origin of languages (or perhaps rather language itself; and perhaps not only origin but also

teleology). This is why Derrida's philosophical thought is quasi-transcendental: because his argument is that the condition of possibility of the origin of language requires the condition of impossibility of *finding* this origin. The origin of language is lost before the attempt to find it has even begun. This is an obvious consequence of the fact that any attempt to find these origins requires a sort of philosophical-cum-literary speculation-cum-mythology such as Rousseau himself has recourse to in his own thought – beginning with the 'social contract' concept of the *state of nature* which is supposed to identify humankind's more general historical origins. For Derrida, as for Rousseau, the problem of humankind's origins is linked to the problem of the origin of human languages. But unlike Rousseau, Derrida does not engage in philosophical speculation or literary mythologizing in order to provide explanations. Instead, as the concept of supplement implies (amongst others), his thought alludes to the ultimate unknowability of our explanations of the origins of life itself.

However, there is a difference between arguing that the origins of life 'itself' are unknowable, and that the origins of 'this or that' life are unknowable. The former is generic and the latter is specific. The former enquires about the origin of history itself; the latter enquires about the origin of a particular individual who is inscribed within a pre-existing history. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida is more concerned with the generic than the specific. For example, his concept of arche-writing outlined in 'Writing Before the Letter' mediates between the binary opposition of speech and writing, thereby infusing all language and communication with the properties of writing more generally. In 'That Dangerous Supplement', in the famous 'Question of Method' section regarding the nature of critical or deconstructive reading, he conceptualizes the idea of the text to which reading finds its primary point of application: '*There is nothing outside of the text*' (Derrida, 1976, p.158). But the text, he argues, is not just the literary text, the specific text that is read and written in the narrow sense of the term; instead it is the general text according to the idea of arche-writing in which all forms of communication are affected. For Derrida, the text is world-historical reality insofar as language is radically implicated in this reality:

What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of the 'dangerous supplement', is that in what one calls the real life of these existences 'of flesh and bone', beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of

differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc (pp.158-159).

In juxtaposing 'real life' with the text, Derrida can allow the latter to do the work of the former, thereby continuing the work of metaphysics while simultaneously displacing it. The prejudices of metaphysics (of presence, purity, properness, etc) become displaced; but metaphysics in the neutral sense of the term (as a worldview on the nature of the world) continues. Derrida offers such a worldview when he refers to 'supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references'.

Real life is an infinite chain of supplements within which one is inscribed. But what does this mean, exactly? In this chapter, I will consider the answer to this question with regards to Derrida's reading of Rousseau in 'That Dangerous Supplement'. In doing so this chapter will pick up on a couple of interpretations of Derrida's reading of Rousseau, by Burke and de Man, in which the problem of literary criticism in Derrida will be addressed. But first it is important to consider the nature of Rousseau's thought as it is relevant to Derrida in *Of Grammatology*.

Confessing Desire

Rousseau began writing his 'Essay on the Origin of Languages' at a similar time to writing his famous 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality' (the second of three 'Discourses'), but the former was unfinished during his lifetime and published posthumously. In his essay 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Founder of the Sciences of Man' (in: Levi-Strauss, 1976), the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss hailed Rousseau's 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality' as the foundation of the modern discipline of anthropology. It is in the context of the thought of Levi-Strauss that, in the first chapter of 'Nature, Culture, Writing', Derrida thus moves backwards in time 'from Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau'. But here, before we turn to *Émile* and *The Confessions*, let us consider the 'Essay' and Rousseau's second 'Discourse'.

In *Rousseau*, Nicholas Dent says: 'whether or not Rousseau saw himself as working in quite this way, it does in fact make quite a lot of sense to see his thought as moving progressively from the diagnosis of human and social ills to an attempt to find their remedy' (Dent, 2005, p.80). 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality' is thus an attempt to diagnose the ills of humanity. Taken by itself it is thus a relatively

pessimistic text, as the ills are offered with little sense of what to do about them. Near the beginning Rousseau positions himself in the context of the social contract thinkers who have utilized the concept of the state of nature: ‘The philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the necessity of returning to the state of nature, but none of them has reached it’ (in: Rousseau, 1987, p.38). What is distinctive about Rousseau, in comparison with Hobbes and Locke before him, is the new version of the state of nature that he offers, and the consequences for thinking about society that is implicated in this version. In *Leviathan* Hobbes portrayed the state of nature as a state of war; a chaotic war of all against all. Mankind enters into a social contract because the state of nature is the harsh reality of war: ‘the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short’ (Hobbes, 1985, p.186). For Hobbes, natural law is about seeking peace, and because the state of nature is a state of war it makes no sense for man to remain in the state of nature, where he is animal-like in attempting to satisfy his own passions.

In contrast to Hobbes, Locke, in his *Two Treatises of Government*, argues that the state of nature is not a state of war but is rather a state of liberty. He continues: ‘But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence’ (Locke, 1924, p.119). That is, in the state of nature mankind might be free, but natural law does not protect our private property from theft. This protection, offered by the positive laws created by mankind in society, is ultimately the reason why we enter into a social contract. With such contrasting versions of the state of nature, it is important to note the different forms of political rule in society that result. For Hobbes, in order to curb mankind’s natural violence, the autocratic figure of the Sovereign is given absolute power (which is synonymous with the statement of ‘the divine right of kings’). For Locke, in order to institute and enforce the necessary complex positive laws concerning the protection of an individual’s property, the separation of state powers is necessary (culminating in a more democratic constitution). But unlike both Hobbes and Locke, in ‘Discourse on the Origin of Inequality’ Rousseau is not writing with a political agenda as such. Rather, his agenda places morality before politics. As Lévi-Strauss notes, there is indeed a moral tendency in how Rousseau goes about his anthropological business which positions the self radically in relation to others before itself: the second ‘Discourse’, ‘lies in a conception of man which places the other before the self, and in a conception of mankind which places life before men’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1976, p.37).

Levi-Strauss gets his conception of Rousseau as the founder of anthropology from the fact that, in the second 'Discourse', he gives real world examples of indigenous tribes, such as the South African Hottentots, in order to consider in a practical way what he means when he refers to the idea of the state of nature. Because Hobbes and Locke refer to the state of nature without practical examples, they misconceive mankind in the state of nature: 'They spoke about savage man, and it was civil man they depicted' (in: Rousseau, 1987, p.38). This argument guides Rousseau's own depiction of savage man as naturally good, and mankind's experience of the state of nature as a happy one. On the one hand, Rousseau's concern is moral (regarding the causes of good and evil in humanity); and on the other hand, his concern is psychological (regarding the causes of happiness and unhappiness in humanity). Morality and psychology are two sides of the same coin of human feeling for Rousseau. And as a work of moral psychology, the second 'Discourse' argues the cause of their negative aspects (i.e., evil and unhappiness) to come from civil society itself: 'someone could easily write the history of human maladies by following the history of civil societies' (p.42). For Rousseau, civil society becomes the origin of inequality in mankind, as social organization implies the relation of ruler and ruled or rich and poor; and the state of nature, in contrast, is the prehistory in which human relations were once equal in their solitariness. But, he argues, there can be no return to this prehistorical and prephilosophical state of nature as the formation of society implies there can be no going back: 'We will never see those happy days reborn when the people did not dabble in philosophizing' (p.99). For Rousseau, history begins through the philosophical impetus, as the techniques of thinking turned humans away from their natural state of feeling.

Rousseau's blend of morality and psychology in human feeling is expressed most directly in his sentimentalist conception of pity. For Rousseau, this conception requires an adjustment to the so-called 'golden rule' of morality (which perhaps transposes the Hippocratic Oath from a medical to a moral context):

Instead of the sublime maxim of reasoned justice, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, pity inspires all men with another maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the preceding one: *Do what is good for you with as little harm as possible to others*. In a word, it is in this natural sentiment, rather than in subtle arguments, that one must search for the cause of the repugnance at doing evil that every man would experience, even independently of the maxims of education. Although it might be appropriate for Socrates and minds of his stature to acquire virtue

through reason, the human race would long ago have ceased to exist, if its preservation had depended solely on the reasonings of its members (in: Rousseau, 1987, p.55).

For Rousseau, the sentiment of pity involves the impetus for self-preservation and self-love, which in turn require the intuitive recognition of the same sentiments at work in other people. Just as one oneself does not want to feel the effects of an unnecessary pain caused by the words and deeds of others, so one should therefore limit one's relations with others so as to not cause unnecessary harm to them. This is different from the golden rule because the latter generically implies that the other likes and dislikes what oneself likes and dislikes. But this may not be the case, and so Rousseau's conception of pity involves a relation to the other in which we do not want to see them in pain, thereby taking into account the specifics of whatever it is that causes pain in particular people. Through pity, we identify with another's pain to the degree that we become sensitive to whatever it is that causes pain in that person; and in recognizing the causes, we are better placed to take preventative action. For Rousseau, the 'natural sentiment' of pity takes priority over the 'subtle arguments' of virtue acquired through reason; and this is justified with recourse to the natural existence of human tears: '*Nature, in giving men tears, bears witness that she gave the human race the softest hearts*' (p.54). But those hearts have been corrupted by civil society founded upon the '*perfectibility*' (p.45) of the mind.

The second 'Discourse' also briefly takes up the task more explicitly reserved for the 'Essay on the Origin of Languages'. Assigning language as the basis of culture, cultivation, civilization, or education; of nurture rather than nature; Rousseau says: 'let us think of the inconceivable difficulties and the infinite amount of time that the first invention of languages must have cost' (in: Rousseau, 1987, p.48). For Rousseau, the formation of languages did not occur in the necessities of domestic encounters, 'in the domestic intercourse among fathers, mothers, and children' (p.48). Rather, the formation of language 'is the cry of nature' (p.49). That is, when the natural world itself provided painful circumstances beyond the control of savages in the state of nature, it is their cries of help that formed language. Indeed, just as babies cry for help, in this respect the formation of languages is less about adult teaching of languages to children, and more about children struggling to vocalize their wants and needs: 'It should be noted that, since the child had all his needs to explain and consequently more things to say to the mother than the mother to the child, it is the child who must make

the greatest effort toward inventing a language' (p.48). Consequently, the teaching of language by parents to the child, 'is a good way of showing how already formed languages are taught, but it does not tell us how languages are formed' (p.49). The formation of languages is thus childlike. In a move that makes *Émile* famous, Rousseau is known for identifying with the perspective of the child qua child, rather than interpreting the child as if it were merely a small adult – as was the prevalent thinking in his day that he was critical of.

If we return briefly to Dent's suggestion to see Rousseau's thought as developing from the diagnosis of humanity's ills to their remedy, then both *Émile* and 'The Social Contract' can be understood as remedial of the diagnosis given in the earlier three 'Discourses', particularly the second on inequality (at any rate, the structure of Dent's book implies this). With its central argument that the birth of civil society is the origin of mankind's inequality, the second 'Discourse's' diagnoses for modernity appear bleak, if taken by themselves. Both *Émile* and 'The Social Contract' were written and published by Rousseau at a similar time, and they deal with the opposite spheres of life in terms of private life and public life respectively. While Rousseau's novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* was the most famous novel in eighteenth-century France (Rousseau, 1997), and so his most widely-read work in his own lifetime, it is undoubtedly 'The Social Contract' for which he is most remembered (in: Rousseau, 1987). But here, it is *Émile* that interests us most; in particular as a precursor to *The Confessions*. *Émile* is a treatise on education; but it is written in a part-novelistic manner via the invention of the character Émile. The task that Rousseau sets himself is to demonstrate how the education or upbringing of a human individual in civil society must be performed in order to be such that it is in accordance with the teaching of Nature itself. For Rousseau, since Nature is inherently good, human nurture should be in accordance with Nature.

If Rousseau appears to speak out *against* education, as in the above extract from the second 'Discourse' which gave his adjustment to the golden rule, it is because the techniques of education that have developed in civil society have the opposite effect to their intended one. That is, they not only make children unhappy and unruly, but then, later in life, they have the effect of making adults unhappy with themselves and nasty to each other. For Rousseau, the primary reason for this goes back to how we treat and teach children, in not allowing children to be children: 'The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know without asking what a child is capable of

learning. They are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man' (Rousseau, 1993, p.2). The character of *Émile* is thus Rousseau's hypothetical case study in which we treat a child qua child, as taught according to Nature and thus according to mankind's natural goodness. He makes clear from the outset that his interest is not in public education: 'If you wish to know what is meant by public education, read Plato's *Republic*. Those who merely judge books by their titles take this for a treatise on politics, but it is the finest treatise on education ever written' (p.8). Rather, Rousseau's interest is in the education of private life; that is, in the context of domestic upbringing. For Rousseau, civil education by itself would only teach people to be at war with themselves, endlessly divided between duty and desire: 'He who would preserve the supremacy of natural feelings in social life knows not what he asks. Ever at war with himself, hesitating between his wishes and his duties, he will be neither a man nor a citizen' (p.8). But what is his solution?

His solution is to teach children how to be men, not how to be citizens. This, in turn, involves teaching them *how to live*: 'Before his parents choose a calling for him nature called him to be a man. Life is the trade I would teach him. When he leaves me, I grant you, he will be neither a magistrate, a soldier, nor a priest; he will be a man' (Rousseau, 1993, p.10). For Rousseau, the sort of education that teaches children to be civilians, altruistically in the service of others, and leaves them to figure out their own happiness for themselves, is not only doomed to failure, but is also doomed to hypocrisy: 'It is only fit to turn out hypocrites, always professing to live for others, while thinking of themselves alone' (p.9). From the moment we are born, we learn; life is lifelong learning *about* life: 'We begin to learn when we begin to live' (p.10). Because life involves so many injuries, both physical and emotional, ultimately culminating in death and mourning, Rousseau acknowledges that to learn to live is to learn to live with life's pains. But to teach children in such a way that removes the element of natural feeling from living life is not to teach them how to cope with life's pains: 'This is not teaching him to bear pain; it is training him to feel it' (p.11). For Rousseau, we need to let children be children; that is, we need to facilitate their imagination rather than stifle it by educating them in adult realities: 'Mankind has its place in the sequence of things; childhood has its place in the sequence of human life; the man must be treated as a man and the child as a child' (p.51). This, however, is not to pander to the child's wants: 'to yield to his tears is to teach him to cry' (p.59). Rather, it is to bring up the child such that they know that they are not the powerful ones

in the relationship, which liberates them from a premature sense of entitlement; thus allowing them to play more imaginatively. In child's play, problems are encountered that the children themselves are encouraged to overcome, thereby facilitating their physical and psychical development through nature's own education, rather than through the unnatural institutions of the adult world.

Émile is structured in five books, each book dealing with a different stage of life: i.e., the first book deals with infancy, the second with childhood, the third with adolescence, etc. At each stage Rousseau documents how the child should be brought up, counteracting along the way the various traps that parents fall into in their child's upbringing: viz., the trap of the traditional idea of the tutor as the knowledgeable authority figure from whom the child learns disinterestedly in classroom teaching. Instead, he suggests that the parents and tutors should learn to manipulate the environment in such a way that facilitates the child's play, within which the child will encounter problems that they themselves will take an active interest in overcoming. As well as the prevalent way of thinking about education in Rousseau's own time, his arguments are also directed against a view of childhood which could be said to originate in Augustine's *Confessions*, in which, as a result of original sin documented by the Fall, children are born sinners. In contrast, in *Émile* Rousseau argues that a natural dose of self-love or selfishness is healthy for the human heart:

Let us lay down as an incontrovertible rule that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart, the how and the why of the entrance of every vice can be traced. The only natural passion is self-love or selfishness taken in a wider sense. This selfishness is good in itself and in relation to ourselves; and as the child has no necessary relations to other people he is naturally indifferent to them; his self-love only becomes good or bad by the use made of it and the relations established by its means (Rousseau, 1993, pp.66-67).

For Rousseau, children are not old enough to reason properly, and so any wrong-doing that they perform is judged so by the adults around them, but is not understood by the children themselves. As he puts it: 'wrong-doing depends on the harmful intention' (p.67), and as the child is not old enough to reason properly, he therefore does not possess quite the capacity for the ill-will which acts as the basis of the wrong-doing for adults.

The notion of self-love that Rousseau generally promotes – *amour-propre* as distinct from *amour de soi* – is one in which the former develops out of the latter. That is, the task of education, for Rousseau, is to transform the self-love we naturally

experience in childhood (*amour de soi*) into a mode of adult self-love which includes pity within its general scheme (*amour-propre*). As Dent puts it, it follows from this that adult self-love becomes a sort of self-worth and self-respect such that we expect to receive respect from others, out of which there is also respect given to others, as we must also acknowledge self-respect at work within others themselves:

It is that the central demand of *amour-propre*, to receive our due recognition and respect from other people, is capable of being met provided we are clear about what *is* our due from others – not servility and fawning adulation but a position among men of common regard and common respect, recognizing our equality as humans (Dent, 2005, p.105).

As *Émile* becomes a young adult, he requires an education in religion in order to provide *amour-propre* with a solid foundation in inner conscience: ‘conscience persists in following the order of nature in spite of all the laws of man’ (Rousseau, 1993, p.274). In the fourth book of *Émile* Rousseau inserts a section entitled, ‘The Creed of a Savoyard Priest’, his most famous text on the philosophy of religion. Here, Rousseau argues for natural religion: ‘the light of reason alone, in a state of nature, can lead us no further than to natural religion’ (p.333). That is, religion in which we bypass the orthodoxy of the church in favour of the sentiments of the human heart: ‘True worship is of the heart’ (p.326). Rousseau, brought up a Protestant, was nonetheless a staunch critic of religious dogmatism – ‘The Creed of a Savoyard Priest’ led to the burning of *Émile* – and promoter of religious toleration. Before placing Rousseau in dialogue with Derrida, let us turn our attention finally to *The Confessions*.

Although the title of Rousseau’s *Confessions* is undoubtedly taken from Augustine, he makes no explicit attempt to distinguish its underlying theme from that of Augustine’s. Already we can see both similarities and differences. Augustine was writing both as a prayer to God and to promote the virtue of conversion to his readers. While Augustine addresses God Himself, Rousseau instead addresses his human readers. Indeed, this difference is apparent right from the opening page:

I have unveiled my inmost self even as Thou has seen it, O Eternal Being. Gather round me the countless hosts of my fellow-men; let them hear my confessions, lament for my unworthiness, and blush for my imperfections. Then let each of them in turn reveal, with the same frankness, the secrets of his heart at the foot of the Throne, and say, if he dare, ‘*I was better than that man!*’ (Rousseau, 1996, p.3).

Augustine writes for God; Rousseau writes for his ‘fellow-men’: even though he does indeed believe in God, his confession is not for him in quite the same way.

Commenting on this extract, Peter France in *Rousseau: Confessions* notes that what Rousseau says is compatible with the Protestant tradition of the time: ‘This is compatible of course with a Protestant tradition of public confession, and the final lines of the preamble imagine a scene of reciprocal confession – he will tell his sins, then everybody else will tell theirs’ (France, 1987, p.25). As such, Rousseau’s *Confessions* cannot be considered simply as a sort of ‘secular autobiography’ in contradistinction to Augustine’s ‘spiritual autobiography’, even though its address is to his fellow-men rather than to God. Regarding the point of Rousseau’s confession, France continues: ‘But to what end? To gain forgiveness, would be a normal Christian answer, and this may be in Rousseau’s mind too, but he tends to speak rather of gaining relief’ (p.25). That is, it would appear that Rousseau thinks that confession is not merely a moral vehicle for having sins pardoned, but is also a psychological vehicle for not having to bear the mental weight of the sin any longer.

Another characteristic difference between Augustine and Rousseau is that Augustine wrote his *Confessions* with the theme of original sin in mind, thereby showing how childhood is as corrupt as adolescence and adulthood. By contrast, Rousseau spends considerable time in the first part of his *Confessions* documenting various events of his childhood in order to demonstrate his natural goodness of heart. He articulates how this goodness has been forced to struggle against the grain of multifarious misfortunes, for which he himself has had to bear the consequences. Beginning with his very birth, to which he lost his mother: ‘Ten months later I was born, a weak and ailing child; I cost my mother her life, and my birth was the first of my misfortunes’ (Rousseau, 1996, p.5). Brought up by his father, he was educated from a young age in literature which sensitized him to the plights of the world: ‘I felt before I thought: this is the common lot of humanity. I experienced it more than others’ (p.6). Able to understand the literature well for his age, but unable to truly understand it, he therefore grew up with confused and powerful emotions, feelings which have never left him:

In a short time I acquired, by this dangerous method, not only extreme facility in reading and understanding what I read, but a knowledge of the passions that was unique in a child of my age. I had no idea of things in themselves, although all the feelings of actual life were already known to me. I had conceived nothing, but felt everything. These confused emotions, which I felt one after the other,

certainly did not warp the reasoning powers which I did not as yet possess; but they shaped them in me of a peculiar stamp, and gave me odd and romantic notions of human life, of which experience and reflection have never been able wholly to cure me (p.6).

Consistent with *Émile* is the idea that being taught to read and educated in lots of literature at such a young age is harmful to a child, which is why he here calls it a ‘dangerous method’. A method which on the one hand might be said to facilitate imagination, but facilitates it with imagination unfit for the mind of a child.

Indeed, the juxtaposition of imagination and memory is much stronger in Rousseau than it is Augustine, who assigns memory a privileged place for human thought. In her essay ‘Augustine and Rousseau: Narrative and Self-knowledge in the Two Confessions’ Ann Hartle says: ‘there is a sense in which remembering is, for Rousseau, a function of the imagination’ (Hartle, 1999, p.270). There is also a sense in which, to say this, Rousseau is placed directly alongside his onetime friend David Hume, who, in *A Treatise on Human Nature*, says: ‘Thus it appears, that the *belief* or *assent*, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and that this alone distinguishes them from imagination’ (Hume, 1978, p.86). That is, there are no absolutely stable grounds with which to distinguish memory from imagination. As such, when writing one’s autobiography, which requires writing from one’s memory, there will undoubtedly be embellishments from one’s imagination. This can be seen in both parts of *The Confessions* (each part is of course comprised of six books). In the first part, Rousseau’s self-portrayal is of a relatively happy upbringing and existence. In the second part, his self-portrayal is of a much more suspicious nature due to the characters of those he believes surround him. As he puts it at the beginning of the second part: ‘Destiny, which for thirty years favoured my inclinations, during a second thirty thwarted them’ (Rousseau, 1996, p.265). *The Confessions* is a lengthy book full of detailed descriptions of a multitude of events of Rousseau’s life; but to reduce all of the detailed events of his lifetime to this pithy viewpoint is equally the work of imagination as of memory. But it is this imagination that thus directs the *tone* of his writing throughout as much as anything else. Perhaps one should not forget Rousseau when he refers, ‘to what an extent I am capable of being inflamed by beings of the imagination’ (p.536). But let us turn our attention now to Derrida’s reading of Rousseau in ‘That Dangerous Supplement’ – and we will set up a little bit of groundwork before drawing on the scholarship of de Man and Burke.

‘That Dangerous Supplement’ is undoubtedly the most well-known chapter in *Of Grammatology*. The statement of there being nothing outside the text has become a sort of empty watchword for both protagonists and antagonists of deconstruction. But as we have already made the case for what this means, let us consider the other concerns that are at work in this chapter, notably Derrida’s reading of Rousseau. As Arthur Bradley argues in *Derrida’s Of Grammatology*, the dynamic between how Derrida reads Rousseau and how he also uses this reading as an opportunity to say what he wants to about his own thought forms a difficult and strange balancing act:

If ‘That Dangerous Supplement’ is now one of the most famous chapters in *Of Grammatology*, it is also – and particularly for readers new to Derrida – one of the most idiosyncratic: Derrida’s reading constantly tacks back and forth between Rousseau’s life and work and seems to treat everything from the philosopher’s most personal confessions to his largest theoretical claims as grist to his own mill (Bradley, 2008, p.99).

Here it is this juxtaposition of life and work in Derrida’s reading of Rousseau that concerns us the most. Derrida’s argument is not merely that Rousseau denounces writing as the loss of presence, but that he also renovates it as a vehicle to recover that lost presence, of which it itself was the cause: ‘Rousseau condemns writing as destruction of presence and as disease of speech. He rehabilitates it to the extent that it promises the reappropriation of that of which speech allowed itself to be dispossessed’ (Derrida, 1976, p.142).

Derrida’s reading of Rousseau is organized around this paradox, and it is precisely within this paradox that the juxtaposition between life and work occurs. Derrida continues:

The first movement of this desire is formulated as a theory of language. The other governs the experience of the writer. In the *Confessions*, when Jean-Jacques tries to explain how he became a writer, he describes the passage to writing as the restoration, by a certain absence and by a sort of calculated effacement, of presence disappointed of itself in speech (Derrida, 1976, p.142).

As ‘a theory of language’, writing becomes excluded in the work of Rousseau; as ‘the experience of the writer’, writing becomes rehabilitated in the life of Rousseau. The way in which this exclusion of writing operates in Rousseau’s actual treatise on language, ‘Essay on the Origin of Languages’, is not Derrida’s concern in ‘That Dangerous Supplement’. However, he does manage to pick out a citation from a little-known text by Rousseau called ‘Pronunciation’ in which he explicitly describes writing

as a supplement to speech (something which does not happen in the ‘Essay’):
‘Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech. ...
Speech represents thought by conventional signs, and writing represents the same with
regard to speech. Thus the art of writing is nothing but a mediated representation of
thought’ (Rousseau, in: Derrida, 1976, p.144). Thus Derrida has evidence for his claim,
which is also a preparatory one for his subsequent reading of the ‘Essay’, that
Rousseau’s theory of language works to exclude writing – and does so by way of the
notion of the supplement.

What is curious about ‘That Dangerous Supplement’ is the way in which
Derrida *conceptualizes* the supplement (ultimately, as an adequate substitution for a
deficiency or privation that can be both necessary and contingent). Having just cited
from Rousseau’s second ‘Discourse’, suggesting that, ‘the moment of mine-blindness,
that is, of metallurgy, is the origin of society’ (Derrida, 1976, p.149), Derrida continues
by invoking a relation between blindness and the supplement:

Blindness thus produces that which is born at the same time as society: the languages, the regulated
substitution of signs for things, the order of the supplement. One goes *from blindness to the supplement*.
But the blind person cannot see, in its origin, the very thing he produces to supplement his sight.
Blindness to the supplement is the law. And especially blindness to its concept. Moreover, it does not
suffice to locate its functioning in order to *see* its meaning. The supplement has no sense and is given no
intuition. We do not therefore make it emerge out of its strange penumbra. We speak its reserve (p.149).

Paradoxically, Derrida conceptualizes the supplement at the same time in which he
states a general wariness towards the idea of the very possibility of it functioning *as* a
concept. But of course, the guiding idea underlying *Of Grammatology* as a whole
regards a general wariness towards the problem of turning words (signifiers) into
concepts (signifieds) in which the latter appear purely self-present or transcendent.
Deconstruction undermines the metaphysical force of what Derrida calls the
transcendental signified: the concept whose authority over the word is absolute.

This undermining occurs via the concept of *play*. In ‘Writing Before the Letter’
Derrida says: ‘One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as
limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and the
metaphysics of presence’ (Derrida, 1976, p.50). For precisely the reason that Rousseau
gave in ‘Pronunciations’, where writing is a representation of speech which is itself a
representation of thought, Derrida thus opens *Of Grammatology* by naming the
movement of language, that is of language-as-writing in general or as arche-writing, as

essentially the signifier of the signifier: ‘In all senses of the word, writing thus *comprehends* language. Not that the word “writing” has ceased to designate the signifier of the signifier, but it appears, strange as it may seem, that “signifier of the signifier” no longer defines accidental doubling and fallen secondarity’ (p.7). The problem in metaphysical philosophy regarding the nature of reality is that the human experience of reality involves representation. In the history of metaphysics, this representation occurs by the substance of the human mind itself. But in metaphysics, the existence of language poses a problem, since language mediates human experience; and so there is a tendency to evade the problem of language by assuming transparency of its signifiers to its signified concepts. For Derrida, this problem hinges on the concept of writing because of the *double* representational structure given to it by the metaphysical tradition itself. Through the counter-concept of arche-writing (which counteracts the narrow metaphysical conception of writing), Derrida locates the foundations for radically rethinking how reality itself is formed: from a metaphysical position which seeks shortcuts around the problem of representation toward some idea of pure reality, to a deconstructive position which considers reality itself as always already contaminated by an elaborate and potentially infinite chain of representations.

But why does the concept of play become useful? If the boundary between reality and representation becomes complicated, and does so through the problem posed by language, then metaphor also contaminates the literal work of meaning – and Derrida invents the term ‘metaphoricity’ (Derrida, 1976, p.15) in order to argue that effects of literal meaning must occur in the context of the underlying metaphorical schematic of language itself. But with this in mind, there are two analogies for ‘real life’ itself which Derrida alludes to in *Of Grammatology*: real life as a game and real life as theatre. Derrida uses the analogy of the game when discussing Saussure in the second chapter of ‘Writing Before the Letter’, called ‘Linguistics and Grammatology’, where Saussure notably gives the analogy the game of chess for linguistic structure. And not just Saussure, as Derrida says: ‘expelling the problem of *meaning* outside of their researches, certain American linguists constantly refer to the model of a game. Here one must think of writing as a game within language’ (Derrida, 1976, p.50). Rather than the problem of meaning, the model of the game instead invokes the idea of rule-following. A moment later he continues: ‘It is therefore the *game of the world* that must first be thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world’ (p.50). The game of the world is that general context within which meaning itself is

part and parcel of the human experience of reality: i.e., the problem of both meaning in language and meaning in life. Derrida's 'there is nothing outside of the text' refers to this general world-historical context. That is, Derrida would have said 'there is nothing outside of historical reality' if the metaphysical tradition did not exclude the problem of its linguistic representation.

The analogy of real life as theatre returns us to Derrida's reading of Rousseau. Here Derrida connects up the themes of imagination and pity in Rousseau's theory of theatre, thus alluding to the latter's *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre* (Rousseau, 1968). In the chapter following 'That Dangerous Supplement', called 'Genesis and Structure of the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*', Derrida says: 'Let us note in passing that Rousseau's entire theory of the theatre also establishes a connection, within representation, between the power of identification – pity – and the faculty of imagination' (Derrida, 1976, p.184). Particularly so, then, in the 'tragic scene' (p.185), where the plights of those represented on stage provide a vehicle for the audience's imagination to identify with the actors as one puts oneself in their position. In the context of theatrical representation in the tragic scene, imagination provides the impetus for perfectibility: 'it surmounts animality and arouses human passion only by opening the scene and the space of theatrical representation. It inaugurates the perversion whose possibility is itself inscribed in the notion of perfectibility' (p.185). Imagination becomes the condition of theatrical representation, for Rousseau, because the tragic play is presented to the audience as the representation of how horrific life can become; invoking the identification (pity) for the suffering of the characters; in turn invoking the impetus to avoid such suffering in the notion of perfectibility. More generally, it is interesting to note the way in which Derrida's own thought mimics Rousseau's sentiment without explaining it in quite the same metaphysical vocabulary of self-presence implied in concepts like 'imagination'. For example, the concept of imagination can be substituted for that of invention: 'Deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all' (Derrida, 2007, p.23), says Derrida in his essay 'Psyche: Invention of the Other'. And undoubtedly, theatrical representation is linked to the more pervasive question in deconstructive theory of literary representation and invention.

The theme of tragedy in theatrical representation can be connected here to Derrida's conceptualization of the supplement as the adequate substitution for privation: e.g., at the end of his essay 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', in *Writing and Difference*, he says: 'To think the closure of representation is to think the

tragic’ (Derrida, 1978, p.250). That is, because representation has been so geared towards the transparency of the living present, of the life-force of the soul, of the inside of the psyche, of the outside of the world, etc, what Derrida calls ‘the closure of representation’ thus moves towards death. It makes death the condition on which life is possible. Theatre is a cruel theatre. The game is a ‘cruel game’ (Derrida, 1976, p.259). It involves the play of infinite representation, of infinite substitution, in which there can be no return to the idea of a pure or original reality in which the heart’s desire is fully satisfied. Not only is death the condition of life, but privation becomes the condition of satisfaction, hence the cruelty. The closure of representation does not therefore mean the end of representation; in *Of Grammatology* Derrida is careful to distinguish *closure* from *end*. The latter is merely destructive, in which something (e.g., an idea, or concept, or tradition – representation or metaphysics) is left in the past and forgotten about. The former is instead deconstructive, in which the thing in question is complicated, contaminated, and sent off into the future: ‘in its closure, representation continues’ (Derrida, 1978, p.250). In its closure, metaphysics continues in the form of deconstruction. Derrida’s metaphysics without metaphysics posits the beginning as always already a representation or repetition. And as for the end, even death keeps something in reserve so as to preserve life against itself, even if it is not one’s own life: e.g., in principle one’s own death implies the inheritance for the still-living other.

To return again to Derrida’s reading of Rousseau, this relation between life and death is something that Derrida picks up on in Rousseau’s *Confessions*. Derrida quotes Rousseau saying: ‘I can certainly say that I never began to live, until I looked upon myself as a dead man’ (Rousseau, 1996, p.221). In the chapter prior to ‘That Dangerous Supplement’ where Derrida provides a reading of Levi-Strauss, he alludes to a section in *Tristes Tropiques* that Levi-Strauss calls ‘A Writing Lesson’, which documents an incident in which, as an experiment, the anthropologist provides members of the Nambikwara tribe with some writing utensils (Levi-Strauss, 1992). It becomes a notable section for Derrida as here Levi-Strauss aligns writing with the moral debasements of the so-called ‘civil society’ of the Western world, as compared with the good-hearted innocence of tribal life. But in ‘That Dangerous Supplement’ Derrida alludes back to his reading of Levi-Strauss when he ironically refers to Rousseau’s own ‘writing lesson’ in this relation between life and death:

Such would be the writing lesson in Jean-Jacques's existence. The act of writing would be essentially – and here in an exemplary fashion – the greatest sacrifice aiming at the greatest symbolic reappropriation of presence. From this point of view, Rousseau knew that death is not the simple outside of life. Death by writing also inaugurates life (Derrida, 1976, pp.142-143).

This extract directly precedes the above citation from *Confessions*. For Derrida, writing specifically is symbolic first and foremost with death (via the author's death); and language more generally is symbolic first and foremost with the relation to the other (via the act of communication). So although it is not quite put in such terms explicitly in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's reading of Rousseau's *Confessions* in 'That Dangerous Supplement' implies it: viz., *arche-writing symbolizes heterothanatology*. The relation to both death and the other, indeed to the death of the other, is already named by arche-writing.

Not only this, but that heterothanatology as the condition of possibility of autobiography is a feature that is implied within Rousseau's 'reappropriation of presence' given to writing: i.e., *The Confessions* restores writing so as to come to the aid of life-writing, to autobiographical confession as the cure of the soul, but only insofar as life and the self pass through death and the other; a tragic rite of passage that writing itself symbolizes. It will have been writing that acted as the poison, but it also acts as the cure – as Derrida notes with his concept of *pharmakon* from the chapter 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination* (Derrida, 1981). The supplement is the *pharmakon* of privation: at once the cause of privation and the means to its substitution. Or as Derrida puts it: 'the supplement supplements' (Derrida, 1976, p.145). A literary critical interpretation of this might focus on the role of the author's intentions (Rousseau's or Plato's) – indeed, this is what Seán Burke's interpretation of Derrida does in his chapter 'Misread Intentions' in *The Death and Return of the Author*. Burke says: 'Supplementary play in Rousseau discovers a Platonic equivalent in the *pharmakon*, a similarly exorbitant figure which derives from and yet defies authorial intention' (Burke, 2008, p.145). We will come to this literary critical interpretation of Derrida in more detail in a moment by considering de Man's essay on Derrida in *Blindness and Insight*, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau'. As a preliminary to this, against Burke, I would argue that to consider the supplement and the *pharmakon* merely with respect to the issue of the author's intentions in the critic's role of reading is to significantly reduce the broader philosophical and conceptual force that they carry for understanding 'real life'.

For example, consider when Derrida gets around to discussing the moment at which Rousseau in *Confessions* refers to masturbation (auto-eroticism) as a ‘dangerous supplement’ to the act of sex (hetero-eroticism): ‘Dangerous supplement. These are the words that Rousseau uses in the *Confessions*’ (Derrida, 1976, p.149). Indeed, Derrida prefaces this discussion with one on *Émile*. In amongst some long quotations from *Émile*, Derrida says: ‘Without childhood, no supplement would ever appear in Nature. The supplement is here both humanity’s good fortune and the origin of its perversion. The health of the human race’ (p.147). The supplement finds its practical point of application in helping us understand ‘the health of the human race’. Surely this is a more poignant and pertinent topic than the role of the author’s intentions; and it is also Derrida’s real intention in ‘That Dangerous Supplement’ to propound such themes. There is no supplement without childhood because childhood represents originary weakness: even if the broader socioeconomic context of a family is privileged, it is nonetheless the case that all human life is born in the heteronomy of dependence. And here, *kindness* is more important than money: ‘Men, be kind to your fellow-men; this is your first duty, kind to every age and station, kind to all that is not foreign to humanity. What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?’ (Rousseau, 1993, p.50). Of course, kindness is only one of the conditions of a happy life, the moral condition; the other condition is pleasure, the psychological condition. And just as death is the arch-symbol of life’s pain, sex is the arch-symbol of life’s pleasure. Hence, Derrida’s reading of Rousseau is not overly concerned with his intentions regarding the word ‘supplement’; rather, it is concerned with the more important themes of life’s pain, life’s pleasure, and the health of the human psyche.

Derrida is more concerned with reconceptualising the nature of reality: we could say that his intention is ‘metaphysical’ if the tradition of metaphysics were not saturated by the prejudice of presence (self-presence, temporal presence, and eternal presence). Most scholars of Derrida here lose sight and consider instead his displacement of the metaphysical tradition itself. Here we are going in the other direction to consider what his own ‘metaphysics’ is; what his own approach to the nature of reality is. And if the double representation regarding the boundary between language and reality is the *form* of what we saw Derrida call ‘the game of the world’ then the *content* is what he calls, ‘the play of substitutions’ (Derrida, 1976, p.156). Regarding then the subjective human experience of reality, and not merely the objectivity of reality itself, this play of substitutions, which occurs in ‘an infinite chain’ (p.157), impinges on each individual’s

life in a way that is unique to them. In this way the supplement concerns the individual's experience, or lack thereof, of pleasure. As Derrida notes having just cited the part of the *Confessions* that refers to the 'dangerous supplement':

The experience of auto-eroticism is lived in anguish. Masturbation reassures ('soon reassured' [Derrida is reciting Rousseau here]) only through that culpability traditionally attached to the practice, obliging children to assume the fault and to interiorize the threat of castration that always accompanies it. Pleasure is thus lived as the irremediable loss of the vital substance, as exposure to madness and death (pp.150-151).

That is, as the supplement is both the symbol of the ultimate lack of pleasure and convoluted means with which pleasure thus becomes partially satisfied in the context of this lack, it therefore impinges upon each person's life by emphasizing the various ways in which desire becomes satisfied and unsatisfied in each individual case. But this relation of pleasure to its dissatisfaction, given to it by the very same supplement that thus attempts to satisfy it, therefore acts 'as exposure to madness and death'. Indeed, in a generic way this also explains the act of suicide: it is the psyche tortured by displeasure to the degree where death seems more appealing than life. A moment ago we referred to Derrida's designation of Rousseau's 'writing lesson' in its relation to life and death: in this discussion he also refers to Rousseau's 'literary suicide' (p.143) insofar as he places death radically inside life; and does so in the writing of his own life.

Before we conclude, let us consider de Man's influential 'rhetorical reading' of Derrida in *Blindness and Insight*. It is perhaps useful here to recall Derrida's proposition that 'blindness to the supplement is the law'. For in his account of 'Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau', de Man himself *avoids* Derrida's discussion of the supplement in 'That Dangerous Supplement'. Indeed, de Man generally appears to evade the work of concepts; but it is precisely this that, in this particular reading of Derrida, radically misrepresents the latter's thinking. This is an important point because de Man's literary critical form of deconstruction has, to date, more often than not offered the underlying impetus for most interpretations of Derrida. But as Rodolphe Gasché notes in his essay 'Deconstruction as Criticism', de Man actually subjects Derrida's thought to a literary critical criticism: 'Yet to become fruitful for literary criticism, Derrida's work has first to be submitted to a critique by literary criticism itself. That is why "The Rhetoric of Blindness" reproaches Derrida's reading of Rousseau' (in: Gasche, 1994, p.54). This is of course not to say that all the literary

critical work on Derrida is wrong or faulty; but just that it can ignore the underlying philosophical impetus of his work to understand the nature of ‘real life’ and its ‘human experience’. Instead, in deconstructive literary criticism, the first and last point of reference is to the ‘literary text’; and here Derrida’s ‘there is nothing outside of the text’ is understood to be not a statement about the nature of reality. Rather, as Geoffrey Hartman puts it in his essay ‘Looking Back on Paul de Man’, it is a literary critical statement ‘about the difficulty of turning texts inside out’ (Hartman, 1989, p.5). I would argue that Derrida is saying both; and to claim it is one rather than the other is to water down his thought.

In ‘The Rhetoric of Blindness’ de Man argues: ‘Critics’ moments of greatest blindness with regard to their own critical assumptions are also the moment at which they achieve their greatest insight’ (De Man, 1983, p.109). And also that: ‘Derrida’s work is one of the places where the future possibility of literary criticism is being decided, although he is not a literary critic in the professional sense of the term’ (p.111). De Man’s argument is thus centred upon the way in which Derrida’s reading of Rousseau – that is, his reading of the ‘Essay on the Origin of Languages’ – and indeed his method of reading more generally, concentrates on picking out marginal ‘blind spots’ within a text so as to use them against the dominant part of a text. As Derrida puts it towards the end of ‘That Dangerous Supplement’: ‘The concept of the supplement is a sort of blind spot in Rousseau’s text, the not-seen that opens and limits visibility’ (Derrida, 1976, p.163). That is, the supplement not only designates the structure of the play of substitutions in the game of the world, but also is tied to Rousseau’s text, and also to Derrida’s text as it is the latter who gives it the conceptual force. So the metaphor of blindness is already at work in *Of Grammatology*, but in a double-bind manner: on the one hand it occurs in relation to the difficult conceptualization of the supplement; on the other hand it occurs as part of the deconstructive method of critical reading. In ‘The Rhetoric of Blindness’, de Man implicitly disregards the first moment, and more explicitly adjusts the second so as to argue that Derrida’s critical insight regarding blindness also contains an uncritical blindness regarding the very juxtaposition of blindness and insight, a blindness which applies itself to his reading of Rousseau.

In order to point to this juxtaposition, de Man does not read Rousseau through Derrida’s reading of Rousseau, but rather offers his own reading of Rousseau in order to contrast it with Derrida’s. As he puts it: ‘we have to reverse the interpretative process

and start reading Derrida in terms of Rousseau rather than vice versa' (De Man, 1983, p.123). To do this involves not so much comparing and contrasting their respective philosophies, but instead, reading them as literature. Indeed, one of Derrida's main flaws in his reading of Rousseau, for de Man, is having read Rousseau's text qua philosophy rather than qua literature: Derrida, 'remains unwilling or unable to read Rousseau as literature' (p.138). To read Rousseau as literature rather than philosophy, and *mutatis mutandis* to read Derrida as literature rather than philosophy, involves being attentive to their different 'rhetorical modes': 'Our concern is not so much with the degree of blindness in Rousseau or in Derrida as with the rhetorical mode of their respective discourses' (p.122). This in turn involves locating cognition not in the subject but rather in literary language: 'it follows from the rhetorical nature of literary language that the cognitive function resides in the language and not in the subject' (p.137). Which has two consequences: the first is the symbolic 'death of the subject' (p.113). The second requires a perspective in which the two figures at hand, Rousseau and Derrida, are not making philosophical or epistemological statements about the nature of reality, but are instead telling different stories or different versions of the same story: 'unlike epistemological statements, stories do not cancel each other out, and we should not let Derrida's version replace Rousseau's own story of his involvement with language' (p.119).

Within this schematic of rhetorical reading, in which the main theme is attentiveness to the respective rhetorical modes of Rousseau and Derrida, there occurs in de Man a watered down version of what the supplement actually is. De Man says: 'Derrida's main theme, the recurrent repression, in Western thought, of all written forms of language, their degradation to a mere adjunct or supplement to the live presence of the spoken word, finds a classical example in the works of Levi-Strauss' (De Man, 1983, p.115). Here the supplement is merely a metaphor for the way in which writing in the narrow sense of the term has substituted 'the live presence of the spoken word'. That is, there is no sense of the supplement as occurring on a similar conceptual level as that of arche-writing, thereby doing its own conceptual work. For de Man, the supplement merely does rhetorical work; and as such, it finds its point of application only in literary texts, not in real life. But for Derrida, the chain of supplements is the reason why the world we inhabit, and our experience of it, is such a complicated place; and why the attempt to satisfy our own individual desires within this world can become so convoluted and hyperbolic. It becomes not a matter of *transposing* the location of

cognition from the subject to language; but rather of saying that, on the boundary between language and reality, the infinite chain of supplements *juxtaposes* cognition with the unknowable. For de Man, deconstruction merely becomes about attentiveness to rhetorical modes, and since Rousseau's text is highly attentive to its own rhetorical mode, it has no blind spots: 'Rousseau's text has no blind spots: it accounts at all moments for its own rhetorical mode' (p.139). Hence: 'There is no need to deconstruct Rousseau' (p.139). De Man says that Derrida failed to read Rousseau as literature; but de Man himself failed to read Derrida as philosophy. De Man's blindness to the *conceptual mode* of the supplement (in particular with regards to the satisfaction of desire), and indeed of writing itself as arche-writing, is the ultimate blind spot in his own misreading of Derrida.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude here by bringing the discussion back to Rousseau's *Confessions*, and to some of the problems it throws up in the juxtaposition of self with other and life with death. Rousseau was well aware that, in confessing his own inner feelings and thoughts, he is not merely confessing himself but is also confessing others as well: 'showing myself in my true character' is 'impossible without also showing others as they were' (Rousseau, 1996, p.505). As France notes: 'He himself said on several occasions that in confessing himself he was bound to confess others, to reveal their failings as well as his own' (France, 1987, p.28). Indeed, the fact that confession, particularly public confession in a written autobiographical form, does by necessity involve this revealing of other's failures from one's own perspective; a placing in the public arena in an autobiographical work of the *negative* characteristics of others; this is exactly what envelopes the very written fabric of an autobiography within the confines of a potentially morally judgemental mode of communication. It is for precisely this reason that Derrida *hesitates* to confess in 'Circumfession': because, 'one always confesses the other' (Derrida, 1993, p.147). That is, on the one hand Rousseau confesses the other so easily; but on the other hand Derrida's argument is that one should not do this so easily because there is the moral responsibility not to cause harm to the other – the moral responsibility that Rousseau himself articulates in his own adjustment of the golden rule.

It is in the context of such considerations that Derrida, in 'Circumfession', posits the following undecidable principle of confession: 'to leave suspended the question of

knowing if one is finally asking pardon in writing for some earlier crime, blasphemy, or perjury or if one is asking for pardon for the crime, blasphemy, or perjury in which consists presently the act of writing' (Derrida, 1993, p.46). Of course, the immediate reference of Derrida's undecidable principle of confession concerns the actually written autobiography (and so, some might say, to the literary act). But it is not a far stretch to hypothesize that the principle operates in everyday life and experience, and indeed that it is here that it takes its most poignant point of application: i.e., in autobiography as a concept with which we take as an aid to understanding the dynamics and psychodynamics of living everyday life with others. Take the example of masturbation in the problem of desire. On the one hand, autobiography as '*the articulation of desire*' (Derrida, 1976, p.163) represents the articulation of one's own inner feelings. But on the other hand, to confess a desire for sex, for lust or love, is to confess a desire for the other, where one's own inner feelings can only be satisfied by the exterior other in which one requires the other's decisive consent; which of course one might not receive, so instead one gives it to oneself via masturbation. The moral problems posed here can be extremely delicate: ranging from violence as direct as rape to violence as indirect as leading someone on – which thus requires pity for the respective victims (the raped and the duped).

This is of course not to say that Derrida's concept of autobiography solves the moral psychological problems posed by the human need for love, and the subtle modes of articulation and communication they presuppose. Rather, it is to inscribe these problems into the more general theory of subjectivity from which they have traditionally been absent. Indeed, the problem posed by autobiography, as life's desires, for the theory of subjectivity hinges on the following double-bind: on the one hand, desires are felt in such a way that is radically interior to oneself; but on the other hand, their point of application is more often than not toward something or someone radically exterior to oneself, and is therefore at least partially outside of one's own autonomous control. For example, this is the case even in the auto-erotic experience of masturbation, in which the radically interior fantasy which provides the underlying impetus to masturbate will most likely be not of one's own masturbating self, but rather of some radically exterior hetero-erotic sexual experience. But not only is a deconstructive moral psychology inscribed within the theory of subjectivity regarding the potentially violent relation of self and other, there is also a deconstructive metapsychology concerning the ultimately temporal relation of life to death. For

Derrida, life is not merely about deciding on a desired goal and methodically working towards it; it is also about the unpredictable spontaneity of chance events that supplement this process. Through this supplement, autobiography thus inscribes the concept of *lifetime* within the theory of subjectivity.

Within this latter concept is the formation and transformation of people's very personalities. France says that the *Confessions* articulate, 'the inner development of an individual, the formation of a personality' (France, 1987, p.109). Dent echoes this: 'The exaltation of the drama of the formation and unfolding of personality rather than a narrative of achievements was to be, and surely still is, hugely influential in the development of Romantic autobiography' (Dent, 2005, p.197). The 'formation of personality' is an economical way to put it; perhaps too economical for someone of Derrida's subtlety. But when the 'bio' of autobiography refers to biology as much as it does to biography, and Derrida is very much a thinker of the body as of the mind, there becomes the need to account for the different stages of development of human life: not merely qua each particular narrative but also qua universal physical and psychical needs at each particular stage. Although Derrida's thought does not do this directly, for instance as directly as Rousseau's *Émile*, it does conceptualize autobiography to the degree where these concerns become unavoidable in the more general deconstructive theory of subjectivity. So much of Derrida's thought involves a philosophy of time, in which, as David Wood notes in *The Deconstruction of Time*, the idea of time in acts, 'as a semiautonomous principle of the real' (Wood, 2001, p.x). He continues: 'With this principle, our thinking about time can span human institutions, *psychic development*, and natural processes' (p.x; my emphasis). Insofar as Derrida's autobiographical thought is heterothanatographical, it not only presupposes his philosophy of time, but it also inscribes it into the idea of the psychic development of human experience (and of course nonhuman experience). The temporality of experience becomes radically connected to the idea of the lifetime of existence, which is the underlying condition of any sort of 'formation of personality'.

In conclusion, in many respects Rousseau's *Confessions* offer a sort of practical example of *Émile's* principle. They adhere to the same structure of the 'formation of personality'; the same principle of individual development within a family structure; a structure which is itself broadly influenced by the political culture in which the family is inscribed. For Rousseau, *Émile's* principle of 'learning to live' involved a radical retreat from politics while acknowledging that this retreat itself occurred in broader

political circumstances that, on the one hand the individual themselves is not responsible for, but on the other hand is nonetheless is in a relation of dependence. As *The Confessions* articulates: ‘my view had become greatly enlarged by the historical study of morals. I had come to see that everything was radically connected with politics, and that, however one proceeded, no people would be other than the nature of its government made it’ (Rousseau, 1996, p.393). In both *Émile* and *Confessions* this retreat was symbolized by the virtue of country-life as distinct from the vices of town-life – for in the latter we are more prone to civil society’s uncivil manners. That is, an interest in psychological health paradoxically involves both proximity to and distance from political concerns – such is the simultaneous implication and incommensurability of public life and private life, of work and life. Although it has different effects in Derrida’s work compared with Rousseau’s, this paradox remains an important feature of his autobiographical thought; and the next chapter will touch upon it further.

Learning to Live: Marx & Derrida

Introduction

Derrida's philosophical thought moves in two directions. First of all it involves a critique of the philosophical tradition, by which it utilizes the discipline of literature as representative of those features characteristically excluded by philosophy (style, fiction, rhetoric, narrative, humour, etc). And second, in his readings of other philosophers, Derrida sets the groundwork from which future research in deconstructive philosophy can be done in such a way that is more careful and sensitive regarding the problems of metaphysical prejudice.

In *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Rodolphe Gasché articulated Derrida's arguments with respect to the philosophical tradition, maintaining a critical distance from the appropriation of Derrida in literary criticism. In *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*, what Gasché calls 'a companion volume of sorts to that earlier book' (Gasché, 1994, p.2), he articulates Derrida's philosophy of difference (otherness, singularity, etc) more specifically. The opening essay in *Inventions of Difference*, 'Deconstruction as Criticism', also addresses the problem of deconstructive literary criticism. In one argument Gasché makes he says: 'most of what appears as deconstructive criticism contributes more to the prolonging the impasses of traditional academic criticism than to opening up new areas of research' (p.23). In the point noted above regarding the two directions of Derrida's philosophical thought, *The Tain of the Mirror* applies most directly to the first direction, and *Inventions of Difference* sets the foundations for the second direction, of 'opening up new areas of research'. Although there is of course a third direction, of that provided in the field of deconstructive literary criticism, Gasché's point here regards the opening up of new areas of *philosophical* research that is inspired by Derrida's thought, not literary research; and a further point he makes is that the latter has eclipsed the former. As he puts it in his essay in *Inventions of Difference* called 'The Eclipse of Difference': the appropriation of deconstruction to literature 'contributes to a further stiffening of the classical concept of difference' (p.84) as it is merely concerned with a self-reflexive 'praxis of difference' (p.85) as a way of evading metaphysics. For Gasché, the point, in philosophy at any rate, is rather to consider both the genealogy of the concept of difference and the theoretical implications for the way in which Derrida reworks it.

The present study is thus indebted to Gasché's proposal for the foundation of a deconstructive philosophy. But in this chapter I would like to go a step further than Gasché and make the following argument: that insofar as Derrida's thought requires research into new areas of deconstructive philosophy it thus entails a particular approach to *philosophical criticism*. While, in practice, as philosophical criticism deconstruction could take many forms, in principle, because its first point of displacement is of the metaphysics of presence and self-presence, its first form would therefore be the critique of the metaphysics of objectivity and subjectivity that is at work in any particular theoretical doctrine. That is, deconstruction puts into question both the worldview underlying the nature of the world, and the psychology underlying the nature of the psyche, that is at work in any one particular philosophical position. Indeed, particularly regarding the latter of these two modes of questioning (as this concerns us more here), Derrida's autobiographical thought shows a theory of subjectivity at work as part of the underlying basis of, for example, political and economic doctrines. As such, he puts such doctrines into question not necessarily by taking them on their own politico-economic terms, but rather by questioning them at their problematic foundations regarding their metaphysics of subjectivity. This is what is meant by deconstructive philosophical criticism: to put into question the underlying foundations of a specific mode of thought, in particular by addressing the assumptions of its implicit theory of subjectivity (and/or objectivity). In this chapter, I will consider Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* as an exemplary case in point.

Initially, *Spectres of Marx* might seem like an unusual or counterintuitive book for the consideration of Derrida's autobiographical thought. This is particularly so since Marx is a politico-economic thinker, and the tradition of orthodox Marxist interpretation reads him as such. But consider the subtitle of *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Two politico-economic designations sandwich a psychological term (work of mourning), thereby making this psychological term their intermediary; the proxy they must pass through. Indeed, for a book on Marx, Derrida's 'Exordium' sets the opening stage in a strange and surprising manner:

Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally*.

Finally but why?

To learn to live: a strange watchword. Who would learn? From whom? To teach to live, but to whom? Will we ever know? Will we ever know how to live and first of all what 'to learn to live' means? And why 'finally'? (Derrida, 2006, p.xvi).

This opening is surprising particularly for more orthodox intellectual Marxists, as is evident from most of the responses to *Spectres of Marx* in the edited collection entitled *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx* (Sprinker, 1999) – for they seem to have overlooked this concept of *learning to live* that Derrida proffers to Marxist readership. Of course, it comes from Rousseau's *Émile*, as we saw in the previous chapter; and Derrida here refers to it as a 'watchword' for *Spectres of Marx* in general. Blindness to the watchword is the law. Through the concept, or rather watchword, of learning to live, *Spectres of Marx* is organized according to Derrida's autobiographical thought. And with it, he puts to Marx the problem of political-economy as also a problem of the philosophy of life – something he was already propounding anyway, as Freud notes in 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' (in: Freud, 1964). As Douglas Adams puts it in *Mostly Harmless*: 'You live and learn. At any rate, you live' (Adams, 2009, p.150). If we do not necessarily live and learn, then we must at least learn to live before it is too late (hence the 'finally' in Derrida's watchword).

The concept, or perhaps watchword, of work of mourning is one that has already been considered in the introduction to the present study with respect to Derrida's *Memoires for Paul de Man*. As we saw, this latter book also articulated Derrida's concept of *plus d'un*, a concept that also opens the first chapter of *Spectres of Marx*:

The spectres of Marx. Why this plural? Would there be more than one of them? *Plus d'un* [More than one / No more one]: this can mean a crowd, if not masses, the horde, or society, or else some population of ghosts with or without a people, some community with or without a leader – but also the *less than one* of pure and simple dispersion. Without any possible gathering together (Derrida, 2006, p.1-2).

For Derrida, *plus d'un* paradoxically means both more than one and less than one: more than one in the sense of 'a crowd, if not masses, the horde, or society'; less than one in the sense of 'pure and simple dispersion'. That is, a lack of oneness and unification within the very same crowd that refers to the more than one: 'without any possible gathering together'. A unified crowd would know how to live, and learning would be a relatively rational affair prescribed by the particular mode of unification. But a dispersed crowd involves much more complicated dynamics, and learning to live *en masse* in infinite sites of such isolated dissemination requires a more subtle understanding of what it is to learn to live at all.

It is this problem that Derrida takes to his reading of Marx which will be considered here. At stake is the underlying psychology behind Marx's very identification of the proletariat as the universal class. In teasing out the problems of this underlying psychology it will be demonstrated that Derrida's thought is a form of philosophical criticism, in particular one that addresses the problems of an underlying theory of human subjectivity. At the same time, via the autobiographical watchword of learning to live, he also sets the foundations with which the theory of subjectivity can be rethought. But first, let us consider Marx's thought as it is relevant to *Spectres of Marx*.

Learning to Live

As is well-known, Marx's thought occurs as a critical response primarily to three intellectual contexts of the Enlightenment: British liberal capitalist thought (Smith, Ricardo, Mill); French utopian socialist thought (Proudhon, Saint-Simon, Fourier); and German speculative philosophy, in the form of Hegel and the Young Hegelians (Feuerbach, Bauer, Stirner). For the liberal capitalists, Marx's main criticism is that they have misrepresented the economic structure of the historical present, based on profit, as the natural and eternal way of things; and so they exclude from the idea of the wealth of nations the class of workers, and so the majority of the population, who actually produce this wealth. For the utopian socialists, his main criticism is that their ideas are not grounded in historical reality: i.e., they remain influenced by what is judged to be a naive Rousseauian mythological narrative of the relation between the state of nature and civil society, rather than ground their ideas in the historical realities of civil society itself. And for the speculative philosophers, his main criticism is that their underlying religious worldview covertly deifies the historically present mode of political structure as the end of history, making them politically conservative much like the liberal capitalists. And yet, despite the theologies, there was also a unique blend of dialectical and teleological method to Hegelian philosophy which gave it its power, and which was a great influence on Marx's early intellectual development. Since what concerns us here in our account of Marx is more the philosophical side of his thought, we will draw on his two early works, written but unpublished before *The Communist Manifesto*, which address Hegelian philosophy: *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* and the first volume of *The German Ideology*.

Marx's *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* provides a materialist critique of Hegel's dialectical idealism. Although the choice of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is

such that Marx seeks to address Hegel's political philosophy, in the course of his critique he argues that Hegel's real interest is not actually political philosophy but rather is logic: 'Hegel's true interest is not the philosophy of right but logic. The philosophical task is not the embodiment of thought in determinate political realities, but the evaporation of these realities in abstract thought' (Marx, 1972, p.18). From the outset, Marx's critique of Hegelian philosophy is thus guided by the opposition between the abstract and the real. In the course of his analysis Marx shows how Hegel's political trinity in *Philosophy of Right* between family, civil society, and state, is guided by an underlying theological logic which reduces the real conditions of life to speculative abstractions. Consider this in relation to the view of human history given in Hegel's prior *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here Hegel speculated that the nature of human history is saturated with the philosophical dialectic (as a logical strategy of negation and ascension: i.e., to negate a proposition with a counterproposition, then to ascend the juxtaposition with a new proposition and counterproposition, in principle until the lofty heights of truth are reached). As one self-conscious human comes into contact with other self-conscious humans, they perceive the other as a threat to their individual autonomy, and thus as a threat to their very existence; which thus ensues in, 'a life-and-death struggle' (Hegel, 1977, p.114). In this struggle, famously mythologized as Hegel's 'master-slave dialectic', there is a conscious recognition on the part of the weaker person that the other is stronger; and, not wanting to die, the weaker accepts a state of servitude in order to survive.

So for Hegel, the real historical past is but the history of varying power relations of master and slave. But he also argues that real history is in effect reducible to the history of philosophy, in particular to philosophy's idea of the human soul or spirit, which gives real history its *purpose*. The purpose or teleological structure of history – that is of future-history – becomes the realization of the human spirit, which brings an end to the master-slave dialectic, and thus an end to history itself. History ends with the realization of absolute knowledge, or the absolute idea, in which the historical power relations that have developed between humans become equalized and ascended. The dialectical logic underlying Hegel's account here is dependent on the construction of *middle terms* that mediate between two opposites which negate each other. For instance, in the opposition between master and slave Hegel points towards, 'the negative significance of fear' (Hegel, 1977, p.118), which is at work mediating the relationship. Hence, in *Philosophy of Right*, the state becomes the mediator between the

family and civil society (i.e., other families) (Hegel, 2008). But for Marx, underlying Hegel's account is the more pervasive phenomenology of spirit in which the actual empirical realities of family, civil society, and state, are themselves reduced to the mind's idea: 'The Idea is given the status of a subject, and the actual relationship of family and civil society to the state is conceived to be its inner imaginary activity' (Marx, 1972, p.8). He continues: 'if the idea is made subject, then the real subjects – civil society, family, circumstances, caprice, etc. – become unreal' (p.8). Because in Hegel's thought empirical reality is so saturated with spiritual substance, from Marx's materialist perspective it is the spiritual substance which is falsely understood to be real, and not the empirical reality itself.

The main body of Marx's *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* offers a very dense reading of a very abstract thinker. In contrast, the more famous introduction to the book, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"', is much more readable. In the main body, Marx says, 'it is not religion that creates man but man who creates religion' (Marx, 1972, p.30), in an attempt to critically demonstrate the underlying religious nature of Hegel's speculative philosophy, and so of speculative philosophy itself. In his introduction, the purpose is to counteract religion more generally. The first sentence says: 'the critique of religion is the prerequisite of every critique' (p.131). Marx then echoes the statement from the main body: 'The foundation of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion, religion does not make man' (p.131). For Marx, those who think that religion, or God, has made man, are deluded about their condition of existence as if they were on drugs, 'opium' to be more precise:

The wretchedness of religion is at once an expression of and a protest against real wretchedness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their true happiness. The call to abandon illusions about their condition is the call to abandon a condition which requires illusions. Thus, the critique of religion is the critique in embryo of the vale of tears of which religion is the halo (p.131).

The statement here that religion 'is the opium of the people' is of course the most famous citation from this extract. But in the extract as a whole there is a moral sentiment underlying what Marx is saying: viz., that we need to look at the real living conditions of people in order to see how they actually are unhappy (so that we can do something practical about it), and that consequently we must not cover over these real

conditions with the speculative illusions of the actual existence of spiritual substances (thereby hiding *a priori* any sort of practical solution to real problems).

In this atheistic scheme of things, it becomes the 'task of history' to undermine theology's sacredness. Here, philosophy is allied to history but subservient to it. And once history has done its task, the 'task of philosophy' becomes to highlight how we alienate ourselves in the secular world in which we inhabit, in order to critique the problem of 'human self-alienation' and proffer practical solutions to it:

It is the task of history, therefore, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world. It is above all the task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, to unmask human self-alienation in its secular forms, once its sacred form has been unmasked. Thus, the critique of heaven is transformed into the critique of the earth, the critique of religion into the critique of law, the critique of theology into the critique of politics (Marx, 1972, p.132).

Of course, Marx himself proffers his own practical solution to the problem of human self-alienation in his own 'critique of politics'. The introduction alludes to it in the designation of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as the politico-economic structure of modern capitalism, in which the proletariat become the universal class of human emancipation: 'Just as philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapons in philosophy' (p.142). For Marx, philosophy is ultimately to be negated as it signifies passive contemplation rather than proactive action; thinking life rather than actually living life. Philosophy signifies individual thought rather than social action, and as he says in the main body: 'the nature of the particular person is not his beard, his blood, his abstract *Physis*, but rather his social quality' (p.22). But for Marx, philosophy cannot be negated until it is *actualized*, and since the proletariat find their spiritual weapons in philosophy, they hold the key to the actualization of philosophy. But just as they hold the key to philosophy's actualization, the latter in turn finds its purpose in 'the abolition of the proletariat': 'Philosophy cannot be actualized without the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot be abolished without the actualization of philosophy' (p.142). Hence, philosophy finds its true purpose in the historic task of the proletariat.

In *The German Ideology*, which Marx co-authors with Engels, this historic task becomes much clearer in the context of their outline of *historical materialism*, in the first part of the first volume. The first volume of *The German Ideology*, the main bulk of the book as a whole, contains a critical analysis of the group of their contemporary

German philosophers they call the ‘Young Hegelians’ (Marx and Engels, 1998, p.35). Taking especial interest here is Feuerbach (in the first part); Bauer (in a short second part); and Stirner (in an extended third part, which offers a lengthy analysis of *The Ego and His Own* (Stirner, 2005)). For Marx and Engels, the problem with the Young Hegelians is much like the problem with Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: i.e., an abstraction from historical reality. They say: ‘It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to enquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the connection of their criticism with their own material surroundings’ (Marx and Engels, 1998, p.36). In order to acquire a sense of what they mean when they refer to ‘material surroundings’, they write what might be called a history of the present: i.e., a history that is directed towards the present time; written in such a way so as to designate the real-world problems of the present time; so as to make an effective intervention in present social action; thereby transforming the present conditions of existence into improved conditions in the short-term future, and in principle lasting into the long-term future. In order to write this they distinguish between, on the one hand the material conditions of life that are ‘already existing’ (p.37) for individuals, and on the other hand material conditions of life that are ‘produced by their activity’ (p.37). Economic production thus offers the base of historical materialism.

Having made this designation, Marx and Engels then interpret European history as having gone through three stages of economic production (tribal, ancient, and feudal), in order to allude to the historical conditions of the two modern ones (capitalism and communism). Modern German ideology, in the hands of the Young Hegelians, presents ideas of human consciousness abstracted from the real living conditions in order to present that consciousness as the very source of those living conditions. But for Marx and Engels, in an apparently existential reversal of this false ideology, it is life itself that becomes the source of consciousness:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of

their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness (Marx and Engels, 1998, p.42).

Of course, the famous part of this extract is the final sentence, which by itself would designate an *existentialist* philosophy. But in the context of the extract, we can see that it in fact refers to the *materialist* relationship between the economic base and the intellectual superstructure of a society. *The German Ideology* is concerned with exorcising ghosts, in particular in the reading of Stirner, who in the second part is quoted as saying: 'truth is a ghost' (Stirner, in: Marx and Engels, 1998, p.110). And here, we see that, for Marx and Engels, ideology has a spectral nature: 'The phantoms formed in the brains of men'. The problem they pose is that these phantoms are but products of a mode of thinking indicative of the privileged few of any one particular form of society. As such, they are false products, as they speak to the privileged few (bourgeois) and not to the underprivileged many (proletariat) of modern capitalist society.

So for the proletariat, these ghosts do not exist. The division between the economic base and the intellectual superstructure thus involves a view of the division of labour as, in the first instance, a division between material and mental labour: 'Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears' (Marx and Engels, 1998, p.50). For Marx and Engels, history, as the history of particular modes of division of labour, becomes understood as the history of opposing economic classes. Just as it was the historic destiny of the bourgeois to overthrow the feudal lords (in the transformation from feudalism to capitalism), Marx and Engels identify it to be the historic destiny of the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie (in the transformation from capitalism to communism) – and where history finds its purpose and end. The problem with modern capitalism is its ideology concerning the nature of the way in which private property is acquired. Marx and Engels argue that capitalism is endowed with the modern German ideology of the speculative philosophers in which human self-consciousness is understood to pre-exist the circumstances of actual existence. For capitalism fosters, 'the illusion that private property is based solely on the private will' (p.100). But as Marx and Engels had already argued, 'circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances' (p.62). As such, they emphasize how capitalism is already in a process of transition

towards communism; and just as the bourgeoisie revolutionized society from feudalism, so must the proletariat revolutionize society from capitalism.

In a knowing irony, *The German Ideology* also stresses the much more complex nature of modern capitalist economics, as it is no longer constrained to one nation. At the same time that Marx and Engels stress ‘the connection of German philosophy with German reality’, they also consider the way in which capitalist consumerism is based on the satisfaction of material needs. But this process becomes hyperbolic, as it invents new needs for which new means of satisfaction, new techniques and technologies, must also be invented: ‘the satisfaction of the first need, the action of satisfying and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired, leads to new needs; and this creation of new needs is the first historical act’ (Marx and Engels, 1998, p.48). This satisfaction of material needs, the creation of new material needs to satisfy, thus involves the creation of a *world market*; as foreign products are imported and exported from and to foreign countries. The proletariat’s labour-power is born in the context of the historical formation of this world market, meaning that history itself is no longer merely of individual nations like Germany or continents like Europe, but is truly becoming *world history*:

Moreover, the mass of workers who are *nothing but workers* – labour-power on a mass scale cut off from capital or from even a limited satisfaction [of their needs] and, hence, as a result of competition their utterly precarious position, the no longer merely temporary loss of work as a secure source of life – presupposes the *world market*. The proletariat can thus only exist *world-historically*, just as communism, its activity can only have a ‘world-historical’ existence. World-historical existence of individuals, i.e., existence of individuals which is directly linked up with world history (p.57).

German speculative philosophy, which is based on the Hegelian concept of the ‘world spirit’ (p.59), is compared with the modern capitalist invention of the ‘*world market*’ (p.59). Indeed, the analogy can be carried further, as the world market is based on the invention of the *stock market*; and so to ‘speculative buying’ (p.79); to ‘speculation in stocks and shares’ (p.80); and so to the so-called ‘public’ nature of the private sector, when a business becomes a *corporation* by allowing a share of it to be bought and sold in the stock market (Dasgupta, 2007, p.114). Of course, in such a scenario, multinational corporations become more powerful than national democratic governments – and in ways that are only just beginning to be analysed by members of the more recent *global justice movement*; where right-wing governments are themselves

shown to consent to, rather than challenge, the violent effects of the economic colonialism of the multinationals (e.g., Monbiot, 2001; Klein, 2007).

But what of the historic destiny of the proletariat? *The German Ideology* alludes to this, without necessarily concentrating on it – after the first part Marx and Engels become more interested in demystifying Stirner’s spectre. In the first part itself, they allude to what they consider to be an historical fact: viz., not only that the relation between bourgeoisie and proletariat is the relation between the *capitalist class* and the *working class*; but that it is also the relation between the ‘ruling class’ and the ‘revolutionary class’ (Marx and Engels, 1998, p.68). This transposition from the proletariat qua *working class* to the proletariat qua *revolutionary class* becomes the basis of the argument of *The Communist Manifesto*: i.e., in the designation of the proletariat as a *politically active* entity. And therefore, not merely an entity with a working-class identity (i.e., propertyless), but with the means to transform or revolutionize their identity from non-owner to owner – although not in the capitalist sense of an individual owner. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels remind us that, in modern capitalism, each individual worker has the potential to transform their own individual identity from that of worker to capitalist: ‘it now enables these individuals to raise themselves into the ruling class’ (p.69). But as Marx says in *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’*, this only makes the individual partisan to capitalism’s underlying individualism: ‘Present civil society is the accomplished principle of individualism: individual existence is the final end, while activity, labour, content, means, etc., are merely means’ (Marx, 1972, p.81). In contrast to capitalism’s individualism Marx and Engels emphasize the virtue of communism’s socialism: the individual human as primarily a social animal, in which socialist economic structures of *common ownership* are our ultimate politico-economic destiny in our societal communities.

The pithy demonstration of capitalism’s internal contradictions in *The Communist Manifesto* explains the reason why this has become historically necessary. Although its own structure of the world market economy has become hyperbolic and complex in its speculative nature, modern capitalism has ironically, ‘simplified the class antagonisms’ (Marx and Engels, 2002, p.220). This simplification, into bourgeoisie and proletariat, has led to the *exploitation* of the latter by the former: ‘naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation’ (p.222). The modern democratic state has become the administrator of modern capitalism: ‘The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’ (p.221). The

bourgeoisie itself exists only by producing a state of constant unrest by continually *reinventing the technologies* underlying its economy, the ‘instruments of production’: ‘The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and with them the whole relations of society’ (p.222). This leads to *overproduction*: to ‘the epidemic of overproduction’ (p.226). The proletariat are thus ‘enslaved by the machine’ (p.227); enslaved by, for example, the newly invented factory machines. For Marx and Engels, this means that, ironically, ‘there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce’ (p.226). For the *ownership* of the means of subsistence is in the hands of *the few* rather than in the hands of *the many*: the bourgeoisie ‘has concentrated property in a few hands’ (p.224). The proletariat are almost powerless in such circumstances, competing with each other for wage labour: ‘the condition for capital is wage labour. Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers’ (p.233).

In such circumstances, what are the proletariat to do? In Lenin’s question: ‘What Is to Be Done?’ (in: Lenin, 1987). The solution: ‘Working men of all countries, unite!’ (Marx and Engels, 2002, p.258). The proletariat must form into communist parties, ‘working-class parties’ (p.234), so as to both unify their identity and become one political voice for change. The change in question: ‘Abolition of private property’ (p.235). But of course, this does not refer to, ‘personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man’s own labour’ (p.235); i.e., private property understood in the sense of the objects each *individual* utilizes in everyday life. Instead, it refers first of all to an abolition of the capitalist *system* in which the owners of the buildings and tools that form the means of production (e.g., factories and factory machines) are not the ones who use these means for their own labour:

We by no means intend to abolish this personal appropriation of the products of labour, an appropriation that is made for the maintenance and reproduction of human life, and that leaves no surplus wherewith to command the labour of others. All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the rule class requires it (p.236).

And secondly, it refers to replacing the capitalist system with a communist system of common ownership of the means of production, in which the workers who actually use these means to produce goods are simultaneously the owners of these means: ‘You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing

society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths' (p.237). For Marx and Engels, common ownership is therefore fairer, and so is a more just way of organizing the economic base of society. The ghost of communism haunts capitalism: 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism' (p.218).

Let us now consider Marx in relation to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*. The interpretation of Derrida given here is distinct from the prevalent ones in the field. The interpretation given here emphasizes the autobiographical element in *Spectres of Marx*, arguing that through this element this book operates a philosophical criticism of Marx, in particular with respect to his underlying theory of subjectivity. This philosophical criticism takes effect in the very identification of the proletariat in the prescription of their historic task. But before I turn to my own interpretation of Derrida in more detail I will briefly consider some of the others in the field. Four in total, coming from different perspectives: 'post-Marxism' (Simon Critchley), 'literary theory' (Peggy Kamuf), 'negative theology' (John D. Caputo), and 'radical atheism' (Martin Hägglund). The labels here given to each interpretation are partly in order to distinguish them from one another, partly for brevity's sake, partly in order to capture something distinctive within each one, and therefore, hopefully, partly accurate. It is hoped that, in highlighting this diversity of scholarship, it will show how *Spectres of Marx* is one of those books by Derrida, like many others, which defies a singular interpretation as a result of its polytechnic concerns. For example, this can range from Marx's critique of religion, to the problem of Marxist tradition (both intellectual and historical) and what we inherit from it, to the critique of the state of the contemporary capitalist world, to literary criticism, to the problems of class identity and the theory of identity it presupposes.

In his essay, 'The Hypothesis, the Context, the Messianic, the Political, the Economic, the Technological: On Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*', in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas, & Contemporary French Thought*, Simon Critchley considers Derrida's strategy of double reading regarding the notion of spectre: 'Derrida focuses this double gesture in the ambivalent usage of a specific word by the author he is considering, in this case *Spectre, Gespenst*' (Critchley, 1999b, p.145). The six words that form long title of Critchley's essay comprise the title of the six separate sections of the essay itself. He also picks up on Derrida's neologism of 'hauntology', where he usefully says: 'One of the crucial distinctions in SdM turns, characteristically for Derrida, on a homonym, namely the difference between *ontologie* and *hauntologie*,

a difference that can only be marked grammatologically in writing' (p.146). With the consequence that: '*hauntologie* is the condition of possibility of *ontologie*' (p.147). Indeed, via Critchley's explanation, the similarity of *hauntology* to Derrida's founding neologism of *différance* is uncanny. All of this useful classification occurs in the first section, 'Hypothesis'. More generally, however, Critchley's essay, particularly in the latter two-thirds, is more concerned with the political implications that arise from *Specters of Marx*; implications which are broadly positioned in the context of post-Marxist thought – that is, in the context of Laclau's and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). For example, Critchley alludes to the way in which the word 'hegemony' is used by Derrida in *Spectres of Marx*: 'In SdM, Derrida indeed speaks of hegemony, using the word – which is, to my knowledge, relatively new to his vocabulary – on at least eight occasions' (p.164). While this is of course a legitimate road to go down, it is not my concern here to get into the political dimensions of 'SdM'.

In her two essays, 'The Ghosts of Critique and Deconstruction' and 'The Haunts of Scholarship', in *Book of Addresses*, Peggy Kamuf begins by alluding to the difficulties of Derrida's *plus d'un*: 'Depending on whether or not one pronounces the "s": *plu(s)/plus*, the expression shifts registers from that of counting by ones to that of counting without number one, or of taking account of the other than one' (Kamuf, 2005, p.219). On the following page, invoking the distinction between 'critique' and 'criticism', she continues by giving what seems like a sort of quarter-apology and three-quarter-apologia for deconstruction as literary criticism instead of philosophical critique (the latter invoking, 'critique in the Kantian sense' (p.220)):

So, although the topic of critique and deconstruction sets up some strict, philosophical questions, I'm going to invoke the altogether looser discourse of criticism. This discourse, however, has at least the advantage of being somewhat more familiar, since it is not confined to the publications or classrooms of formal philosophy but spills over into mass-circulated newspapers, for example in the form of supplemental Sunday "Book Review" sections. Moreover, that deconstruction has been frequently assimilated to the discourse of criticism is something anyone in these broadly defined intellectual circles may easily observe (p.220).

Kamuf seems to think here that deconstruction as literary criticism has advantages over deconstruction as philosophy; but the former is not without its problems. For instance, using the example of 'mass-circulated newspapers' as some sort of justificatory 'advantage' for deconstruction-as-literary-criticism is unfair, because it says just as

much about the underlying economy of these newspapers (i.e., regarding the populism behind what its owners and editors think will make the newspaper sell more) as it does about the ‘discourse of criticism’ itself. Or when she says the advantage of the discourse of criticism is that it is ‘familiar’; familiar to whom? And is all philosophy ‘formal philosophy’?

More generally, the purpose of Kamuf’s ‘The Ghosts of Critique and Deconstruction’ is to examine the way in which Stephen Greenblatt’s ‘new historicist’ essay ‘What Is the History of Literature?’ (in: Greenblatt, 2005), in its reading of Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’, does not address Derrida’s reading of ‘Hamlet’ in *Spectres of Marx* – where Derrida draws in particular on Hamlet’s haunted phrase, ‘The time is out of joint’ (in: Shakespeare, 2001, p.384). The moment of criticism comes by drawing on Derrida’s distinction in *Spectres of Marx* between the *visor effect* and the *helmet effect*, and applying it to Greenblatt by arguing he sees the latter but not the former: ‘Historical criticism, and perhaps especially New Historicism, would appear to see clearly enough the helmet, that is, the chief prosthesis of power, but does not notice the visor’ (Kamuf, 2005, p.234). That is, the helmet, ‘like the visor’, is a symbol of ‘the chief’s authority’ (Derrida, 2006, p.7). But unlike the helmet, the visor has, ‘the supreme insignia of power: to see without being seen’ (p.8). In ‘The Haunts of Scholarship’ Kamuf draws on Rousseau’s *Émile* and, towards the end of the essay, alludes briefly to Derrida’s ‘watchword’ of *learning to live* – although she leaves the connection between them implicit. To this degree it could be seen as partial groundwork for this chapter. She uses the argument of Rousseau’s *Émile*, that reading should be left out of the child’s education until such point, ‘that children will learn naturally to read as soon as they see reading’s usefulness’ (Kamuf, 2005, p.247). In such circumstances, reading will thus become pleasurable to the child. She continues: ‘The pleasure principle only works, however (if it ever really works at all) on the condition of spectrality’ (p.248). It is this spectrality that warrants the brief allusion, towards the end of the essay, to Derrida’s ‘learning to live’ watchword – where Kamuf becomes concerned merely with the grammar of Derrida’s expression rather than its rich conceptual force. As her title suggests, her point is not about life, but rather about literary scholarship. Here I intend to reverse this thematic order of priority so as to discuss life rather than literature.

Finally is the interpretation of *Spectres of Marx* as addressing the problem of religion. This concerns the concept that Derrida develops here of the *messianic without messianism*, which he links to the idea of justice as the undeconstructible condition of

deconstruction, as developed in his essay ‘Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority”’. In Caputo’s *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, this concept of the messianic without messianism is given as further evidence of ‘Derrida’s religion’: ‘this messianic structure goes to the heart of deconstruction, that is, to the heart of Derrida’s religion’ (Caputo, 1997, p.118). In contrast, in Hägglund’s *Radical Atheism*, this concept is given, against Caputo, as further evidence of Derrida’s radical atheism: ‘The same radical atheism can be traced in Derrida’s notion of the messianic without messianism’ (Hägglund, 2008, p.132). However, what this opposition between Caputo and Hägglund amounts to is that, where the former has emphasized the ‘messianic’ part of Derrida’s formulation (here he does not even refer to it as being ‘without messianism’), the latter has instead emphasized the ‘without messianism’: ‘Derrida emphasizes that what he calls the messianic is without messianism and without religion’ (p.132). As was said in the chapter on Augustine discussing these two thinkers, it would appear that a notion of *radical agnosticism* is needed in order to capture what is actually going on in Derrida’s thought on religion – a notion that provokes not only a religious tolerance of other religions, but also a religious tolerance of atheism; as well as, in a fair exchange, an atheistic tolerance of religion itself (i.e., radical atheism as violently intolerant of religion just as organized religions are of heretics). Indeed, once again, it is curious how the notion of agnosticism is not considered by other scholars working in the field: e.g., Critchley refers to *Spectres of Marx* as ‘quasi-atheistic’ (Critchley, 1999, p.160). The passions are too high in this area such that scholars lose perspective: a more disinterested notion of agnosticism is required in order to keep the peace.

So from considering some of the dominant literature in the field, we can get a picture of some of the dominant concepts and themes in *Spectres of Marx*: sophisticated polylingual manoeuvres (around ‘ghost’, and ‘plus d’un’), hauntology, hegemony, visor effect, helmet effect, messianic without messianism, etc. Out of this literature, the ‘watchword’ of learning to live makes a brief appearance in Kamuf’s essay ‘The Haunts of Scholarship’, but does so with a different emphasis than the one I would like to give here. Towards the end of her essay she quotes the opening line from *Spectres of Marx* that we saw earlier: ‘Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally*’. Kamuf’s response is the following:

This *incipit* is a spectral event, neither fictional nor nonfictional, performative, one might say, if that did not imply somewhere a self-knowing self-present first person. The phrase comes, *as it were*, from nowhere, from ‘someone’ who says it; it opens up with a series of pronouns, beginning with the third person indefinite: *quelqu’un*, someone, ‘Someone, you or me...’ Notice that the order of the pronouns is third, second, first, which reverses the ordinally numbered series but preserves, perhaps, the division between the non-personal third and personal first/second pronouns (to recall Benveniste’s distinction) (Kamuf, 2005, p.251).

Kamuf’s interest here is in the first part of the citation, not the second part; that is, the part she quotes as: ‘Someone, you or me...’ This is why it becomes a ‘spectral event’ for Kamuf: because the ‘someone’ who ‘comes forward’ (from where? to where?) is here anonymous, but still has a seemingly positive designation, ‘you or me’. It is a figure that comes forward, a spectral figure that is not easy to make out, that sees us with our being able to see them (note the play of the ‘visor effect’); as if what was actually said – ‘I would like to learn to live finally’ – was heard as an echo from an unknown origin. This is clever analysis from Kamuf. But it is analysis of the rhetorical force of the first part of the citation rather than an analysis of the conceptual force of the second part. Before coming to the conclusion of this chapter, it is this latter analysis that I would like to undertake here. This I will do by concentrating, for the most part, on Derrida’s opening ‘Exordium’ to *Spectres of Marx*. In the conclusion I will then consider the implications of Derrida’s learning to live watchword for his reading of Marx, thereby highlighting his particular mode of philosophical criticism as distinct from literary criticism.

In the opening ‘Exordium’ Derrida connects the watchword of learning to live to the problem of violence: ‘from the lips of a master this watchword would always say something about violence’ (Derrida, 2006, p.xvi). The master, here, is the teacher; the teacher who teaches the student how to learn to live. In this respect, there is, Derrida notes, a moment of address in the watchword through which the information that is taught travels from one destination to another; from one person to another. He suggests that there are three moments of this address: ‘Such an address hesitates, therefore: between address as *experience* (is not learning to live experience itself?), address as *education*, and address as *taming* or *training* [dressage]’ (pp.xvi-xvii). Address as experience because experience always relates to some worldly context with which one becomes familiar; such that one says that one has learned from experience (or not); such that one says that one is experienced (or inexperienced). Address as education because, as one learns from experience in the first moment of address, the process of learning

becomes one of education; in both formal (institutional) contexts and informal (life) contexts. And address as taming or training because, as the process of learning in education is meant to teach some activity or other, the discipline required in learning the activity requires a focus of attention through which one becomes tamed or trained. Indeed, there is an echo of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, here, as the latter's argument involved the suggestion that disciplinary power is a productive form of power of bodies and minds, rather than a destructive form of power. The prison structure, as involving disciplinary power, is in principle guided by the ideal of the reforming or re-education of the prisoners' negative attitudes which got them into prison in the first place (Foucault, 1991).

One can also detect the radical empiricism contained in Derrida's watchword: learning to live as 'experience itself'. But it is a radical empiricism which is connected, on the one hand, to his quasi-transcendental approach to justice, as he puts it in 'Force of law', 'as an experience of the impossible' (Derrida, 2002, p.243); and on the other hand, to death, to the other, and to the spectral structure that death and the other bring to the understanding of life and the self. I will come to the topic of justice in a moment, but let us consider first the way in which Derrida prefaces this with the watchword of learning to live as 'ethics itself'. He says: 'To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death' (Derrida, 2006, p.xvii). A moment later he paradoxically continues:

And yet nothing is more necessary than this wisdom. It is ethics itself: to learn to live – alone, from oneself, by oneself. Life does not know how to live otherwise. And does one ever do anything else but learn to live, alone, from oneself, by oneself? This is, therefore, a strange commitment, both impossible and necessary, for a living being supposed to be alive: 'I would like to learn to live' (p.xvii).

For Derrida, the formulation 'to learn to live' is paradoxical in a quasi-transcendental manner: i.e., 'both impossible and necessary'. It is impossible because, since one is already living life, what is it, then, to learn to live? What is it to learn what one is already doing? The impossibility arises in the premise that we have not learnt to do what we are already doing. That is, we have not learnt to do *properly* what we are already doing; and so to learn to do properly what we are already doing becomes impossibly difficult. To learn to live is to learn to live properly, and this is what saturates it with moral necessity. To learn to live is necessary because it highlights moral necessity: the moral responsibility that it imposes on the individual toward the

other becomes infinite; a responsibility up to and beyond death; both one's own death and the other's death.

On the one hand, this responsibility both comes from the other's address and moves toward the other's address; that is, as the responsibility to do no harm or violence to the other. On the other hand, this responsibility is so radically felt within oneself (or it ought to be, in order for the ethical relation to occur) that it is also almost as if it were self-given. Here we might allude to Derrida's essay 'Passions: An Oblique Offering', in *On the Name*, in which he contrasts his moral thought with Kant's on the relation between duty and desire:

A gesture 'of friendship' or 'of politeness' would be neither friendly nor polite if it were purely and simply to obey a ritual rule. But this duty to eschew the rule of ritualized decorum also demands that one go beyond the very language of duty. One must not be friendly or polite out of duty. We venture such a proposition, without a doubt, against Kant (Derrida, 1995a, p.7).

From this, we can see further, then, why, for Derrida, the moral necessity constitutes a simultaneous impossibility: for to be friendly and polite not out of duty, but instead out of passion or desire, presupposes that one actually *likes* the people to whom one applies one's friendship or politeness. Of course, this might not be the case; and in such circumstances we come across what, in the chapter on Augustine, we saw as the problem of the broken alliance, and so of the already-broken alliance that might require complete severance. Otherwise the friendship in question is in danger of being disingenuous and grounded in false pretences: a pseudo-friendship. To make matters worse, or at any rate more complex, this relation to the other might also presuppose the problem of a third party, another friend or perhaps family member, who is loyal to the person that one oneself dislikes. Within the moral psychological watchword of learning to live is therefore the origin of the problem of friendship and family breakdown: i.e., learning to live as learning to both prevent and cope with such emotional difficulties.

Indeed, then there is of course the enigmatic 'finally': 'Finally what' (Derrida, 2006, p.xvii), Derrida asks (without a question mark, perhaps implying that it would have been a rhetorical question anyway). Within the 'finally' is Derrida's spectral moment. 'Finally' would imply the question: Learning to live to what end; what purpose? A question which invokes death: but, Derrida suggests, not then as an affirmation of either life or death pure and simple, but as what takes place between them:

If it – learning to live – remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death *alone*. What happens between the two, and between all the ‘two’s’ one likes, such as between life and death, can only *maintain itself* with some ghost, can only *talk with or about* some ghost (p.xvii).

Inscribed *a priori* into life, death transposes the life-force (soul or spirit) that the metaphysical tradition has ascribed to the very concept of life with the spectre. In the main body of *Spectres of Marx* Derrida says, near the beginning of the first chapter: ‘the spectre is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other’ (p.5). Later in the book he says, near the beginning of the final chapter: ‘For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-spectre of the spirit without at least an appearance of the flesh, in a space of invisible visibility, like the dis-appearing of an apparition’ (p.157). The ‘finally’ imposes the disjointed temporality of the spectre; the moment of ‘becoming’; of the spectre as the becoming-body of the spirit and the becoming-spirit of the body. The spectre is what takes place between life and death: life is haunted not just by death, but also by the emotional and practical difficulties of life itself.

It might have been noticed that, above, when Derrida invokes learning to live as ‘ethics itself’, this only constitutes one half of the double-bind he proposed. Derrida’s relation to the term ‘ethics’ is much more ambiguous than his relation to the term ‘justice’, which, in ‘Force of Law’ he describes as the undeconstructible condition of deconstruction: ‘The undeconstructibility of justice also makes deconstruction possible, indeed is inseparable from it’ (Derrida, 2002, p.243). This ambiguity is to do with Derrida’s relation to Levinas, who described the ethical relation as the face-to-face relation with the other. Geoffrey Bennington succinctly summarizes the problem in his chapter ‘Deconstruction and Ethics’ in *Interrupting Derrida*: ‘The possibility of the third party (another other, the other’s other) haunting my face-to-face with the other gives the possibility of *justice*’ (Bennington, 2000, p.39). A moment later he continues: ‘Derrida wants to say that this originary presence of the third party haunting the face-to-face with the other may appear to compromise or contaminate the purity of the properly ethical relation’ (p.40). So where the ethical relation involves a dual relation of two people face-to-face; in contrast, for Derrida, justice not only names or identifies the third party in this relation, but identifies it as the essence of the relation itself. This means that the other to whom one relates might not be there in front of us, as he puts it

in his 'Exordium' to *Spectres of Marx*: 'this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*' (Derrida, 2006, p.xviii). And towards the end of the 'Exordium' he says: 'justice carries life beyond present life or its actual being-there, its empirical or ontological actuality: not toward death but toward a *living-on* [sur-vie]' (p.xx).

Learning to live *finally* is therefore learning to survive, or live-on, against a life which throws up so many emotional and practical difficulties; and to do so by causing as minimal harm as possible to others; which is very difficult, perhaps impossible, because it might well have been those very same others who gave me my own difficulties. Having quoted another moment in *Spectres of Marx* where Derrida uses the term 'sur-vie', Critchley says: 'Derrida is obviously seeking to deconstruct the limit between the living and the non-living and show that the seeming priority of life in fact presupposes a *sur-vie* that undermines this priority' (Critchley, 1999, p.152). Indeed, towards the end of the first chapter in *Spectres of Marx* Derrida says: 'the dead can often be more powerful than the living; and this is why to interpret a philosophy as philosophy or ontology of life is never a simple matter' (Derrida, 2006, p.60). Perhaps this is Derrida's own 'writing lesson', as it applies itself to the process of learning to live: that to learn to live is to learn to live *finally*, which presupposes that any philosophy of life must concern itself with death, and so with spectres, and so with a very idea of life as always already living-on or survival *against* life's own difficulties (emotional, practical, etc). Here, before concluding, I would argue against an interpretation such as that given by Hägglund, where Derrida's notion of survival is reserved for a philosophy of radical atheism. And to do this I would like to invoke not only the earlier concept of radical agnosticism, but also of autobiographical agnosticism.

The notion of autobiographical agnosticism I argued for was one which left open the relation to the other's otherness by invoking their singular upbringing and characteristics. People from all walks of life can suffer from life's difficulties. To reserve Derrida's notion of survival for the ideological purposes of 'radical atheism' is therefore, in a way, to disallow the difficult life experiences of the majority of the world's population (given that, so they say, ninety-odd percent of the world's population remain religious in some form; even in today's secular world). To disallow this makes no moral sense, especially in the context of Derrida's notion of justice. Of course, some people suffer more than others from life's difficulties. But here, surely,

the issue is less about religion and atheism and more about prosperity and poverty, about the privileged and the underprivileged – amongst other issues, for emotional difficulties can have more than one cause (e.g., problematic family dynamics). And this invokes ‘a certain spirit’ of Marxism, as Derrida says throughout *Spectres of Marx*, the spirit that he wants to maintain against more orthodox Marxism: ‘the religious also informs [...] that “spirit” of emancipatory Marxism whose injunction we are reaffirming here, however secret and contradictory it appears’ (Derrida, 2006, p.209). On the one hand, Derrida’s thought is, as Hägglund notes, critical of religion; but on the other hand he keeps something of religion in reserve as a tool to use against those who would violently denounce it (such as Marx himself).

This implies that Derrida’s thought is a form of what might be called, and was alluded to above, *tolerant agnosticism*: i.e., not an agnosticism that is so often accused of sitting on the fence, but rather an agnosticism articulated in the name of justice that seeks to keep the peace. Indeed, the problem of an inclination for violence can inform this emancipatory spirit of Marxism, at times inscribing it within the very identity of the proletariat, and it is this that Derrida seeks to counteract in Marx’s thought, as I will argue in the conclusion.

Conclusion

Spectres of Marx is a book about capitalist violence – note Derrida’s critical reading of Fukuyama’s capitalist triumphalism in the second chapter, which leads, in the third chapter to his bleak outlook: ‘The world is going badly’ (Derrida, 2006, p.96). It is also a book about communist violence. However, it is not, in that, a matter of documenting what is, now, perhaps the well-known history of the violence of communist institutions. Rather, it is a book about what constitutes violent behaviour in the first place, using communism as an exemplary example of blindness to its own mode of violence. That is, of the way in which initial violent rhetoric can lead to actual physical violence in the transposition from intellectual to institutional Marxism: pointing to a war of words that underlies, and exists alongside, the world’s wars. *Spectres of Marx* was written in response to the end of the Cold War, and the Cold War was of course a war of propaganda – a war of propaganda nonetheless famous for proxy wars so that the dominant powers in question, the USA and the USSR, did not have to fight each other directly.

The ghost to which Derrida refers his readers is one that, on the one hand, applies itself to the structure of history as disjointed time: ‘haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in a chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar’ (Derrida, 2006, p.3). In other words, past violence lives-on in the memory of its victims. But it is at once constantly present with them and yet present only to them and nobody else: i.e., its presence to oneself is its absence to others. And so arises the problem of the *evidence* of the actual historical reality of the past violence; the problem of whether others will believe me when I accuse someone else of causing me harm. This is why, for Derrida, the ‘work of mourning’ underlies his concept of the ghost: the haunted memory mourns for the loss of its happiness. On the other hand, the ghost is not only the structure of history, but is also the structure of rhetoric: ‘the figure of the ghost is not just one figure among others. It is perhaps the hidden figure of all figures. For this reason, it would perhaps no longer figure as one tropological weapon among others. There would be no meta-rhetoric of the ghost’ (p.150). The ghost is thus the structure of history and rhetoric; it is historicity and rhetoricity as the dual problem of the relation between the event and its description (or perhaps rather depiction). Within this relation is the problem of what Derrida calls: ‘the *visor effect*: we do not see who looks at us’ (p.6). That is, the problem of blindness to one’s own mode of violence, particularly rhetorical: i.e., not only one does not see who looks at us, but one does not hear who listens to us.

Indeed, it is this rhetorical violence of Marx, of the text of Marx itself, which Derrida attempts to address in *Spectres of Marx*, particularly in the final chapter, where Derrida offers a critical reading of Marx’s reading (or exorcism) of Stirner’s ghost in *The German Ideology*. He says:

Why such relentless pursuit [*acharnement*]? Why this hunt for ghosts? What is the reason for Marx’s rage? Why does he harass Stirner with such irresistible irony? One has the impression, since the critique appears so insistent and redundant, both brilliant and ponderous, that Marx could go on forever launching his barbs and wounding to death. He could never leave his victim. He is bound to it in a troubling fashion. His prey captivates him. The *acharnement* of a hunter consists in setting out an animal lure, here the living lifeless body of a ghost, in order to trick the prey (Derrida, 2006, p.174).

Derrida continues a little later: ‘This logic and this topology of the *paradoxical hunt* [...] should not be treated as a rhetorical ornament when one reads *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*: its first sentences, as we saw, immediately associate the figure of haunting with that of hunting’ (pp.175-176). In other words, there is an unapologetic,

violent rhetoric in the founding texts of communism that should not be considered as mere 'rhetorical ornament'. For example, hear *The Communist Manifesto*: 'where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat' (Marx and Engels, 2002, p.232). But who are these 'proletariat' that will perform this 'violent overthrow'?

This question invokes a basic philosophical criticism of Marx's very identification of the proletariat; a criticism which underlies Derrida's explorations in *Spectres of Marx*, and is contained in the concept of *plus d'un* that we saw earlier. Derrida said that *plus d'un* involved the more than one of a crowd or mass, but paradoxically also, 'the less than one of pure and simple dispersion'. Marx's critique of capitalism involves the designation of a 'ruling class' (the bourgeoisie) and the 'ruled class' (the proletariat). But the problem is that the bourgeoisie do not rule society with the collective consciousness of itself as a class. Indeed, the bourgeoisie might well rule capitalist society, but they do so *in a dispersion* of individual business owners. Logically, then, it follows that the proletariat are also dispersed, and so concerned more with their own private affairs than with those of their class. On the one hand, class identity is perhaps part and parcel of each and every individual's identity; but on the other hand, this identity does not necessarily extend itself out to the level of the actual possession of a class consciousness. For those who are (or who desire to be) politically active, and so involve themselves in a political community of likeminded individuals (or would at least like to), there may well be a certain class consciousness. But for the vast majority in modern democratic societies who are not politically active (which is not to say they will not take a more passive interest in politics), there are only the struggles of private life to contend with. Marx wants to speak to the majority of society in the proletariat; but he ends up only speaking to *a minority within the proletariat itself*: i.e., to those who are politically active. And even then, they have to adhere to the value of the 'violent overthrow', which is dangerously close to the paradoxical problem of creating injustices in the search for justice itself. Like those who train hard in order to be fit and healthy but end up badly injuring themselves in the process, and so almost unable to train at all.

Granted, Marx wants to make all the proletariat politically active; but trying to make this happen is not the same thing as stating historical facts, which Marx presents himself as doing with historical materialism in contradistinction to speculative philosophy. Hence, Marx's *vision* for a universally politically active proletariat is his

own neo-Hegelian form of speculative philosophy. Marx mimics the very thing he denounces in Hegel and Stirner: ‘two great hunters, Marx and Stirner, are in principle sworn to the same conjuration’ (Derrida, 2006, p.176). Historical materialism is therefore bound to the very same teleological structure of history as Hegelian philosophy, only it goes in the final direction of communism rather than capitalism. Perhaps a nice end in principle; but when the means to that end is in practice unapologetically violent, how can there be any guarantee that it will be achieved without creating the collateral damage of begrudged victims who will rebel against the injustices of communism in its turn? Indeed, some might say that this is the benefit of hindsight, but would not a certain foresight, perhaps from another theoretical perspective, have been able to see in advance this very problem? This is why Derrida, although like Marx alludes to life’s practicalities as the point of application of a theory, does not denounce philosophical abstraction with quite the same force: ‘Pardon me for beginning with such an abstract formulation’ (p.49). Learning to live finally instead poses the question of finality to Marx as whether, all things considered, the *proletarian* revolution really is the best way forward. Perhaps this requires the substitution of the term ‘poverty’ for ‘proletariat’ in the brilliant penultimate sentence from ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right”’ we saw earlier: ‘Philosophy cannot be actualized without the abolition of [poverty]; [poverty] cannot be abolished without the actualization of philosophy’. For me, this is the spirit of Marx that Derrida retains.

Here, learning to live becomes the watchword for Derrida’s relation to Marx by highlighting Marx’s own naivety in denouncing so quickly his inheritance from Rousseau. In such a case, perhaps Derrida also articulates this Rousseauian phrase with a Nietzschean inflection: for instance, in ‘Circumfession’ he refers to both Rousseau and Nietzsche as his ‘two positive heroes’ (Derrida, 1993, p.133). Since what Marx tends to avoid is what, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche calls ‘the case of the individual human being’ (Nietzsche, 1996, p.107), it is precisely this case that Derrida’s thought poses to Marxist thought. And this not so as to return to a form of existential Marxism (e.g., Sartre), but perhaps rather to juxtapose existentialism with Marxism in an undecidable paradox, where ‘deconstruction’ is perhaps the ambiguous middle term. This paradox regards the strange sense of both proximity to and distance from political concerns, and the simultaneous implication and incommensurability of public life and private life, of work and life. Is the violent political activity of the proletarian

revolution really how one wants to live? Is it really how one should be taught how to live? What happens after the revolution? As Derrida puts it in his 'Exordium': 'where, for example, is Marxism going? where are we going with it?' (Derrida, 2006, p.xix). Derrida's 'learning to live' watchword positions Marx between Rousseau and Nietzsche. It poses the complex question of *individual* life history and life goals as an important feature of what it is that thinking must attend to – something all too forgotten in more orthodox Marxism; one of its blind spots.

Human subjectivity is not merely political, but is also psychological. Derrida's autobiographical thought touches base with the psychological aspects of subjectivity, and in *Spectres of Marx* this occurs in his watchword of 'learning to live'. In this context, 'learning to live' alludes to the need to account for individual difference as well as class difference, and so the need to account for the historical circumstances not only of the class but of the individual. It is by addressing this underlying problem with Marx's thought that this watchword performs a philosophical criticism of it: a criticism which addresses the very *identification* of the proletarian identity itself. For, as it says in *The Communist Manifesto*: 'The lower strata of the middle class – the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesman generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants – all these sink gradually into the proletariat' (Marx and Engels, 2002, p.228). This is too reductive of the *plus d'un* to be true, and so it constitutes an oversimplification at the point of identification (not only of the proletarian identity but also of the bourgeois identity; of the different levels between them; and of the different levels below the former and above the latter). This oversimplification is not merely political and economic, but is also psychological as a result of the action that each individual member of the proletariat is supposed to take, and as a result of the driving passion which is supposed to underpin this action. In Derrida's thought, since learning to live is to learn to live with others, and with oneself as other, it becomes connected to his approach to justice as the relation to the other's otherness. The deconstructive conception of the third other might come along to disturb the twofold dialogical relation naively hypothesized by most philosophers; but that does not mean that, in the group context, all individual identity becomes altogether lost.

For it is only in the relation to the other where one finds one's individual difference. The identity of the individual only becomes possible when there is recognition of one's difference from others in one's daily life. Learning to live is learning to live with other's differences. In its own way, individual difference becomes

a higher priority than class difference, because the class *unity* which underlies class activity presupposes agreement among different individuals within the class in question. But since different people have different conceptions and sensibilities of how to live their own lives, of what they each want from life, and of what limitations the circumstances of their life impose with respect to the choices that are available or unavailable to them, this agreement is therefore *a priori* uncertain – particularly insofar as it is agreement for violent action. Through this emphasis on individual difference, learning to live, as well as initially applying itself to Derrida's autobiographical thought, connects up with a deconstructive theory of subjectivity saturated with this sense of justice. Indeed, this concern with individual difference will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

Autobiographical Riddles: Nietzsche & Derrida

Introduction

The relation of Nietzsche to Derrida is perhaps more controversial in deconstructive scholarship than almost any other philosopher because of the status popularly given to Nietzsche as an arch-deconstructor, a status hinted at by Derrida himself (Schrift, 1996). The key question then becomes what Derrida inherits from Nietzsche and what in Nietzsche he is critical of. For an example of what Derrida inherits, the first chapter of the first volume of *Human, All Too Human*, 'Of First and Last Things', begins by highlighting the problem of the binary oppositions of metaphysical philosophy:

Almost all the problems of philosophy once again pose the same form of question as they did two thousand years ago: how can something originate in its opposite, for example rationality in irrationality, the sentient in the dead, logic in unlogic, disinterested contemplation in covetous desire, living for others in egoism, truth in error? Metaphysical philosophy has hitherto surmounted this difficulty by denying that the one originates in the other and assuming for the more highly valued thing a miraculous source in the very kernel and being of the 'thing in itself' (Nietzsche, 1996, p.12).

Metaphysical philosophy is then contrasted with what Nietzsche calls historical philosophy:

Historical philosophy, on the other hand, which can no longer be separated from natural science, the youngest of all philosophical methods, has discovered in individual cases (and this will probably be the result in every case) that there are no opposites, except in the customary exaggeration of popular or metaphysical interpretations, and that a mistake in reasoning lies at the bottom of this antithesis: according to this explanation there exists, strictly speaking, neither an unegoistic action nor completely disinterested contemplation; both are only sublimations, in which the basic element seems almost to have dispersed and reveals itself only under the most painstaking observation (p.12).

Historical philosophy becomes the basis of Nietzsche's existential-cum-deconstructive thought, a thought which is critical of the very foundations of metaphysical philosophy: 'Lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers' (p.13). It is this 'family failing' that is the interest of this chapter, although less directed against the philosophical tradition and more directed towards Nietzsche's existential-psychological insight, and to Derrida's implicit inheritance and adjustment of it in his autobiographical thought.

To make it clearer what Nietzsche says above regarding the difference between metaphysical and historical philosophy, and why it is here relevant, consider the

following aphorism from the second volume of *Human, All Too Human* in the essay, 'The Wanderer and His Shadow':

Habit of seeing opposites. – The general imprecise way of observing sees everywhere in nature opposites (as, e.g., 'warm and cold') where there are, not opposites, but differences of degree. This bad habit has led us into wanting to comprehend and analyse the inner world, too, the spiritual-moral world, in terms of such opposites. An unspeakable amount of painfulness, arrogance, harshness, estrangement, frigidity has entered into human feelings because we think we see opposites instead of transitions (Nietzsche, 1996, p.326).

This transposition from opposition to difference of degree is what Derrida himself calls *différance*, and does so in the context of Nietzsche's thought: '*différance* is the name we might give to the "active," moving discord of different forces, that Nietzsche sets up against the entire system of metaphysical grammar, wherever this system governs culture, philosophy, and science' (Derrida, 1982, p.18). This is, of course, not to say that Derrida agrees with everything Nietzsche says; for the potential moments where Nietzsche's text appears inconsistent is something that concerns him. But this citation from 'Différance' nonetheless highlights the Nietzschean context of Derrida's thought. Indeed, it has become necessary to make an addition to the citation from Derrida here: not only 'wherever this system governs culture, philosophy, and science'; but also where it governs, as Nietzsche puts it, 'human feelings'.

However, unlike Rousseau, Nietzsche does not aim or proclaim to articulate the truth of human feelings. For Nietzsche, faulty logical thought is at the heart of faulty ontological and psychological thought. As such, although Rousseau emphasizes the importance of rhetoric for an education in articulation and eloquence, he is also, like the metaphysical tradition, distrustful of rhetoric for its manipulative and deceptive capabilities. In contrast, rhetoric is embraced much more in Nietzsche than it is in Rousseau, as he puts it in 'On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense':

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike people as firmly established, canonical, and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins (in: Nietzsche, 1999, p.146).

Nietzsche does not articulate the truth of human feelings; rather, their error. For Nietzsche, humans are burdened with false feelings because they think wrongly and

interpret actions wrongly. And this is because of the faulty logic that underpins metaphysical worldviews; worldviews that, in the cultures of the Western world at any rate, have saturated the sentiment of popular culture through their transposition from intellectual to institutional Christianity. But if faulty logic is the cause of this problem, then in part rhetoric becomes the means to its alleviation, through which there is much more emphasis on paradox, and the impasses that arise in the everyday communicative contexts of social intercourse with others. For Nietzsche, feelings both derive from and infect our communications with others; communications that are both rhetorical and historical. Feelings are not only an auto-affective experience that happens inside the individual, but are bound up with ‘human relations’ with others in the world that surround each individual person; and who, like it or not, for better or for worse, happiness or sadness, are or have been important to each individual’s life.

On this point, there are few who are as important as our family members; our parents. It is well-known that Nietzsche’s father died when he was still a child. The first lines of the first essay in *Ecce Homo*, ‘Why I Am So Wise’, allude to this death: ‘The fortunateness of my existence, its uniqueness perhaps, lies in its fatality: to express it in the form of a riddle, as my father I have already died, as my mother I still live and grow old’ (Nietzsche, 1992, p.8). In his essay ‘Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name’, in *The Ear of the Other*, Derrida alludes to this riddle in the first section of the essay, ‘Logic of the Living Feminine’ – the title of which alludes to the mother in the riddle who lives and grows old. But what does this riddle mean? This chapter will draw in particular on Norris and Smith to aid in the interpretation of Derrida’s relation to Nietzsche. But first let us turn to Nietzsche in more detail.

Autobiographical Riddles

Nietzsche’s first major book, *The Birth of Tragedy, Out of the Spirit of Music*, combined an influence from two major figures in German Romanticism. On the one hand, Schopenhauer’s interpretation of the human will, in *The World as Will and Representation* (Schopenhauer, 1969), as structured by painful experience in the event of the will’s dissatisfaction; and on the other hand, Wagner’s music-dramas as they were fuelled by the problems of human life posed by classical tragic drama. Himself trained in classical philology, Nietzsche sought to combine these two figures into his own dramatic theory by synthesizing another two figures from ancient Greek tragedy:

Apollo and Dionysus. In these two figures, Nietzsche calls for the '*rebirth of tragedy*' (in: Nietzsche, 1999, p.76), in which tragic drama offers radical insights into the nature of the moral and psychological predicaments of humankind. As Nietzsche puts it in his essay written at a similar time to *The Birth of Tragedy* but unpublished in his lifetime, 'The Dionysiac World View', Apollo and Dionysus are 'stylistic opposites' (p.119) in ancient Greek art. Apollo, the god who was given the temple at Delphi, is representative of the Delphic inscriptions: 'know thyself' and 'nothing in excess'. Dionysus, the god who had a cult following at hedonistic festivals (comprised of satyrs and maenads), is in contrast representative of the opposite: forgetting oneself in an excess of pleasure.

On the one hand, Apollo, as a god of prophesy and the sun, represents the dream of truth. That is, prophesy is 'the perfection of these dream-states' (in: Nietzsche, 1999, p.120); and sun is the beautiful light of truth: 'The god of lovely semblance must be the god of true knowledge as well' (p.120). Within this image of truth given in the dream, there is therefore a certain experience of pleasure, but it is the so-called higher pleasure gained from self-knowledge and self-control in the principle of individuation: 'Apollo as the deification of the *principium individuationis*' (p.26). The wisdom of Apollo is grounded in the self-knowledge and self-control that each individual must exercise in order to turn their reality into their dream; it becomes the taming of humankind. That this transformation is prophesied becomes the basis of 'Apolline optimism' (p.130). On the other hand, Dionysus, as the god of the so-called lower pleasure of intoxicated ecstasy, represents the wild animal instincts of humankind. But within this wild state, humankind is in a community of likeminded people who all lose themselves in the intoxicated ecstasy of the community in song and dance: 'as they sing and dance, human beings express their membership of a higher, more ideal community' (p.120). And of course, not just song and dance, but sex: 'Almost everywhere an excess of sexual indiscipline, which flooded in waves over all family life and its venerable statutes, lay at the heart of such festivals' (p.20). In such a state, humans do not care for artistic images because they themselves have become the artworks: 'What does he now care for images and statues? Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art' (p.121). In the Apollonian experience the individual becomes an example of a more general rule. But in the Dionysian experience the individual becomes the creator and destroyer of rules themselves. One creates the new rule and destroys the old. One does not look on at images of awesome things; one becomes the awesome thing itself.

Nietzsche's taste for the Apollonian, and for Schopenhauer and Wagner, occurs only in his early thought. In *Ecce Homo* the chapter on *The Birth of Tragedy* begins by saying: 'In order to be just to "The Birth of Tragedy" (1872) one will have to forget a few things' (Nietzsche, 1992, p.48). From *Human, All Too Human* onwards, the Dionysiac life experience organizes the spirit of Nietzsche's thought; but what is so radical about his thought is his distinctive interpretation of Dionysiac philosophy. For Nietzsche, the Dionysiac life experience is not merely about the promotion of a hedonistic philosophy. It is also about how one interprets the human experience of the world before and after the pleasurable experience; for pleasurable experience is in its nature *temporary*. Pleasurable experience is a short-term experience in the long-term of one's life history, which from a broader cosmological perspective is a really short history anyway; but in the context of the experience of pleasure and pain it can feel like a really long history because the pleasurable moments of life tend not to outweigh the painful ones. Hence, in contrast to Apollonian optimism, Nietzsche's thought is grounded in Dionysian pessimism; but it is a particular sort of pessimism that he distinguishes from the 'romantic pessimism' (Nietzsche, 1996, p.212) of Schopenhauer and Wagner, as he puts it in the 'Preface' to the second volume of *Human, All Too Human*. Traditionally speaking, pessimism is life-negating – whether in its 'romantic' form or in its more Christian 'ascetic' form, as Nietzsche puts it *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Nietzsche, 1994). Nonetheless, it is more philosophically poignant than optimism; for optimism not only lacks insight regarding the moral and psychological predicaments of humankind, but also the manner of this lack is naive to the point of delusional in the face of the adversities thrown at us by life – such as physical and emotional pain, death, injustice, hatred, neglect, etc. In its delusion, optimism is characteristic of the theological faith that something good will happen when there are little real world grounds for this faith.

The paradoxical task Nietzsche sets himself is therefore the development of a form of pessimism that is instead *life-affirming*; this is what the name of Dionysus represents in his thought. As does also, as he puts it in his 'An Attempt at Self-criticism', the preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy, or: Hellenism and Pessimism* (note also the changed subtitle): 'that Dionysiac monster who bears the name *Zarathustra*' (in: Nietzsche, 1999, p.12). Nietzsche is of course alluding to the character of his now infamous philosophical novel, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which the founder of the Zoroastrian religion (the pre-Islamic religion of ancient Persia) is

fictionalized and reworked to tell a different story to mankind. Not a story of the One God (Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest monotheisms), and of the polar opposites of good and evil: ‘Zoroastrians are highly optimistic, certain that good will prevail, and are determined to partake of this good through the highest moral ideals, and in the fight against evil in all its forms during their life on earth’ (Gill, 1997, p.186). But rather, a story of how ‘*God is dead*’ (Nietzsche, 2003, p.41), and that the Superman must take his place: ‘*I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome*’ (p.41). Zarathustra becomes a preacher not of theological optimism; but rather of what, in the ‘Preface’ to the second volume of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche refers to as ‘courageous pessimism’ (Nietzsche, 1996, p.211). Indeed, in the book preceding *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche first refers to the death of God, he also refers to this courageous form of pessimism as ‘Dionysian pessimism’ (Nietzsche, 1974, p.331).

It is important to note, here, that Nietzsche is not a pessimistic philosopher. Courageous or Dionysian pessimism is no garden-variety pessimism. It is not a weak pessimism that glances at the past in disgust, and at the future in despair, before spending the present wallowing in self-pity. Rather, as Nietzsche puts it in ‘An Attempt at Self-criticism’, it is ‘a pessimism of *strength*’ (Nietzsche, 1999, p.4). But what is that? Which is to ask: What is the Superman? In the same year that he wrote ‘An Attempt at Self-criticism’ (1886), Nietzsche also wrote a new ‘Preface’ to *Human, All Too Human*, in which he says:

And, to speak seriously: to become sick in the manner of these free spirits, to remain sick for a long time and then, slowly, slowly, to become healthy, by which I mean ‘healthier’, is a fundamental *cure* for all pessimism (the cancerous sore and inveterate vice, as is well known, of old idealists and inveterate liars). There is wisdom, practical wisdom, in for a long time prescribing even health for oneself only in small doses (Nietzsche, 1996, p.9).

The subtitle of *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* designates the ‘free spirit’ to which Nietzsche here refers, and which was a concept that was to remain throughout his later thought. The Superman is the ideal free spirit. As such, the concept of free spirit is not necessarily what one will associate with it today: i.e., having a carefree nature. For one can have a carefree nature by virtue of one’s own natural disposition without necessarily being a Superman in Nietzsche’s sense. The free spirit is rather the basis of Nietzsche’s psychological insight insofar as this insight is directed

against the naive thinking implicit within the moralism contained in both our philosophical and our everyday judgements. For Nietzsche, this moralism, which is more often than not a mode of optimism, has done humankind more harm than good. However, he also believes that pessimism is an easy way out for the weak-minded: the free spirit is thus ‘a fundamental cure for all pessimism’. Weak pessimism is unhealthy; in contrast, Nietzsche’s strong pessimism has mental health as its goal. But paradoxically, this health is prescribed ‘only in small doses’ because, he argues, there is psychological wisdom in the effort to become healthy from a period of ill-health. While metaphysical philosophy attempts to invent a ‘moral psychology’, Nietzsche’s thought partially juxtaposes morality and psychology, arguing that psychological insight undermines the moral insights that have traditionally dominated human civilizations. The free spirit is thus the basis of Nietzsche’s *transvaluation of values* (Nietzsche, 1994).

A free spirit is one who can look at life for what it ultimately is: a tragedy involving not merely death but various negative effects of human relationships such as hatred and distaste, fear and cowardice, loneliness and solitude, deception and error, bullying and neglect, in a word unhappiness in all its forms. The problem he poses is the need to still affirm life even when taking its tragic contexts into account. Nietzsche is not a pessimistic philosopher, but a tragic philosopher; as he puts it in *Ecce Homo*, in the chapter ‘The Birth of Tragedy’: ‘In this sense I have the right to understand myself as the first *tragic philosopher* – that is to say the extremist antithesis and antipodes of a pessimistic philosopher’ (Nietzsche, 1992, p.51). The Superman is one who has the strength to face the darker side of life and appear unafraid; perhaps even sometimes to laugh in the face of danger – if the Superman’s favourite colour of sadness is purple, ‘purple melancholy’ (Nietzsche, 2003, p.240), then perhaps his favourite colour of humour is black. For Nietzsche, it is precisely naivety to the darker side of human relationships that causes their failure; and the free spirit represents his attempt to counteract this naivety. In *Human, All Too Human* the concept of the free spirit is introduced in the fifth chapter, ‘Tokens of Higher and Lower Culture’:

In any event, however, what characterizes the free spirit is not that his opinions are the more correct but that he has liberated himself from tradition, whether the outcome has been successful or a failure. As a rule, though, he will nonetheless have truth on his side, or at least the spirit of inquiry after truth: he demands reasons, the rest demand faith (Nietzsche, 1996, p.108).

The unfree spirit, what Nietzsche calls the ‘fettered spirit’ (p.108), passively goes through the motions of their daily routine without consideration for the conditions in which the routine itself has formed into its present existence – and so they do not seek improvement or betterment of their living conditions for the future. It is precisely because the free spirit acts in the name of this improvement that Nietzsche says that he has ‘truth on his side’. It is not that the free spirit has no routine, but that they actively make continual improvements to it such that it never remains the same routine; for it is constantly changing and evolving.

Nietzsche’s names or nicknames for the ‘free spirit’ are Dionysus, Zarathustra, and Superman. The spirit of the free spirit rests in the will to become a genius. Mediocrity is not an option for the Superman. In this rests Nietzsche’s pro-individualist anti-socialism, as he puts it in ‘Tokens of Higher and Lower Culture’:

The Socialists desire to create a comfortable life for as many as possible. If the enduring homeland of this comfortable life, the perfect state, were really to be attained, then this comfortable life would destroy the soil out of which great intellect and the powerful individual in general grows: by which I mean great energy (Nietzsche, 1996, p.112).

For Nietzsche, a ‘comfortable life’ is the origin of mediocrity, and ‘unfavourable circumstances’ (p.115) are the origin of genius as the individual must strive to overcome the adversity posed by these circumstances, and in the process overcome themselves. In this rests the paradoxical moral problem for humankind that his philosophical psychology of the all-too-human poses. On the one hand, one can work to rid the world of the worst evils of human inequalities of power, but in so doing one will also rid the world of the conditions which facilitate genius, which is also one of the conditions for some of the greatest goods in the world. Or on the other hand, one can preserve the conditions which facilitate genius, and so the condition that facilitates some of the greatest goods, but at the expense of maintaining the greatest evils of the world. At the same time, Nietzsche is sceptical of the concept of ‘genius’ because it is an enigmatic term whose objectivity is questionable due to the role played by individual judgement and taste. Indeed, the designation ‘genius’ also hides the force of becoming which underpins the formation of the artist’s work, as he puts it in the chapter in *Human, All Too Human*, ‘From the Souls of Artists and Writers’: ‘But no one can see in the work of the artist how it has *become*; that is its advantage, for wherever one can see the act of becoming one grows somewhat cool’ (p.86).

By referring to Nietzsche's thought as 'pro-individualist', this should not be confused, as socialists might be inclined to think, as complicity with individualism in the modern democratic-capitalist sense: i.e., with an emphasis both on the autonomy of the individual in private affairs and on the individual as an agent for profit-producing consumerism for privately owned businesses in public affairs. Instead, it is meant merely in the existential, and therefore psychological (as distinct from politico-economic), sense of a concern for the predicaments that occur in the life of the individual. Here, existentialism is one of the key (post)modern philosophies for understanding human subjectivity in biographical and autobiographical terms. As Nietzsche puts it in the final chapter of the first volume of *Human, All Too Human*, 'Man Alone with Himself': 'No matter how far a man may extend himself with his knowledge, no matter how objectively he may come to view himself, in the end it can yield to him nothing but his own biography' (Nietzsche, 1996, p.182). Whatever may be the problems, from a deconstructive perspective, with 'the humanist-existentialist version of autobiography' (Smith, 1995, p.55) that Robert Smith addresses in *Derrida and Autobiography*, I think it is important here to make a distinction. On the one hand, where Nietzsche's existential philosophy in the broader critical context of the history of metaphysical philosophy becomes complicit with and allied to Derrida's deconstructive philosophy; and on the other hand, where the subsequent and more recent history of a literary-critical popularization of humanist-existentialism within the newly developed genre of autobiographical theory is understood to contain metaphysical prejudices that require deconstructive literary criticism. In the part of *Derrida and Autobiography* that matters most, 'Clarifying Autobiography', it is suspicious that, on the one hand, Smith's first chapter in this part, 'Worstward Ho: Some Recent Theories', positions deconstruction against existential-humanism while being inconveniently unclear about the essentialism/existentialism divide. And on the other hand, in the second chapter of this part, 'Labyrinths', he is very wary about distinguishing Nietzsche from Derrida even though in the previous chapter he took a zealous attitude against existentialism.

Having made a distinction, then, between existentialism in the context of the history of metaphysical philosophy and existentialism in the context of the history of literary-critical autobiographical theory (the latter of which is considerably more recent and so covers a considerably shorter timescale), it becomes important to return to Nietzsche's aesthetic philosophy. For the aesthetic ideas contained in his existentialist perspective in fact *underpin* deconstructive literary criticism. The chapter in *Human*,

All Too Human, 'From the Souls of Artists and Writers', is here a useful starting point. For Nietzsche, art is paradoxical. On the one hand, generically throughout world history and specifically in German Romanticism it has become infected with a metaphysical hankering after the lost presence, perfection and goodness of humanity. The chapter begins by saying: 'In the case of everything perfect we are accustomed to abstain from asking how it became: we rejoice in the present fact as though it came out of the ground by magic' (Nietzsche, 1996, p.80). Nietzsche thus poses the question of becoming to the idea of artistic genius. In posing this question, art is shown in the service of metaphysics:

It is not without profound sorrow that one admits to oneself that in their highest flights the artists of all ages have raised to heavenly transfiguration precisely those conceptions which we now recognize as false: they are the glorifiers of religious and philosophical errors of mankind, and they could not have been so without believing in the absolute truth of these errors (p.102).

It is interesting to note the way in which Nietzsche begins here: 'It is not without profound sorrow'. Having had his intellectual upbringing in the culture of German Romanticism, in which art provided the means of escape from the harsh realities of the world, it must have hurt Nietzsche to consider the possibility that artists had become the 'glorifiers' of metaphysical prejudice.

On the other hand, through the question of becoming art is now representative of the symbolic world: it symbolizes the symbolic world; it becomes representative of the world of representation. As Nietzsche says in 'From the Souls of Artists and Writers':

The finished and perfect art of representation repulses all thinking as to how it has become; it tyrannizes as present completeness and perfection. That is why the masters of the art of representation count above all as gifted with genius and why men of science do not. In reality, this evaluation of the former and undervaluation of the latter is only a piece of childishness in the realm of reason (Nietzsche, 1996, p.86).

If the task of art is to represent reality, then the medium of its representation can no longer be considered neutral because of the metaphysical errors it has depicted. Once this neutrality disappears, the relation of representation to the reality that it depicts no longer occurs in a straight line. Interpretation becomes necessary, and reality becomes caught up the complex web of cultural systems of representation; systems which themselves require complex forms of interpretation so as to decode the codes that representation implies. This returns us to Nietzsche's emphasis on language as

metaphor and rhetoric because metaphor supplies the code and rhetoric supplies the technical tools to decode the metaphorical codes of language. For Nietzsche, the rule of rhetoric in the everyday life of human beings is part of what makes life so difficult to live, because it involves, as he put it in 'On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense', the 'art of dissimulation' (in: Nietzsche, 1999, p.142). The art of dissimulation involves various negative qualities of social interaction: 'deception, flattery, lying and cheating, speaking behind the backs of others, keeping up appearances, living in borrowed finery, wearing masks, the drapery of convention, play-acting for the benefit of others and oneself' (p.142). It is in the context of these negative qualities of social interaction that Nietzsche directs his demystification of the all-too-human to some of the key moral and psychological problems encountered in human relationships.

One of the key components of Nietzsche's understanding of rhetorical language is that it is infected with power. If Clausewitz (1997) said that politics is war by other means, then Nietzsche's argument is that rhetoric is the politics of everyday life. Rhetoric is not physical warfare, but rather is psychological warfare in a war of words. Of course, while such wars can be fought in open dispute and disagreement, they can also be more subtle; saturated with insinuation. Nietzsche's insight here is not a question of denouncing the workings of rhetoric itself. Rather, as he argues in the chapter in *Human, All Too Human*, 'On the History of the Moral Sensations', it is a question of demystifying the covert sadism and schadenfreude that can underpin the social intercourse of human relations:

In the conversations of social life, three-quarters of all questions are asked, three-quarters of all answers given, in order to cause just a little pain to the other party; that is why many people have such thirst for social life: it makes them aware of their strength. In such countless but very small doses in which malice makes itself felt it is a powerful stimulant to life: just as benevolence, disseminated through the human world in the same form, is the ever available medicine. – But will there be many honest men prepared to admit that causing pain gives pleasure? that one not seldom entertains oneself – and entertains oneself well – by mortifying other people, at least in one's own mind, and by firing off at them the grapeshot of petty malice? (Nietzsche, 1996, p.39).

When social life is organized by such 'conversations', saturated with negativity, it becomes necessary – for those free spirits who cannot keep up the pretence without going mad, or at least getting very stressed and upset – to temporarily escape from the hubbub of social life and find solace in solitude. This is what, in 'Tokens of Higher and Lower Culture', Nietzsche calls 'the genius of meditation' (p.132). At any rate, this is

one of his most pervasive psychological recommendations: if the alliance with another is already broken with little hope of fixing it, then sever it completely and try to actively forget it so that you have the space to get on with your own life in a more affirmative manner. In this recommendation is the Dionysian philosophy of creation through destruction. Of course, life circumstances can dictate that this may not always be possible or practical. But if it is doable, in the long run it can be healthier for oneself; and as he puts it in the 'Preface' to *Human, All Too Human*, it is this '*will to health*' (p.8) that directs his interpretation of the free spirit. Much like in Augustine and Rousseau, the connection is made between moral problems and the problems of psychological health. However, in Nietzsche's thought it is the underlying Dionysian foundation of this connection that is different and that makes it radical – and as we saw earlier, his prescription for health in small doses means that the will to health is only necessary in unhealthy circumstances.

Before turning to Derrida's relation to Nietzsche, and returning to the riddle from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* that this chapter began with, let us briefly consider *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Two insights made by Zarathustra are in particular a fundamental feature of Nietzsche's conceptual repertoire: *will to power* and *eternal recurrence*. The concept of will to power, which is articulated in the section 'Of Self-overcoming', is distinguished from two other sorts of will: the will to truth of the classical philosophers, and the will to life articulated in more recent thinkers like Schopenhauer and Darwin. At stake in these latter two concepts is an account of what it is that drives human nature (knowledge and survival). For Nietzsche, it is rather the will to power which is the most powerful force of human nature: 'The will of the weaker persuades it to serve the stronger; its will wants to be master over those weaker still: this delight alone it is unwilling to forego' (Nietzsche, 2003, p.138). Because the will to power is a force within oneself, it is oneself that is to be overcome – hence the term 'self-overcoming'. One only balances power by first balancing the will to power within oneself. But to balance power within oneself takes a considerable amount of willpower on one's own behalf: i.e., paradoxically the will to power becomes directed against itself as one is pitted against oneself as if in a war. For Nietzsche, to manage this war within oneself effectively involves affirmation of what one has become in one's own life; an affirmation that is contained in the concept of eternal recurrence, which is articulated in the section 'The convalescent'.

Like in Buddhism, the wisdom of Zarathustra is that life is suffering: ‘I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering’ (Nietzsche, 2003, p.233). The wisdom of concept of eternal recurrence is the wisdom that it becomes necessary to affirm life, to affirm one’s own life, as if one were to live it identically over and over again to infinity – with all of the pain it has thrown at us. It is to know thyself as one has felt and dealt with painful events, and still say ‘Yes’ to life. Truly a task for the Superman, Nietzsche becomes the advocate of the tragic affirmation of one’s life without self-pity. The self-knowledge that he advocates is not therefore to know who one is in one’s essence, but rather is that given in biographical knowledge: i.e., of knowing what one has become in one’s life and in one’s reactions to its events, as the subtitle says to *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*. Nietzsche does not avoid the ‘who’ altogether, indeed the ‘Foreword’ to *Ecce Homo* begins with reference to it in the fact that it is his autobiography: ‘Seeing that I must shortly approach mankind with the heaviest demand that has ever been made on it, it seems to me indispensable to say *who I am*’ (Nietzsche, 1992, p.3). It is not that there is no essence, but paradoxically that essence has *become*. In the chapter ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One’ in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says: ‘The whole of Zarathustra might perhaps be reckoned as music; – certainly a rebirth of the art of *hearing* was a precondition of it’ (p.69). The fact that Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy is based on this rebirth is something that Derrida addresses in *The Ear of the Other* and elsewhere. So let us turn now to Derrida’s undoubtedly *Nietzschean* interpretation of Nietzsche (for any Derridean interpretation of Derrida must account for his Nietzschean interpretation of Nietzsche).

As we have seen, from *Human, All Too Human* to *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche’s thought is concerned with the (auto)biographical not merely as a mode of self-knowledge, but more generally as a mode of self-relation: i.e., in which one does not merely possess a disinterested self-knowledge, but where one has an interested stake in the self-improvement of one’s life. In his thought is undoubtedly a sceptical response to a Rousseau-inspired Romantic autobiography, prevalent in his day, in which the individual is considered naturally good but becomes corrupted by the responsibilities and pressures of unnatural modes of relation taught in the cultures of civil society. Such is the ‘fettered spirit’ in Nietzsche’s own thought, which perhaps highlights the influence of Romanticism within it. However, there is much that he would be critical of in Romantic autobiography, and by the time of *Ecce Homo* he explicitly mocks what he

interprets as an egocentric self-congratulatory attitude at work in autobiographical writing. This occurs in the titles of the three opening chapters – ‘Why I Am So Wise’, ‘Why I Am So Clever’, and ‘Why I Write Such Good Books’ – which also, ironically, repeat the very thing that they mock. But one needs finely-tuned ears in order to hear this silent irony, and this is something that Derrida addresses near the beginning of his essay on Nietzsche in *The Ear of the Other*, ‘Otobiographies’. Speaking of autobiography Derrida says: ‘I must ask you to shift its sense a little and listen to it with another ear. I wish to take a certain pleasure in this, so that *you may learn this pleasure from me*’ (Derrida, 1988a, p.4). Here we can see Derrida’s Nietzschean mode of teaching: where the teacher asks their pupils to listen to what they say at the present time so as to understand at some future time what was meant when the pupil has taken the time to *think for themselves* about what was meant (an ‘active’ hearing).

What Derrida offers particularly in the first part of ‘Otobiographies’, ‘Logic of the Living Feminine’, is a Nietzschean elaboration on the theme of autobiography, in which it is asked of us ‘to shift its sense a little and listen to it with another ear’. But what ear? Let us consider a couple of Derrida’s scholars on *The Ear of the Other* in order to consider this point: Christopher Norris’s essay ‘Deconstruction Against Itself: Derrida and Nietzsche’, and Robert Smith’s chapter in *Derrida and Autobiography*, ‘Labyrinths’. In ‘Deconstruction Against Itself’ Norris addresses the Anglo-American reception of deconstruction into the institution of literary criticism, in which Nietzsche’s inclination for metaphor and rhetoric is often cited as the overriding inspiration for Derrida’s own thought. He thereby emphasizes the meaning of the ‘teaching of Nietzsche’ in Derrida’s subtitle to ‘Otobiographies’ as referring to the teaching institution. Indeed, there is textual warrant for this interpretation as the second part of ‘Otobiographies’, ‘The Otograph Sign of State’, moves from a reading of *Ecce Homo* to a reading of a much lesser-known book by Nietzsche called *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (Nietzsche, 2004). In ‘Otobiographies’ as a whole there is, then, a curious interconnection of the autobiographical and political themes of Derrida’s thought, which hinges on the idea of teaching (particularly regarding the problem of how to teach Nietzsche’s in the context of his appropriation by the Nazis) – although, of course, the political aspect of the essay is not the concern here. Likewise, Norris’s interpretation does not concern itself with the autobiographical dimension of ‘Otobiographies’, and so its influence here can only be marginal. As such, his interpretation of ‘the ear’ in Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche is given political rather than

psychological significance: 'What emerges from this reading is a series of ambivalent but intensely political meditations on "the ear," developing the theme of cultural decadence brought about by the overdependence on passive hearing' (Norris, 1986, p.64). Later on I will instead argue for a more psychological emphasis on the Derrida's notion of the ear.

But Norris's essay does offer more general arguments regarding the relation between Nietzsche and Derrida that it is useful to consider briefly. In particular, Norris uses the opportunity of Derrida's discussion of the problems of how to teach Nietzsche with his own discussion of the problems of how to teach Derrida. These are problems that have multiplied as a result of Derrida's assimilation into the discipline of literary criticism, in which it is the 'rhetorical' Nietzsche that has been most appealing:

For there is one version of Nietzsche that has proved highly acceptable to adepts of deconstruction, including (previously) Derrida himself. This is the 'rhetorical' Nietzsche, arch-debunker of Western metaphysics, he who undermined the truth-claims of philosophy from Socrates to Hegel by insisting that all concepts came down to metaphors in the end; that 'truth' itself was merely a product of our willing bewitchment by language, or our subjection to the vast, unrecognized powers of tropological persuasion (Norris, 1986, p.62).

In such a context Norris suggests that Nietzsche's own concepts, such as will to power and eternal recurrence, become 'dangerous themes' (p.62) for a deconstruction appropriated to literary criticism – for the force of their very conceptuality would construct an impasse with the force of Nietzsche's metaphorical insight, an impasse between philosophy and literature rather than the victory of the latter over the former. The latter's victory he understands as a correct reading of the 'rhetorical' Nietzsche but a misreading of Derrida, particularly in the light of *The Ear of the Other*, where he says: 'it is important to see how Derrida has shifted his ground in relation to Nietzsche' (p.68). Derrida might '(previously)', in his early work, particularly 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', 'the text most often cited by Anglo-American converts to the cause' (p.62), have been amenable to the 'rhetorical' Nietzsche, but in *The Ear of the Other* 'Derrida has shifted his ground'. But if Derrida has shifted his ground, were there not also grounds for the literary critical interpretation of his thought?

As for Nietzsche, it would seem that the main problem for Norris is that he is offered as one of the grounds for modern or postmodern irrationalism (one of the main charges made against Derrida's thought). Norris argues that in *The Ear of the Other*

Derrida's reading of Nietzsche, 'blocks the way to any straightforward indictment of Nietzsche, any reading that attempts (like Lukacs in *The Destruction of Reason*) to identify his thought as the source and inspiration of modern irrationalism' (Norris, 1986, p.66). At this point, coming towards the end of his essay, Norris invokes the reading of Nietzsche given by Richard Rorty, arguing that: 'Rorty's is a thoroughly Nietzschean reading of Derrida, if the name "Nietzsche" is taken to signify a break with all received (enlightened) ideas of argumentative consistency and truth' (pp.66-67). For Norris, Rorty's interpretation of Derrida is the one that has done the most damage since it is both pro-Derrida and pro-irrational (or at least, it blocks the conditions to any rational argument); and it is therefore the interpretation that has facilitated Derrida's appropriation into the discourse of literary criticism that avoids the philosophical significance of his thought. Personally, I think that what Norris is really good at doing is highlighting the tensions that are prevalent in the discipline of deconstructive enquiry and research. But I do not think that *The Ear of the Other* represents a 'shift' in Derrida's thought from an early Derrida who was an advocate of Nietzsche's apparent eristic irrationalism to a later Derrida who was not an advocate. I think that the impasse between literary rhetoric and philosophical concept was always there in Derrida's thought – and indeed, was always there in Nietzsche's thought also.

Norris seems to spend his time arguing: defending Derrida's philosophical thought against either its attacks from more traditional rationalist philosophers or its assimilation into a form of literary criticism which may have become a representative of eclectic postmodern irrationalism (although the danger in this latter judgement is that 'literary criticism' becomes a sort of straw man). But it is often better, not to mention better for oneself (i.e., healthier), to forget petty arguments and instead spend your time constructing what you yourself think is the philosophical significance of a thinker. What Norris seems to forget is that the subtitle to 'Otobiographies' which says the 'teaching of Nietzsche' can also refer to Nietzsche's own philosophical teaching regarding the psychological problems of humankind. If *The Ear of the Other* is understood in this context, then Derrida's own philosophical thinking is significant because it becomes an heir of precisely these problems: problems which, as the present study is arguing, find their point of application in his conceptualization of autobiography. Let us turn, then, to Smith's chapter in *Derrida and Autobiography*, 'Labyrinths'. In biological science the word 'labyrinth' is a name given to the twisting passages of the inner ear, and so Smith structures his chapter into thirteen sections all

entitled 'turning' but distinguished numerically. Before the 'First Turning', he begins the chapter by saying: 'Having in the previous chapter ['Worstward Ho'] made some general remarks about autobiography today, I would like now to look at Derrida's reading of two specific autobiographical texts, Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Michael Leiris's *Biffures*' (Smith, 1995, p.75). Derrida's reading of the latter text occurs in one of his earliest considerations of the ear, 'Tympan' in *Margins of Philosophy*. Again from biology, the word 'tympanum' refers to the eardrum, which separates the outer ear from the middle ear.

Smith begins with reference to the problem of hearing-oneself-speak, the metaphysical problem of self-presence and self-identity via auto-affection, that Derrida's thought poses. If, on the one hand, 'auto-affection as "presence" and "life" are practically synonymous' (Smith, 1995, p.77), then on the other hand, as Smith puts it a moment later: 'Presence will be at the heart of autobiography (a form of "the history of life") considered as a subjectivism' (p.77). In other words, Derrida's autobiographical thought must first call into question the problem of subjectivism within the very idea of autobiography itself. Since this problem hinges on the motif of hearing-oneself-speak, the critical questioning of subjectivism in autobiography must address the problem of the ear. The selfsameness of human subjectivity becomes called into question in the necessity of communication with others: 'In order for the ear to get its message back from the mouth it must run the risk of allowing that message to be broadcast beyond the circle of self' (p.78). Hearing-oneself-speak cannot guarantee the self-presence of human subjectivity because the voices we hear even inside our own head can always be those of the others around us who are part of our lives, and who form part of our life history: 'a chance alterity associates itself with subjectivity at its origin' (p.78). Once this 'chance alterity' becomes inscribed into human subjectivity, there rests the problem of communication between self and other. If autobiography is to do anything, it must address the history of the communications and relationships that one has had with others in one's life – which is less of an auto-affection and more of a hetero-affection. It is one thing to discuss, as Rousseau does, how one oneself feels; but when those feelings are themselves an *effect* of one's communications in one's relationships, or at least so intricately bound up with them such that one does not know what is the cause and what is the effect, to do justice to autobiography it becomes necessary to consider the mode of communication rather than the truth of one's feelings.

It is out of consideration for this mode of communication that Smith finds the significance of Derrida's neologism of *otobiographies*, a term which synthesizes 'autobiography' with 'otology' (the science of the ear). Smith says: '*Otobiographies* is written in the plural, for the circuit from mouth to ear is also an a priori open or public thoroughfare, the messages sent along it taking the form not so much of a sealed and esoteric letter as a postcard for all and sundry to read' (Smith, 1995, p.78). In other words, autobiography is riddled with the problem of *documenting* the communications that one has had with others in one's life; and as such, is less concerned with hearing-oneself-speak and more concerned with hearing-others-speak; through which arises the further problem of miscommunication. This invokes the altogether Nietzschean problem of perspective and interpretation. For autobiography is not merely one's own life story (i.e., it is not merely biography), but rather is a story that is told from one's own perspective. The problem is that since each and every one of us is capable of telling our own life story (indeed cannot live without doing so), there arises the problem of understanding what is communicated, for what is communicated is done so from a particular perspective but is interpreted from another's perspective. In autobiography, I might tell myself my life – 'And so I tell myself my life' (Nietzsche, 1992, p.7), as Nietzsche puts it in his brief prologue, 'On This Perfect Day...' – but particularly in everyday life, it is not necessarily me who is listening: '*Listen to me! for I am thus and thus. Do not, above all, confound me with what I am not!*' (p.3), as Nietzsche puts it in his 'Forward'. I will return to Smith in a moment, but I would first like to consider the significance of this latter citation from Nietzsche.

In this latter citation, Nietzsche is saying, to paraphrase: please do not misunderstand me, for being misunderstood is what I hate the most about social intercourse with others when they do not take the necessary time to reaffirm back to me what I affirm about myself, and instead respond with a negation of me as they try to mould me in their own image (much like a thoughtless family member). This is why, for Nietzsche, despite the problem of perspective that it poses, the idea of autobiography also carries significant utility: it gives one the space and the opportunity to *become* oneself; that is, so that one can *begin* to affirm oneself instead of being constantly moulded by others. Autobiography is not for others but is for me, as Derrida says of Nietzsche in *The Ear of the Other*: 'He indeed says: I tell my life *to myself*; I recite and recount it thus *for me*' (Derrida, 1988a, p.12). When Derrida asks us to hear the very idea of autobiography with another ear, the ear of the other, he does so from a

Nietzschean perspective that holds in reserve the affirmative space of becoming-oneself in the context of the negation of others. And yet, for Derrida it logically follows that one oneself is also capable of giving others the very negation that one does not like to receive from them; and so his phrase ‘the ear of the other’ becomes a proposition of communication ethics in which one must become sensitive to the other’s otherness – which is an extravagant way of saying that one must remember to consider things from the other’s perspective. As such, *The Ear of the Other* articulates a paradoxical relation to Nietzsche: on the one hand, Nietzsche’s own position is adopted wholeheartedly; on the other hand, Derrida supplements Nietzsche’s position with his own, such that it becomes impossible to say that he wholeheartedly adopts Nietzsche’s position. This simultaneous adoption and supplementation of Nietzsche is seen in Derrida’s double-affirmative structure: ‘yes, yes, amen, amen’ (p.14).

Against Norris, I would argue that this does not mean that there has been a ‘shift’ from Derrida’s early statements on Nietzsche compared with what is said in *The Ear of the Other*. For the very term ‘deconstruction’ already implies this simultaneous adoption and supplementation of Nietzsche. On the one hand, deconstruction can be construed as a synthesis of the two aspects of Dionysian philosophy of construction through destruction. On the other hand, deconstruction can also be construed, qua synthesis, as somewhat less spontaneous and more thoughtful than the purely Dionysian free spirit. That is, in Derrida’s adoption of the Dionysian philosophy from Nietzsche there remains a trace of the Apollonian which supplements it; and so it becomes a matter of *ad hoc* judgement which attitude best suits which circumstances. Indeed, this is also what Smith implicitly argues in the ‘Fifth Turning’: ‘A convergence of Dionysian frenzy and discord with Apollonian orderliness and regulation forms the marriage circle’ (Smith, 1995, p.83). However, Smith’s argument on this point is at times quite unclear. For example, when, in the ‘Eighth Turning’, he discusses Derrida’s relation to Zarathustra, on the one hand he says: ‘Zarathustra is antithetical, an “Antichrist” whose vocation is opposition. Despite Nietzsche’s refrain that he is opposed to dialectics, Zarathustra’s position remains dialectical, ironically perhaps, by doing just that’ (p.88). But on the other hand, a moment later he says: ‘Derrida is more non-dialectical than anti-dialectical – but then, so perhaps was Zarathustra, whose opposition was an opposition beyond opposition, an overturning of the pig-headedness and vulgarity of the affront’ (p.88). Is Zarathustra ‘non-dialectical’ or ‘anti-dialectical’? And given Derrida’s thought is so influenced by dialectical manoeuvres, is it right to

hastily characterize it as ‘non-dialectical’? In what way is it ‘non-dialectical’? As Gasché pithily notes in his chapter ‘Deconstructive Methodology’ in *The Tain of the Mirror*, regarding dialectics Derridean deconstruction: ‘maintains contradiction and resists its sublation into a higher unity’ (Gasché, 1986, p.151). As such, it depends on precisely what is meant by the term ‘dialectical’.

If ‘dialectical’ is merely, and perhaps more colloquially, the initial moment of juxtaposition, and the paradoxical impasse that results, then deconstruction could perhaps be termed ‘dialectical’ rather than ‘non-dialectical’. The ‘sublation into a higher unity’ to which Gasché refers is a more technical philosophical definition arising in particular from the thought of Plato and Hegel. Indeed, the ‘dialectic’, or in Derrida’s term ‘aporia’ (which acts as an intermediary, without sublation, between the very opposition dialectic/non-dialectic), between temporality and structure is a notable one in Derrida’s thought; and it is one that Smith himself alludes to in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s riddle concerning the mother and the father. After quoting this riddle himself, in the ‘Fourth Turning’ Smith says:

Otobiographies writes itself out across this quotation. There is a relation of two things – two chronologies, rather – which, through the figure of the child, both belong to and are separable from each other. One (the mother) is the figure of a temporal excess over the other (the father). Though temporal, the excess exists not *in* time, for that would be to become subject to mortality. It pertains rather to a ‘structure’ of temporal difference, embodied in the child, between the time of the mother and that of the father. As structural, it is infinite and ageless. But it is also finite in that it is a structure (Smith, 1995, p.80).

Smith is quite insightful here, for a few reasons. Firstly, he highlights how the riddle is made from the perspective of ‘the child’; since the riddle is made with reference to the mother and the father, it becomes as if it were articulated by their child. This, of course, is not to say that the child in question is still a child: perhaps they have passed on into adolescence or even adulthood; nonetheless they remain ‘the child’ of their parents (such is the anachronism contained in the very concept of ‘child’ as it transgresses the biological stage of ‘childhood’). Secondly, since the father is identified with death and the mother with life, there is ‘a temporal excess’ of the latter over the former. And thirdly, this temporal excess is argued, by Derrida, to be a structural feature of temporality itself; and therefore ‘exists not in time’, but rather as the essence of time, or perhaps rather as the essence of the so-called human experience of time.

So far the opposition of self/other has been emphasized in the interpretation given here of *The Ear of the Other*. Before concluding, I will consider in more detail this temporal structure in the opposition life/death that Derrida addresses from Nietzsche's riddle in 'Otobiographies'. This will deepen what Smith says above, since he does not stay on this point for very long. Indeed, Derrida refers to his account in 'Logic of the Living Feminine' as a 'discourse on life/death' (Derrida, 1988a, p.4). Underlying this discourse is Nietzsche's emphasis on ill-health, as he explains immediately following the articulation of his riddle:

This twofold origin, as it were from the highest and the lowest rung of the ladder of life, at once decadent and beginning – this if anything explains that neutrality, that freedom from party in relation to the total problem of life which perhaps distinguishes me. I have a subtler sense for signs of ascent and decline than any man has ever had, I am the teacher par excellence in this matter – I know both, I am both. – My father died at the age of thirty-six: he was delicate, lovable and morbid, like a being destined to pay this world only a passing visit – a gracious reminder of life rather than life itself. In the same year in which his life declined mine too declined: in the thirty-sixth year of my life I arrived at the lowest point of my vitality – I still lived, but without being able to see three paces in front of me (Nietzsche, 1992, p.8).

In this extract, also cited by Derrida, Nietzsche invokes ill-health, his own but also in general, as the intermediary between life and death: ill-health is why life is never full(y) life. Life is never life itself pure and simple ('of life rather than life itself'), and is therefore why death becomes inscribed within it *a priori*: life and death become *allies*. As Derrida says: 'The alliance that Nietzsche follows in turning his signature into riddles links the logic of the dead to that of the living feminine' (Derrida, 1988a, p.17).

Throughout the bulk of world history, it has been the husband who has left home to work or to fight wars and the wife who has stayed at home to nurture the family. The family structure is at once the underlying fabric of so-called 'civil society' as that which gives it its power, and is powerless or passive in relation to the cultural traditions of civil society itself. But when the alliance between life and death represents the divide between mother and father, that which holds so-called 'family life' together becomes that which breaks it apart (which is also to juxtapose the civil with the uncivil; for in civilization civility begins at home). In a strange statement, something along these lines seems to be going on in how Derrida interprets Nietzsche's riddle with respect to the trajectory of his own thought:

Elsewhere, I have related this elementary kinship structure (of a dead or rather absent father, already absent to himself, and of the mother living above and after all, living on long enough to bury the one she

has brought into the world, an ageless virgin inaccessible to all ages) to a logic of the death knell (*glas*) and of *obsequence*. There are examples of this logic in some of the best families, for example, the family of Christ (with whom Dionysus stands face to face, but as his specular double). There is also Nietzsche's family, if one considers that the mother survived the 'breakdown'. In sum and in general, if one 'sets aside all the facts', the logic can be found in all families (Derrida, 1988a, pp.17-18).

Derrida can 'set aside all the facts' here because, although Nietzsche is speaking of his own family, he is doing so, as he puts it a moment earlier: 'symbolically, by way of a riddle: in other words, in the form of a proverbial legend, and as a story that has a lot to teach' (p.16). Because the riddle is symbolic the brute facts of each individual's family life do not matter – perhaps it is the mother who dies before the father (as in Rousseau's case) – in relation to the principle or logic that the riddle teaches. As such, 'the logic can be found in all families'. But what, precisely, is the logic that is at work here?

The logic that is at work, as some of Derrida's opening statements in 'Logic of the Living Feminine' address, is one that concerns the problem of the philosophy of life. For Derrida, Nietzsche is one of the few thinkers in the history of philosophy – 'with the possible exceptions of Freud and, in a different way, Kierkegaard' (Derrida, 1988a, p.6) – who has presented his philosophy *as* a philosophy of life. And yet, he has done so at the expense of the philosophical idea of life itself pure and simple. For Derrida, Nietzsche shows life in its complexity; and as such shows it without a simple polar metaphysical opposite that would work to oversimplify it:

What one calls life – the thing or object of biology or biography – does not stand face to face with something that would be its opposable ob-ject: death, the thanatological or thanatographical. This is the first complication. Also, it is *painfully difficult* for life to become an object of science, in the sense that philosophy and science have always given to the word 'science' and to the legal status of scientificity. All of this – the difficulty, the delays it entails – is particularly bound up with the fact that the science of life always accommodates a philosophy of life, which is not the case for all other sciences, the sciences of nonlife – in other words, the sciences of the dead (p.6).

On the one hand, life 'does not stand face to face' with its 'opposable ob-ject' because it is allied with it. On the other hand, life is distinguished from death insofar as it becomes impossible to have a science of life that is free from all perspective, ideology, bias, etc: i.e., 'life always accommodates a philosophy of life'. The attempt to liberate oneself from such biases is not only difficult; but in being so becomes painful, 'painfully difficult'. For Derrida, and perhaps also for Nietzsche, the autobiographical becomes allied to the thanatographical or heterothanatographical since the ears with

which one discovers the laws of life, giving life itself a hearing as we are put through its painful trials, cannot be one's own but rather must come from the other.

The logic or law of the living feminine is thus a law which alludes to a different form of relation to the so-called 'other sex' as the condition of the future to come. The logic of the living feminine refers not to the bulk of the *paternal past* of world history (now dead although not buried and forgotten), but rather to a *feminine future* that is yet to come and that for the time being remains enigmatic. At once a designation saturated with both the grandiosity of world-historical significance (in the political question of how families should be structured) and the specificity of the autobiographical context of family life (where the significance applies itself to one's own experience of one's own family), the logic of the living feminine is a haunted logic: a hauntology. Haunted both by the past which is dead but remembered in mourning, and by the future which is anxious about the living present for occurring in ill-health as a consequence of the past death. Some might consider this dour and negative, but for both Nietzsche and Derrida, the idea of affirmation carries more significance if it occurs against a surrounding negative context. For to affirm when circumstances are all good and happy requires no effort; it is even instinctual. But to affirm when it seems impossible to do so is a test of the power of affirmation itself; not to mention a test of character. At any rate, one must always remember that when circumstances are all good and happy they are also fragile (feminine) in this state and so violently changeable from it: all that is good and happy can quickly become inverted, meaning that one must constantly guard against complacency. But the moment one has one's guard up one realizes that not all is good and happy; and that there can be a fine line between violence and nonviolence, evil and good, unhappy and happy, pain and pleasure. Let us conclude now by considering the implications of all these autobiographical riddles.

Conclusion

In 'Why I Am So Clever' Nietzsche turns to the meaning of his subtitle to *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*. At the heart of it is his underlying critique of morality (i.e., his immoralism) in which he positions selfishness at the origin of the idea of living for others:

At this point I can no longer avoid actually answering the question *how one becomes what one is*. And with that I touch on the masterpiece in the art of self-preservation – of *selfishness* ... For assuming that the

task, the vocation, the *destiny* of this task exceeds the average measure by a significant degree, there would be no greater danger than to catch sight of oneself with this task. That one becomes what one is presupposes that one does not have the remotest idea *what* one is. From this point of view even the *blunders* of life – the temporary sidepaths and wrong turnings, the delays, the ‘modesties’, the seriousness squandered on tasks which lie outside the task – have their own meaning and value (Nietzsche, 1992, p.34).

Selfishness is immorally positioned at the heart of altruistic morality by making what a moment later he calls: ‘these little things – nutriment, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness’ (p.36), these little things form, ‘the fundamental affairs of life’ (p.36). For Nietzsche, life is comprised of its ‘little things’ which act as a fundamental *distraction* from the very idea of living with others. Everyday life is comprised of: we go to sleep at night, wake up in the morning, get ready for work, work, go shopping for food, go home and eat, rest and relax in our own way, etc. The *affairs* of life are organized in such a way that one becomes wrapped up in one’s own little life as if it were the whole world. Within which we also think about what we want from our life, and in trying to put it into practice become self-enclosed even more. And yet, for Nietzsche, there is nothing *wrong* with this – it is even *good* to be selfish in this way and further oneself in the world, for then at least one does not become a burden to others. The entire attitude of the ‘free spirit’ is invented in order to liberate us from false burdens.

In this chapter I have argued that in Derrida’s thought there is both an adoption and a supplementation of Nietzsche’s thought: from an affirmation of life to a double affirmation of death and the other. Within this reaffirmation, there is, then, an adjustment of Nietzsche’s immoralist stance as the trace of Apollonian order partially tames the Dionysian wildness of the free spirit. Indeed, if Nietzsche is going to point towards the ‘fundamental affairs’ of life, then he must also include within this the fundamental *responsibilities* of life. For example, what if the free spirit were a parent? It is one thing to invent a riddle that appears as if it were from the perspective of the child, but what about when the child itself has a child? Are the responsibilities of parenthood included within the perspective of Nietzsche’s free spirit? Or does the idea of the free spirit speak only to the rebellious adolescent? Such questions imply, as does the trace of Apollo (and indeed the trace of Rousseau’s adjustment of the golden rule), that the free spirit, though a useful and even necessary psychological invention, can never entirely liberate itself from the fettered spirit. Indeed, one of the things that the present study has more generally been arguing, since the first chapter, is the case for

Derrida's 'autobiographical agnosticism' – in which the *singularity* of the life is accounted for. This must also include the life of the fettered spirit as much as that of the free spirit. It also works to temper Nietzsche's notably aggressive atheism. For example in 'Why I Am So Clever' he says: 'I have absolutely no knowledge of atheism as an outcome of reasoning, still less as an event: with me it is obvious by instinct' (Nietzsche, 1992, p.21). In contrast, Derrida does not have a problem with the reasoning for atheism; but rather with its passion, which mimics religious passion, as it is, precisely, a passion to attack religion: 'I am by nature warlike. To attack is among my instincts' (p.16), as Nietzsche puts it in 'Why I am so wise', as he attempts to 'wage war on Christianity' (p.18).

If there is a difference between Nietzsche and Derrida it is that the latter is more reserved and less inclined to lash out than the former: it is a difference of attitude. As Nietzsche puts it in 'Why I Am So Clever', he has 'an instinct for *self-defence*' (Nietzsche, 1992, p.33). But where Nietzsche perhaps thinks that the best form of defence is attack; in contrast, Derrida perhaps thinks that the best form of defence is the *counterattack*: i.e., one waits for the other to make the first move, to draw first blood, and judges the level of the other's aggression before responding. For in the logic of the counterattack the instinct for self-defence is actually heightened: since afterwards, one can point to the other as the one who drew first blood for no reason, whereas one's response can be deemed a reasonable reaction in relation to the initial action it was responding to. But there can of course be dangers to the logic of counterattacking, such as overreaction. Another danger is that one becomes reactive in one's attitude, thereby becoming an unwitting fettered spirit. Nietzsche's solution here is: 'Another form of sagacity and self-defence consists in *reacting as seldom as possible* and withdrawing from situations and relationships in which one would be condemned as it were to suspend one's "freedom," one's initiative, and become a mere reagent' (p.33). There is an affinity here with what Derrida says regarding 'nonresponse' in his essay, 'Passions: An Oblique Offering': 'It will perhaps be said that this nonresponse is the best response, that it is still a response and a sign of responsibility. Perhaps' (in: Derrida, 1995a, p.19).

Like Zarathustra's retreat into the solitude of his caves, the simple removal of oneself from the negative circumstances in question can be a powerful form of self-defence (although being simple does not necessarily make it easy to do). And though things get passed over in silence in this solitude, this silence can nonetheless speak

volumes – which can become necessary especially when we feel that others do not listen: the deaf of the other. As Nietzsche puts it in ‘Why I Am So Wise’: ‘I have need of *solitude*, that is to say recovery, return to myself, the breath of a free light playful air... My entire Zarathustra is a dithyramb on solitude or, if I have been understood, on *cleanliness*’ (Nietzsche, 1992, p.18). In the irrational social context of the other’s deafness, Zarathustra’s advice is that it may become necessary to retreat from the psychological warfare of social intercourse into the safety of one’s own solitude. Zarathustra’s irony, however, is such that, in one’s solitude, one may find that the deafness was also one’s own. In ‘Why I Am So Clever’, after referring to the ‘blunders of life’ in the extract which began this conclusion, Nietzsche continues: ‘They are an expression of a great sagacity, even the supreme sagacity: where *nosce te ipsum* would be the recipe for destruction, self-forgetfulness, self-*misunderstanding*, self-diminution, -narrowing, -mediocratizing becomes reason itself’ (p.34). The logic of solitude is therefore to aid and increase self-understanding and self-knowledge when we feel too lost in the herd of social intercourse. It is a logic based on the value of self-defence.

One of Derrida’s more obscure works on self-defence is his short essay, ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’ [‘What is Poetry?’]. Here he discusses the strange self-defence technique of the hedgehog, which curls itself up into a ball to show its spikes, but as it does so: ‘It blinds itself. Rolled up in a ball, prickly with spines, vulnerable and dangerous, calculating and ill-adapted (because it makes itself into a ball, sensing the danger on the autoroute, it exposes itself to an accident)’ (Derrida, 1991, p.233). Where on earth might Derrida get the idea from, to discuss the paradoxical self-defence technique of the hedgehog? From the very same page of *Ecce Homo* we have just been citing. Nietzsche says: ‘Would I not in face of it have to become a *hedgehog*? – But to have spikes is an extravagance, a double luxury even if one is free to have no spikes but *open hands*...’ (Nietzsche, 1992, p.33). At stake in this analogy with self-defence techniques and attitudes is the boundary between apology and apologia. Which perhaps provokes the following question: Is an immoralist capable of apology? Does the free spirit, in seeking to preserve their strength, understand apology as a sign of weakness? Or is there courage in humility? If we are discussing self-defence then we are discussing apologia, in which case we are discussing the boundary between apologia and apology, self-defence and other-defence, arrogance and humility, egoism and altruism, etc. For both Nietzsche and Derrida, a life lived in the cultures of civil society means that one’s domestic upbringing will become infused with a moralizing that seeks

to inhabit the 'fundamental affairs' of everyday life. But unlike Derrida, Nietzsche is very quick to preface these moral habits with the character of 'falsehood'. Derrida's undecidable hesitation on this point marks a difference between himself and the one philosopher he mimics the most through his reaffirmation.

Right at the end of *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, on the final page of the third Appendix, Simon Critchley says of Levinas: 'As Levinas was fond of putting it, the entirety of his philosophy can be summarized in the simple words, "Après vous, Monsieur"; that is, by everyday and quite banal acts of civility, hospitality, kindness and politeness that have perhaps received too little attention from philosophers' (Critchley, 1999a, p.287). Although Derrida undoubtedly adopts the Levinasian manners of 'After you, sir', I think he also supplements it with the question: 'How are you?' That is, in the problem that Nietzsche poses between the 'who' and the 'what' of oneself, it is the 'how', the anagram of the 'who', that acts as the fundamental intermediary of this opposition. This concern with the 'how' will be considered in the following chapter.

Autobiographical Speculation: Freud & Derrida

Introduction

If, as the present study has been arguing, the conceptualization of autobiography in Derrida's thought occurs in the direction of the reconceptualization of subjectivity, then this direction must address the problem of the nature and development of the subject's psychological experience throughout the course of their life. Conceptually speaking, autobiography is of interest because it economically places the self and the life, the internal mind and the external body, alongside one another. As we have seen, in the broad historical context of the discourse of philosophy it takes until Rousseau before the heart's feeling is given priority over the mind's thought; and it takes until Nietzsche before life is tragically rethought in its relation to death. However, despite their insights and their reversals, neither of these thinkers provides a systematic approach to the nature of the human psyche; it takes until Freud before such a systematic approach is offered. The relation between Freud and Derrida is an enigmatic one, for it can become a question of where the boundary rests between the similarities and differences of their respective movements: psychoanalysis and deconstruction. This is enigmatic because Derrida himself forces us to think differently about psychoanalysis. In this chapter, of course consideration of this question of the similarities and differences between psychoanalysis and deconstruction is unavoidable. But what is unique about the way in which this consideration will here be approached is its occurrence through the theme of the autobiographical – what, in his essay 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', in *The Post Card*, Derrida calls 'autobiographical speculation' (Derrida, 1987, p.305).

Derrida forces us to think differently about Freud. In his essay 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, he reinterprets the text of Freudian psychoanalysis according to the topic of writing. That is, on the one hand according to a topic that one would normally think is barely of concern in Freud's thought (barring the short essay of Freud's that Derrida reads, 'A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-pad"' (in: Freud, 2001b)), and on the other hand according to a topic that dominates Derrida's thought. The reinterpretation occurs in the fact that, for Derrida, Freud's 'A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-pad"' is symptomatic of the tightrope that psychoanalysis walks along between metaphysics and its deconstruction. Qua symptomatic, there is an underlying reliance in Freud's oeuvre on the metaphor of writing, which ranges from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (where one must write down one's dreams in order to

remember them) to his 'Note', and beyond: 'From now on, starting with the *Traumdeutung* (1900), the metaphor of writing will *appropriate simultaneously the problems of the psychic apparatus in its structure and that of the psychic text in its fabric*' (Derrida, 1978, p.206). Far from being a topic that barely occurs in Freud, writing is instead a topic that preoccupied him. What Derrida calls the 'scene of writing' is something of a *mise en scène*: the writing apparatus sets the stage for an analogy with psychical apparatus, particularly with the scene of the unconscious. Freud calls psychoanalysis 'depth psychology', as it interprets the dynamics of the deeper processes that occur in the unconscious mind (of which dreams are the evidence). But typical writing instruments (e.g., paper or slate) have only their surface, which is why the layered organization of the Mystic Pad intrigued him.

Paradoxically, at the same time that Derrida invokes a certain proximity of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, he also simultaneously calls for a certain distance. On the opening page of 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' he says:

Despite appearances, the deconstruction of logocentrism is not a psychoanalysis of philosophy. These appearances: the analysis of a historical repression and suppression of writing since Plato. This repression constitutes the origin of philosophy as *epistēmē*, and of truth as the unity of *logos* and *phonē*. Repression, not forgetting; repression, not exclusion. Repression, as Freud says, neither repels, nor flees, nor excludes an exterior force; it contains an interior representation, laying out within itself a space of repression (Derrida, 1978, p.196).

It is customary to say of Derrida's deconstructive operations on binary oppositions that one term in the opposition is 'privileged' and the other 'excluded'. But here, Derrida is precise with the relation of phono-logocentrism to writing that it is a relation neither of exclusion, nor of forgetting (the latter invoking Heidegger's notion of the 'forgetting of Being' which opens *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962)), but rather of repression. Derrida assimilates Freud's concept, but applies it to a different object: viz., the metaphysical tradition rather than the individual person. Which begs the question: Why is this 'not a psychoanalysis of philosophy'? It is not a psychoanalysis of philosophy for two reasons. First because Freud's terms are themselves understood by Derrida to be a part of the metaphysical tradition, a tradition that Freud spends very little time distinguishing himself from. And second because there is too much attention to detail of the text of philosophy (and other discourses) in deconstruction – what in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' Derrida calls the '*originality of the literary signifier*' (Derrida,

1978, p.230) – to adhere to the methodology of psychoanalysis (the latter of which, for Derrida, moves too hastily towards the meaningful signified).

As we can see, there is thus a change of terrain made by Derrida in distinguishing himself from Freud: from the nature of the individual person to the nature of the metaphysical tradition. However, since the idea of autobiography cannot but emphasise the psychoanalytic object, the psychological development of the individual person, does Derrida's autobiographical thought return to the perspective of psychoanalysis? How can Derrida's autobiographical thought be consistent with his earlier ambitions? Undoubtedly, as this chapter will argue, the deconstruction of logocentrism is only the first stage of Derrida's thought. There is more to deconstruction than the safety net of the point of reference of the 'metaphysical tradition'. But if the assumptions contained in psychoanalytic concepts are problematic from the perspective of deconstruction – 'all these concepts, without exception, belong to the history of metaphysics' (Derrida, 1978, p.197) – nonetheless, it is also problematic for deconstructive theory to avoid the psychoanalytic object from the safety net of another point of reference. The task of this chapter is therefore to set the *groundwork* to think the psychoanalytic object better than psychoanalysis itself, and to do so from a Derridean perspective (the conditions for which have already been set up in the present study by the way in which the conceptualization of autobiography provokes the reconceptualization of subjectivity in his thought). This is an impossible yet necessary task: for it is relatively easy to problematize the psychoanalytic terminology by changing terrain (as is customary in deconstructive scholarship), but it is considerably more difficult to do so in such a way that reconceptualises the human subject by making improvements upon psychoanalysis itself.

However, I would argue that this is what is demanded by a deconstructive *philosophical criticism*. In this way, this chapter is analogous to the Marx one, in which the very identification of the proletariat qua proletariat was put into question. Similarly, this chapter will initially consider the *foundational* concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis in order, later on in the chapter, to show the way in which Derrida argues how Freud himself counteracts these foundational concepts. With this in mind, towards the end of the chapter I will move into a critical reading of an essay by Bennington, 'Circanalysis (The Thing Itself)'. Here the very relation between deconstruction and psychoanalysis will be considered in more detail, but will occur via a criticism of Bennington's change of terrain from the psychoanalytic object to the metaphysical tradition. Instead, utilising

the concept of autobiography as the basis for rethinking the traditional theory of subjectivity given in psychoanalysis, it will be argued that deconstructive philosophy is capable of rethinking the psychoanalytic object since this object is that of philosophy itself. Before turning to these difficulties, let us turn to Freud's thought in more detail.

Autobiographical Speculation

Freud's thought begins with the therapeutic impetus to cure, or at least alleviate and improve, the neurotic illnesses (or 'psychoneuroses') of human beings. This occurs by diagnosing the neurotic symptoms from which the illnesses in question are made visible. And understanding neurotic symptoms and illnesses requires a theoretical account – which Freud argued was derived from scientific observation – of the nature and development of the human psyche itself. As he pithily put it in his essay 'The Question of Lay Analysis', the point of psychoanalysis is 'to understand a neurosis and to cure it' (in: Freud, 1991, p.62). Freud's originality was based in the fact that, as he understood it, the origin of neurotic symptoms and illnesses was grounded in the different ways in which the sexual instinct (or 'libido') of humans can become obstructed and displaced in the biological and biographical development of an individual person. He says: 'factors from sexual life play an extremely important, a dominating, perhaps even specific part among the causes and precipitating factors of neurotic illness' (p.27). Before turning to Freud's notion of psychosexual development, let us first consider the theoretical dynamics of the psychical apparatus itself (or 'metapsychology').

Freud's essay 'The Question of Lay Analysis' addresses the question of to what degree a layperson can become a professional psychoanalyst, in an effort to counteract the charge that psychoanalytic practitioners were quacks. It therefore concerns itself with the 'analytic situation' (in: Freud, 1991, p.8) between doctor and patient which organizes the institution of psychoanalytic practice. Freud writes himself in dialogue with an Impartial Person, an educated but sceptical questioner of the principles of psychoanalysis, here playing the part of the layperson. From early on, what becomes apparent is that psychoanalysis attempts to offer the very foundations for psychology, foundations which are considerably lacking:

Have you not noticed that every philosopher, every imaginative writer, every historian and every biographer makes up his own psychology for himself, brings forward his own particular hypotheses

concerning the interconnections and aims of mental acts – all more or less plausible and all equally untrustworthy? There is an evident lack of any common foundation. And it is for this reason too that in the field of psychology there is, so to speak, no respect and no authority. In that field everyone can ‘run wild’ as he chooses. If you raise a question in physics or chemistry, anyone who knows he possesses no ‘technical knowledge’ will hold his tongue. But if you venture upon a psychological assertion, you must be prepared to meet judgements and contradictions from every quarter. In this field, apparently, there is no ‘technical knowledge’. Everyone has a mental life, so everyone regards himself as a psychologist. But that strikes me as inadequate legal title. The story is told of how someone who applied for a post as a children’s nurse was asked if she knew how to look after babies. ‘Of course’, she replied, ‘why, after all, I was a baby once myself’ (p.14).

Simply being a person oneself and having one’s own psychical experience does not constitute a solid basis from which to begin making psychological observations and judgements. Freud is thus attempting to do for the discipline of psychology what Aristotle did for the discipline of philosophy: just as Aristotle classified the different branches of philosophical knowledge, from which the so-called ‘big questions’ in philosophy are derived (to which he gave his own answers), Freud classifies the different problems of psychology as the psychological problems of human experience (to which he gives his own diagnoses).

In order to account for the general aetiology of the variety of neurotic illnesses (e.g., hysteria, paranoia, anxiety, schizophrenia, melancholia, megalomania, hypochondria, etc) Freud’s initial argument regarding the nature of the psyche is that it cannot have the simple singular surface layer of consciousness as its underlying core. Neurotic illnesses derive from the fact that one has become absent from oneself, which requires the hypothesis of the existence of the *unconscious*. Within the dynamic between the conscious and the unconscious, there is a psychological conflict between what Freud calls the *id* and the *ego*. The *id* is the instinctual drive for pleasure in its various guises within each individual, each of which requires immediate satisfaction; the *ego* is the rationalization of how to go about compromising with the fact that not all of the *id*’s pleasures can be satisfied immediately. Since the *ego* imposes postponement on the *id*, there develops an internal psychical conflict within each individual person:

In the *id* there are no conflicts; contradictions and antitheses persist side by side in it unconcernedly, and are often adjusted by the formation of compromises. In similar circumstances the *ego* feels a conflict which must be decided; and the decision lies in one urge being abandoned in favour of the other. The *ego* is an organization characterized by a very remarkable trend towards unification, towards synthesis. This characteristic is lacking in the *id*; it is, as we might say, ‘all to pieces’; its different urges pursue their own purposes independently and regardless of one another (in: Freud, 1991, p.18).

The id is thus akin to what Freud generally calls the *pleasure principle*; and the ego is akin to what he calls the *reality principle*. That is, the id seeks the satisfaction of its various pleasures regardless of the real world circumstances it might be in; and the ego tries to find the most economical way for the id to go about its business in the actual circumstances of the real world.

In the relation between the two levels of conscious experience and unconscious dynamics, the ego and the id have different locations. The id remains entirely in the unconscious, while the ego can move between the two levels, as Freud says in ‘The Question of Lay Analysis’: ‘All that is true is that everything that happens in the id is and remains unconscious, and that processes in the ego, and they alone, can become conscious. But not all of them are, nor always, nor necessarily; and large portions of the ego can remain permanently unconscious’ (in: Freud, 1991, p.19). Insofar as the ego can become conscious, there is thus a third level, the *preconscious*, which acts as the preparatory point of transition from unconscious to conscious, as Freud says in his essay ‘The Unconscious’: ‘In consideration of this capacity for becoming conscious we also call the system Cs. the “preconscious”’ (p.148). Insofar as the ego can move towards consciousness, it becomes capable of moving towards the mind’s perception of the outside world. At this point, the ego realizes that, as well as passively receiving the living conditions from the outside world, it is also partially capable of actively intervening in it and changing it according to its own intent, as Freud says in ‘The Question of Lay Analysis’:

It is also possible to intervene in the external world by *changing* it, and to establish in it intentionally the conditions which make satisfaction possible. This activity then becomes the ego’s highest function; decisions as to when it is more expedient to control one’s passions and bow before reality, and when it is more expedient to side with them and to take arms against the external world – such decisions make up the whole essence of worldly wisdom (p.22).

The function of the ego is to find out the best possible way in which to satisfy the id’s desires; but it must do so by maintaining its alliance with the external world. Conflict arises between the ego and the id, sparking the formation of a neurosis: ‘A neurosis is thus the result of a conflict between the ego and the id’ (p.24). And this is because the ego must repress the id’s desires: ‘The ego [...] institutes a *repression* of these instinctual impulses’ (p.23).

A major factor in the dissatisfaction of the id is that the external world comes hardwired with moral rules and codes, which as youngsters we learn from our family and as we grow into adulthood we learn are implicit within our cultural traditions and modes of behaviour. The internalization of these rules forms within our psychological apparatus what Freud calls the *superego*: ‘the super-ego is the vehicle of the phenomenon that we call conscience’ (in: Freud, 1991, p.42), as he puts it in ‘The question of lay analysis’. Just as the duality of the unconscious and the conscious is mediated by the third term of preconscious, so the ego and the id are mediated by the third term of superego. For Freud, both the ego and the superego form the general *narcissism* of human beings. In his essay ‘On Narcissism: An Introduction’ he describes what he calls the ‘narcissistic attitude’ (in: Freud, 2001c, p.73) as the condition within which the ego, instead of attending to the outside world, turns back onto itself in the formation of its own ideals. These *ego ideals* themselves have a dual element: ‘The ego ideal opens up an important avenue for the understanding of group psychology. In addition to its individual side, this ideal has a social side; it is also the common ideal of a family, a class or a nation’ (p.101). In other words, as one grows into adulthood, one becomes concerned with achieving certain life goals. Those life goals can be either one’s own, in the ego’s attempt to satisfy the id; or they can be specific ones within the community within which one grew up, in the ego’s attempt to satisfy the superego.

With Freud, it is almost impossible to abstract an account of the nature of the psychological apparatus from that of psychosexual development. For the relation between the id, the ego, and the superego, is one that he argued to develop at specific stages of the life cycle – particularly in the formative years from infancy to puberty. Indeed, the psychological apparatus itself is sexualized by Freud insofar as the id is synonymous with the *libido*: i.e., the sexual instinct of human beings. At this point, it might be useful to ask: How, then, do we account for the fact that ego ideals can be non-sexual? The answer to this question is in Freud’s concept of *sublimation*. Sublimation is the process by which the energy of the id becomes directed away from a sexual object onto some other object, as Freud explains in ‘On Narcissism: An Introduction’:

We are naturally led to examine the relation between this forming of an ideal and sublimation. Sublimation is a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct’s directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon deflection from sexuality (in: Freud, 2001c, p.94).

Freud goes on to say that, since the ego ideal idealises a particular object or objective, the work of idealization is distinct from the work of sublimation: for where the former displaces the sexual object and becomes fixated on other objects and objectives, the latter displaces the sexual instinct itself. On the one hand, sublimation is thus a key process by which people become normalized into the practicalities of civilized culture, as we substitute sexual activity for other non-sexual activities. On the other hand, it is precisely the high demands of civility that creates these almost unattainable ego ideals, which play their part in the repression of the id and the formation of neuroses – ‘the neuroses of civilization’ (in: Freud, 1991, p.65).

The idea that civilization is the cause of neuroses perhaps shows an influence from Rousseau: Freud’s (1961) *Civilization and its Discontents* might have been called *Discourse on the Origin of Neuroses*. In this analogy, Freud’s unprecedented ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’ could be seen as a psychoanalytic reworking of *Émile*. The first essay, ‘The Sexual Aberrations’, outlines the various perverse deviations that work against so-called ‘normal’ sexuality: ‘The relation between these deviations and what is assumed to be normal requires thorough investigation’ (in: Freud, 1991, p.281). From the outset it should be noted that, from a contemporary garden-variety politically correct perspective, the language of ‘normality’ that Freud uses here could be seen as morally bankrupt; as if he were making a value judgement against one version of what constitutes ‘normal’ sexual life. Perhaps there is a danger of this; but such is the difficulty of Freud’s task in this first essay. In his day particularly in the context that he was working in, ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ would have connoted a medical classification. In our day of postmodern identity politics (which tends to maintain an ironic distance from Freud), the terms ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ are used with more moral connotations. In fairness to Freud, I think it is important to take him on his own meaning here: indeed, that the very word ‘neurosis’ connotes ‘psychological abnormality’ implies that ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ are terms hardwired into the dynamics of the psychological apparatus, and into the goal of psychoanalysis, and so they are terms we have already been using without using them directly. Also, it is not entirely clear in this first essay to what degree Freud himself is calling into question the very idea of ‘normal’ sexuality, and to what degree he thinks that sexual ‘abnormalities’ need to be therapeutically transformed back into ‘normal’ ones again. Undoubtedly arguments could be made for both sides. At any rate, in this first essay

Freud himself says, ‘how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach’ (p.304).

By ‘normal’ sexuality Freud thus means the heterosexual act of sexual intercourse without deviation from the meeting of the two genitalia. He initially divides his account between deviations in terms of the *sexual object* (i.e. concerning heterosexuality), and then deviations in terms of the *sexual aim* (i.e., concerning the sexual act itself). His account of the deviations of the sexual object thus begins with the simple inversion of heterosexuality, in homosexuality, which he calls ‘inversion’ (in: Freud, 1991, p.282); between which he identifies different gradations, such that we can identify bisexuals, whom he refers to as ‘*amphigenic* inverts’ (p.282). He then offers a discussion on the nature-nurture debate in relation to heterosexuality and its levels of inversion, arguing that both factors play their part: ‘The nature of inversion is explained neither by the hypothesis that it is innate nor by the alternative hypothesis that it is acquired’ (p.286). His account of the deviations in the sexual aim is dependent on a feature which is described later in the first essay, namely, that the human body contains numerous ‘erotogenic zones’ (p.311); and not just the genitalia. He thus begins his account of deviations in the sexual aim by referring to the kiss: ‘the kiss [...] is held in high sexual esteem among many nations (including the most highly civilized ones)’ (p.294). Such begins Freud’s interest with the body’s orifices as providing a major route for sexual deviations. In terms of the deviations themselves, in particular he refers to voyeurs and exhibitionists (i.e., those who like to see and those who like to be seen); sadists and masochists (i.e., those who like to inflict pain on others and those who like to have pain inflicted on themselves); and sexual frigidity and sexual overexcitement (i.e., an underactive and an overactive libido).

The second essay on sexuality, ‘Infantile Sexuality’, contains his theory of the stages of ‘psychosexual development’ (in: Freud, 1991, p.337). His general proposition is that human sexuality does not begin in puberty, but rather, begins in infancy with the infant’s incestuous attachment to its parents – in particular, in the case of a boy, with the boy’s attachment to his mother. Such is the famous Oedipus complex first alluded to in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The boy thus considers his father a threat with respect to the acquisition of his mother, and fears he will be castrated: he develops the ‘castration complex’ (p.334). In contrast, in the case of a girl, the girl notices the lack of her penis and becomes envious: ‘envy for the penis’ (p.334). There are five stages of psychosexual development that Freud alludes to: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and

puberty. The first three, Freud says, 'begins between the ages of two and five' (p.338). With the oral stage the baby becomes anxious as it is drawn away from breastfeeding, and substitutes it with activities such as thumb sucking. With the anal stage the baby becomes anxious as it must go through a period of toilet training. And with the phallic stage begins a period of what Freud calls 'infantile masturbation' (p.329), where the young child's exploration of their own genitals leads them to auto-erotic activity. However, since such activity becomes discouraged by parents, from the ages of five to around twelve there is a period of latency until sexual feelings are reawakened in puberty. In other words, the Oedipus complex only appears in childhood development between the age of two and five. This is because the ego in the young child has not yet begun to form; this formation begins in the latency period, towards the end of which, at the beginning of the puberty period, the superego has begun to develop.

The Oedipus complex occurs, and recurs in puberty in a different form, because from the period of latency onwards the ego succeeds in repressing the child's id. The third essay on sexuality, 'The Transformations of Puberty', articulates the 'new sexual aim' (in: Freud, 1991, p.345) of the adolescent: i.e., to find a sexual object that is neither one's family nor oneself. This new sexual aim leads to a paradox: on the one hand, a dramatic increase in auto-erotic activity; and on the other hand, a desire for hetero-erotic activity rather than auto-erotic activity. One theme that runs through all three essays is the concern with sexual prohibition. For Freud, if almost all neuroses originate in the cathartic libido and its sublimations and substitutions, then disturbances of sexual development are of primary importance in psychoanalysis. One important factor of such disturbances becomes the way in which the sexual prohibition of a child's development is managed by their parents. For such prohibitions involve the development of what in the second essay Freud calls *mental dams*: 'the mental dams against sexual excesses – shame, disgust and morality' (p.331). One of the difficulties of puberty is thus coping with the incest taboo of civilization: for infantile sexuality knew nothing of it, meaning that each of us has an unconscious childhood memory of having felt incestuous desires. In puberty, the new sexual aim is new precisely because it cannot have an old familial aim as an outlet. As Freud says in the third essay: 'the moral precepts which expressly exclude from his object-choice, as being blood-relations, the persons whom he has loved in his childhood' (p.360).

One of the factors that led Freud to come to the conclusion of the incest taboo as the structure of the Oedipus complex is not merely that it is an unwritten moral law of

civil cultures, but also because, he argues, it is a more prevalent feature of our nightly dreams than we would like to admit. His essay 'On Dreams', which summarizes the main themes of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, begins with reference to the cross-cultural significance given to dreams in mythological history: here, the superstitions associated with the 'ancient overvaluation of dreams' (in: Freud, 1991, p.82) is contrasted with the modern undervaluation of dreams in scientific circles. In his own theory of dreams, they are given the intermediate valuation that they carry psychological significance for understanding the unconscious processes of waking life. He distinguishes between the '*manifest* content of the dream' (p.88) (i.e., the events of the dream), and the '*latent* content of the dream' (p.88) (i.e., the underlying significance of the dream's events), continuing: 'I shall describe the process which transforms the latent into the manifest content of dreams as the "dream-work"' (p.89). That is, the dream-work is the process of the interpretation of dreams in which the psychoanalyst unpicks the underlying significance of the dream's events. Here, the significance in question applies itself only to the dreamer themselves. In studies of children's dreams, Freud came to the conclusion that nightly dreaming is a consequence of daily wishful thinking. In dreams we fulfil the wishes that were unfulfilled during the day: 'The common element in all these children's dreams is obvious. All of them fulfilled wishes which were active during the day but had remained unfulfilled. The dreams were simple and undisguised *wish-fulfilments*' (p.91). As such, Freud's emphasis on dreaming, and on the interpretation of dreams, opens the psychological gateway to the concern with what it is we *fantasize* about in daily life.

The emphasis on the boundary between fantasy and reality is undoubtedly one of the key components of psychoanalytic theory, particularly as it plays its part in the diagnosis of various neurotic disorders in which an ability to distinguish clearly one from the other has become distorted. Freud's hypothesis that the dream-work demonstrates the underlying symbolic sexual connotations of dreams is, today, perhaps exaggerated and caricatured in the various outlets of pop culture. However, this does not mean that there are no grounds for this caricature. For example, towards the end of 'On Dreams' Freud says:

The majority of dream-symbols serve to represent persons, parts of the body and the activities invested with erotic interest; in particular, the genitals are represented by a number of often very surprising symbols, and the greatest variety of objects are employed to denote them symbolically. Sharp weapons,

long and stiff objects, such as tree-trunks and sticks, stand for the male genital; while cupboards, boxes, carriages or ovens may represent the uterus (in: Freud, 1991, p.123).

That Freudian psychoanalysis so readily connects a non-sexual signifier with a sexual signified is undoubtedly problematic. Psychoanalysis offers a theory of displacement, or sublimation, by which attention is turned from the singular concern with sex to the plethora of other disseminated concerns. Perhaps one of the reasons why deconstruction institutes a displacement of psychoanalysis itself is because the language within which it claims to make its interpretations pays little attention to the work of language itself. In 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' Derrida says: 'writing is the stage of history and the play of the world. It cannot be exhausted by psychology alone' (Derrida, 1978, p.228). The problem here is that, once psychology begins to offer interpretations of what an event in someone's life *symbolizes* to them, a theory of the organization of the psychical apparatus by itself is *inadequate*. In *Derrida's Writing and Difference* Sarah Wood says: 'If psychoanalysis is necessary for Derrida, it is not enough' (Wood, 2009, p.116). One must also account for the linguistic apparatus through which this symbolization itself occurs, and through which the various apparatuses of reality itself are mediated. With this in mind let us turn our attention more directly to a dialogue between Freud and Derrida, and return to the theme of autobiographical speculation.

Derrida's essay 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, provides a deconstructive interpretation primarily of Freud's essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. In this essay Freud develops the concepts of *repetition compulsion* and the *death drive*. For Freud, the experience of pleasure only ever offers a temporary alleviation of the onset of a feeling of unpleasure or pain. As such, there develops in the id the need to constantly repeat the experience of pleasure. In the unconscious mind this means that the id's need is experienced as a compulsion that returns eternally within each individual person, requiring them to continually repeat the attempt to satisfy the need. The repetition compulsion invokes a strange paradoxical experience; one of simultaneous pleasure and unpleasure, as Freud describes: 'the great part of what is re-experienced under the compulsion to repeat must cause the ego unpleasure, since it brings to light activities of repressed instinctual impulses' (in: Freud, 1991, p.230). On the one hand, the repetition compulsion causes pleasure by continually replenishing the id's feeling of the lack of pleasure which develops once the

temporary experience of pleasure has begun to dissipate. On the other hand, the repetition compulsion causes unpleasure in the ego by reminding it that its activities are reinforcing the repressions which underlie the id's continual need for temporary alleviation. For instance, in the transition from one stage of development to the next, a particular mode of relating to oneself must be given up in favour of another; and this sense of giving up the old for the new inscribes anxiety into the repetition compulsion.

In such predictably rough transitions, Freud argues that a 'narcissistic scar' develops: 'Loss of love and failure leave behind them a permanent injury to self-regard in the form of a narcissistic scar' (in: Freud, 1991, p.230). This loss of love he interprets as already prepared for in the game of *fort-da* ('there-gone'), or peekaboo, played by adults with young children: a game which is understood to lessen their separation anxiety later in life. In a footnote to his description of this game, he provides an account of an observation of a child who began to play this game by themselves with a mirror:

One day the child's mother had been away for several hours and on her return was met with the words 'Baby o-o-o-o!' which was at first incomprehensible. It soon turned out, however, that during this long period of solitude the child had found a method of making himself disappear. He had discovered his reflection in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach to the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror-image 'gone' (p.225).

Indeed, this specular aspect of the *fort-da* game is undoubtedly implied by Derrida's essay title of 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', in French, 'spéculer'. In her chapter 'Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis', in *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics*, Christina Howells says of this word: 'It refers to Freud's anxieties about his relation to speculative philosophy, but also carries echoes of financial and economic "speculation," as well as the "specular" or mirroring effect whereby Freud's text enacts what it describes – specifically the *fort-da* principle' (Howells, 1998, p.107). On the initial point that Howells refers to here, it is clear that Freud's intention was always to present psychoanalytic theory as derived from empirical observation. However, he did at times acknowledge, against himself, that he was speculating – for example, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' itself he refers to his 'metapsychological speculations' (in: Freud, 1991, p.238).

For Freud, the repetition compulsion is the first stage, a stage within the ego, which begins to overpower the id's pleasure principle: 'there really does exist in the

mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle' (in: Freud, 1991, p.232). As the ego's reality principle develops, and learns that the external world can be a dangerous place, it does not merely attempt to negotiate the id's pleasure principle with the demands of the external world, but also by itself develops an instinct for self-defence: '*Protection against stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than reception of stimuli*' (p.236). Here, 'the ego's instinct for self-preservation' (p.221) involves the creation of a 'protective shield' (p.236), the ego's defence mechanisms. In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' Freud becomes concerned that the ego's reality principle does not by itself take us beyond the pleasure principle because it fundamentally works to satisfy the id's pleasure principle as best as it can, if only via its unpleasurable postponements: 'the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle can only be made responsible for a small number, and by no means the most intense, of unpleasurable experiences' (p.221). Freud's insight that the ego develops a repetition compulsion, which is at once devoted to satisfying the id's pleasures and devoted to protecting itself against the unpleasurable dangers of the real world, becomes the basis of his development of the death drive. As he puts it: 'The upshot of our enquiry so far has been the drawing of a sharp distinction between the "ego instincts" and the sexual instincts, and the view that the former exercise pressure towards death and the latter towards a prolongation of life' (p.250).

The ego contains not only the reality principle but also the death drive; with the latter derived not only from the fact that reality can be a dangerous place, but also because death is hardwired into life itself: 'all living substance is bound to die from internal causes' (in: Freud, 1991, p.251). The ego's instinct for self-preservation is also equally an instinct for self-destruction, insofar as the compulsion to repeat can repeat traumatic instances as equally as it can pleasurable instances. Freud's initial evidence for this is in the observation of patients who, having suffered traumatic experiences, relive those experiences in their dreams. On the evidence of trauma dreams, or perhaps rather nightmares, Freud concedes in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' that he must, 'admit for the first time an exception to the proposition that dreams are fulfilments of wishes' (p.240) – a counterproposition to that put forward in title of the third chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 'The Dream as a Wish-fulfilment' (Freud, 1997). Wishing for something does not make it so. Towards the end of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' Freud returns to the standard psychoanalytic argument that perversions in sexual aims, of which sadism is exemplary as it appertains to mastery of the world

around it, are the origin of neuroses as they rest on the boundary between the ego and the id:

But how can the sadistic instinct, whose aim is to injure the object, be derived from Eros, the preserver of life? Is it not plausible to suppose that this sadism is in fact a death instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego and has consequently only emerged in relation to the object? It now enters the service of the sexual function (in: Freud, 1991, p.259).

The problem that sadism has is that, though it is at once a symbol of both the life and death instincts, it cannot actually master either of them, despite its efforts. Such is the weight that Freud put on the game of fort-da as a foundation for the early acceptance of loss, separation, and death.

In the 'Envois' ['Sendings'] section of *The Post Card*, Derrida says: 'I have never understood why psychoanalysis is so hung up on such a backward technology of the *fort:da* or of "direct" discourse' (Derrida, 1987, p.44). The reference to direct discourse is perhaps to the analytic situation in the institution of psychoanalytic practice, imagined by Freud that the patient will express themselves to the analyst with complete candour. As he says in 'The Question of Lay Analysis': 'We call on him to be completely straightforward with his analyst, to keep nothing back intentionally that comes into his head, and then to put aside every reservation that might prevent his reporting certain thoughts or memories' (in: Freud, 1991, p.11). Without complete candour, the patient is understood by Freud to be *resisting* analysis – a resistance which much of his thought conceptualizes, culminating particularly in his short essay, 'The Resistances to Psycho-analysis' (in: Freud, 2001b). In contrast to this psychoanalytic situation, Derrida's allegorical and circumlocutionary writing style, in 'Envois' and in 'Circumfession' (and undoubtedly elsewhere, but the latter text invokes the former as its main predecessor), is often an attempt on his part to implicitly perform the very principle in his writing that it neglects to explicitly state. As such, with Derrida, often the point of his thought is implicit rather than explicit in the text within which it is articulated. As we have seen in previous chapters, the reason for this is Derrida's overriding concern with the strange dynamic between the work of concepts (signified) and the work of articulation (signifier) in the texts that form the discourse of philosophy. Indeed, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' already refers to: 'An attempt to justify a theoretical reticence to utilize Freudian concepts, otherwise than in quotation marks' (Derrida, 1978, p.197).

Clearly, for Derrida, the status of the key concepts in psychoanalysis are problematic and open to revision. This is so even if they are deemed to possess an explanatory power perhaps to an unprecedented degree in the context of the history of philosophy (and undoubtedly in the subsequent history of academic psychology, which has regressed somewhat since Freud's foundations). If 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' calls for all the concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis to be placed within quotation marks, then 'To Speculate – On "Freud"' places Freud's name itself into quotation marks. Howells notes that this latter essay of Derrida's 'puts quotation marks around Freud's name because it is concerned with autobiography and questions of the relationship between "man" and "work"' (Howells, 1998, pp.106-107). I would like to make a more radical claim than this: I would argue that Derrida puts quotation marks around Freud's name because, in a situation in which all of the concepts of psychoanalysis have already been put in quotation marks by Derrida, it then becomes necessary to transform the psychoanalytic project and object itself. Just as 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' picks out Freud's essay 'A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-pad"' in order to radicalize how we think of Freud's key concepts by arguing that writing is one of them, so 'To Speculate – On "Freud"' picks out Freud's essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' as a way of radicalizing the psychoanalytic project and object itself. Indeed, the 'Envois' section of *The Post Card* acts as a preface to the essay that follows it, 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', because in this preface Derrida invents what he calls the 'postal principle' (Derrida, 1987, p.27) as a counter-concept to Freud's concept of the pleasure principle. In *The Post Card* Derrida tries to set up the conditions for a more effective manner of going 'beyond the pleasure principle'.

Derrida's notion of the *postal principle* has two central meanings. First, like any mail in general that is sent in the post, there is always a danger that it might not arrive at its destination, what Derrida in 'Envois' calls *adestination*: 'The condition for it to arrive is that it ends up and even that it begins by not arriving. This is how it is to be read, and written, the *carte* of the adestination' (Derrida, 1987, p.29). With this first meaning of the postal principle Derrida deconstructs the teleological nature of human experience. According to this teleological nature, we would like to know where we are going (in life), where our destination is, and both if and when we will arrive there. We would like to know this because we would like to know when our next pleasurable experience will be, and how long it will last for. To deconstruct the teleological nature of human experience is therefore to call into question the *eventuality* of the pleasurable

experience. And second, like a postcard in particular that is sent in the post, it articulates the fact that it is ‘half-private half-public’ (p.62). With this second meaning Derrida deconstructs the psychological nature of human experience. According to this psychological nature, like Freud, we would like to be able to articulate and conceptualize the nature of the human mind; the internality of the psychical apparatus. The problem is – as Freud is aware, as Derrida notes in ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ where he argues that Freud also, ‘wants to respect simultaneously the Being-in-the-world of the psyche’ (Derrida, 1978, p.212) – that psychological experience is situated in the external world: in given historical epochs; in given political and technological conditions; in given national, cultural and linguistic traditions; and in given countries, cities, towns, villages, roads, houses, and family dynamics. To deconstruct the psychological nature of experience is therefore to call into question very *placement* of the psyche in the externality of both the immediate world around it and the mediate world at large.

Here I would like to pose the following hypothesis: viz., that Derrida’s notion of the postal principle is a metaphor for the *apparatus of communication*, particularly insofar as it acts as an intermediary between the internality of the psychical apparatus and the externality of the various apparatuses of the real world. Here, on the one hand, a destination represents the problem of miscommunication, as the communicative situation contains within it the possibility of both its success and failure. And on the other hand, half-public half-private represents the problem of historical inaccuracy, as the process of historical dating contains within it the possibility of contamination from the infinite rehearsal of the psyche’s memory and imagination. From Derrida’s perspective, the idea of the communicative apparatus is therefore what is most lacking in Freud’s thought – particularly as the miscommunications of everyday life become rehearsed in one’s memory as one tries to figure out whether someone was being nice or nasty to them. For communication breakdown is a key component in the formation of psychological problems – as, for example, the influential psychotherapist Carl Rogers noted (Rogers, 1961). Derrida’s emphasis on the ear is an emphasis on listening; and the idea of listening is about interpolating preventative measures into the structures of language that call attention to the problem of miscommunication. For instance, in *Limited Inc* Derrida conceptualizes this interpolation under the name ‘mistype’ (Derrida, 1988b, p.39). The difficulty of interpreting the meaning of what others say to us, judging their tone, implies *a priori* that even so-called ‘everyday language’ is

capable of being indirect. Everyday language is not necessarily candid language. In *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* Hélène Cixous says: 'I cannot emphasize enough that his whole philosophy is a consequence of the displacement of everyday language' (Cixous, 2004, p.59). When it comes to language, Derrida is not merely interested in the literary context, but also the everyday context, for in both contexts rests the problem of rhetorical indirectness and misdirection. Indeed, it could perhaps be argued that situated in the intermediary space of the communicative apparatus is Derrida's *grammatology*.

Take, for example, the nicknames that Derrida utilizes throughout his work (e.g., 'SarI' in *Limited Inc*): these are as much a feature of everyday language as they are of literary language. The displacement of the proper name is not reserved merely for the literary perspective. But the assimilation of Derrida's thought in literature departments tends to sideline his emphasis on his applicability to everyday life in favour of his applicability to literary texts. Perhaps this issue is even more pertinent in the relation of deconstruction to psychoanalysis, where psychoanalysis has itself experienced as much flourishing in literature departments as deconstruction, which is perhaps due to the popularity of Lacan and essays by him such as 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' (in: Lacan, 2006). Today, Freud is probably read, and his poignancy understood, more in literature departments than in both philosophy and psychology departments. So I disagree with a half sentence in the 'Introduction' by William Kerrigan and Joseph H. Smith to an influential book in the field that they edited, *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis and Literature*: 'if for Lacan there was too little philosophy in Freud, for Derrida there is too much' (Kerrigan & Smith, 1984, p.xiv). Here they are briefly summarizing the argument of the essay by Alan Bass in their book, 'The Double Game: An Introduction' (Bass, 1984), so perhaps it is a little unfair to attribute ownership of this sentence entirely to them. At any rate, undoubtedly there is an allusion in this citation to the fact that Derrida inscribes Freud's concepts into the history of metaphysics. However, in the context in which this citation is made it gives the reader the impression that Derrida's main point of relevance and applicability is to the literary text. In contrast, I would argue that it is to everyday life; and also that the conceptualization of autobiography in his thought goes as much in the direction of the everyday as it does in the direction of the literary (for the latter, see Robert Smith's *Derrida and Autobiography*).

Let us turn more directly to the theme of autobiography, then, in ‘To Speculate – On “Freud”’. This essay contains four chapters. The first chapter, ‘Notices (Warnings)’, begins by conceptualizing Nietzsche’s double theme of life and death into the term ‘*life death*’ (Derrida, 1987, p.259). Since this is not Nietzsche’s own concept as such, but is rather the conceptualization of a Nietzschean theme, one can see the transformative work of reaffirmation involved in Derrida’s simultaneous adoption and supplementation of Nietzsche’s thought (which was articulated in the previous chapter). Ultimately, in ‘To Speculate – On “Freud”’, Derrida uses this concept in order to provoke a similar sort of reaffirmation of the themes of life and death in Freud’s ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’. But this is in order, precisely, to put psychoanalysis into question by arguing that the development of its new concepts (repetition compulsion and death drive) impinges radically on the status of its old ones. However, in Derrida’s essay as a whole there are various detours in the making of this point. In ‘Notices (Warnings)’ he quotes from Freud’s ‘An Autobiographical Study’ (in: Freud, 2001a) to the effect that, on the one hand, Freud notices a resemblance to psychoanalysis in prior philosophers, particularly Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; but on the other hand, he also warns that they played such a small part in his intellectual development that they should not be understood as his intellectual predecessors. The issue, for Derrida, is thus the inheritance that Freud owes to the philosophical tradition at the precise moment of his disavowing of that very inheritance: ‘whether he analyses it or not, Freud submits to an imperative which prescribes that he interrupt the chain and refuse the inheritance. And that he thereby found another genealogy’ (Derrida, 1987, p.266). One of the main features of Derrida’s deconstruction of Freud is thus to think the gap between intellectual and institutional psychoanalysis; between psychoanalytic theory and psychoanalytic practice.

For as Freud puts it in his essay, ‘On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement’: ‘psychoanalysis is my creation’ (in: Freud, 2001c, p.7). As his creation, there is an epistemological break with the philosophical tradition; an avoidance of philosophical speculation as psychoanalytic theory is made after observation rather than before it. And yet, as we saw earlier, in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ he also utilizes the very language of speculation. In ‘Notices (Warnings)’ Derrida asks: ‘Did Freud *give* himself over, *abandon* himself to speculation?’ (Derrida, 1987, p.265). The problem here is that, where the early Freud seemed empiricist, the later Freud seems speculative; and yet, while speculative, he becomes more dismissive of his

philosophical inheritance. For Derrida, psychoanalytic practice is grounded in the theme of the patient's resistance to analysis via an evasive periphrasis. So the problem for deconstruction is in identifying what psychoanalysis *itself* resists at the theoretical level; and it seemed to resist philosophical speculation. Hence, Derrida argues that Freud, 'defends himself against [philosophy] by *avoiding it*' (p.266). And yet, in later, more reflective works, Freud appears to 'give himself over' to speculation; but paradoxically, while doing so, for example in his 'An autobiographical study', avoiding his philosophical inheritance even more. In order to return, towards the end of 'Notices (Warnings)', to the theme of life death (which is already inscribed in *différance*), Derrida rethinks this speculative structure in relation to *différance* itself: 'the graphics of *différance* belongs neither to science nor to philosophy in their classical limits' (p.288). He thus proposes a hypothesis: 'the speculative structure has its place and its necessity in this graphics' (p.285).

These latter citations from Derrida provoke a paradox regarding speculation. On the one hand, it is impossible to philosophize about death, and about the relation of life to death, and of the temporality of this relation, without a certain logic or law of speculation at work. On the other hand, it is also impossible for this graphical speculation inscribed within *différance* to conform to the laws of logic that define the limits of classical philosophical speculation. Although, to some, philosophical speculation seems too free insofar as it can hypothesize the existence of God, and the existence of anything else that one cares to think of in some so-called 'thought experiment'; in contrast, for Derrida, it is also the case that there is an element in which philosophical speculation is too constrained by the laws of thought that underlie it. Once the law of non-contradiction is put into question, once logical paradoxes begin to make their mark, the philosophy of life can no longer avoid the problem of death; instead, this problem would have to be posed *a priori*. Having already opened an autobiographical space in the first chapter by citing from Freud's 'An Autobiographical Study', in the second chapter, 'Freud's Legacy', Derrida embarks upon a curious analysis of Freud's game of *fort-da* involving a strange and complex autobiographical speculation. By reading into some implicit judgements that Freud makes regarding the child he is observing in this game, Derrida suggests that the child in question is a family relation to Freud. As Howells notes: 'Derrida observes in Freud's tell-tale signs of a very personal involvement: the child, he is sure, is Freud's grandchild, son of his

daughter Sophie who died shortly before the essay was completed' (Howells, 1998, p.108).

Before Derrida gives a discussion of this scene that Howells pithily describes, he articulates what he understands to be the general law of autobiographical speculation itself:

To go forward in my reading, I now need an essential possibility whose chance, if it can be put thus, will have been momentous: it is that every autobiographical speculation, to the extent that it constitutes a legacy and the institution of a movement without limit, must take into account, in its very performance, the mortality of the legatees. As soon as there is mortality, death can in principle overtake one at every instant. The speculator then can survive the legatee, and this possibility is inscribed in the structure of the legacy, and even within this limit of self-analysis whose system supports the writing somewhat like a grid. The precocious death, and therefore the mutism of the legatee who can do nothing about it: this is one of the possibilities of that which dictates and causes to write (Derrida, 1987, p.305).

There are three points to note here. First, that 'autobiographical speculation' refers here to a mode of interpretation, perhaps even a judgement, which is applied to someone's life (including potentially one's own). One must therefore be in a position to know a few disconnected facts about the person's life and work, and try to connect the dots in such a way that makes sense, but for which there is little obvious evidence. In this sense, autobiographical speculation happens every day: for example when we wonder about someone's mode of communication towards us, attempt to interpret their intentions, and make judgements about their character based on the conclusion we come to about them. Second, regarding Derrida's argument that the condition of any autobiographical speculation is 'the mortality of the legatees' (that is, the mortality of those that one is speculating about): this is so because the problem of autobiographical speculation is that, generally speaking, like any communicative context, it can come to an end because of the possibility of 'precocious death'. And third, the structure that Derrida speaks about here with respect to the legatees would also, in principle, apply itself to the speculator themselves, such that death could come along to interrupt the moment of speculation itself.

Before concluding, I would like to utilize this autobiographical emphasis to prepare a critical reading of the essay in Geoffrey Bennington's book *Interrupting Derrida* called 'Circanalysis (The Thing Itself)' – the 'critical' part of the reading will occur in the conclusion, firstly I will briefly recount its main themes. In this essay, Bennington uses Derrida's 'Circumfession' as a springboard to discuss the more general

relationship between psychoanalysis and deconstruction. His neologism of *circanalysis* is thus invented in order to point to a circumnavigatory manoeuvre in Derrida's relation to psychoanalysis. Towards the end of his essay Bennington offers a definition of his neologism: 'Derrida's circanalysis, his way of turning around psychoanalysis without ever getting round it or claiming to have completed the tour, would be the only way to be fair with Freud, to give oneself the time (which will, alas, always be lacking) for the thing itself in its stealing away' (Bennington, 2000, pp.108-109). This metaphor of 'turning around' is also alluded to at the beginning of the essay: 'Freud is never named in "Circumfession". This text, which seems – more than any other text of his, perhaps – to *turn around* psychoanalytic themes, as though offering itself to a psychoanalytic reading, does so without any direct reference to Freud' (p.93). It will be recalled from the first chapter, on 'Circumfession', that Derrida there utilizes a statement towards the end of 'Envois' regarding this phrase to turn around: 'Cover of the first of the notebooks preparatory to a book on circumcision, "The Book of Elijah," projected from 1976. End of the *Envois* section of *The Postcard* (1979): "I shall wonder what, from my birth or thereabouts, *to turn around* has meant"' (Derrida, 1993, p.89). Bennington, who, of course, is himself a character in 'Circumfession', is thus alluding to this intertextuality of 'Envois' and 'Circumfession': the former addresses Freud, and one would have thought that the latter ought to address Freud but it does not even mention him by name.

It will also be recalled that in 'Circumfession' Derrida documents his mother's last days; he writes for his mother in a work of mourning before her death in anticipation of it. The seventh period in 'Circumfession' opens with a reference to the guilt Derrida feels at publishing his mother's last days:

If it is invulnerable, this matrix, and some would say that that's its defect, what on earth can happen to it, from what wound is it waiting for me, me who, among other remorse with respect to my mother, feel really guilty for publishing her end, in exhibiting her last breaths and, still worse, for purposes that some might judge to be literary, at risk of adding a dubious exercise to the 'writer and his mother' series, subseries 'the mother's death', and what is there to be done, would I not feel as guilty, and would I not in truth *be* as guilty if I wrote here about myself without retaining the least trace of her (Derrida, 1993, pp.36-37).

What is it to write about one's own mother, and to publish that writing in the public domain for all to read? On the one hand Derrida feels guilty for 'publishing her end'; on the other hand he also argues that, given he is writing his (semi-)autobiography, he would 'be as guilty' if he wrote only about himself without reference to his mother.

Such is the difficult moral problem with writing an autobiography (and which is partly why Derrida only writes a semi-autobiographical text), addressed in the second chapter on Rousseau, namely that autobiography is about the others in one's life as much as it is about oneself in one's life. Even so, the guilt remains.

At any rate, the reference here of Derrida's to 'the "writer and his mother" series, subseries "the mother's death"', is as much an allusion to the psychoanalytic literature on the subject. The much parodied line of psychoanalysis, 'Tell me about your mother', is also alluded to by Derrida here in 'Circumfession'. As Bennington says, 'Circumfession' appears to 'turn around' psychoanalytic themes, and yet never names Freud – while naming him indirectly by referring back to *The Post Card*, his monumental book on Freud. Bennington continues, quoting 'Circumfession' near the beginning of this extract:

Derrida speaks, for example, of himself as 'author of more or less legitimate writings about Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Benjamin, Austin' [Derrida, 1993, p.115]), but omits Freud from his list, which is striking in the context of the list, given that Derrida is saying that he is the only philosopher who will have dared to describe his own penis. This marked absence of Freud works as though he was saying: 'Here, analyse me, I'm happy to lend myself to it, I even demand it, I'm giving you something to work on, you see – unlike the patient Freud talks about at the beginning of the text on negation, I don't even say "It is not my mother" so you can immediately mutter "So it was his mother", I say myself, without waiting, "It's my mother, I speak only of her, you ought to know what that means"; and look, to make life easier for you, I'm not even going to speak of analysis or Freud in this text, I'm not even going to begin to call into question the concepts you will not fail to invoke in your analysis. I expose myself in all innocence to your ear' (Bennington, 2000, p.93).

In Freud's brief text 'Negation', which Bennington refers to here, Freud observes a patient negating that someone in the dream symbolizes his mother: "You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother." We amend this to: "So it *is* his mother" (in: Freud, 2001a, p.235). According to Bennington, Derrida is in agreement with Freud that it is his mother, but also posing Freud the semi-rebellious question: So what are you going to do about it that I cannot figure out for myself? A moment later Bennington continues: 'The scene thus played by "Circumfession" is like the exasperation of a situation so well described by Serge Leclair almost thirty years ago: how to analyse, once the patient already more or less shares the analytic knowledge of the analyst?' (Bennington, 2000, pp.93-94). It is this penetrating question, and a critical reading of Bennington's own answer to it in 'Circanalysis', that the conclusion will now address.

Conclusion

Bennington's answer to the above question, as he refers enigmatically to 'the troubled history of the relations between psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida' (Bennington, 2000, p.94), involves the aid of a declaration that Derrida made about psychoanalysis, vocally (i.e., it is undocumented), after a lecture given by René Major in 1988: 'I have never subscribed to any proposition of psychoanalysis' (Derrida, in: Bennington, 2000, p.95). With the help of this declaration behind him, Bennington makes the following hypothesis:

My hypothesis today will be that the relationship Derrida entertains with psychoanalysis is an *original* one, i.e. that on the one hand this relationship is his alone (no-one else has that relationship with psychoanalysis), and on the other hand that this relationship is not the same as the relationship he entertains with other authors or currents of thought he reads, so that he would not make this declaration about Heidegger or Lévinas or Nietzsche. And also, no doubt, that the relationship of Derrida with Freud is *original* in the sense that it is there at the origin, from the start, that there is, and would have been, no Derrida without Freud (p.96).

In emphasizing 'original' in this manner, Bennington is implying that the relationship Derrida has with Freud is *singular*: i.e., that much like a relationship of everyday life – of family member, a friend, a lover, a colleague, an enemy, etc – it has its own dynamic. What Bennington is alluding to is that psychodynamics are embedded not so much in the internality of the psychical apparatus, but rather in the half-private half-public (or half-internal half-external) dynamics of the communicative apparatus of the specific relationship itself: perhaps what one could call a *relatio-dynamics* rather than a psycho-dynamics.

However, if Bennington appears to imply this in the above articulation of his hypothesis, ironically it is not something that seems to concern the rest of 'Circanalysis'. Instead, he becomes concerned with making his own declaration regarding the very identity of deconstruction in relation to psychoanalysis: 'deconstruction *is not* psychoanalysis, and is so much not psychoanalysis that it is deconstruction' (Bennington, 2000, p.97). Bennington is one of those very partisan Derrideans, known for giving corrective readings not only of Derrida's critics but also his other followers. Indeed, the latter occurs in the third part of *Interrupting Derrida*: in the final chapter, 'An Idea of Syntax', he reviews Marian Hobson's (1998) book *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines*, and says, rather oddly: 'She eschews any deconstructive coquetry or stylistic ambition in her own writing, and often prefers,

perhaps strategically in view of the reader she is hoping for, the robust if unsatisfactory use of common-sense descriptions' (p.181). Bennington seems to think that to be a Derridean is to write like him – but some of us just like his *ideas* so much we like to explain them as clearly as we can. Surely Derrida would allow others the space to write how they want to write? And anyway, is there only one deconstructive writing style; or is there *more than one*? Perhaps we should all write like Paul de Man, who is considerably more monotonic than Derrida. One could probably say that, if Derrida is the founder of deconstruction, Bennington is the founder of Derridean orthodoxy – of what makes a Derridean a Derridean. But *Interrupting Derrida* is a false title, for there is no 'interruption' to speak of. Bennington's 'Introduction' tries to force the issue by paradoxically positing, 'an "other than" other than the "other than" that inhabits Derrida's writing already' (p.2). But is there only one 'other than' in Derrida's writing; or is there (already) *more than one*? For me, Bennington's pseudo-interruption implies the present need to interrupt Bennington himself, and properly.

To return to 'Circanalysis', Bennington's arguments become superior: for they move from an identification of deconstruction in contradistinction to psychoanalysis to the fact that deconstruction *knows more* than psychoanalysis. The reason for this is that deconstruction is more aware of the inherited status of the concepts that it utilizes:

Like any thinker, including Derrida, Freud must draw his concepts from the metaphysical tradition; and like any thinker who thinks something new, who invents something, he must invent on the back of these inherited concepts. And Freud does so. But what he does not do is to reflect this double necessity: he fails, then, in this double reflection, and fails in it doubly, on the historical as much as on the theoretical level. [...] And so this is, it would appear, essentially what distinguishes deconstruction from psychoanalysis: not really thinking through both the necessary belonging of its concepts to the history of metaphysics and its necessary strategic displacement of those concepts, psychoanalysis *understands less* than deconstruction (Bennington, 2000, p.101).

I think that Bennington has got it wrong on this point: deconstruction cannot be superior to psychoanalysis merely by invoking the inheritance of its concepts from the metaphysical tradition, because this would *change the topic of conversation*, and then psychoanalysis and deconstruction would be talking at cross purposes. If 'psychoanalysis understands less than deconstruction', and *ergo* deconstruction understands more than psychoanalysis, then they have to be talking about the same thing. Otherwise nobody is in a position of understanding anybody about anything, and there develops a radical confusion; the sort of confusion that, in everyday life, causes

communication breakdown which will eventually lead to a relationship breakdown. Then, the allegedly ‘original relationship’ that Derrida has with Freud and psychoanalysis will simply become embittered. If there is a ‘troubled history’ there, then who is causing the trouble? Who is not making their case clear; and who is not listening?

I would argue that, if deconstruction is to understand more than psychoanalysis, then it has to rethink the *psychoanalytic object* better than psychoanalysis itself. Hopefully this chapter, indeed the present study as a whole, has begun to address what it is in Derrida’s thought that at least sets up the groundwork for rethinking this object: viz., his idea of the autobiographical grounded in what, in ‘To Speculate – On “Freud”’, he calls the ‘heterothanatographical’ (Derrida, 1987, p.273). The life of the self grounded in the death of the other. Derrida’s radicalization of Freud’s ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, indeed of psychoanalysis generally, seems Nietzschean on this point. On the one hand, the whole concept of ‘life death’ invokes the Dionysian philosophy of creation through destruction. On the other hand, the resistance to the ‘analytic situation’ of psychoanalysis, perhaps then to the institution of psychoanalysis, is grounded in Zarathustra’s advice to the free spirit to go and find themselves in their own way rather than become a mere follower of him. From the final section of the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘Of the Bestowing Virtue’, quoted by Nietzsche himself at the end of his ‘Foreword’ to *Ecce Homo*:

You say you believe in Zarathustra? But of what importance is Zarathustra? You are my believers: but of what importance are all believers?

You had not yet sought yourselves when you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all belief is of so little account.

Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.

Truly, with other eyes, my brothers, I shall then seek my lost ones; with another love I shall then love you (Nietzsche, 2003, p.103).

If one shares the analytic knowledge of the psychoanalyst, then perhaps there is no need for an actual therapy session with a so-called ‘expert’ (since one already has the capability to self-diagnose; although, of course, another ear can help). But this does not mean that one will not have one’s own psychological problems to tend to. To put into question the concepts of psychoanalysis by addressing their problematic inheritance does not make the psychological problems of everyday life magically disappear. And if the problem of the relation between the inheritance problems and the psychological

problems were left unaddressed, then it could be construed as *avoiding* the latter by changing the topic of conversation. Indeed, since most people of the world *do not have* the analytic knowledge of the psychoanalyst, what would be Bennington's proposal for the majority of folk (rather than for the intellectual elite)?

'Circanalysis' has a strange ending. Bennington takes a hyperbolic literary critical approach to Derrida's thought, suggesting that it might all be a fiction:

I have often wondered what would change if, by an extraordinary discovery, it turned out that everything Derrida puts forward about the metaphysical tradition were a fiction. Let us imagine that he had invented a novel about philosophy, with characters called Plato, Kant, Hegel, etc. And within this fiction about a fiction, one could then wonder what would happen if such and such a character were removed from the story (Bennington, 2000, p.109).

I am not entirely sure where Bennington wants this literary thought experiment to go. Perhaps this is the key moment in *Interrupting Derrida* of his actual, proper interruption: the fictionalization of Derrida. But as with standard philosophical thought experiments, the question I would ask to Bennington here is: What for? Such thought experiments are too frivolous for me. 'Let us imagine', instead, that Derrida's thought actually matters to the real world; to the plights of existence and experience; and to the psychological problems of humankind. Let us imagine that deconstruction is concerned with the welfare of humankind; that it is concerned with *how* people are. In such a case, in what way does Derrida's thought help us to understand these problems? This is the sort of question that, for me, underlies his conceptualization of autobiography. For although these problems are the explicit address of psychoanalysis, Derrida's argument is that the psychoanalytic object *just is* the philosophical object. Here the difference between Derrida and Freud is perhaps analogous to that between Heidegger and Levinas. Just as Heidegger's notion of Being is a *universal* designation and Levinas's notion of the Other is *singular*, similarly, where Freud's familial structure is universalized in the Oedipus complex, Derrida's familial structure is organized around his consideration of autobiographical singularity. In terms of the reconceptualization of subjectivity that it provokes, perhaps we have seen a clue to this in the idea of the singularity of relatio-dynamics, but I will leave the groundwork for this to the conclusion which follows.

Conclusion

Paradoxes of Subjectivity

In the main body of the present study I have presented scholarly arguments in the area of Derrida's autobiographical thought. Throughout the chapters there has been an insistent and consistent argument for the conceptualization of autobiography in his thought, and that the reason for this conceptualization is to provoke the reconceptualization of subjectivity. In this conclusion I would therefore like to succinctly synthesize the main insights from the chapters in order to turn in a more *systematic* manner towards this question of the reconceptualization of subjectivity.

We have seen from the first chapter that Derrida's thought presents an ambiguous relationship to the conflict between religion and atheism. What he tends to do is to change the terrain of the argument from being about whether or not God exists to being about the conflictive nature of the argument itself. Derrida calls for a lessening of the passions in this conflict by arguing for what I called a radical agnosticism, which is perhaps better understood as a transcendental agnosticism opening the very condition of articulation with which God's name is invoked. Here, agnosticism is not an empirical-experiential state of unknowing, a state which promotes the charge of 'sitting on the fence'; rather, it is a deconstructive intervention into the passionate way in which the argument traditionally occurs, in order to call for a more intellectually driven debate. The reason for this is that the violence contained in the passion tends to do an injustice to the other side before the argument has even properly begun (hence why it was also called a 'tolerant agnosticism' in the Marx chapter). To this degree, as we saw, Derrida's transcendental agnosticism can have proponents that are either atheists or theists. In the first chapter radical agnosticism was articulated as an autobiographical agnosticism. Here, the openness of radical agnosticism to both sides of the debate becomes transposed to the more extended domain of everyday life experience, which involves a plethora of individual differences that are impossible to classify. In the final chapter of 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', called 'Paralysis', Derrida invokes this impossible taxonomy: 'Everything is due to the difficulty of properly naming the thing itself. Actually this difficulty is an impossibility, a difficulty whose limits can only be indefinitely put back' (Derrida, 1987, p.382). Ultimately, deconstruction is a general openness to the infinitude of these individual differences, impossibly accounting for the

singularity of the circumstances and the characteristics at work in everybody's autobiography.

In 'Circumfession' Derrida argued that God is the origin of tears. Of course, 'tears' can be understood in both senses: as a rip or a cut; and as the result of crying. God would be the origin of tears in the first sense because of circumcision. But circumcision is a theme within Derrida's own autobiography; and it was not the intention of the first chapter to become overly concerned with his autobiography in particular, as it was rather more philosophically oriented towards the condition for everybody's autobiography. As such, the latter sense of 'tears' was emphasized, and interpreted as symbolic of emotion or feeling more generally (for one can cry from an experience of both intense pain and intense pleasure), and therefore as undermining the priority of the Augustinian *cogito*. Also, this interpretation led neatly into the following chapter, since Rousseau's thought is a key moment for Derrida in the history of metaphysics in which feeling is given priority over thought. For Rousseau, the relation between feeling and action, or rather emotion and motion, calls for a transformation of the 'golden rule' of morality: from 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' to 'do what is good for you with as little harm as possible to others'. However, it was argued that, since in his *Confessions* Rousseau – apparently hypocritically – himself hurts the feelings of others, this is one of the key reasons why Derrida's autobiographical thought is circumlocutionary. For Derrida, circumlocution is not merely the basis of an immoral manipulation, but paradoxically is also the basis of a moral apologia of the other: i.e., a protection of the other by not unnecessarily revealing their secrets to the world.

The reading of Derrida's pivotal chapter in *Of Grammatology*, 'That Dangerous Supplement', offered an original interpretation that was sceptical of the pervasive literary critical interpretation in which Derrida's key concepts of text and supplement are primarily given a literary point of reference. Instead, it was argued that these concepts should be understood philosophically: i.e., as having a 'metaphysical' point of reference. This deepened the argument concerning the nature of feelings, by highlighting the way in which they can be substituted and supplemented when they are left unsatisfied, so as to leave open the space for a partial satisfaction by other means. The scepticism around the literary critical interpretation of Derrida led, in the following chapter, to a reinterpretation of his thought as a form of philosophical criticism. Here, by philosophical criticism is meant that Derrida's thought works by placing into

question the very foundations and underlying premises of a mode of thinking. In particular, since deconstruction is the unbalancing of the metaphysics of self-presence, one of its key components is therefore to put into question the underlying conception of human subjectivity that is at work in a mode of thinking. In this chapter the target was Marx's thought, in which the identification of the proletariat qua proletariat (that is, as a revolutionary class) is demonstrated to be more complicated and problematic than Marx himself envisaged. Marx wanted the proletariat to 'unite'. But since this is only possible in a political context, Marx disallowed the psychological space for considering the person as an individual entity – in effect reducing psychology to political economy. It was argued that, against Marx, Derrida's half-Rousseauian half-Nietzschean watchword of *learning to live* allowed this space to be rethought.

In allowing the space for the psychological consideration of the individual, it was argued in the following chapter that Derrida's most prominent philosophical forebear was Nietzsche, whose emphasis on existentialist individuality is an inspiration for deconstructive philosophy. Derrida's simultaneous adoption and supplementation of Nietzsche's thought offered a reaffirmation of Nietzschean affirmation. Indeed, the very concept of deconstruction involves the simultaneous adoption and supplementation of Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy of the force of construction through the force of destruction. As adoption, it synthesizes the two forces; but as supplementation, the figure of Apollo is held in reserve. In his essay 'Force and Signification' in *Writing and Difference* Derrida says: 'The divergence, the *difference* between Dionysus and Apollo, between ardour and structure, cannot be erased in history, for it is not *in* history. It too, in an unexpected sense, is an original structure: the opening of history' (Derrida, 1978, p.28). For Derrida, deconstruction is not simply about the forces of construction and destruction, but also about the question of what force mediates between these forces at the very opening of historical formation and transformation. As such, he invokes Nietzsche's earlier designation of the different artistic styles of Apollo and Dionysus. For even if it turned out that the later Nietzsche is correct in saying that the Dionysian is more psychologically insightful than the Apollonian, it nonetheless matters that people themselves in everyday historical life are not always psychologically insightful, as Nietzsche himself argued. Hence, in accounting for the origin of historical reality, as Derrida attempts, one must consider with fairness the taming forces of Apollonian civilization.

Nietzsche had his distinctive style of criticism, and his powerful Dionysian perspective which gave that criticism its force. But there is more than one style to consider, and the thought of Nietzsche itself contains the trace (in German, *spur*) of these other styles. In *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* Derrida invoked the connection between the English word 'spur' (impetus) and the German word 'spur' (trace) in order to reconsider the relation between an underlying impetus (i.e., what the substantial truth of something is), and the way in which that impetus is manifested (i.e., the different styles of presentation that contain a trace of their underlying substance, but which through that trace are also capable of creating a gap (in French, *écart*) between style and substance). This concerns autobiography because it implies the difference between genuineness and disingenuousness; and the problem of how one goes about making a judgement, and the way in which that judgement applies itself towards any particular person. We would like to think we know someone; but how can we be sure that they are not wearing a mask for social life? And if we do not entirely know someone, then they are a potential threat to our existence; where, in such circumstances it is only wise to learn self-defence. In *Spurs* Derrida says:

In the question of style there is always the weight or *examen* of some pointed object. At times this object might be only a quill or a stylus. But it could just as easily be a stiletto, or even a rapier. Such objects might be used in a vicious attack against what philosophy appeals to in the name of matter or matrix, an attack whose thrust could not but leave its mark, could not but inscribe there some imprint or form (Derrida, 1979, p.37).

In *Spurs* Derrida picks out an isolated fragmentary aphorism from Nietzsche's works, 'I have forgotten my umbrella'. Here, the umbrella could be construed as yet another attacking object that Nietzsche alludes to – e.g., in *Twilight of the Idols* he professes to philosophize with a hammer (Nietzsche, 1990); or in *Ecce Homo* in the chapter on 'Beyond Good and Evil' he says: 'From now on all my writings are fish-hooks' (Nietzsche, 1992, p.82). For Derrida, it seems, Nietzsche remembers his attacking objects but forgets his defensive ones. The umbrella is at once a 'pointed object', shaped like a fish-hook, but it also shields us from the weather.

Perhaps an analogy between deconstruction and martial arts would not be out of place here (particularly as this analogy would impinge on the question of style as a result of the debate in martial arts theory of which art offers the best style of self-defence). And in the following chapter on Freud, the ego's protective shield, its defence

mechanisms against the potentially threatening forces from the external world, implicitly continues the analogy of self-defence given at the end of the chapter on Nietzsche. In 'To Speculate – On "Freud"' Derrida argues that Freud tries to defend himself against philosophical speculation; but that he also ends up using this all-too-philosophical method of enquiry into the psychological phenomena he purports to have discovered through observation. This is so in particular with respect to the *fort:da*, as Derrida argues at the end of the second chapter 'Freud's Legacy', which becomes subsumed by 'an auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphic scene of writing' (Derrida, 1987, p.336). Derrida argues that, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud seeks only the one step beyond the pleasure principle, the death drive, but instead takes many other steps (including the *fort:da*). He notices that Freud uses the phrase, a 'step further', too many times to have only one step: 'Freud uses this expression ten times – only to take it back in advance' (p.336). For Derrida, the scene of writing is not an analogy which sets the stage for Freud's multilayered metapsychological structure; rather it is an analogy for the way in which the written mode of communication betrays the structure itself by the creation of its own scene. For Derrida, the scene of writing is therefore the stage or the step beyond the pleasure principle; the scene of writing is the shield of deconstruction against the idea of the psychical scene set up by psychoanalysis.

At the same time, as Derrida articulates it, the very idea of the scene of writing itself sets the stage for another metapsychological theory in terms of what Derrida calls the 'auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphic'. Here, it is perhaps the case that Derrida leaves the space open for his own 'metapsychological fable' (Derrida, 1978, p.228). Unlike Freud, the two conceptual oppositions to be considered are not the conscious/unconscious and the ego/id, but rather are the two involved in the deconstruction of autobiography: self/other and life/death. If the core problem of the Freudian psychical apparatus is that it represses the communicative apparatus, then the process of bringing the latter apparatus to the surface must impinge upon the structure of the psychical apparatus itself – if it can still be said that there is such a thing (perhaps in this space remains the whole complex relation between Derrida and Lacan). This returns us to the central argument of the present study made in the introduction: viz., that Derrida's conceptualization of autobiography provokes the reconceptualization of subjectivity. This reconceptualization is presented here under the title of 'Paradoxes of subjectivity', in which the general paradoxical manner of deconstructive enquiry becomes applied specifically to the problem of human subjectivity. The two main

conceptual oppositions in the word ‘autobiography’, auto/heteros and bios/thanatos, offer the initial opening into these paradoxes (for the ‘graphy’ see the final chapter of Robert Smith’s *Derrida and Autobiography*). However, once the implications and the consequences of these oppositions are drawn out, as we will see they open themselves up to further paradoxes.

With regards to the nature and experience of human subjectivity, the autos/heteros opposition applies itself to the spatial part of subjectivity (as the relation between oneself and another implies proximity and distance), and the bios/thanatos opposition applies itself to the temporal part of subjectivity (as the relation between life and death implies beginning and end). For Derrida, space and time are implicated within one another: for example, in ‘Différance’ he speaks of, ‘the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time’ (Derrida, 1982, p.8). Hence, the objectivity created by space and time is constantly in motion, in a process of becoming, and so is radically unstable qua objectivity: not only do things themselves change, but as they change so does the language that refers to them, and so the names for the things also change. Part of the reason for this instability is that Derrida is already thinking of objectivity not only as it is in itself, but also and perhaps more importantly as it is experienced through human subjectivity. The problem that human subjectivity poses to objectivity is that, if objectivity is already by itself made unstable via its own process of motion, then this instability becomes increased through the activity and reactivity of human emotion. The forces which underpin objective motion (which are studied by physics) therefore constitute a miniscule problem for humans themselves when compared with the forces which underpin their own subjective emotion. Indeed, this begs the question: if physics is the sole discipline that has always studied the forces of objective motion, then what discipline has the sole patent to study the forces of subjective emotion? Today there would like to be only one such discipline (psychology): but for Derrida, the problem is that the discipline of psychology inherits too many problematic assumptions from the philosophical disciplines of metaphysics, logic, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and jurisprudence; as well as from other humanities disciplines such as anthropology, history, biography, and of course the recent resurgence in autobiographical theory.

There is, then, more than one discipline that has a stake in human emotion, and this is one of Derrida’s objections to Freud. In ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ he says: ‘But we must think of this scene in other terms than those of individual or

collective psychology, or even of anthropology. It must be thought in the horizon of the scene/stage of the world, as the history of that scene/stage. Freud's language is *caught up* in it' (Derrida, 1978, p.229). A citation like this one appears to distance Derrida's interest from the problem of 'individual or collective psychology'. Coupled with the emphasis which tends to be given in deconstructive literary theory that 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' institutes the '*originality of the literary signifier*' (p.230), this distance seems even further away as this latter emphasis itself postpones the rethinking of the problem of individual or collective psychology. However, Derrida's statement concerning the originality of the literary signifier is only the third of four domains that Derrida expresses interest in as opening up other fields of research that call for the rethinking of psychoanalysis: the second of the four is a '*history of writing*' (p.230). But the other two (the first and the last) actually call for a return to psychoanalytic themes, but in such a way that counteracts some of Freud's assumptions. The first field that Derrida refers to is: '*A psychopathology of everyday life* in which the study of writing would not be limited to the interpretation of the *lapsus calami*' (p.230). And the last field he refers to is: '*a new psychoanalytic graphology*' (p.231). As such, Derrida's thought does not try to close off the possibility of psychoanalytic research on 'individual or collective psychology'; but rather seeks to open it up in a manner that is more wary of the metaphysical assumptions that traditional psychoanalysis inherits and performs.

Before concluding, let us return to the two oppositions in question more directly so as to develop the idea of the deconstructive paradoxes of subjectivity. In Derrida's thought writing is symbolic of communication more generally (the counter-concept of arche-writing covers all forms of communication). In the chapter on Freud it was argued that what is repressed in Freudian psychoanalysis is the idea of the communicative apparatus as the means through which the internality of the human psyche comes to relate to the externality of the historical world. In Derrida's thought this very opposition between inside and outside is placed into question by arche-writing; and an extension of this opposition is that between self and other. But what is at stake in this placing-into-question? On the one hand, there is the metaphysical element in which it is deemed possible to separate a domain of inner psychical space from the outer space of the world. In this respect, Freud is correct that the entire philosophical tradition before him tends to privilege consciousness as the constitution of this psychical space. However, Derrida's objection to Freud on this point is that, although

the designation of the unconscious brings fresh psychological insights, it is still grounded on the idea, which is ultimately metaphysical, in which it is possible to separate a domain of psychical space. That is, although the meaning of the word ‘unconscious’ implies an absence of self, to position the unconscious itself in a domain of psychical space is to act as if there was in fact a psychical substance that was present within the self (only without the self’s own knowledge). It would appear that Derrida’s thought is thus grounded on the impossibility of a psychical space, as it would presuppose the metaphysics of a psychical substance – whether that substance was conscious or unconscious or both would not matter. The paradox here is the need to discuss the psyche on the one hand, but on the other hand to do so without acting as if it were an actual substance. How do we discover the nature of something that cannot exist (in the metaphysical sense of the word)?

On the other hand, there is the moral element concerning the very relation of between self and other, a relation mediated by the communicative apparatus. This relation is moral because it is the site of potential violence between people; or indeed, between humans and animals. And since the communicative apparatus is itself the means through which this relation is mediated, what interests Derrida about language is that before any specific communicative act occurs this general capacity for violence is contained in all forms of communication – which is why, in *Of Grammatology*, he names an ‘arche-violence’ at work in arche-writing (Derrida, 1976, p.112). This is perhaps the main reason why Derrida is so careful with his language in all of the texts that he writes; particularly so since the texts that he writes are always in relation to another text of another thinker. At any rate, the emphasis on the relation of self (*autos*) and other (*heteros*) invokes the problem of autonomy and heteronomy. The metaphysical tradition relies on an underlying moral notion of the autonomy of the individual person in social life: i.e., that one is responsible for one’s actions in one’s relation to others. The problem that Derrida’s thought poses here is contained in the question: at what point in one’s life does one become responsible? The idea of individual autonomy and responsibility sounds good for the majority of so-called mature adults, but one is born neither mature nor an adult. Furthermore, the general position of one’s birth is beyond one’s own autonomous control: from one’s socioeconomic living conditions, to the characters of one’s parents, to the characters of one’s schoolmates, to one’s own potential physical disabilities, and even to one’s own emotions and passions. How are we to be responsible for our actions when we are not

even in control of what our own passions are; the very same passions which drive our actions? Derrida's thought here involves a general emphasis on the various real world modes of heteronomy, including those that affect us internally, particularly regarding the way in which they paradoxically both undermine the idea of autonomy and yet call for it with an even stronger intensity.

In any relation between self and other, which includes the relation to both the other's other and to the other within oneself, there develops the dynamics of the relationship (what in the chapter on Freud I called *relatio-dynamics*). To this degree, each relationship is singular and has its own dynamic which occurs through its own unique mode of communication. Since each person is capable of presenting themselves differently to different people, in a way, what matters is less the general character of someone and more the specific dynamics at work in the mode of communication that is used in relation to specific people. For one must leave the space open to account for secrets, feigned affections, and social masks. In such circumstances, different people will have different versions of the same person – and since these versions will be moral ones, this is no small matter in people's lives. Judgements will be made for and against specific people, and these judgements may be countered by the people who receive them; such that in the 'truth' of matters, of who is right and wrong, of who is in the right and who is in the wrong, it becomes almost impossible to take an objective stance. And yet we act as if we can: caught up in the heat of this potential war of words, one only has access to how one feels about the specific relationship in question. It is almost impossible to live life without this communicative confusion at work in the dynamics of our relationships. The paradoxical concern is that it is equally almost possible to live life *with* this communicative confusion, for in this space of the *relatio-dynamics* rests the play of misrepresentations (lies) and misinterpretations (errors) in the game of what Nietzsche calls the will to power. Based on the mode of communication, the proximity and distance in our relation to others becomes not merely spatial, but more importantly, emotional: i.e., intricately connected to the dynamics at work in the rhetorical activity of our everyday communicative interrelations.

In amongst these complications to life's relationships, the spectre of death haunts our very existence; and is perhaps symbolic of these very complications. Such is the complex interrelation of life and death; what Derrida calls, paraphrasing Nietzsche and Freud, 'life death'. Here it is perhaps noteworthy that in his essay, 'Immanent Death, Imminent Death', David Farrell Krell loses the gap between them, calling it by

the strange portmanteau term, '*lifedeath*' (Krell, 1994, p.152). For if the problem that Derrida poses in the concept of lifedeath is that it means that death can arrive at any moment, then this unpredictability must be accounted for: not only as part of the chance occurrence of the future events of one's life, but also in one's relation to oneself insofar as an implicit knowledge of one's death impinges on one's relation to one's life and the decisions one makes about its course. As Krell notes: 'An arrival that could only be *imminent*, that is, always merely on the verge of coming to presence, and *immanent*, ensconced in the innermost interior of a fortress-like crypt' (p.152). The first sense is Heideggerian, which accounts for the objective philosophical structure of Being-towards-death. The second sense is Freudian, which accounts for the subjective psychological concern with death after the event of traumatic experience. Indeed, perhaps the second sense is also Nietzschean; in the 'Preface' to *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche says: "Better to die than to go on living *here*" – thus responds the imperious voice and temptation: and this "here," this "at home" is everything it had hitherto loved!' (Nietzsche, 1996, p.7). Such are the words of the free spirit who experiences the pain of liberation from the fettered spirit; for, 'such bad and painful things are part of the history of the great liberation' (p.7). If one has the need to liberate oneself, to make oneself more autonomous, then it is from the heteronomy of life circumstances that are at once painful to inhabit yet painful to transcend.

In his psychological theory Derrida deepens the existential understanding of human subjectivity as concerned with the anxieties of everyday life and relationships, and with the anxieties over our living conditions with their potential proximity to pain and death. If deconstruction circumvents psychoanalysis, it cannot simultaneously proclaim to understand more than psychoanalysis unless it offers its own rethinking of the psychoanalytic object. But the psychoanalytic object of study is *prima facie* the same as the existential object – or rather subject. Derrida thus utilizes the idea of existential subjectivity in order to deepen it with his deconstruction of autobiography; and this deconstructive deepening of existentialism impinges on psychoanalysis. On the one hand, the emphasis on autobiographical singularity undermines the psychoanalytic version of universal family relations. It does not reduce the events and experiences of this or that family context to some notion of hypostatized universality. Instead it considers the complex web of practicalities at work in each specific context; the dynamics not of the psyche but of the relationships themselves; and not so much the stages of life as the difficult process of transition from one stage to the next. On this

latter point, the psychoanalytic generalization of the neuroses that occur at these points of transition when they do not happen smoothly is oversimplified and requires rethinking. On the other hand, the deconstruction of autobiography, for example with its emphasis on heterothanatology as its very condition of possibility, invokes the key conceptual oppositions that are at work in the reconceptualization of subjectivity (self/other and life/death). As such, it sets up the conditions through which one could rethink in a more general way the stages of life and the neuroses that can develop in the difficult process of transition.

But although Derrida does this groundwork by deepening the existential understanding of life through the general paradoxes of subjectivity, there is little in his thought that offers much in the way of practical advice for this rethinking of life's development. Indeed, perhaps his emphasis on autobiographical singularity precludes it, and declares such a rethinking impossible. From the perspective of deconstruction, for the present at least, psychoanalysis remains necessary yet inadequate – but can be both circumvented and supplemented via a deepening of the existential outlook. The impossibility of adequately rethinking the stages of life, and the psychological problems which occur at the onset of each stage, is perhaps a consequence of Derrida's more general arguments concerning the impossibility of taxonomic classification. This is the key problem for any psychological theory: How is one to classify something that is singular? When that singularity must account for, as Jacob A. Riis put it, *How the Other Half Lives* (Riis, 1997), then one must also inscribe the possibility of economic poverty in the outer world into the problem of constructing a psychological theory of the inner world. And yet, that very same singularity is also what undermines Marxist collectiveness: for Derrida, like psychoanalysis, Marxism becomes necessary yet inadequate. Consequently, the deconstructive deepening of existentialist subjectivity thus operates an impossible balancing act between competing factors which impinge upon any psychological theory. For there can be multiple causes to people's psychological problems; and in each singular case those causes can have different locations within each individual's own life history. Attentiveness to this difference of location is the ultimate psychological insight of Derrida's autobiographical thought. Like a sort of radical existentialism, one must be flexible to the dynamics at work in individual circumstances, rather than operate with speculative theories of universalized psychodynamics (like traditional sort of psychoanalysis).

Due to the triadic relation between time, language, and subjectivity, at work in his thought, Derrida's psychological insight begins with the paradoxical relationship between rhetorical language and historical reality. The problem of the relation between rhetorical activity and historical activity is that they radically impinge on one another, creating an impasse. On the one hand, rhetorical activity imposes itself on history, and history becomes passive to its constructions; but on the other hand, historical activity imposes itself on rhetoric, and rhetoric becomes passive to its circumstances. History cannot but operate in relation to the rhetorical language that constructs it; and rhetorical language cannot but operate in the circumstances that surround it. Within this space between the two, there is a transmission that is capable of becoming blocked or diverted or even perverted (to use a Freudian term). This perversion of the active performance occurs on the very boundary between events and their description (since the activity in question is both rhetorical and historical), and in 'Envois' Derrida refers to this in his neologism, the 'perverformative' (Derrida, 1987, p.136). This neologism is of course addressed to the ordinary language pragmatists who claim to study the pragmatics of language use. For Derrida, what they fail to theoretically account for is the *relationship between* language, objective event and subjective experience; as they operate with a wishy-washy theory that gives all the credence to language so as to give the appearance of, as we saw him put it in an earlier chapter, *mastering history*. But what is it to master history? To master history is Derrida's coded terminology for the *metaphysics of autonomy*: it is the idea that one is, or at least is capable of being, in complete control of one's life. The adherents to ordinary language believe they are being critical of the metaphysics of historical objectivity, but they do so by covertly operating with one of the most uncritical metaphysical prejudices concerning human subjectivity.

This general emphasis on pragmatics is popularly referred to, deriving from the pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, as the 'linguistic turn' (Rorty, 1967). Instead, Derrida's emphasis on writing creates what Arthur Bradley has called the 'scriptural turn' (Bradley, 2008, p.52). But even if the triadic relationship between language, event, and experience, is poorly theorized in the pragmatic perspective, nonetheless its potential insights into the inner workings of language itself should not be dismissed. Derrida acknowledges this in his neologism of pragrammatology. In principle, then, through the notion of pragrammatology, coupled with the perverformative, there ought to be at work a more radical deconstructive understanding of this triadic relationship. When Derrida approaches the concepts of 'event' and 'experience' in his work, it is

most often from the quasi-transcendental perspective of impossibility; and first and foremost, impossibility designates a hyperbolic difficulty. So at stake is a dimension of human experience organized around events, and structures – e.g., social, political, and legal structures; historicity comes not only in distinction from rhetoricity but also from what Derrida calls *structurality* (see: Derrida, 1978, pp.278-293) – that are very difficult for its participants and spectators to comprehend. Given that what concerns us here is the dimension of subjective experience given in the idea of autobiography, I will restrict my theorizing on this point to the domain of individual life history rather than, say, world political history. The question then becomes: Generally speaking, what sorts of life events are difficult for someone to comprehend? But perhaps this question should be prefaced by another: At what point in someone's life does one need to begin to comprehend events that one will find difficult to comprehend?

Freudian psychoanalysis is grounded in the hypothesis that neurotic disorders have their origin in sexual problems – which can become non-sexual, or at least have the appearance of being non-sexual, through the work of sublimation, substitution, or displacement. And because of its radical theory of infantile sexuality, psychoanalysis considers childhood to be the most important period of a person's life history, as any perversions in sexuality are interpreted as originating in this period via deviations from the proper development of the Oedipus complex. But it is not childhood that organizes Derrida's interest in the autobiographical dimension of life history; rather, it is adolescence. For example, in 'Envois' he says: 'As an adolescent, when I made love against the wall' (Derrida, 1987, p.13). This takes him closer to a Nietzschean existential outlook in which the free spirit, the adolescent rebel, searches for their autonomy and independence in the context of heteronomous feelings of dependence on their parents. Needless to say, the parents themselves, who are perhaps so used to communicating with their children *qua* children, then have a very difficult job. Namely, of communicating with their adolescent children, who now have one foot in the door of adulthood, in such a manner that at once maintains their authority *qua* parents yet allows a certain space for the fostering of their adolescent child's adult autonomy. Adolescents are known for being stroppy with their parents (amongst other people); but perhaps this is also because parents themselves continue to communicate with their adolescent children either as if they were still children (giving them too little autonomy), or as if they were fully-fledged adults (giving them too much autonomy): 'you are so attached to your autonomy' (p.133).

For Derrida, adolescence is not merely a time when puberty begins, and so when the sexual object changes (from family in the incestuous infantile Oedipus complex to anyone but family members). It is a paradoxical time when the sexual object is so overwhelmingly desirable yet so overwhelmingly unattainable. And this, also, coupled with the paradox of it being a time of feeling so overwhelmingly dependent on one's family when an overwhelming desire for independence haunts our existence. Adolescence is a time when feelings themselves are overwhelming and so very difficult to comprehend. As such, *it is adolescence, not childhood, which offers that point in time that we need to comprehend but cannot* – and so this is the period of life when neurotic disorders originate, generally speaking. The ancient wisdom of philosophers for this period of life is perhaps to look to the guidance of one's elders and parents. But when the parents themselves are not acting responsibly, or when for one reason or another there has developed a communication breakdown between parent and adolescent child, the adolescent will *not necessarily* have anyone there to look to for guidance. At this point, what happens is as much down to *chance* as it is down to what any philosophy or speculative theory can offer: 'I remain fascinated by the apparently totally chance character of the event' (Derrida, 1987, p.169), as Derrida puts it in 'Envois'. In other words, adolescence is a time not only when one's own character is changing, but also when these changes are as much down to chance events as they are down to one's own autonomous decision-making. Perhaps, if the opportunity presented itself to do what one wanted to do and become who one wanted to become, then one would take it with open arms. But when the arrival of this opportunity is itself down to chance, the situation can become melancholically disheartening.

If between Rousseau and Freud the task has been to understand the child qua child; then in contrast, between Nietzsche and Derrida the task is rather to understand the adolescent qua adolescent. For when we grow into adults, it is the adolescent turn of events which haunts us, not the childhood Oedipus complex. At the same time, it is important to note that this is a generic statement: autobiographical singularity dictates that one must be attentive to the specific circumstances of each individual's life history. Perhaps in this person it will be some childhood event which haunts them, in that person some adolescent event, and in the other person it might even be some adulthood event. Of course, it is impossible to know *a priori*. Nonetheless, there is at least a nod towards adolescence made by Derrida's autobiographical thought that must be considered; and adolescence itself operates a nod towards adulthood; and adulthood a nod towards

dying. The overwhelming feelings of adolescence have a strange sense of coming in relation to death (Nietzsche's, 'it is better to die than to go on living here'); every decision seems like a life-and-death decision; it is adolescents who are so nihilistically wayward. Adolescents narcissistically find everything beyond themselves so difficult to comprehend; and everyone else finds adolescents themselves so difficult to comprehend. Within the melancholic pleasure-seeking of the adolescent, the experience of the absence of the object of one's desire is felt as if it were a loss of something present. The melancholy is thus a form of mourning. Indeed, it is Freud who first broached this triadic relationship between melancholy, mourning, and narcissism in 'Mourning and Melancholia': 'Melancholia, therefore, borrows some of its features from mourning, and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism' (in: Freud, 2001c, p.250). Derrida's critical relation to Freud here comes in his counter-concept of *mid-mourning*: 'there is only twilight and mid-mourning' (Derrida, 1987, p.195).

To begin to consider this counter-concept, let us turn to 'Circumfession', where Derrida refers to it as half-mourning: '*if full mourning is half-mourning, what follows for the mourning of mourning?*' (Derrida, 1993, p.167). When Robert Smith considers this concept in *Derrida and Autobiography* he offers his own translation for it:

I bear my own life in coming from the death of the other: auto-hetero-thanato-biography, or the Orphic first few steps of verse. Strictly speaking, this is not mourning, then – mourning is classically an object idealisation – since my life is inspired by it; not mourning, but what Derrida calls '*demi-deuil*', or 'mid-mourning'. No one emotion need be associated with this such as grief, for it is ongoing, changing, transforming. I propose to translate '*demi-deuil*' with a word from *Finnegan's wake*, which is 'funferal': funeral, fun-for-all, fanfare, triumf (Smith, 1995, p.142).

I think that there is a moment of insight and a moment of confusion at work in Smith here. The moment of insight is where he says that, in Derrida's concept of mid-mourning, 'no one emotion need be associated with this such as grief, for it is ongoing, changing, transforming'. That is, whatever it is that haunts someone in their life is subject to their continuing activity not to be haunted by it, which may have moments of both success and failure that will be experienced differently at different points in time. Also, where he says that, 'my life is inspired by it'; perhaps this can be understood as: my life is inspired by that activity with which I try to negate that which haunts me, however this inspiration is not entirely a happy one because I remain haunted nonetheless. However, I find his translation of mid-mourning as 'funferal' confusing

and in need of clearer explanation. To deepen Derrida's conception of mid-mourning, I would rather return to a text like 'Circumfession' and explain it in terms of the adolescent feeling of loss *before* an actual loss has occurred. Here Derrida's mother was dying but not yet dead. In that experience, one anticipates the loss before it actually happens, and mourns for the loss before the proper 'work of mourning', as Freud called it in 'Mourning and Melancholia', is meant to occur.

For Derrida, life is lived in the perpetual 'work of mid-mourning' (Derrida, 1987, p.335), as we anticipate the loss of something before the end of the thing in question. This can also work with the experience of love. On the one hand, one knows *a priori* that the loving relationship one is in is destined to come to an end with a loved one dying before another. This experience Derrida articulates in numerous places, notably in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, where he refers to:

[A] logic or an a-logic of which we can no longer say that it belongs to mourning in the current sense of the term, but which regulates (sometimes like mourning in the strict sense, but always like mourning in the sense of a general possibility) all our relations with the other *as other*, that is, as mortal for a mortal, with the one always capable of dying before the other (Derrida, 1989, p.39).

On the other hand, this structure, of one dying before the other, can itself become symbolic of the way in which one's love for the other person can itself be lost before death comes to take the other person away from us: the experience of the death of love itself before the death of the loved other. We become involved in loving relationships not only knowing *a priori* that one person in the relationship will die before the other, but also knowing *a priori* that it is possible that the very feeling of love for the other person might die before death itself arrives to take them away from us. Indeed, this latter possibility is itself symbolic of the impossibility in designating the so-called 'proper amount' of love that one is to give. In 'Circumfession' Derrida says: 'I write that there is *too much* love in my life, emphasizing *too much*, the better and the worse, that would be true, love will have got the better of me, my faithfulness stands any test, I am faithful even to the test that does harm, to my euthanasias' (Derrida, 1993, p.157). To love too much is to feel the pain of love as equally as its pleasure. Perhaps even, to be the recipient of someone who gives too much love is to receive it as if it were too little – as the perverformative of the 'proper amount' can lead to idiosyncratic complications, let us say, rather than generalized neurotic disorders.

How to conclude such a discourse as the present one? Impossible, but necessary. In his interview, 'There Is No One Narcissism (Autobiographies)', Derrida says:

There is not narcissism and non-narcissism; there are narcissisms that are more or less comprehensive, generous, open, extended. What is called non-narcissism is in general but the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more open to the experience of the other as other. I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed, it would be destroyed in advance. The relation to the other – even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible reappropriation – must trace a movement of reappropriation in the image of oneself for love to be possible, for example. Love is narcissistic. Beyond that, there are little narcissisms, there are big narcissisms, and there is death in the end, which is the limit. Even in the experience – if there is one – of death, narcissism does not abdicate absolutely (in: Derrida, 1995b, p.199).

Here the more traditional moral discourse concerning selfishness and altruism is rethought in relation to the existential-cum-psychoanalytic concern with 'narcissistic reappropriation'. For Derrida, altruism, or non-narcissism, 'is in general but the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more open to the experience of the other as other'. In other words, there are no good deeds that do not contain a trace of selfishness; however, this does not necessarily remove the goodness of the deed as it is partially inherent within the deed itself. Narcissism is to do with the 'image of oneself'. Traditionally autobiography is given a negative image, as if it were a vehicle for selfishness. Derrida asks us to listen to its concept with another ear: perhaps this is that autobiography, because it is as much another's as it is mine, is also a vehicle for an improved mode of altruism which clears the space for considering the other's life from the other's perspective. Rather than reduction of the other's otherness to the self's selfsameness, autobiography, because it involves the confession of the other, demands sensitivity in its relation to the other, in particular in the way in which it goes about articulating its confession. The old moral adage says to put oneself in another's shoes, to look at things from another's perspective, but it does not tell us *how* to go about doing this. Perhaps somewhere in the deconstruction of autobiography is the key to this 'how' by offering a semi-practical location to find this key. Indeed, it was suggested in the chapter on Nietzsche that Derrida's neologism of *otobiographies* is radically connected to this moral adage.

Indeed, but is it morality or madness that should have the last word in a discourse on subjectivity? In another semi-autobiographical text of Derrida's,

Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin, he says: 'I have always suspected the law, as well as language, of being mad, of being, at any rate, the unique place and the first condition of madness' (Derrida, 1998, p.10). The plurality that Derrida invokes here implies a plurality of linguistic and cultural rationalities; between which judgements can be made against each other to the effect that they can judge each other as irrational: 'All culture is originally colonial' (p.39). The violence of the judgement calls forth a strange relation of judgement to injustice; but also of judgement to irrationality. Between the colonizer and the colonized there is the boundary which demarcates a space for the other that the colonizer transgresses, a transgression which is the mark of colonial violence. But is colonial violence merely a cultural phenomenon? For example, is not the metaphor of colonization a useful one for considering the relation to the other as such? Just as Derrida uses the metaphor of the 'mother tongue' in *Monolingualism of the Other* to suggest a strange intertwining of cultural and familial concerns, similarly the metaphor of colonization can have a similar effect: the violence of colonialism addresses not merely the space of cultural tradition, but also the space of familial interaction. One can colonize another's space merely by being too physically close to them; but the instrument of the tongue can colonize another's psychical space merely by saying something in the wrong way. And then what is said is lost in history, only to be rehearsed in one's memory; a feature of life that disturbs rationality.

For Derrida, *how* the tongue is utilized in everyday life is the condition of both morality and madness. How is one to retain one's reason, and to survive the violence, of the mother's tongue? For the mother's tongue can be both nurturing and neglectful – and of course, here the 'mother' is a symbolic title for familial otherness more generally since she is always the origin of my birth, and so is always the origin of the 'my life' which acts as the autobiographical point of reference. Since this possibility (of the same figure being the origin of both nurture and neglect) is inscribed into autobiography *a priori*, Derrida's initial concern in the deconstruction of autobiography is not so much with the empirical specifics of 'this or that' life, but is rather with the possibilities and impossibilities of subjective experience itself. That is, Derrida's initial concern is with the quasi-transcendental conditions which mediate all so-called subjective experience. This is the radical role played by the communicative apparatus, here rethought in the familial-autobiographical context of the mother's tongue. Such are the scars that are at work in the tongue of the other before one has even opened one's mouth to speak. If it is only possible to consider the nature of the psyche as logically posterior to life, then it

is also only possible to consider life as logically posterior to death's alterity; which is ultimately symbolic of these scars. In order to broach the nature of emotion in subjectivity – from the scars and scares to the joys and jubinations – it will perhaps become necessary to consider more deeply what Nietzsche calls the 'spirit of music', since the tonal nature of music has a privileged place in the very language of emotion (on this point, perhaps it is notable that Augustine riddles his *Confessions* with citations from the 'Book of Psalms'). Indeed, in today's highly mediated cultures music is no longer the only domain containing this tonality.

So in conclusion, why is it through some idea of autobiography that the backbone of a deconstructive theory of subjectivity is approached? The answer to this question depends upon the metaphysical properties that are traditionally ascribed to subjectivity in the first place – where one property in particular, *autonomy*, is implicit and pervasive. For example, in the 'Preface' to *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Levinas refers to: 'the ideal of autonomy that guides philosophy' (Levinas, 1969, p.25). But while the figure of the child is powerless in comparison to their parent and in a position of absolute heteronomy; the figure of the adolescent is not yet a mature adult, and so is in a position of becoming-autonomous. Here, both figures place the metaphysics of the autonomous subject into question. Beyond the mature adult are the disabilities of old age and then the decay of death; which further places into question the metaphysical presupposition of personal autonomy. Which begs the question: When, in the life of the human being, does autonomy actually happen? Of course, such a question depends upon the specifics and practicalities of each individual case; of each person's life history. This is the reason why autobiography is of interest: on the one hand, the *autos* of autobiography implies the metaphysics of autonomy at work within its concept; but on the other hand, if we listen to that concept with another ear, it is only through the autobiographical location that one makes contact with these heteronomous practicalities and life circumstances. That is, it is only through the deconstruction of autobiography that the metaphysical presupposition of the autonomous subject is called into question and given a location not in the interior substance of the psyche, but rather in the events of life which are on the very boundary between interior and exterior.

In this way, the deconstruction of autobiography radically undermines the metaphysics of life which makes of it a *life-force*. Here, life is reduced to the power of the soul to give life to the body, or the power of the mind to overcome the body's impulses ('mind over matter', as they say; but of course, in the end matter will have its

way). That the soul is said, from the Platonic and theological tradition, to exist *in itself* becomes an important primary stage in the metaphysical ideal of human autonomy. This absolute separation of soul from body cannot be understood to be part of Derrida's autobiographical thought, where, in a Nietzschean manner, the forces of life undermine the very idea of a life-force. In this tradition of radical existentialism, the soul is not an actually existing substance. This is not to say that the *concept* of 'soul' is not useful; for it is through this concept that we have an idea of our emotional experience; it is the basis through which we understand happiness and unhappiness; it is the basis through which we understand experiences as heavenly and hellish. And just as the soul is not an actually existing substance, heaven and hell are not actually existing otherworldly places; rather, they are modes of experience in *this* world (which also explains why even an atheist calls to God's name in moments of intense pleasure and pain). The problem for any notion of personal autonomy is thus grounded in the fact that those who experience hell on earth, or at least some level of it, cannot be said to have the *opportunity* to possess this autonomy. As we saw earlier, the problem that deconstruction poses for any psychological theory is the difficulty in classifying autobiographical singularity. But precisely because the events of life are on the very boundary between interior and exterior, this singularity is not necessarily so subjective that there is no objective element to them whatsoever.

For the autobiographical location also makes transparent, up to a point at any rate, the living conditions, the life circumstances, the *habitat*, of an individual's life. As such, perhaps one might not literally be able to put oneself in the shoes of the other, in the sense of feeling what they feel. Nonetheless, considering things from another's perspective becomes at least partially possible to judge when taking into account the opportunity that their life circumstances have or have not given them to develop their own autonomy. So while the classification of one's subjective psychical singularity becomes impossible, the autobiographical condition of this impossibility simultaneously makes possible the basis from which one can make partial contact with the more objective life circumstances through which the psyche itself is formed. I believe that this is the radical insight into the paradoxes of subjectivity that Derrida's autobiographical thought presents.

Bibliography

Adams, D., 2009. *Mostly harmless*. London: Pan Books.

Anderson, L., 2001. *Autobiography*. London & New York: Routledge.

Augustine, 1910. *The soliloquies of St. Augustine*. Translated from Latin by R. E. Cleveland. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.

Augustine, 1961. *Confessions*. Translated from Latin by R. S. Pine-Coffin. London: Penguin.

Augustine, 1993. *On free choice of the will*. Translated from Latin by T. Williams. Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

Austin, J. L., 1962. *How to do things with words*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Bass, A., 1984. The double game: an introduction. In: J. H. Smith & W. Kerrigan, eds. 1984. *Taking chances: Derrida, psychoanalysis, and literature*. Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Bennington, G., 2000. *Interrupting Derrida*. London & New York: Routledge.

Bergo, B., Cohen, J. & Zagury-Orly R., eds., 2007. *Judeities: questions for Jacques Derrida*. Translated from French by B. Bergo & M. B. Smith. New York: Fordham University Press.

Bradley, A., 2008. *Derrida's Of grammatology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Burke, S., 2008. *The death and return of the author: criticism and subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. 3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Cadava, E., Connor, P. & Nancy, J.-L., eds., 1991. *Who comes after the subject?* London & New York: Routledge.

Caputo, J. D., 1997. *The prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida: religion without religion*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D. & Scanlon, M. J., eds. 2005. *Augustine and postmodernism: confessions and circumfession*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Cixous, H., 2004. *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a young Jewish saint*. Translated from French by B. B. Brahic. New York: Columbia University Press.

Clausewitz, C. V., 1997. *On War*. Translated from German by J. J. Graham & F. N. Maude. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics.

Critchley, S., 1996a. Deconstruction and pragmatism – is Derrida a private ironist or a public liberal? In: C. Mouffe, ed. 1996. *Deconstruction and pragmatism*. London & New York: Routledge.

Critchley, S., 1996b. Prolegomena to any post-deconstructive subjectivity. In: S. Critchley & P. Dews, eds., 1996. *Deconstructive subjectivities*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Critchley, S., 1999a. *The ethics of deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Critchley, S., 1999b. *Ethics-politics-subjectivity: essays on Derrida, Levinas, & contemporary French thought*. London & New York: Verso.

Critchley, S. & Dews, P., eds. 1996a. *Deconstructive subjectivities*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Critchley, S. & Dews, P., 1996b. Introduction. In: S. Critchley & P. Dews, eds. 1996. *Deconstructive subjectivities*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Culler, J., 1982. *On deconstruction: theory and criticism after structuralism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Dasgupta, P., 2007. *Economics: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

De Man, P., 1983. *Blindness and insight: essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

De Man, P., 1984. *The rhetoric of romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dent, N., 2005. *Rousseau*. London & New York: Routledge.

Derrida, J., 1976. *Of grammatology*. Translated from French by G. C. Spivak. Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Derrida, J., 1978. *Writing and difference*. Translated from French by A. Bass. London: Routledge.

Derrida, J., 1979. *Spurs: Nietzsche's styles*. Translated from French by B. Harlow. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J., 1981. *Dissemination*. Translated from French by B. Johnson. London: The Athlone Press.

Derrida, J., 1982. *Margins of philosophy*. Translated from French by A. Bass. London & New York: Prentice Hall.

Derrida, J., 1984. *Signsponge*. Translated from French by R. Rand. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J., 1986. *Glas*. Translated from French by J. P. Leavey, Jr. & R. Rand. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press.

Derrida, J., 1987. *The postcard: from Socrates to Freud and beyond*. Translated from French A. Bass. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J., 1988a. *The ear of the other: otobiography, transference, translation*. Translated from French by P. Kamuf. C. McDonald, ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Derrida, J., 1988b. *Limited inc*. G. Graff, ed. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Derrida, J., 1989. *Memoires for Paul de Man*. Revised Edition. Translated from French by C. Lindsay, J. Culler, E. Cadava, & P. Kamuf. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J., 1991. Che cos'è la poesia? In: P. Kamuf, ed. 1991. *A Derrida reader: between the blinds*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J., 1992. *Acts of literature*. D. Attridge, ed. London & New York: Routledge.

Derrida, J., 1993. Circumfession: fifty-nine periods and periphrases written in a sort of internal margin, between Geoffrey Bennington's book and work in preparation (January 1989 – April 1990). In: G. Bennington & J. Derrida. 1993. *Jacques Derrida*. Translated from French by G. Bennington. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J., 1995a. *On the name*. Translated from French by D. Wood, J. P. Leavey, Jr., & I. McLeod. T. Dutoit, ed. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., 1995b. *Points... interviews, 1974 – 1994*. Translated from French by P. Kamuf *et.al.* E. Weber, ed. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., 1998. *Monolingualism of the other; or, the prosthesis of origin*. Translated from French by P. Mensah. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., 2001. I have a taste for the secret. Translated from French by G. Donis. In: J. Derrida & M. Ferraris. In: *A taste for the secret*. G. Donis & D. Webb, eds. 2001. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Derrida, J., 2002. *Acts of religion*. G. Anidjar, ed. London & New York: Routledge.

Derrida, J., 2005. Composing "Circumfession". In: J. D. Caputo & M. J. Scanlon, eds. 2005. *Augustine and postmodernism: confessions and circumfession*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Derrida, J., 2006. *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. Translated from French by P. Kamuf. London & New York: Routledge Classics.

Derrida, J., 2007. *Psyche: inventions of the other, volume 1*. P. Kamuf & E. Rottenberg, eds. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., 2008. *The animal that therefore I am*. Translated from French by D. Wills. M.-L. Mallet, ed. New York: Fordham University Press.

Foucault, M., 1991. *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*. Translated from French by A. Sheridan. London: Penguin Books.

France, P., 1987. *Rousseau: confessions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Freud, S., 1961. *Civilization and its discontents*. Translated from German by J. Strachey. New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company.

Freud, S., 1964. *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*. Translated from German by J. Strachey. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Freud, S., 1991. *The essentials of psycho-analysis*. Translated from German by J. Strachey. A. Freud, ed. London: Penguin Books.

Freud, S., 1997. *The interpretation of dreams*. Translated from German by A. A. Brill. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics.

Freud, S., 2001a. *The ego and the id, and other works*. Translated from German by J. Strachey. J. Strachey, ed. London: Vintage Books.

Freud, S., 2001b. *On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology, and other works*. Translated from German by J. Strachey. J. Strachey, ed. London: Vintage Books.

Gasché, R., 1986. *The tain of the mirror: Derrida and the philosophy of reflection*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press.

Gasché, R., 1994. *Inventions of difference: on Jacques Derrida*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press.

Gaston, S., 2006. *The impossible mourning of Jacques Derrida*. London & New York: Continuum.

Gill, D., 2003. *World religions: the essential reference guide to the world's major faiths*. London: HarperCollins.

Greenblatt, S., 2005. *Renaissance self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hägglund, M., 2008. *Radical atheism: Derrida and the time of life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Hartle, A., 1999. Augustine and Rousseau: narrative and self-knowledge in the two confessions. In: G. B. Matthews, ed. 1999. *The Augustinian tradition*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.

Hartman, G., 1989. Looking back on Paul de Man. In: L. Waters & W. Godzich, eds. 1989. *Reading de Man reading*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hegel, G. W. F., 2008. *Philosophy of right*. Translated from German by S. W. Dyde. New York: Cosimo.

Hegel, G. W. F., 1977. *Phenomenology of spirit*. Translated from German by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heidegger, M., 1962. *Being and time*. Translated from German by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell.

Hillis Miller, J., 1991. *Theory now and then*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Hobbes, T., 1985. *Leviathan*. C. B. Macpherson, ed. London: Penguin Books.

Hobson, M., 1998. *Jacques Derrida: opening lines*. London & New York: Routledge.

Howells, C., 1998. *Derrida: deconstruction from phenomenology to ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hume, D., 1978. *A treatise on human nature*. 2nd ed. P. H. Nidditch, ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Kamuf, P., 1988. *Signature pieces: on the institution of authorship*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

Kamuf, P., 2005. *Book of addresses*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Kearney, R., 1984. *Dialogues with contemporary continental thinkers: the phenomenological heritage*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Kearney, R., 2005. Confessions and “Circumfession”: a roundtable discussion with Jacques Derrida. In: J. D. Caputo & M. J. Scanlon, eds. 2005. *Augustine and postmodernism: confessions and circumfession*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Kerrigan, W. & Smith, J. H., 1984. Introduction. In: J. H. Smith & W. Kerrigan, eds. 1984. *Taking chances: Derrida, psychoanalysis, and literature*. Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Klein, N., 2007. *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Krell, D. F., 1994. Immanent death, imminent death. In: S. Shamdasani & M. Munchow, eds. 1994. *Speculations after Freud: psychoanalysis, philosophy and culture*. London & New York: Routledge.

Kronick, J. G., 2000. Philosophy as autobiography: the confessions of Jacques Derrida. *MLN*, 15 (5), pp.997-1018.

Lacan, J., 2006. *Écrits*. Translated from French by B. Fink. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C., 2001. *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Verso.

Lenin, V. I., 1987. *Essential works of Lenin: 'What is to be done?' and other writings*. H. M. Christman, ed. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Levinas, E., 1969. *Totality and infinity: an essay on exteriority*. Translated from French by A. Lingis. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.

Levi-Strauss, C., 1976. *Structural anthropology, volume 2*. Translated from French by M. Layton. London: Penguin.

Levi-Strauss, C., 1992. *Tristes tropiques*. Translated from French by J. Weightman & D. Weightman. London: Penguin Books.

Locke, J., 1924. *Two treatises of government*. New York: Everyman's Library.

Marcus, L., 1994. *Auto/biographical discourses: criticism, theory, practice*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Marx, K., 1972. *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of right'*. Translated from German by A. Jolin & J. O'Malley. J. O'Malley, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marx, K. & Engels, F., 1998. *The German ideology: including theses on Feuerbach and introduction to the critique of political economy*. Translated from German by Unknown. Unknown ed. New York: Prometheus Books.

Marx, K. & Engels, F., 2002. *The communist manifesto*. Translated from German by S. Moore. G. S. Jones, ed. London: Penguin Books.

McQuillan, M., 2001. *Paul de Man*. London & New York: Routledge.

Monbiot, G., 2001. *Captive state: the corporate takeover of Britain*. London: Pan Books.

Nancy, J.-L., 1991. Introduction. In: E. Cadava, P. Connor, & J.-L. Nancy, eds. 1991. *Who comes after the subject?* London & New York: Routledge.

Nietzsche, F., 1974. *The gay science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs*. Translated from German by W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books.

Nietzsche, F., 1990. The twilight of the idols: or, how to philosophize with a hammer. In: F. Nietzsche. *Twilight of the idols and the anti-Christ*. Translated from German by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.

Nietzsche, F., 1992. *Ecce homo: how one becomes what one is*. Translated from German by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.

Nietzsche, F., 1994. *On the genealogy of morality*. Translated from German by C. Diethel. K. Ansell-Pearson, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F., 1996. *Human, all too human: a book for free spirits*. Translated from German by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F., 1997. *Daybreak: thoughts on the prejudices of morality*. Translated from German by R. J. Hollingdale. M. Clark & B. Leiter, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F., 1999. *The birth of tragedy, and other writings*. Translated from German by R. Speirs. R. Geuss & R. Speirs, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F., 2003. *Thus spoke Zarathustra: a book for everyone and no one*. Translated from German by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.

Nietzsche, F., 2004. *On the future of our educational institutions*. Translated from German by M. W. Grenke. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press.

Norris, C., 1986. Deconstruction against itself: Derrida and Nietzsche. *Diacritics*, 16 (4), pp.59-69.

Ofrat, G., 2001. *The Jewish Derrida*. Translated from Hebrew by P. Kidron. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Riis, J. A., 1997. *How the other half lives*. London: Penguin Classics.

Robbins, J., 1995. Circumcising confession: Derrida, autobiography, Judaism. *Diacritics*, 25 (4), pp.20-38.

Rogers, C., 1961. Dealing with breakdowns in communication – interpersonal and intergroup. In: C. Rogers. *On becoming a person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable.

Rorty, R., 1967, ed. *The linguistic turn: recent essays in philosophical method*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Rorty, R., 1996. Response to Simon Critchley. In: C. Mouffe, ed. 1996. *Deconstruction and pragmatism*. London & New York: Routledge.

Rousseau, J.-J., 1966. Essay on the origin of languages. Translated from French by J. H. Moran. In: J. H. Moran & A. Gode, eds. 1966. *Two essays on the origin of language*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Rousseau, J.-J., 1968. *Letter to M. d'Alembert on the theatre*. Translated from French by A. Bloom. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Rousseau, J.-J., 1987. *The basic political writings*. D. A. Cress, ed. Indianapolis & Cambridge: Indiana University Press.

Rousseau, J.-J., 1993. *Émile*. Translated from French by B. Foxley. London: Everyman.

Rousseau, J.-J., 1996. *The confessions*. Translated from French by Anon. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics.

Rousseau, J.-J., 1997. *Julie, or, the new Heloise: letters of two lovers who live in a small town at the foot of the alps*. Translated from French by P. Stewart & J. Vaché. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England.

Schopenhauer, A., 1969. *The world as will and representation, volume 1*. Translated from German by E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Schrift, A. D., 1996. Nietzsche's French legacy. In: B. Magnus & K. M. Higgins, eds. 1996. *The Cambridge companion to Nietzsche*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shakespeare, W., 2002. Hamlet. In: W. Shakespeare. *The complete works of William Shakespeare*. New Lanark, Scotland: Geddes & Grosset.

Smith, R., 1995. *Derrida and autobiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sprinker, M., ed. 1999. *Ghostly demarcations: a symposium on Jacques Derrida's specters of Marx*. London & New York: Verso.

Stein, G., 1993. *Everybody's autobiography*. Cambridge: Exact Change.

Stirner, M., 2005. *The ego and his own: the case of the individual against authority*. Translated from German by S. T. Byington. J. J. Martin, ed. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Terada, R., 2001. *Feeling in theory: emotion after the 'death of the subject'*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press.

Wood, D., 2001. *The deconstruction of time*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Wood, S., 2009. *Derrida's Writing and difference*. London & New York: Continuum.

Wordsworth, W., 1854. *The complete poetical works of William Wordsworth*. H. Reed, ed. Philadelphia: Troutman & Hayes.