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Alter Ego: Toward a Response Ethics of Self-Relation

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Alter Ego: Toward a Response Ethics of Self-Relation

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B.A. Trinity College, 2011

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Abstract

Alter Ego: Toward a Response Ethics of Self-Relation
By Ellie Anderson

Operating at the intersection of response ethics and the study of selfhood, my dissertation defends an account of the self that is characterized by internal otherness. Influenced by twentieth-century French philosophy, particularly response ethics, deconstruction, and phenomenology, I claim that one's otherness to oneself is the basis of the relation to oneself and others. I argue that our internal otherness exceeds the bounds of consciousness, knowledge, and representation: it cannot be captured by something like self-knowledge. Rather, our conscious understanding of ourselves relies on more originary modes of self-relation that demonstrate internal otherness. I show that modes of self-relation such as decision making, auto-affection, and the first-person perspective attest to internal otherness and suggest that selfhood and otherness are constituted through their relation to one another. I argue that this relation is one of contamination, such that selfhood and otherness are never pure or absolutely separate from one another. I then claim that, just as self-relation is not primarily a matter of knowledge, neither is the relation to other beings. Rather, we relate to others *as other* because we are other to ourselves. This culminates in an ethic of reciprocity that foregrounds the difference between oneself and other beings. My account of selfhood and otherness draws primarily on the work of Jacques Derrida, while also employing the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The dissertation critiques the model of the self-other relation offered by Emmanuel Levinas, which dominates discourses in response ethics today. It shows that Derrida's deconstruction is a rich but frequently overlooked resource for an account of selfhood that foregrounds internal otherness and renders coherent the relation to other beings in and through their otherness.

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Introduction

"I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others."

—Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*[1]

If the nineteenth century heralded the death of God, the twentieth century proclaimed the death of the self. The dominant modern view of the masterful, agential subject toppled, and along with it went the ideals of pure self-knowledge and willful application of the moral law. Dominant currents of twentieth-century European philosophy deny that the self is autonomous, fully conscious, and self-present, showing instead that consciousness is constituted by what is *other* to it: for example, its environment, social context, and vulnerability. These developments have been in marked contrast with the substantialist view of the self that has characterized much of Western metaphysics, which takes the self to be a physical or mental entity and thus considers self-knowledge to be the primary form of self-relation. The Cartesian banishment of doubt in favor of certainty is in this regard the *arché*-moment of modern philosophy: self-relation is figured as a matter of self-knowledge, and the self is considered an entity (*res*). This primacy of knowledge also translates to relations with other beings, emerging most frequently in the ethical idea that all that individuals need in order to make ethical decisions is knowledge, especially knowledge about the moral law.

[1] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham, 2005), 84.

The critique of this form of thinking—and above all, its basis in a kind of sovereign, transparent, agential subjectivity—was to a great extent inspired by Nietzsche, developed through Heidegger, and radicalized by philosophies generally considered 'poststructuralist' and identified with thinkers such as Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard, Kristeva, Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida, Althusser, and Butler. Beginning in France starting around the 1960s, these thinkers argued that the self is not a stable entity, and began to call this outmoded view 'metaphysical,' following Heidegger. This rejection of metaphysical thinking led to the dominance of the idea that the self is a construct: whether of language, of capitalism, of patriarchy, or of other forms of power. Understanding the self, then, is not a question of pure self-knowledge, because the self is produced by what is other to it and does not constitute an entity. This view stands in direct opposition to 'modern' views of the self emerging from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which tend to align the self with reason, autonomy, and independence from others. As a result of the prominence of this view in recent decades, it has become commonplace among philosophers schooled in the continental European tradition to argue that the self is not self-possessed or fully self-conscious. When these discourses have not denied the existence of a self altogether, they have paved the way for a new conception of selfhood that emphasizes internal otherness, leading to rich analyses of the ways that we are 'other to ourselves.'[2]

In recent decades, many philosophers have tried to reconcile this dissolution of the self with ethical responsibility. Once the traditional view of the self topples, so too do the ethical theories that were constructed upon it. If the self is not a singular entity capable of complete self-knowledge, then how can individuals be ethical? Philosophy has long been

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[2] See, for instance, Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia, 1991); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1992), Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

accustomed to thinking that responsibility emerges from an independent, atomic self that is separate from others. Both the autonomy and will emphasized by deontology, and the calculus and efficiency on which utilitarianism depends, demand a central role for self-knowledge and self-possession.[3] Formulating the categorical imperative and maximizing the greatest good for the greatest number are both rational and and self-conscious enterprises. Implementing these ethical outlooks demands being capable of acting in accordance with them: this requires not only self-knowledge, but also self-mastery. Because much of twentieth century European philosophy has denied the possibility, let alone the desirability, of these values of self-knowledge and self-mastery, the question becomes: how do we think ethical responsibility otherwise?

It thus becomes crucial to offer a new ethical theory that is not based on the modern, rational individual, but which instead accounts for disjunctions within the self. By far the most influential attempt of this kind is Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1961), which birthed what has come to be called 'response ethics' in the Anglophone world. Levinas argues that ethics is not about rational decision making, weighing options in the abstract, or relating to other beings because we see similarities in them to ourselves. Instead, he claims that ethics is about responding to an Other. Who or what is this Other? The Other is a being who appears to me as completely beyond my grasp. The other is what shows up as fundamentally separate from me, as foreign to me, and as arising from a place beyond my own perspective on the world. I can never understand the viewpoint of the Other. Rather than trying to put myself in another's shoes, ethics is, for Levinas, a matter of responding to others as they present *themselves*. On his account, one must treat others *as other* and not

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[3] Whether this is also true of the third great ethical tradition in Western philosophy, virtue ethics, will be the subject of a future project.

presume any similarity or shared experience with them. This new ethical standpoint does not require constructing an account of the self as a masterful agent of its own decisions and desires. In fact, it does not emphasize the self at all. Its focus is on the other. The ethics of Levinas thus takes up, in his words, the "end of mastery," and indicates that we are in relation with "something that is absolutely other," and whom we cannot assimilate through our own understanding or control.[4] We can see, then, how this ethical perspective lines up with the death of the self associated with twentieth-century thinking.

In short, two major currents of recent philosophy in the continental European tradition are 1) the effort to interrogate, reframe, and and sometimes eliminate the notion of subjectivity, and 2) the reorientation of ethics toward a respect for otherness. These two currents were born out of the same philosophical climate of post-war France, and therefore have been entangled from the start even as their commitments and emphases are different. The first of these currents includes thinkers influenced by Foucaultian, Deleuzian, Marxist, and many feminist frameworks. Here, attention to the fracture within subjectivity, and/or its formation through forces that are not its own, often goes along with concern with social and political issues, especially a concern with power and forces in the social sphere. On this view, the self is considered the product of external forces or social relations. The second of these currents is broadly Levinasian, emphasizing the ethical injunction to respect or preserve the otherness of other beings. Both of these currents constitute attempts to reconcile the death of the modern subject with responsibility, yet their emphasis is different. On my view, each of these two emphases tends to take for granted the 'death of the self' without offering enough in the way of a new understanding of selfhood in the wake of their rejection of the

[4] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1990), 74.

transparent, modern subject. The matter of identity and difference as they relate to the difference between the self and other beings has not been adequately theorized. This leads to a blind reversal of metaphysical thinking that remains on its same ground. This results in what I will call 'crypto-subjectivity'.

The modern metaphysical subject is so widely rejected in contemporary philosophy in the continental tradition that many academic discussions within and outside philosophy today treat the term 'subject' as a dirty word. Subjectivity is seen as passé, as metaphysical, as irrevocably linked with transcendental authority, pure agency, and ultimately, with a white, able-bodied, heterosexual male prototype of the human. Yet my view is that the rejection of this term, when not supplemented with a rigorous alternate thinking of identity and difference, activity and passivity, self and other, and sameness and alterity, is often a mere gesture that overlooks the legacy of the sovereign subject in the very discourses that reject it. This legacy continues in a 'spectral' fashion: the specter of the subject is haunting philosophy. One could say that, in a sense, all specters are specters of the subject. The ghost, then, would be the ghost of a sovereign, self-present subjectivity whose pretensions to mastery over its own fate in life continue to haunt the dead and the living. Specters are specters of living beings—humans, and, sometimes, animals. The ghost is the ghost of a being no longer alive, but alive *as* dead. Here, I would like to suggest that 20th century and contemporary continental philosophy is haunted by a certain crypto-subjectivity, playing off of the neologism 'crypto-normativity' coined by Habermas in his critique of Foucault.[5]

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[5] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*: *Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987). 'Crypto-subjectivity' as a term has actually been used already by Terry Eagleton, albeit in a very different context: Eagleton uses it to describe the way that works of art in Kantian aesthetics 'communicate' with human subjects. See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990).

This crypto-subjectivity is evident in both of the two currents I have identified above. With respect to the first current, philosophies that take the subject to be a byproduct of social forces confront difficulties in explaining agency and resistance, and much of contemporary social and political theory in the continental tradition concerns precisely these difficulties. On my view, this difficulty is irresolvable if one takes the self to be completely, absolutely produced by external forces. Crypto-subjectivity in this tradition operates in two ways: 1) external power dynamics are taken to have sovereign agency of their own, and thus become a displaced site for the traditional conception of the subject; 2) agency is often assigned to the fractured subject produced by power anyway, despite its incommensurability with the other elements of these theories. Theories in the second current—philosophies that foreground alterity emerging from a Levinasian or post-Levinasian ethical framework—tend to privilege the Other over the 'Same,' which usually aligns more or less with a subject, self, or ego. I contend that a troubling epiphenomenon of this privileging has been crypto-subjectivity in the sense that the Other is taken to be absolute ethical authority, making it the new, displaced locus of sovereign subjectivity. I will attempt here to demonstrate crypto-subjectivity in each of these two currents. For the first, we will take as an example Butler, whom I see as the major contemporary figure of the first current. For the second, I will more briefly note some issues that arise but that will be treated at greater detail in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. Because much of this dissertation concerns issues that arise with the Levinasian framework, I will mention here some of those issues and how they pertain to the problem of crypto-subjectivity before offering my solution to the problem.

Both in her insistence that the subject is the product of social forces external to it and in her foregrounding of the issue of responsibility, Butler offers a crystallization of the view that I have broadly identified as a major current in contemporary philosophy. In a

sense, the issues that concern Butler are precisely the issues that concern me in this dissertation, and her idea that the non-transparency of the self is the locus of ethical responsibility is one with which I am in strong agreement. She is, in fact, the closest contemporary philosopher to my aim of linking responsiveness to other beings with responsiveness to otherness within the self. However, to my mind, Butler lacks the robust account of selfhood that such a theory requires. Butler's work over the past three decades has constituted a number of attempts to conceptualize subject-formation in increasingly coherent and sufficient ways, but I argue that she does not succeed in this. Unlike some other contemporary philosophers in the continental tradition, Butler does not disavow the word 'subject'; she does, however, disavow the connotations of transparency, agency, and sovereignty that have tended to be linked with the term in the history of metaphysics. Yet in the formulation of her views, Butler fails to pursue the implications of a theory of selfhood predicated on the internal otherness to which she pays lip service. As a result, she falls into what I have been calling 'crypto-subjectivity' because she has recourse to an agential, transparent subject despite her claims to the contrary.

To show this, I will briefly consider the views proposed in three of Butler's texts: *The Psychic Life of Power, Giving an Account of Oneself, and Dispossession: The Performative in the Political.* In order to show that the first of these texts falls into the problem of crypto-subjectivity, I will draw on the arguments made by Kelly Oliver in her book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. I will show that, in all three of these texts, Butler falls short of providing sufficient answers to the question of the relation between self and other. The project of this dissertation will then be to try to provide a sufficient answer to this question, a question to which I am indebted to Butler for asking in compelling ways even as I am not satisfied with her answers.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler deepens the theory of performativity she develops in *Gender Trouble* in order to offer a richer account of the formation of the subject. For this view, she draws on the psychoanalytic account of melancholy, a Foucault-inspired account of power, a dialectical account of recognition, and a Derridean notion of iterability. Butler argues that the subject is formed through subjection to power. Subordination and subjection appear synonymous for her, and—as in her earlier *Gender Trouble*—she claims that recognition as a subject requires submission to dominant modes of power. She states, for instance, that "to desire the conditions of one's own subordination is thus required to persist as oneself."[6] If one cannot persist as oneself without such a desire, there seems to be little to no room for subversion of prevailing power relations. Butler thus takes a view of subject-formation by which the self is formed by external power relations, and then internally distinguishes itself from its environment through a process of melancholic withdrawal. The subject is primarily social, but also emerges as a subject through a process of withdrawal from sociality.

In Butler's work, subject-formation takes a unidirectional form: the outside creates the inside. Interiority is a fold within exteriority. This Foucault-inspired position is, on my view, insufficient because it merely reverses the metaphysical privilege of interiority with a privilege for exteriority that remains caught within the binaristic terms of this opposition. It reverses the hierarchy between interior and exterior without troubling the status of this hierarchy and the relation between its terms (as deconstruction will do). This is a problem, I would argue, for Foucaultian accounts of subject-formation and selfhood more generally. The first-person perspective of subjectivity is seen as an internalization of the third-person

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[6] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 9.

perspective such that the third-person perspective takes the position of sovereignty (I will return to why I find this reversal of first- to third-person perspective insufficient in Chapter 3). There is a kind of crypto-subjectivity in claiming that power constructs the subject, inasmuch as 'power' is then taken to be a stand-in for the all-seeing, all-knowing agency that was once the place of the subject.

Moreover, Butler begs the question in failing to address the question of who or what is subjected to power. If the subject is formed through subjection to power, then what is there that was subjected to begin with? 'Subjection to power' does not make sense if there is not something or someone who is being subjected to this power, but the subject supposedly does not exist prior to this subjection. Butler is left with a chicken-and-egg problem through merely reversing a metaphysical hierarchy. I will argue in this dissertation that this problem is resolved through a deconstructive attention to contamination, which offers a way to think about the constitutive interplay between self and other that does not merely 'favor' one of these terms over another.

In *Witnessing*, Oliver argues that Butler places the subject in an antagonistic relation with others that makes subjectivity "the result of a logic of exclusion or repudiation of otherness," and that what I have called Butler's chicken-and-egg problem leads Butler to rely on a subject prior to subordination in spite of her purported disavowal of it.[7] The melancholic site of subjection that inaugurates the subject presupposes an originary situatedness within the social realm from which one then withdraws: this, Oliver shows, suggests that subjectivity excludes or repudiates otherness. If this is the case, then we are back within the realm of the traditional metaphysical subject as that which is purely opposed

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[7] Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 62.

to otherness. The fact that the origin of this subject is social does not change the fact that this subject is ultimately, for Butler, asocial. Moreover, Oliver argues that Butler's claims about the way that subordination to power constitutes the subject through an absence of ownership over its world presupposes a subject prior to this subordination. Oliver writes: "Butler's talk of ownership, and the alienation that comes from being in a world not of one's own making, presupposes the very self-possessed sovereign notion of subjectivity she argues against."[8] Butler's account of subjectivation in *The Psychic Life of Power* presupposes a crypto-subject—a subject prior to subjection through modes of power—that place her back in the metaphysical tradition of the 'pure' subject apart from social relations.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself,* Butler distances herself from the view of subjectivity proffered in *The Psychic Life of Power* and undertakes a new understanding of the emergence and persistence of the subject in relation to others.[9] Here, Butler avows that in *The Psychic Life of Power*, she "perhaps too quickly accepted this punitive scene of inauguration for the subject."[10] Whereas, in that earlier text, Butler had depended on "an account of a subject who internalizes the law," here she adjusts her view in favor of a different way of considering subject-formation that is, surprisingly, even more explicitly linked with Foucault.[11] The adjustment of her view, however, is exclusively one of tone: she tempers the 'punitive' connotations of her earlier view to reflect Foucault's late interest in codes of morality and codes of conduct that style the self through creative invention (*poiesis*).[12] On my

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[8] Oliver, *Witnessing*, 67-8.
[9] For a helpful and persuasive view of the changes in Butler's conception of subjectivity from the 1990s to the 2002 Adorno Lectures, on which *Giving an Account of Oneself* is based, see Kathy Dow Magnus, "The Unaccountable Subject: Judith Butler and the Social Conditions of Intersubjective Agency," *Hypatia*, 21:2 (Spring, 2006), 81-103.
[10] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham, 2005), 15.
[11] Butler, *Giving an Account*, 15.
[12] Ibid., 16.

view, this leaves the structure of her view essentially the same: the subject is the product or result of norms or external forces that are then lodged within what becomes a subject. The problems we raised with respect to *The Psychic Life of Power,* then, persist. There is a "primary opacity to the self that follows from formative relations"; while the idea that the self has an opacity corresponds with my own view, we can see from this quotation that for Butler, there is a unidirectional causal relation between the social relations of power and the self that they form.[13] The traditional philosophical position that posits the subject as the constituting principle for objects is once again simply reversed in Butler's schema, and therefore offers no real solution to the problems that she presents.

This tendency persists in Butler's recent work, including *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, where Butler describes an originally 'dispossessed' subject in an attempt to further distance herself from the traditional subject as owner and possessor of him or herself. The framework of dispossession, however, is itself yet another reversal of the picture Butler opposes to her own: to move from possession to dispossession is not a successful distancing from the logic of ownership, but merely a privileging of the previously underprivileged term (I will make a similar argument regarding Levinas's use of 'passivity' and 'obsession' toward the end of the following chapter). This reversal of the hierarchy leaves the structure of hierarchical opposition intact. Moreover, dispossession, as we have seen Oliver argue regarding the talk of alienation and ownership in *The Psychic Life of Power*, presupposes, at least in principle an originally self-present and self-possessed subject. It is, therefore, part of the logic of crypto-subjectivity.

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[13] Ibid., 20.

Finally, another element of crypto-subjectivity in Butler's work arises from an issue she has faced since *Gender Trouble* (and one that 'poststructuralist' theorists, those in the Foucaultian tradition in particular, frequently face): if the subject is merely the product of external forces, then how does it develop any resistance or agency in the face of these forces? Butler's general line of response to this question, whether articulated through the terminology of performativity, repetition, or iterability (a term she takes from Derrida that we will treat in Chapter 2), is that the repeated performance of subjectivity makes room for change and mutation in its interstices. That is, power can be subverted because its very structure, which requires repetitive performative gestures, allows for gaps through which subversion may seep. She states: "a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject, and this dependency of the subject on repetition for coherence may constitute that subject's incoherence, its incomplete character. This repetition or, better, iterability thus becomes the non-place of subversion, the possibility of a re-embodying of the subjectivating norm that can redirect its normativity."[14] If subjectivity is originally inaugurated as a fold of the exterior, through subversion to external power, then subjectivity persists through the subject's own repetition of itself *as* subject. And this repetition is itself subject to change or mutation. This last point is central to what Derrida calls iterability, and upon which Butler draws for her position here: for Derrida, repetition or repeatability implies the failure of identity to be unified, pure, or self-enclosed. Therefore, iterability is a logic of otherness within sameness.

However, the way that Butler cashes out this idea is incoherent. Failing to grasp the consequences of iterability—consequences we will lay out in Chapter 2, and which involve

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[14] Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 99.

the contamination of the other by the same and vice versa—leads Butler back into crypto-subjectivity. That is to say, Butler takes the interstices implied by repetition and iterability to be places not of otherness, but rather places of an agential subjectivity that subverts or 'redirects' the 'normativity' of the powers that be. Her language here is crypto-subjective insofar as it implies an agency redirecting or subverting existing norms that on the surface it rejects. Such subversion, in turn, would require consciousness of these norms, and mastery over them such that one may change them. Where is this subversion coming from, one may wonder? While Butler's response is that it comes from a 'non-place,' the failure to elucidate what exactly this might mean and how such subversion operates in detail lead her position to falling back on modern, traditional, metaphysical models of agency while evoking appealing but ultimately empty catchwords. Butler touches on Derrida only to delve into a discussion of subversion of power in Foucault, reaffirming the mere reversal of agency (from inside to outside, from subjectivity to 'power') that leads to so many problems for Foucault's own view.[15]

The issues I have considered with Butler's attempts to reconcile the postmodern subject with responsibility are issues that pertain to a number of contemporary theories that also fail in this effort. In particular, they are issues for any theory that reverses that traditional metaphysical constitution of the self by proclaiming that the self is a pure product of external forces. These are issues for the 'first current' I have identified above. The second current, that of a Levinasian respect for otherness, also attests to crypto-subjectivity. On my view, the Levinasian Other is the twin of the modern metaphysical subject (whether Cartesian, Kantian, Husserlian, or liberal) because it is taken to be absolute and infinitely

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[15] Ibid., 99-100.

transcendent. The Other is the obverse of Enlightenment thinking, remaining within its framework and offering itself as a shadow of metaphysical logic that in fact remains under the spell of its binaristic thinking of identity and difference. It becomes an empty injunction that stands in for sovereignty, the absolute, and omnipotence. While I will be considering the issues with the Levinasian approach at greater length in the chapters of this dissertation, I will at least note here what I mean in accusing this approach of crypto-subjectivity.

Levinasian ethics is haunted by the traditional figure of the subject in the sense that, even when there is a troubling of the subjectivity of the self, the model of sovereign subjectivity persists in the Other. The traditional figure of the self-transparent subject has been displaced from the self, which is now considered fractured and vulnerable, onto the Other. In Levinasian ethics, for instance, the Other is raised to such extreme heights that it is voided of any content and taken to be the absolute ethical authority to such an extent that it becomes indistinguishable from the figure of the sovereign. The privilege that the radical other whom to whom one responds is given tends to imply an absolute unity of that other unto itself. The other is, in this sense, taken as absolute. Because any claims about its content, makeup, or structure are foreclosed by dominant discourses of response ethics, the Other is considered pure, outside of any relation or influence of the Same.

Whereas twentieth-century philosophy moved away from considering the self to be a transparent, agential, sovereign subject, its emphasis on the Other has failed, in my view, to think the Other on different grounds than those previously reserved for the subject. Even when theorists in this group acknowledge that the self has a rich interior life of its own, as is already the case in Levinas, they tend to overlook the fact that this *also* goes for other beings. Thus, the traditional figure of the self-transparent subject is displaced from the self onto the other. The power of the other over oneself is privileged so much that it implies a unity of

that other unto itself. If we take the self to be in relation to otherness, I argue in this dissertation, we also need to emphasize the fact that the other is in relation to the self. Theorizing the internal otherness of the self should entail theorizing the internal otherness of the other unto him or herself. Such theorization need not fall into the traps of overlooking alterity and subsuming the other into the self. In fact, when we do not take fuller account of the relation between self and Other, the word 'Other' risks standing in for the subject as ego with self-presence, ipseity, and ultimate authority. The site of sovereignty remains standing, but has merely moved to the position of the Other.

My own position draws much from these two currents I have mentioned both for its account of the self and for its ethics. I consider it crucial to hold on to the idea that otherness cannot be reduced to a conscious field of representation, knowledge, and mastery. I take seriously the idea that the self is dependent on other beings and constituted through what is other to it. So too do I hold to the insight from response ethics that otherness cannot be grasped through consciousness or controlled by oneself, and that a respect for this otherness is requisite for ethical life. In fact, I think that it is only on the basis of a separation between self and others that ethics is necessary, or, moreover, possible.[16] At the same time, I worry that neither of these two currents in recent philosophy has sufficiently theorized the relation between self and other. We cannot rest in a complacent admission that the death of the self is an event that has occurred, and be content to consider ourselves as having gotten beyond that old and outdated term, 'self.' Nor can we blindly install the word 'other' as a

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[16] An overwhelming emphasis on the dependency of beings on one another raises the question of whether there is even a distinction between self and others at all. If there is no distinction, then it becomes unclear what is left of ethics. Why would ethics even be necessary if there is no separation or disjunction between oneself and other beings? On my view, such an approach, which I see particularly in some variants of care ethics, does not have a strong enough account of the self, and this corresponds to an insufficient respect for otherness.

new catch-all for what should be respected, honored, and obeyed. The issue with both of these attitudes, on my view, is that they covertly reinstall the metaphysical model of subjectivity from which they purport to escape. By failing to reassess the question of selfhood in the wake of the 'death of the self,' thinkers have paid lip service to the nonsubstantial, divided self or split subject while overlooking the way that their discourses perpetuate the metaphysical myth of a transparent, agential, masterful, and self-present subject.

How, then, does one reject the pretensions of the metaphysical subject without falling into the problem of crypto-subjectivity? My proposal in this dissertation is that one needs a theory of the subject that is neither 'pure' from external forces nor merely the product of them. My account will sometimes seem close to the latter position: As we will see in the following section, I call the self a series of 'identity-effects' and claim that the self is constituted through traces of otherness. However, my view contrasts with Foucaultian, Butlerian, and other poststructuralist views of subjectivity in that it does not propose a reversal of the causation implied in modern accounts of subjectivity, moving from a self-constituted, autonomous, and purely independent subject toward a subject constituted through relations of power and purely dependent on these relations. In my view, the latter view is just as 'metaphysical' as the former. It maintains the unidirectional causation as well as the assumptions of presence, omnipotence, and omniscience inherited from the Western philosophical tradition.

I find deconstruction a compelling antidote to these two views. Deconstruction does not merely reverse traditional hierarchical oppositions while leaving the binaries that lead to them intact. Rather, deconstruction undertakes to show the unstable ground of these binaries and the way that they are not purely or absolutely cut off from each other such that

it is a 'choice' between them. This framework provides a compelling way to think about the self in a manner that coherently accounts for internal otherness rather than doing away with the self altogether or considering the subject to be a pure product of external forces. It will be the task of this dissertation to show that the work of Derrida provides a unique set of resources for answering the question of the relation between self and other that does not fall into the problems of crypto-subjectivity.

While we have primarily used the term 'subjectivity' in the foregoing section, the bulk of this dissertation will instead use the term 'self.' I will sometimes use the term 'subjectivity' in the following chapters to indicate the 'first-person perspective,' especially in Chapter 3, but find the term 'self' to be overall more appropriate for what I am articulating in this project. This terminological choice is made for the following reasons: 1) The term 'self' is, etymologically, reflexive, and therefore more readily connotes the relationality that I will argue is the basis for self-relation; 2) this project will trouble the binary between 'self' and 'other,' whereas the term 'subject' more obviously contrasts not with 'other' but with 'object,' and what I am saying does not correspond to a subject-object duality; 3) the term 'subject' is linked with the term 'substance,' and etymologically refers to a substance that stands 'under' what affects it (*subjectum*). As Derrida puts it in "Eating Well": "The subject assumes presence, that is to say sub-stance, stasis, stance."[17] While a number of philosophers have recently tried to resignify the term 'subject'—most notably, Butler, Žižek, and Badiou—in order to argue that the term can imply a radical passivity, on my view this is merely a reversal of the metaphysically-laden associations of the word 'subject' with that

[17] Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject; An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Who Comes After the Subject?,* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 106.

which is pure activity, power, agency, knowledge, and sovereignty (as I have argued with respect to Butler in the previous section). The word 'self,' though itself rife with metaphysically-laden associations, better fits my purposes on the whole than the word 'subject'.

The 'self' is a relatively awkward term that is notoriously difficult to define. Its most misleading feature is its nominative form, a feature to which Nietzsche attributed the tendency to posit a self in Western metaphysics.[18] In this dissertation, I will develop a nonsubstantialist account of the self that the noun 'self' will unfortunately belie. On my view, the self is a series of identity effects that crystallize in a sense of conscious awareness, ownership, and interior life that is in constant flux and is never in fact 'owned' by a substantial subject. What it means to call the self a series of 'identity effects' will become clearer in the following chapters, especially Chapter 2, where I consider how deconstruction helps us to think the self otherwise than as substantial, purely present, and/or purely conscious. We will see that my view of the self is not simply a result of unidirectionally causal external forces that construct a self *ex nihilo*; this will differentiate my position from those characterized by crypto-subjectivity despite some similarities. The idea that the self is never *pure*—that is to say, that the self is never entirely selfsame, independent, autonomous, or transparent—is central to the viewpoint I develop in this dissertation. On my view, the relation between selfhood and otherness is one of contamination: both self and other are constituted in and through their *relation* to each other, which is neither a dialectical relation of sublation nor a relation between two preexisting entities. The relationality of this view prevents it from being a unidirectional view of the causation of the self: that is, from

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[18] See especially Friedrich Nietzsche*, Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989).

upholding on the one hand the self-constitution of self and world that, for many, marks the Western tradition, or, on the other hand, claiming that the self is purely constituted by external forces or powers. Neither the self nor the other is sovereign or pure.

A crucial component of this theory of selfhood is that it is primarily a matter of self-relation. That is, self-relation is what renders possible the identity of both self and other. The idea that relation precedes substance has a number of philosophical predecessors (perhaps the most notable being Hegel; his similarities with and differences from the position I develop here will be noted at various points in this dissertation, however). I will treat three of these predecessors briefly here in order to illuminate the relationality that, on my view, is 'prior' to the existence of the self—as well as of the 'other' by which, I will argue, the self is always already contaminated. While there are many differences between the positions developed by these other three philosophers and the one that I will develop here, each formulates a theory of identity as an *effect* of relation, and therefore will provide helpful insights in describing the general theoretical framework that provides the basis for my project.

1. Hume: in his well-known treatment of personal identity in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume claims that he has never perceived a 'self' anywhere, at any point. There is, therefore, no such *thing* as a self on Hume's view. One need not be an empiricist in order to appreciate an aspect of Hume's argument that follows from his failure to perceive a self: namely, the idea that personal identity is an illusion based on mistaking a relation for an entity. The idea of personal identity is a logical move from relation to identity that corresponds to no actual entity. Rather, successive impressions and ideas are so closely related, on Hume's view, that we have a strong tendency to take them as a suggestion of a singular thing

'behind' this succession. Hume uses the example of hearing a series of noises that so closely follow upon one another that they sound like one long, continuous noise.[19] Personal identity is, for Hume, a factitious idea that results from mistaking *relation* for *identity*.[20]

2. Mead: Mead emphasizes that the 'self' is an essentially reflexive term which has been linguistically adapted from reflexive terms such as 'itself' and 'myself'. The self, for Mead, is not the physical body, nor is it a mental entity or substance. Rather, the self is the combination of basic, subjective awareness and the ability to perceive oneself as an object. The self, put in different terms, is on Mead's view a relation between first-person and the third-person perspectives. As a result, the self is a social emergent based on the ability to adopt the social relation with respect to oneself. Self-relation is at bottom a self-other relation, and is the condition for the possibility of selfhood. Self-relation is not immediate or direct, but always already mediated by the third-person perspective and necessarily experienced indirectly.[21]

3. Heidegger: In *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger argues that identity is itself a relation. Heidegger argues that identity itself presumes a relation of 'being with'—to be identical is to be 'the same as' oneself. In contrast with Hume, who opposes identity with relation, Heidegger places identity under the umbrella of relation. Yet, Heidegger is in line with Hume and Mead in thinking that relation is ontologically prior to identity even if his assertion that identity is a kind of

[19] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.4.6.13.
[20] Relation, for Hume, takes three forms: resemblance (two things are similar), contiguity (two things are next to each other in space or time), and causation, or constant conjunction (two things repeatedly happen in succession).
[21] George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934), 140.

> relation on the surface contrasts with Hume's. Identity is a mediation, a belonging-together, and a connection of something *as* selfsame.[22]

While Hume, Mead, and Heidegger have varying conceptions of identity and relation, not to mention that there is great divergence in their philosophical methods and views, their convergence on the idea that relation precedes identity is a notion on which we will rely throughout this dissertation. The self is not a substance, nor does it precede self-relation (which, as we shall see, is itself a self-other relation). It is this idea that offers the basis for the view that the self is a product of 'identity effects.' I will follow Heidegger in particular on the idea that identity is itself relational.

Theories of personal identity generally distinguish between two possible forms of it: quantitative identity and qualitative identity. Quantitative identity denotes that something is identical if it is one and the same unity over time. This unity can be thought of in terms of bodily continuity, spatiotemporal continuity, psychological continuity, or the continuity of some inherent entity such as the soul. Qualitative identity, on the other hand, implies that something is identical if it bears extreme resemblance over time. Because the latter is relatively easy dismiss, especially in the case of humans, as we undergo so much change on so many levels throughout our lifetimes, theories of personal identity tend to hold more water if they assert quantitative identity. Quantitative identity, however, gives rise to all sorts of problems, which proliferate in literature within Analytic philosophy. The majority of theorists of personal identity dismiss bodily continuity because of the vast changes the body undergoes over time and the way that amputations, transplants, and the replacement of cells do not appear to change fundamentally the person who undergoes them. Spatiotemporal

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[22] Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 25.

continuity raises a similar set of issues, insofar as it only accounts for the perceptible material body and has no way to account for *reductio ad absurdum* thought experiments such as the idea that if one were melted into soup, one would still maintain one's personal identity according to the spatiotemporal view. Finally, psychological continuity gives rise to a host of problems concerning the nature of memory, the stream of consciousness, and what 'counts' as psychologically continuous (what about unconscious experiences or memories? Things we simply don't remember? Severe brain trauma?).

These theories of personal identity, whether qualitative or quantitative, are attempts to argue for an identity of the self or person over time in terms of *idem* identity: that is, identity as 'sameness.' They are not generally treated in philosophy in the continental European tradition, with the notable exception of Paul Ricoeur, who in *Oneself as Another* dismisses the attempts to argue for personal identity sameness (*idem*) and instead argues that personal identity should be based on *ipse* identity, or ipseity. Unlike *idem* theories of identity, Ricoeur's theory of ipseity asserts a sense of mineness that we carry with us throughout our lives, writing our own life stories through narrative. Ipseity, for Ricoeur, is a narrative identity rooted in one's own subjective sense (or what in Chapter 3 we will call the first-person perspective). Ipseity is selfhood, as opposed to identity, which is sameness.

In this dissertation, I do not follow Ricoeur's reframing of the issue of selfhood in terms of ipseity and rejection of the idea that the self has *idem* identity or sameness. Rather, I think that following what we have said above, especially Heidegger's claim that identity is itself a relation, we can reclaim a conception of selfhood as identity or sameness without running into the issues that arise for theories of personal identity rooted in qualitative or quantitative identity. The real issue for these various theories, outlined above, is that they run into insurmountable issues of showing how, if something changes temporally and/or

spatially, it remains *the same*. They are rooted in taking the self to be a substantial entity (whether material or immaterial) that requires preservation 'as the same,' or requires purity. My view, on the other hand, is rooted in the idea that something *is only* the same if it changes. That is, sameness is the product of traces of otherness, or of what Derrida terms *différance*. The majority of this dissertation, Chapter 2 in particular, will constitute the argument that identity or sameness can be rethought through deconstruction, and that deconstruction allows us to account for selfhood in a manner that is not opposed to otherness.

What, then, do I mean by otherness? Otherness, or alterity (I will use the two terms interchangeably throughout), is used in this dissertation to signify that with which one does not identify or consciously associate with oneself. Because the position I will develop here does not disavow selfhood or the subjective 'first-person perspective,' showing the self's contamination by otherness does not amount to eliminating the self altogether. Thus, the idea that otherness is what the self does not associate with itself is coherent on my view even as I account for otherness within the self. We will be destabilizing the opposition between selfhood and otherness as well as showing that the self is never self-standing, self-originating, or pure. To say that the self is not its own origin is not, however, to say that there is no self at all. Considering the self as a series of identity effects notes its constant flux, interdependence, and contamination. The lines between what one considers 'self' and 'other' are continually shifting and are not stable or fixed. At the same time, our working definitions of 'self' and 'other' will do much in the way of clarifying this relation and, if not the opposition between self and other, then at least their differences.

In this dissertation, I will sometimes use the term 'internal otherness.' This term is a heuristic the use of which I will justify in the following chapter, but it is worth pointing out

that it is even less felicitous a term than 'self'. As with the term 'otherness,' I mean to suggest by 'internal otherness' those dimensions of the self that exceed conscious awareness and identification, while indicating by the term 'internal' what can more readily be perceived to play a role in the identity effects of the self. As we will see, I will not merely be collapsing a distinction between oneself and other beings, and so there is a difference between the otherness of other beings and the otherness of oneself. It is this latter that will be suggested by the term 'internal otherness.' It is, however, an unfortunate adjective in that it has inescapably spatial, and therefore substantialist, connotations. My hope is that the arguments made in this dissertation will continually interrupt the substantialist connotations of certain aspects of my terminology, 'internal otherness' being the most objectionable.

I have noted earlier that, on my view, self-relation is the basis for the identity effects that constitute the self. Identity is itself a relation. It is worth pointing out here that this relation is not cognitive. This differentiates my view of self-relation from the metaphysical tradition that tends to characterize self-relation as self-knowledge (proponents of this latter view including, but by no means being limited to, Augustine, Descartes, and Kant). On my view, a conception of self-relation that takes it to be primarily a matter of self-knowledge is only possible if one takes a substantialist view of the self. To claim that the self primarily relates to itself on a cognitive level is to consider the self an entity that can be known. It is to consider the self a present and self-subsisting unity. If the self is a fluctuating series of identity effects that result from the relation between self and other and that are not themselves present or open to conscious reflection, then self-knowledge supervenes on self-relation but is not integral to it. That is, self-knowledge hypostatizes the self, and therefore does not adequately capture what it is trying to indicate.

We will discuss knowledge, both of oneself and of others, in various places in the following chapters of this dissertation. I will not disavow self-knowledge or knowledge of other beings; indeed, knowledge plays a profound role in our lives, and much of one's relation to oneself and to other beings occurs on a cognitive level. The hypostatization of the self required by it is not something to be rejected or avoided *tout court*. At the same time, to say that self-relation is not primarily a matter of self-knowledge is to unsettle the pretension to consider the self a conscious, transparent subject and/or a substantial entity. It opens up a variety of possibilities that will be pursued in this dissertation. Perhaps the most notable of these possibilities is that to take self-knowledge to be supervenient on self-relation is to make it possible to consider self-relation as a kind of self-other relation.

The most powerful consequence of the idea that self-relation is not essentially a matter of self-knowledge is that it renders intelligible the idea that one's relation to other beings is not primarily a matter of knowledge of them, either. Response ethics is concerned with problematizing the notion that one's relation to other beings requires knowledge of them. From a response ethics point of view, the relation to the other is *not* primarily a matter of knowing the other, inasmuch as knowledge implies an effort to grasp, possess, or master. Knowledge overlooks the difference between oneself and other beings. The rejection of knowledge as the ground of relationality is what distinguishes response ethics from other ethical traditions, as we have noted earlier in this introduction. As I see it, one of the contributions of my project is to argue that this is the case also with respect to ourselves. That is, we respond to ourselves as if to another. Self-relation is the basis for self-knowledge, and not the other way around. This conception of the self therefore provides a coherent way of considering the self in light of response ethics' insights into the idea that self-other relation is not inherently cognitive. It allows for an epistemic opacity both with respect to

oneself and to others, acknowledging that knowledge plays a role in mental and social life but not claiming it as its foundation.

The irony of response ethics is that, in focusing exclusively on the other, it has been left unable to account for *who or what responds*. Moreover, an emphasis on the other that does not also acknowledge the sameness or selfhood of the other is incoherent (as I will argue in Chapter 1). My project, then, attempts to take insights from response ethics and develop an account of the self that draws upon and deepens them. I claim that the Levinasian theory of otherness fails to account for the mutual contamination of sameness and otherness, instead absolutizing each of its terms. I will show that Derridean deconstruction offers an alternative to the Levinasian theory of self and other that maintains certain insights of response ethics—particularly, the insight that alterity cannot be overcome or subsumed by sameness and that alterity is heterogeneous to knowledge—while offering a much more satisfying conception of sameness and otherness than is offered by the Levinasian tradition. This dissertation bears a commitment to deconstruction, and will draw primarily on Derrida. I will also turn to Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, showing that the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the existentialism of Beauvoir offer illuminating articulations of the deconstructive moves I will make following Derrida.

This dissertation comprises five chapters. In Chapter 1, I argue that a relation to the other requires internal otherness within the self. This chapter considers in detail Levinas's account of interiority and claims that Levinas fails to account for internal otherness, while Derrida suggests its exigency. Chapter 2, in some sense the theoretical heart of the dissertation, treats a variety of texts and terms in the work of Derrida in order to argue that deconstruction constitutes a robust exploration of the relation between sameness and otherness that attests to 'internal otherness' and offers a way to consider identity and

difference as mutually contaminating. Chapter 3 constitutes a deconstruction of what in phenomenology is called the 'first-person perspective.' This chapter defends my Derridean account of selfhood against Dan Zahavi's critique of it, and claims the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty as a resource for my view. Chapters 4 and 5 turn toward the issue of the self's relation to other beings. I claim that my view, while attesting to otherness within the self, does not eliminate a distinction between this otherness and the otherness of other beings. Chapter 4 considers the structure of the self's relation to other beings, drawing on Derrida for this account and offering a deconstruction of intersubjectivity. Chapter 5 then turns back to Levinas, pointing out issues in his ethical disavowal of reciprocity and showing that Beauvoir offers an ethic of reciprocity that suits the account of self-other relation we have developed in the foregoing chapters.

1. Self-Relation Beyond the Play of the Same

In recent decades, it has become commonplace to speak about internal otherness. Discourses that have heralded the death of the subject, a split self, and the deconstruction of self-presence and consciousness have led to rich analyses of the ways that we are 'other to ourselves.' These discussions, to which I am very much indebted, often draw on poststructuralist theories of social and political power for their claims. However, these discourses often leave unexplored the ethical relation to others in their alterity. The ethics of alterity that is often grouped under the heading 'response ethics,' on the other hand, tends to overemphasize the alterity of the other without attending to otherness within the self. Both of these sides, I have argued in the Introduction, would benefit from an exploration of the status and relation of 'same' and 'other.' Only by considering this foundational problem of what sameness and otherness *are* will an ethics of alterity and an analysis of internal otherness be capable of a rich dialogue that can offer a coherent and compelling response ethics grounded in the relational mode of being of the self.

In this chapter, I approach the problem of internal otherness and its relation to response ethics through a critique of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*. I draw upon Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" for many points of the argument, given that Derrida problematizes the Levinasian schema of same and other in incisive ways that set up the problematic of this dissertation, which is Derridean in its commitments. I go first to *Totality and Infinity* because it is the fundamental text for response ethics, or an ethic concerned with treating and responding to the other as other. While we will see that Levinas revises many of his own positions regarding the relation between self and other in his later work—in part

precisely due to the charges Derrida proffered in "Violence and Metaphysics"—dwelling in *Totality and Infinity* will provide a testing ground for what I perceive to be problems that any ethic of alterity must face in order not to fall into metaphysical pitfalls and ethical traps that render theories of internal otherness on the one hand and response ethics on the other hand limited at best, incoherent at worst. When I use the term 'internal otherness,' I mean to suggest those dimensions of oneself that do not immediately appear as such. They are the components of the self of which we are not consciously aware or with which we do not identify. This chapter will make frequent use of this term, along with the synonymous term 'alterity within the self.' In the following chapters, we will drop the phrase 'internal otherness' because it will be clear by the end of this chapter that the language of internal/external is profoundly misguided for figuring the sort of self-other relation we are developing. However, it will prove useful and relatively unproblematic here because Levinas freely uses the terminology of interiority in *Totality and Infinity*, which will be our primary text for investigation here.

In this chapter, we will first detail the Levinasian picture of self-relation in *Totality and Infinity* before turning to Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" to argue why Levinas's denial of alterity within the self fails. I argue that Levinas sets up an implicit distinction between the 'true' alterity that characterizes our relation to the other, and the 'false' alterity that pertains to modes of self-relation, and that this distinction is untenable. The alterity of self-relation cannot be relegated to a false or inauthentic mode of otherness. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas considers internal otherness to be a mere illusion, as opposed to the alterity of the other who disrupts the interior life of the self. I argue following Derrida that Levinas's schema a) does not do justice to the alterity already present within self-relation, b) falls prey

to a metaphysical notion of same as finite and other as infinite that renders itself unintelligible, and c) cannot account for the self's ability to respond to the other.

1. Levinas on Interior Life

By claiming that ethics is first philosophy, Emmanuel Levinas calls for a reevaluation of the primacy of ontology prevalent throughout the history of Western philosophy. Levinas effected a philosophical revolution of sorts in the wake of his 1961 publication of *Totality and Infinity*, which trenchantly claims that philosophy has overwhelmingly focused on the totality of the 'same' at the expense of the transcendent and infinite 'other'.[23] Levinas claims that the other has not been treated *as other*, but rather has been reduced, through a variety of philosophical moves and systems, to the same. For Levinas, the other is infinite and transcendent, exceeding the bounds of the totality of sameness. Same and other on his view are not terms of a formal opposition, since such an opposition would already presuppose a totality within which the two terms are countable. Moreover, the other is not other when one conceptualizes or represents it, imagines it spatially, considers it in terms of the other's qualitative differences from oneself, or counts it in terms of a quantitative difference from oneself. Alterity is neither quantitative nor qualitative.[24] The failure to account for the irreducibility of alterity, Levinas contends, has foreclosed the possibility of an ethics that would figure responsibility as a relation to the other *as other*, or "absolutely Other [*Autre*],"

[23] Because Levinas does not uniformly capitalize 'other' and 'same' in the French (see footnotes 4 and 8), even when he is distinguishing the transcendent, infinite other from the otherness of the material world, I will leave these words in their lowercase forms throughout, with the exception of quotations. Unless otherwise designated, 'other' in the context of my discussion of Levinas indicates the transcendent and infinite form of alterity.
[24] Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1969), 97.

outside any totality.[25] Levinas instead offers an ethics of alterity, which has come to be called 'response ethics' in the Anglophone world.

The theory of subjectivity that Levinas develops in *Totality and Infinity* is central to his philosophical project of ethics as first philosophy. Indeed, Levinas famously claims in the Preface that this book "does present itself as a defense of subjectivity."[26] In order to present the other as beyond the subject or self, Levinas needs to develop an account of subjectivity. However, Levinas distinguishes a number of dimensions in this theory of subjectivity. He distinguishes between the self as it is in itself and as it is called upon by the other, considering the former to be the necessary condition for the possibility of the latter. We will focus first on the former, for it is where Levinas develops what I am calling his account of 'self-relation.'

In section II of *Totality and Infinity* in particular, which is entitled "Interiority and Economy," Levinas describes a number of ways that the self relates to itself. For him, the self is endowed with a rich, dynamic interior life. The solitude of the self, or ego (*moi*), is not an empty singular isolation; rather, the ego is *with itself*, and is characterized by a dynamic interior life constituting various modes of relating to itself. The self is constantly in a flux of alterations with respect to itself. The ego "is not unique like the Eiffel Tower or the Mona

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[25] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, *An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1969), 39. While translations of Levinas tend to translate *autre* and *Autre* as 'other' and *autrui* and *Autrui* as 'Other' with more or less consistency, I consider it important to retain Levinas's own use of capitalization, even as his use of capitalization of terms is frequently erratic and, at times, apparently even arbitrary. When he means to denote the *Other* in a technical sense—as infinite, transcendent alterity rather than as the otherness of the material world—Levinas will often use *Autrui* or *autrui*, but not always; he very frequently uses *Autre*, or even occasionally *autre*, though *autre* is usually used to denote the material world that is other to the ego but not infinitely or transcendentally so, and which thus remains in the realm of the Same. Thus, I have translated all occurrences of *autre* and *autrui* as 'other,' and all occurrences of *Autre* and *Autrui* as 'Other,' while also noting the French original in brackets. In addition to remaining more faithful to the letter of Levinas's text, Levinas himself often uses *Autre* to indicate the alterity of the Other qua transcendent, infinite being; thus, I think it is misleading to translate *Autre* as 'other.'

[26] Ibid., 26.

Lisa," because it is outside of a distinction between genus and exemplar, or individual and general.[27] It is thus outside a substantialist metaphysics that would make of the self an object among others in the world. It is also contrary to an idealist tradition by which self-identity is found in the equivalence between the I and itself: he states, "The identification of the Same in the ego is not produced as a monotonous tautology: 'I am I' [*Moi c'est Moi*]."[28] The I for Levinas is neither the empty term of identity, nor an object in the world that can be characterized as self-identical through a particular combination of characteristics. Rather, Levinas claims that the ego relates to itself in the fluctuating play of interior life, relating to itself in a variety of manners that are not rooted in conscious self-representation, knowledge, or presence. This account of self-relation constitutes a key contribution to theories of selfhood on my view, as it develops an account of the relation to self that surpasses the modern philosophical tendency of confining accounts of self-relation to planes of knowledge and consciousness, whether through the Cartesian *cogito*, the Kantian transcendental unity of apperception, or the Hegelian substance becoming subject of absolute *Geist*.

A crucial component of this account of subjectivity with which we will take issue in this chapter, however, is its denial that self-relation suggests internal otherness. Alterity, for Levinas, can only come about in relation to another person, which he most often renders with the French terms *autrui, Autre*, and *Autrui*.[29] Although for Levinas, the I is not self-

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[27] Ibid., 117.
[28] Ibid., 37. Trans. modified.
[29] Technical terminology has a strange status in Levinas's philosophical writings. Levinas will often offer specific definitions of a certain word, only to go on to offer differing definitions later both within the same text and in other texts. More confusingly, Levinas often uses a few terms as quasi-synonyms without outlining how he is using them (for instance, his use of 'happiness' (*le bonheur*) and 'contentment' (*le contentement*) in his discussions of *jouissance*). This especially goes for the word Other, as discussed in footnote 4.

identical, univocal, or transparent, the internal difference that characterizes it does not indicate the alterity brought about by the face of the other. Instead, self-relation on his view is confined to an internal "play of the Same," not yet radically interrupted by the other.[30] Even though the self undergoes constant alterations that exceed the domain of transparent self-consciousness, "the Ego is identical in its very alterations."[31] Otherness *appears* to show up within the self, but it is not *real* otherness. For Levinas, the alterations that the ego undergoes through its various forms of self-relation are rather precisely what constitute the identity of the ego, closing itself in upon its identity so that it can then be called to respond in the face of the other.

For Levinas, the identity of the ego is formed through processes of identification. The identity of the self, which we have seen is not merely self-identical sameness such as that of a given object in the world, is achieved through identification. Even as he uses the terms 'identity' and 'identical' in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas does so to indicate a process of identification (which is also characteristic of his earlier work). In *Totality and Infinity*, he states: "To be me is, outside of all individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as content. The ego is not a being that always stays the same, but the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is identity *par excellence*, the original work [*œuvre*] of identification."[32] In a somewhat Heideggerian spirit, Levinas's early work had claimed that the ego is not

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30 Ibid., 37.

31 Ibid., 36. Again suggesting the strange status of technical or quasi-technical terms in Levinas's work, Levinas uses a variety of words to suggest the ego, the self, and the I. I have tried to render these as clearly as possible into English (avoiding, for instance, the solution of some translators to translate 'moi' as '*I*' and 'je' as 'I,' a distinction for which I think italics do not adequately account). I translate the following terms thus: 'the ego' for 'le moi,' with capitalization where Levinas uses 'le Moi'; 'me' for 'moi'; 'I' for 'je,' and occasionally for 'Moi' (with note); and 'self' for 'le soi'; 'self' or 'itself' for 'soi,' depending on the syntax.

32 Ibid., 36. Trans. modified.

something that can be considered in terms of identity, because it has its being *to be* rather than as something that *is*, as in the existence of mere things in the world.[33] Identification is the process or set of processes—an "ontological event"—by which the ego leaves and returns to itself.[34] In his earlier work as well, Levinas distinguishes identity from *identification*, since identification more accurately describes the in-process nature of the subject and the modes of self-relation that constitute its internal difference. As he states in *Existence and Existents*, "One can then not define a subject by identity, since identity covers over the event of the identification of the subject."[35] There, he critiques an idealist theory of the I because it "makes use of the logical idea of identity, detached from the ontological event of the identification of an existent."[36] Instead, Levinas illustrates this event of identification in *Existence and Existents* through the figures of being 'enchained' to oneself and 'riveted' to oneself, which indicate a "relationship between the ego and itself" and "a silent association with oneself in which a duality is discernible."[37] As he puts it, "Being me involves a bond with oneself."[38] The ego here is *with itself*, in relation with itself, and figured as an internal duality.

That which allows for this internal duality, characterizing the dynamic play of the ego, is negativity. Specifically, this negation of the non-I is figured in the external world of nature and the activities that produce the self over and above what is outside of it, such as labor and eating. Negativity is the mechanism by which the ego separates itself from what is

33 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 88.
34 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 64.
35 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 88.
36 Ibid., 88.
37 Ibid., 89.
38 Ibid., 89. Levinas will echo this language in *Totality and Infinity*, though self-relation becomes much more playful with his notion here of 'jouissance'. See, for instance, Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 55: "The imprisoned being, ignorant of its prison, is at home with itself."

around it, and *separation* is crucial to the establishment of subjectivity on Levinas's view. This is the extent to which Levinas affirms Hegel: that is, in his descriptions of the way that the same relates to itself, Levinas describes the process by which the ego distinguishes itself from what is around it and accomplishes a negation of the negation by reincorporating the other into itself. Indeed, Levinas even uses self-consciousness in Hegel as an example of the relation of the ego to itself.[39] Negativity "delineates the Same or the Ego" because it is the manner by which the I distinguishes itself from its environment and then turns that environment into parts of itself.[40] This process of negation results in the separation of the ego from its environment.

Levinas distinguishes this moment of separation from its philosophical predecessors (whether the *Grundstimmung* of anxiety in Heidegger, the doubting of all external knowledge in Descartes, or the independent self-mastery of the Stoics) by calling this separation a *jouissance* and emphasizing that it remains fundamentally engaged with the world.[41] For Levinas, interior life is the ecstatic movement of *jouissance*, which takes pleasure from eating, from basking in the sun, from satisfying its needs, and from enjoying its own happiness.[42] According to Levinas, "only in *jouissance* does the ego crystallize."[43] Far from an abyssal encounter with nothingness or a self-reflexive movement of recognizing the pure I in its

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[39] "Hegelian phenomenology, where self-consciousness is the distinction of what is not distinct, expresses the universality of the Same identifying itself in the alterity of objects thought and despite the opposition of self to self." Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 36. Trans. modified.
[40] Ibid., 41. Trans. modified.
[41] While Lingis translates *jouissance* as 'enjoyment,' I have chosen to keep the French word here, as 'enjoyment' tames the excessive quality of *jouissance* and obscures the rich complex of associations of the French word, including the psychoanalytic use that was prevalent at the time Levinas was writing.
[42] He writes: "Separation is accomplished positively as interiority of a being referring to itself and maintaining itself of itself [*se tenant de soi*]—all the way to atheism! This self-reference is concretely constituted or accomplished as *jouissance* or happiness. It is an essential sufficiency" Ibid., 299. Trans. modified.
[43] Ibid., 144.

abstract form, for Levinas the separation of the interior life of the ego is the adoption of a new understanding of its relation to the world rather than an actual separation from this world. *Jouissance* is not a psychological state or affect, but rather "the very egoism of life," or "the very pulsation of the ego."[44] It is the source of subjectivity as basically selfish, taking pleasure in its own acts, which the subject recognizes as independent by virtue of transforming the 'other' material of the world into itself. For Levinas, "Subjectivity originates in the independence and sovereignty of *jouissance*."[45] In *jouissance*, the subject feels as if it is autonomous and free from the surrounding world, because it has a sovereign presence within this world and can use its environment to benefit itself.

The separation that characterizes *jouissance* is fundamentally relational: it is the ego realizing its own independence from the material world by transmuting this world into itself. *Jouissance* is the nature of the subject's conversion of the material of the world around it into itself: for Levinas, the simple acts of eating and digesting are at the heart of subjectivity. He states, "Food, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of *jouissance*: an other energy, recognized as other, recognized, we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed on it, becomes, in *jouissance*, my energy, my strength, me."[46] In eating, I recognize my food as other to me and turn it into a means of sustaining myself—I turn it into myself. This transmutation occurs by means of *jouissance* and constitutes the inner life of the ego. This vision of the inner life is refreshingly material and playful compared to those typically offered by philosophy. Unlike Heidegger's account of

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[44] Ibid., 112, 113. I have chosen to follow Lingis in translating *egoïsme* as 'egoism,' as it highlights the solipsistic quality of the interior life that Levinas describes. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the word in French also—and primarily, in colloquial French—means selfishness.
[45] Ibid., 114.
[46] Ibid., 111. Trans. modified.

Dasein's being-in-the-world, Levinas's ego has physical needs that it meets—hence Levinas's oft-quoted quip that "*Dasein* in Heidegger is never hungry."[47]

Jouissance is Levinas's alternative to intentionality in Husserl, which for Levinas remains insufficient because intentionality is grounded in representation, and Levinas is instead attempting to formulate a theory of subjectivity that is not grounded in self-representation, -consciousness, or -knowledge. Levinas states that we can take *jouissance*, "very broadly," as "a form of intentionality in the Husserlian sense," with the exception that *jouissance* does not privilege representation in the way that Husserlian intentionality does.[48] Like intentionality, which relates the subject to the phenomenon, *jouissance* is the "primordial relation" of the human with the material world, or "the way life relates to its contents."[49] *Jouissance* is at once this relation of the ego to what is other to itself and the very origination of the interior life, of the ego's relation to itself.

While *jouissance* is, for Levinas, fundamental to the ego's movement of 'separation,' this separation, as we have seen, is no simple negating of the world around the self in a herculean act of sheer will. Rather, it is a coming into one's own in an attitude of independence. Levinas describes separation as the outcome of engagement with the world that results in being "at home with oneself [*chez soi*]. But to be at home with oneself…is to live on [*vivre de*]…to enjoy [*jouir de*] the elemental."[50] Separation is not unrelated to engagement, but rather made possible by it. Separation carves out a space of interiority for the ego amidst the world that it lives from. Although I eat an apple and the apple is 'other,' is not me, only *I* can digest the apple. Only *I* can then separate the apple into waste and

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47 Ibid., 134.
48 Ibid., 122.
49 Ibid., 149, 122.
50 Ibid., 147. Where Lingis translates *vivre de* as 'live from,' however, I have chosen to render the phrase as 'live on,' which is a better equivalent in English.

nourishment. Only *I* can live on it. Levinas terms this outcome of separation *psychism*, which is this dimension of interiority produced through a sense of independence with respect to the world of the 'other,' the material world. This relation to the 'other' of the material world is not tantamount to the realm of the transcendent other, and therefore does not break the totality of the same characteristic of the egoism of separation or psychism. Through separation, the I acquires a relation of independence with what is other to it, hollowing out a space of interiority that is properly its own and establishing itself over and against what is other.[51]

The ego becomes independent from the world through this separation not by relying on itself alone, but rather by taking on its own needs in active form—by acknowledging its dependence on what is other to it in a way that masters the otherness of the worldly. Levinas uses the image of being 'rooted' in the material world but being independent even while rooted.[52] We might think of the plant that grows and develops from being nourished by soil, sun, and water, but which nevertheless remains an independent entity distinguishable from any of these sources of nourishment. While 'interiority,' then, often has idealist connotations of an incorporeal realm of thinking, Levinas grounds it in terms of bodily processes such as digestion—even as, to be sure, he also considers thinking to be a mode of self-relation within the separation of interiority. Yet the independent life of separation by no means precludes enjoying and living off of what the ego needs. Separation is accomplished in the multiplicity of processes by which the ego transmutes what is other to it into itself in a dynamic play of other and same. Thus, it is foreign to any self-reflexive positing of the I on

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[51] See, for instance, Ibid., 60 (trans. modified): In separation or ipseity, "the separated being affirms an independence that owes nothing, neither dialectically nor logically, to the Other [*l'Autre*] who remains transcendent to it." Also 143: "Between the I and *what it lives on* there does not extend the absolute distance that separates the Same from the Other [*Autrui*]."

[52] Ibid., 143.

an abstract level purportedly cut off from the material 'outside' world. And yet at the same time, separation does establish the interior dimension of solitude that constitutes the self over and against the other (meaning both the otherness of the material world and the infinite transcendent, other). Levinas writes, "In *jouissance* I am absolutely for myself [*pour moi*]. Egoist without reference to the Other [*autrui*], I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. Not against the others [*autres*], not 'as for me…'—but entirely deaf to the other [*autrui*], outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate—without ears, like a hungry stomach."[53] *Jouissance* resembles a state of self-absorption, the subject relating to the material world for what it needs but not relating to others on an ethical level, instead retreating into itself.

It is with regard to what the ego *needs* that separation is accomplished. While we have seen that separation is based on a relation to the other in which the ego gains independence by transmuting the other into itself, this separation is brought about by need: the ego *needs* something, and it takes action to get it. For Levinas, "need is the primary movement of the Same."[54] In separating itself from its immersion in the world, the ego begins to relate to the world exclusively in terms of need: in taking what it needs from the world. It becomes capable of satisfying its own needs, and need thus demonstrates the independence of the ego rather than its dependence. Levinas writes: "Needs are in my power; they constitute me as the Same and not as dependent on the Other [*Autre*]."[55] The body is what is able to accomplish this meeting of needs, since it appropriates and works, thereby overcoming the alterity of what we live on. For Levinas, "The body is the very self-possession by which the ego, freed from the world by need, succeeds in overcoming the very misery of this

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[53] Ibid., 134. Trans. modified.
[54] Ibid., 116. Trans. modified.
[55] Ibid., 116. Trans. modified.

freedom."[56] As opposed to desire, which will be the metaphysical desire for the transcendent other on Levinas's view, need is capable of satisfaction.

How does the ego satisfy its needs? It does so through labor. Need "convert[s] this *other* into *the same* [*cet* autre *en* même] by labor."[57] To be a body is to convert the other into myself through labor, and thus "to be *me* though living in the *other* [autre]."[58] But, unlike in Hegel, this movement of the same and its conversion of the other into itself is not the fundamental relation to the other qua infinite transcendence. For Levinas, this conversion of the other into the same is the conversion of what is *autre*—raw matter, animal flesh, the materials of nature—but not the conversion of *l'Autre* or *Autrui*. These latter others will always be human for Levinas, and only capable of being transmuted into the same through contingent acts of violence. Thus, when Levinas states that *jouissance* "depends on an 'other' [*autre*]" he does not mean that it depends on the transcendent, infinite other.[59] Levinas states, "between the ego and *what it lives on* there does not extend the absolute distance that separates the Same from the Other [*Autrui*]."[60] The relation to what is other to the I in separation is not the relation to the other *qua other*. Levinas needs to claim that *jouissance* constitutes the I as a totality unto itself in order to set up the idea that the other breaks this totality. He writes: "Egoism, *jouissance*, sensitivity, and the whole dimension of interiority—the articulations of separation—are necessary for the idea of Infinity, the relation with the other which opens forth from the separated and finite being." Thus, his analysis of *jouissance* sets up the self-enclosed being characterized by internal dynamic play that will be irrupted by the presence of the other.

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56 Ibid., 117. Trans. modified.
57 Ibid., 117.
58 Ibid., 117.
59 Ibid., 144.
60 Ibid., 143.

Levinas, then, suggests that that the realm of separation exists in relation to the material world of what is 'other'—which seems to correspond to a typical modern vision of 'nature,' of the life of plants, animals, and the inanimate—as opposed to the other of the human face. Labor, for Levinas, is "a relation with an other [*autre*] yielding its alterity."[61] In Hegelian (as well as Marxian) fashion, labor is the work on the other that transforms the other into a product of the same. Yet we must note again that this is a relation with the mere material other (*autre*) as opposed to the infinite other (as *autrui, Autrui, or Autre*). Labor does not pertain to the ethically transcendent other, but only to the nonhuman world of one's environment.[62] "In separation—which is produced by the psychism of *jouissance*, by egoism, by happiness, where the Ego identifies itself—the Ego is ignorant of the Other [*Autrui*]," Levinas contends, not yet called upon by the face of the other.[63] For Levinas, the transcendent other can only appear for the same by interrupting the domain of the same, by disrupting the ego's very ipseity. The presence of the other calls into question one's "joyous possession of the world" and replaces it with generosity toward and responsibility for the other who is revealed in the epiphany of the Face.[64]

So far we have discussed separation, psychism, and *jouissance* in terms of the self's process of transmuting the materials of the world into its own forms of nourishment. Now let us consider some more clearly cognitive or self-conscious forms of self-relation that Levinas identifies in *Totality and Infinity*: thinking, taking fright at oneself, and surprising oneself. Through experiences such as these, the self is confronted with its distance to itself,

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[61] Ibid., 116.
[62] Levinas complicates this picture somewhat when he surprisingly grants, "Doing, labor, already implies the relation with the transcendent." Ibid., 109. While he does not follow up this statement and it is outside our purposes here to explore its implications, it is notable in the context of the critique of Levinas that we will undertake further on in the chapter.
[63] Ibid., 62. Trans. modified.
[64] Ibid., 76.

and relates to itself as other. Levinas writes, "The ego that thinks listens to itself thinking or takes fright at its depths and is, to itself, an other [*autre*]….It listens to itself thinking and surprises itself being dogmatic, a stranger to itself."[65] And yet, Levinas takes care again here to distinguish this alterity of the self to itself from the alterity characteristic of the relation to the transcendent, infinite other: he goes on to say of these forms of self-relation that, "faced with this alterity the Ego is the Same, merges with itself, incapable of apostasy with regard to this surprising 'self.'"[66] Thus, he ends up denying that this self-distancing and self-relation indicate alterity within the self. Rather, these experiences prove for Levinas that the self is confined to the domain of the same. They merely serve as mechanisms by which the ego identifies itself through negation and identification, and do not therefore indicate the presence of the other.

These phenomena *seem* to indicate alterity within the self: for instance, one is surprised to find that one holds certain opinions that one did not formerly acknowledge, that perhaps conflict with other ideas that one holds. When I listen to myself think, I may initially not recognize the thoughts as my own, and this reveals a distance within the self. I may be surprised or shocked by the thoughts I am having, such as when I find myself having a thought that goes against my purported beliefs. I may think I am not a racist person, and yet find myself wondering if the black man entering my building behind me actually lives there or not. Yet once I realize that I have just had this thought, I am able to see that it does not correspond to my beliefs. I may be surprised by my having thought it. However, I more or less quickly come to realize that this has in fact been produced by me, and it is then re-absorbed into the consciousness of self. I must take account of the fact that I have just had

[65] Ibid., 36.
[66] Ibid., 36. Trans. modified.

this thought and recognize that there is an inner dogmatism to my beliefs that I have not acknowledged.[67] On Levinas's view, the recognition of distance within the self is not of the register of the encounter with the other, who is transcendent and incapable of reabsorption by the self.

Thus, Levinas insists that there is no alterity in the psychism of the ego. He states, alluding to Rimbaud's famous claim *Je est un autre* ('I is an other'): "The alterity of the I that takes itself for an other may strike the imagination of the poet precisely because it is nothing but the play of the Same: the negation of the ego by the self—is precisely one of the modes of identification of the ego."[68] The alterity of the I, then, is 'nothing but the play of the same.' As we have seen, this play of the same requires negativity in order to function. Yet for Levinas, negativity is not alterity. Rather, the I's modes of identifying itself through self-relation must remain within the domain of the same in order for Levinas's distinction between same and other to function as it does in *Totality and Infinity*. What do we make, then, of Levinas's phrase "the alterity of the I" in the quote above? Levinas is ambiguous about the status of this internal alterity, although it is abundantly clear from the context that even as he uses the word 'alterity,' this is *not* the alterity of the other. How should we consider this alterity within the self, then? For Levinas, is it illusory? It certainly cannot be that the alterity of the I is the same *kind* of alterity as the alterity of the other, just in a weaker form, because the alterity of the other is of such an irruptive, transcendent character that it does not admit of quality or degree.

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[67] This example raises the issue of then how to change the thoughts by which one is surprised and shocked. This issue is outside the purview of this chapter, but will be the subject of a future project on ethical cultivation.

[68] Ibid., 37. Trans. modified.

Illuminatingly, Levinas claims that the interior domain of *jouissance* does not admit of "veritable foreignness [*étrangeté veritable*]."[69] The implication here is, then, that the alterity constitutive of self-relation is false, or merely apparent, as opposed to 'veritable' or true alterity. The other is not already within the self. This notion that otherness in the self is illusory is also clear when Levinas claims, "the I, as other, is not an 'Other.'"[70] Thus, at this point we can justifiably conclude that Levinas puts forth an implicit distinction between what I will now call 'false alterity'—that is, the apparent or illusory alterity of the interior life of the ego—and 'true alterity,' which is the real or genuine alterity of the transcendent, infinite other. This implicit distinction, which Levinas does not thematize but which can be found throughout his writings, especially in the sections of *Totality and Infinity* to which we have been attending, is crucial for Levinas's argument that there is not alterity within the self. Questioning the validity of this implicit distinction will be the task of the rest of this chapter. We will see that, although Derrida does not note this distinction between 'true' and 'false' alterity such as I am arguing here, he nonetheless indicates the problems that arise for Levinas on the basis of it. I will argue that these problems are insurmountable, and that a rejection of the implicit distinction between 'true' and 'false' alterity is requisite for an account of self-relation that does justice to the presence of otherness within the self.

Because of the lack of 'veritable' internal otherness, Levinas calls the realm of self-relation one of 'atheism'. In the movement of separation that establishes the I as I, the I at home with itself, the I is in "a position prior to both the negation and the affirmation of the divine"; that is, before the "dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face."[71] In order to be called upon by the other, Levinas contends that the subject must first separate

[69] Ibid., 145.
[70] Ibid., 37. Trans. modified. [*Le je, comme autre, n'est pas un « Autre »*.]
[71] Ibid., 58, 78.

itself from the world around it through establishing an interior life of independence. Thus, he takes the play of the same and presumes it is enclosable within a totality that is then wholly interrupted by the call of the other. In order for the I to constitute a totality, the 'alterity within the I' must be a false or illusory alterity.

This implicit distinction between true and false alterity is manifest in a passage in *Totality and Infinity* in which Levinas grants that the alterity of self-relation is *analogous* with the transcendent relation between self and other. At the outset of the section entitled "Interiority and Economy," which includes the chapters on separation, *jouissance*, and the other various ways that Levinas describes interior life, Levinas states that his ambition in this section is to distinguish "the relations analogous to transcendence from those of transcendence itself. The latter lead to the Other [*Autre*], whose mode the idea of Infinity has enabled us to specify. Even if they rest on transcendence, the former, and the objectifying act among them, remain within the Same."[72] These modes of relation that are analogous to transcendence are "produced within the Same" and consist in "the interval of separation."[73] The interval, internal difference, or negativity that characterizes them is not the alterity of the other; nonetheless, it is *analogous* to it. As Levinas himself grants in the above quotation, this analogizing move requires that the modes of self-relation 'rest on transcendence'—that is, if what I am calling false alterity is in an analogous relation to true alterity, then false alterity must in some way be founded on true alterity. In the following section, I will demonstrate following Derrida that this priority of true alterity throws Levinas back into the very metaphysics of identity to which he claims to offer an alternative and collapses the very distinction that he implies between apparent alterity and alterity proper.

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72 Ibid., 109. Trans. modified.
73 Ibid., 110. Trans. modified.

2. The Infinitely Other is the Same

On my view, Levinas's distinction between 'true' and 'false' alterity is untenable. His refusal of alterity within the self is not only insufficient for describing the constitution and experience of the self, but also jeopardizes the very difference between same and other on which he stakes his entire philosophical contribution. In order to argue this, I will draw much from Derrida's arguments in the challenging and forceful1964 essay "Violence and Metaphysics," where Derrida argues that *Totality and Infinity* depends upon a distinction between true and false infinity. This parallels and illuminates my contention that Levinas implies a distinction between true and false alterity: Derrida argues that, for Levinas, the true infinity is the other (parallel to what I am calling 'true alterity') and that the false infinity is the same (parallel to what I am calling 'false alterity'). In order to show how Derrida's argument reveals cracks in the Levinasian view, we will need to take what might at first appear to be a detour into the muddy waters of the problem of infinity, one of the longest-debated problems in the history of philosophy. I will briefly outline the major differences between the Levinasian-Cartesian and the Hegelian conceptions of infinity before moving to Derrida's discussion of them and the consequences they have for Levinas's conception of same and other.

The idea of infinity is crucial to the theory of alterity that Levinas lays out in *Totality and Infinity*—as is clear by the very title of the text. Levinas, throughout, aligns the 'same' with totality and the 'other' with infinity. Levinas draws his idea of infinity from Descartes, who considers the infinite an idea that is within the subject and yet cannot be grasped by it. For Levinas, "the infinite is the absolutely other [*autre*]," and is transcendent, exterior, and

"infinitely removed from its idea."[74] In the third of his *Meditations*, Descartes famously argues that infinity is the only idea that must have been implanted in us by a being other than us (God) rather than being possibly produced within human knowledge, because we are unable to *think* it.[75] The very idea of the infinite is necessarily surpassed by what is ideated in it: that is, infinity overflows the idea of infinity. Thus, the very existence of the idea of the infinite in us is proof of its exceeding us—to use Levinasian terms, proof of its absolute exteriority, transcendence, and alterity. It is precisely the fact that the *ideatum* of infinity exceeds the idea one has of it that so intrigues Levinas. This conception of infinity allows him to figure the absolute alterity of the other because it demonstrates how the same can come into contact with the other without collapsing it back into the same. Levinas writes: "The Cartesian notion of the idea of Infinity designates a relation with a being that preserves its total exteriority with respect to the one who thinks it."[76] For Levinas, the other is what exceeds the tendency of the same to make everything a part of itself, because the infinite other is incapable of being represented or thought—and thereby subsumed—by the same. It is not something *negative*: as we have seen, negativity for Levinas pertains instead to the modes of self-relation of the same in separation. "Exteriority is not a negation" on his view, because "negativity is incapable of transcendence."[77] Levinas contrasts his concept of infinity with the Kantian infinity, which is negative because it is thought merely as the infinite

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[74] Ibid., 49.

[75] Ibid., 49. Also, it is worth noting that Levinas warns elsewhere of considering this 'idea in us' as spatially lodged within the ego: he writes in the 1957 essay "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity" that the Cartesian relation of the infinite to the finite is not a relation between a container and its content. See Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1998), 53-54.

[76] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50, trans. modified. See also *Totality and Infinity*, 197, where he says: "The idea of infinity, the overflowing of finite thought by its content, effectuates the relation of thought with what exceeds its capacity."

[77] Ibid., 292, 41.

amplification of the finite.[78] Instead, Levinas thinks infinity *positively*, even as its concept is beyond comprehension. For him, finitude is thought on the basis of infinity, not the other way around.

While Hegel also contrasts his conception of infinity with the Kantian one, the Hegelian view of infinity would be incompatible with the Levinasian-Cartesian conception because the latter preserves an absolute distinction between sameness and otherness that Hegel denies. Levinas aligns Hegel with false alterity insofar as Hegel (along with the overwhelming majority of thinkers throughout the history of philosophy) does not maintain absolute alterity or difference but instead folds it back into the same. The absolute, for Hegel, involves the transmutation of every otherness into sameness in the movement of the *Aufhebung*. For Levinas, the Hegelian approach maintains same and other within the same system or totality, and thus does not account for the alterity that ruptures totality.[79]

Yet the Hegelian response to Levinas would be that the infinite and the finite cannot logically be considered absolutely separate if one wants to think infinity positively. Positive infinity in Hegel is absolute sameness derived through the negation of the negation. Positing an absolute difference between same and other, as Levinas does, would be to fall back on the succession-based model of difference that characterizes Kantian infinity. Moreover, it would be self-contradictory inasmuch as it would consider the finite a totality as opposed to the the infinite, as what is beyond it. If Levinas is indeed positing this, then he is right back in the Kantian conception of infinity that Hegel so robustly critiques. Absolutizing the separation between other and same can only lead to what Hegel calls, targeting Kant, a 'false infinity' (sometimes translated as the 'bad infinite'), in which there exists the same (A) and

[78] Ibid., 196.
[79] Ibid., 290.

the other (B). In the *Logic*, Hegel shows how this A → B logic of relation necessarily leads to a self-contradictory notion of infinity, in which infinity is considered the infinite succession of indefinite differing things that go on without end. Such an idea of unending succession inevitably bases itself on the idea of an ending succession: incompleteness is only intelligible if it is grounded on possible completeness. Yet, the possibility of an endpoint would make the infinite succession finite, and would therefore result in contradiction. This problem of contradiction emerges for any conception of infinity that defines the species in the succession as finite wholes unto themselves (A, B, and so forth), for another finite whole can always be added to the existing group.

In order to avoid this problem, Hegel conceives of a true conception of infinity based on an alternative theory of identity. Hegel's view of identity does not merely distinguish A from B but rather defines B as non-A, and therefore A as not-non-A, and so forth. Here, A and B are inter-defined and reciprocally referential. Identity is a negation of the negation, and the Hegelian idea of infinity is thus modeled on a circle rather than on a succession. Determinate identities are constituted through their differences from what is not them. Sameness is a making determinate of what was previously indeterminate: it is not an underlying or substantial identity without change.

While Levinas agrees with Hegel in taking a positive view of infinity rather than a negative (Kantian) one, Levinas contends that Hegel reduces multiplicity and glosses over difference. Hegel is unable to think the difference between the other and the same, and to maintain the alterity of the other as infinite and non-totalizable. Levinas writes that Hegel is guilty of "positing the infinite as the exclusion of every 'other' [*autre*] that might maintain a

relation with the infinite and thereby limit it."[80] In fact, Hegel is one of the main thinkers that Levinas identifies with the totalizing gestures of philosophy and its attempts to overcome all otherness by bringing the other into the domain of the same. Treating this highly suspect characterization of Hegel is outside the purview of our aims here, but it is worth noting that Levinas considers Hegel, at the very least, to exclude otherness through his theory of infinity, which does not grant an insurmountable difference between the other and the same.

In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida argues that Levinas's view of infinity falls into the trap of Hegel's 'false infinity.' Rather than offering a genuine solution to the sameness to which Hegel's view of the infinite seems to condemn us, Levinas in fact ends up reproducing problems to which Hegel offers solutions. Derrida claims that, although Levinas does not use the Hegelian term 'false-infinity' in this text, it seems to "haunt numerous gestures of denunciation in *Totality and Infinity*."[81] That is, Levinas's critiques of other thinkers and gestures of philosophy sometimes constitute a charge that the thinker or philosophy in question is falling into a 'false-infinity' or succession-based model. Within the context of this passage in "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida is suggesting that Levinas in essence accuses Husserl of a bad-infinity: because the Husserlian *cogito* is, on Levinas's view, self-constituting, it cannot help but see other objects around it as in(de)finitely different from itself, without

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[80] Ibid., 196. It is worth noting that, while Levinas considers him even less in line with Kant than Hegel on the question of infinity because Kant considers infinity negative, Derrida's claims about a Levinasian 'false infinity' will implicitly put Levinas closer to the Kantian notion than to the Hegelian one insofar as Hegel developed the 'false infinity' precisely as a critique of Kant.
[81] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 119. It is worth noting that Levinas *did* later treat the 'bad infinity' and distinguish his conception of infinity from what he considered the bad infinite. See the essay entitled "Infinity," which was first published in 1968. Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence,* trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia, 2000).

relation to itself.[82] The false infinity, for Hegel, is an "indefinite, *negative* form of infinity"—precisely the conception of alterity against which Levinas guards.[83] Drawing a parallel between Hegel's false and true infinities and Levinas's same and other, Derrida contends that Levinas makes the same the false infinity and the other the true infinity. For Levinas, as we have seen, negativity and false alterity are both identified with the interior life of the ego: the same, then, would be the place of Levinas's 'false infinity.' Levinas associates negativity with the self-relation of the interior life of the ego, claiming, "Negativity presupposes a being established, placed in a site where he is at home; it is an economic fact" associated with separation, labor, and *jouissance*: that is, with the domain of the same.[84] As we have seen, negativity carves out the I but does not relate to the alterity of the transcendent other. Derrida asserts that in Levinas, the negativity of the relation to self is "a finite negativity, an internal and relative modification through which the ego affects itself by itself, within its own movement of identification."[85] This finite negativity, and the illusion of alterity that is no more than the play of the same, can be considered as an analogue to Hegel's false infinity.

Conversely, Levinas's other *qua other*, who infinitely exceeds my grasp, would be the 'true infinity' on the schema Derrida lays out. We have seen that this other, identified with the 'true' alterity of absolute exteriority, is not negativity. Thus, Levinas aligns the other with positivity and the same with negativity. This is where the similarity to the Hegelian distinction between false and true infinity is turned on its head: for Hegel, alterity cannot be separated from negativity, and it is precisely absolute sameness that would be true infinity. As Derrida puts it, because Levinas "conceives *true* alterity as nonnegativity (nonnegative

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82 Ibid., 119. We will be defending Husserl against such a conception in Chapter 4, which will include a deconstructive reappraisal of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity.
83 Ibid., 119.
84 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 40.
85 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 93.

transcendence), he can make the other the true infinity, and make the same (in strange complicity with negativity) the false-infinity. Which would have seemed absolutely senseless to Hegel."[86] While Levinas, certainly, would take no issue with being incompatible with Hegel, we will see that this incompatibility amounts to a failure for Levinas's schema of same and other. For Derrida, it is not a choice between Levinas and Hegel; rather, "as soon as *he speaks* against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him already."[87] While Levinas has explicitly distanced himself from Hegel on the subject of infinity, disavowing the Hegelian infinite as not up to the task of figuring alterity, Levinas makes use of the Hegelian infinite in order to reject other philosophical positions, oddly re-confirming the Hegelian view. Hegel, who cannot think infinity otherwise than as totality on Levinas's view, ends up espousing the view that allows Levinas to reject other schemas, such as that of Husserl. Levinas must implicitly rely on the Hegelian infinite even as he explicitly rejects it.

Moreover, Levinas's anti-Hegelian inversion of the infinite same-other relation implodes: for if the same is a finite totality, it is opposed to what is other to it, and therefore has itself the possibility of being other to that other—which means that the same is not the same. As Derrida describes it, "the same as finite totality would not be the same, but still the other….If the finite totality was the same, it could not be thought, or posed as such, without becoming other than itself. "[88] And if the other is so transcendent that it lacks even an

[86] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 119. Trans. modified. Derrida's remark in a July 1971 letter to Houdebine printed in *Positions* may also prove instructive here: Derrida writes, "The position-of-the-other, in Hegelian dialectics, is always, finally, to pose-oneself by oneself as the other of the Idea, as other—than—oneself in one's finite determination, with the aim of repatriating and reappropriating oneself, of returning close to oneself in the infinite richness of one's determination, etc.)." Derrida, *Positions*, 96.
[87] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 120.
[88] Ibid., 119.

identity unto itself, as itself, then the other *is not* the other.[89] In his insistence that the same is finite and a totality, Levinas paradoxically makes the same the other—the other of the other. Yet, because the other is defined as what is not the same (and now the same is the other), then the other is not the other, which makes it the opposite of the other—namely, the same. The distinction that Levinas sets up between same and other inverts itself such that the same becomes the other and the other becomes the same.

It is Levinas's conception of same and other as absolutely separated that renders the finite/infinite binary unintelligible, and in so doing also takes down the same/other distinction. Paradoxically, it is this absolutization of same and other as separated that puts Levinas back into the traditional metaphysics of substance, essence, and identity to which he considers his project diametrically opposed. As Martin Hägglund puts it in the article "The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas," the very reliance that Levinas places on an *absolute* reinstates the very "philosophy of identity, totality, and monadic being" that he claims to be opposing.[90] Levinas, according to Hägglund following Derrida, "speaks of the wholly Other instead of the wholly Same. But the shift in terminology makes no essential difference, since the two extremes—as Derrida maintains in 'Violence and Metaphysics'—invert into each other and at bottom are founded on the same ideal."[91] A

[89] For Derrida, following Hegel, this insistence on the separation between Other and Same can only lead to a false conception of infinity, in which there exists the Same (A) and the Other (B). In the *Logic*, Hegel had shown how this A→B logic of relation necessarily leads to a self-contradictory notion of infinity, in which infinity is considered the infinite succession of differing things. This notion of infinity is self-contradictory an infinite succession of differing things is only intelligible if it has an endpoint. False infinity, then, is a succession-based infinity that necessarily rests on a finite idea (that of succession) while claiming to be infinite. An infinite succession is an impossible notion. This is contrary to Hegel's conception of true or positive infinity that defines B and A in relation to each other, and considers identity a negation of the negation.
[90] Martin Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas," *Diacritics* 34:1 (Spring 2004), 51.
[91] Hägglund, "Necessity of Discrimination," 51.

philosophy that develops alterity as absolute and infinitely removed from identity can only be founded on such a metaphysical idea of identity. While it is only by rigidly keeping other and same apart in an 'absolute' fashion that Levinas is able to uphold his view of the other as transcendent and 'infinite,' it is precisely this juxtaposition of two terms that Hegel warns against in the *Logic* as leading to the false infinity. In directly opposing Hegel, Levinas reproduces a Hegelian logic, but without the consistency of the dialectical notion of infinity. Thus, Levinasian infinity—and, by extension, Levinasian alterity—unravels.

Levinas readily acknowledges that his conception of the relation to the other is "inconceivable in terms of formal logic." [92] However, Levinas fails to consider that this conception is unjustifiable even by its own, other logic. The Levinasian economy makes the other so absolutely other that it paradoxically becomes indistinguishable from the same. It is precisely the Hegelian logic of infinity that is able to avoid this conclusion through its account of identity and negation of the negation. Rather than offering a viable corrective to the Hegelian infinite, Levinas reproduces an inverted Hegelianism that makes the other so absolutely other that it becomes the same, while the same becomes a finite totality that makes of it the other. If we put this discussion back into the terms of 'true' versus 'false' alterity with which it began, we can say the following. For Derrida, Levinas's assertion that the play of the same is merely apparent affirms a binary between the true and the false, the realms of reality and mere appearance, which ironically affirm the very dialectic of a thinker such as Hegel. Philosophy, Derrida writes, "cannot think the false, nor even choose the false, without paying homage to the anteriority and the superiority of the true (same relationship between the other and the same)."[93] Insofar as Levinas pays homage to the superiority of the

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[92] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 195.
[93] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 120.

true (the 'veritable' alterity of the other) and consigns self-relation to the domain of the 'false,' he ends up paradoxically confirming Hegel, reiterating the quintessential gesture of the modern philosophy from which Levinas purports to escape.[94]

Finally, Levinas's idea of finitude and infinity fall prey to an unconscious substantialization of the categories 'same' and 'other' that are inadmissible given the irreducibly temporal nature of finitude. Derrida points out in "Violence and Metaphysics" that the temporal distance of finitude makes it impossible to consider finitude a totality. As Hägglund describes it: "Derrida's principal argument is that the finite cannot be a totality. On the contrary, alterity is irreducible because of temporal finitude. That every slightest moment is disjoined by time entails that neither I nor anyone else can ever be protected *in ourselves*."[95] While we will have occasion to come back to the temporal distance of the self in detail further on in the dissertation in the following chapters, it is worth noting that it is an important component of the deconstruction of Levinas's finite/infinite binary. While Levinas himself emphasizes from his early work onward the manner by which alterity and temporality are linked—such that alterity *is* temporality and vice versa, even—he does not take into account the consequences of that for his theory of infinity. This is perhaps because

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[94] Furthermore, for all of Levinas's insistence on the infinite, absolute, transcendent nature of the other who cannot be grasped within the understanding of the same, Levinas nonetheless speaks constantly of the other. Derrida writes in "Violence and Metaphysics": "If one thinks, as Levinas does, that positive Infinity tolerates, or even requires, infinite alterity, then one must renounce all language, and first of all the words *infinite* and *other*. Infinity cannot be understood as Other except in the form of the in-finite. As soon as one attempts to think Infinity as a positive plenitude (one pole of Levinas's nonnegative transcendence), the other becomes unthinkable, impossible, unutterable." Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 142. The repercussions of the idea that the other is infinite make the very word 'other', clothed in the language of the same and defined always in relation to the same, the in-finite to the finite as what is not the finite, incomprehensible outside of the economy of the same. The Levinasian project cannot help but utter and think the Other: to say 'the other is beyond language and beyond thought' is still to think the other, and within language. Levinas finds himself in a performative self-contradiction that, on Derrida's view, results precisely in the violence that brings the other into the domain of the same. For Derrida, there is no escaping this violence; Levinas's refusal to see it as constitutive of the same-other relation renders his discourse unintelligible.
[95] Hägglund, "Necessity of Discrimination," 50.

of the Cartesian roots of such a theory: Levinas falls back into substantializing the self and other even as he himself has pointed out throughout his career how insufficient a spatial or substantial model of their relation is.

It seems to me that the problems for Levinas arise with his insistence that the other is *absolute*. For Levinas, alterity requires absolute difference or separation from the same. This requirement is behind his disavowal of internal otherness as well as his insistence that otherness be infinite. We have shown in this section that the latter is inconsistent; we will show in the following section that the same is true of the former. Both of these issues center around the issue of the absolute. In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida links this issue back to the Western philosophical tradition by imagining what Parmenides might have to say about Levinas's insistence that the other is absolute, infinite, and transcendent. Derrida asserts that Parmenides would have two responses to Levinas:

> (1) The infinitely other, he would say perhaps, can be what it is only if it is other, that is, other *than*. *Other than* must be *other than* myself. Henceforth, it is no longer absolved of a relation to an ego. Therefore, it is no longer infinitely, absolutely other. It is no longer what it is. If it was absolved, it would not be the other either, but the Same. (2) The infinitely other cannot be what it is—infinitely other—except by being absolutely not the same. That is, in particular, by being other than itself (non ego). Being other than itself, it is not what it is. Therefore, it is not infinitely other, etc.[96]

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[96] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 126.

These two potential responses encapsulate the inconsistency that leads to the implosion of Levinas's conception of alterity. First, how could the other be the other if it were not *other than* the self, which already suggests a relation between the same and the other? If there is such a relation between the same and the other—which seems to be the only way for any conception of otherness to have any sense—then the other is no longer infinite, and absolutely other, which means that it is 'not what it is' given that Levinas has claimed the infinity and absoluteness of the other. And if it is not what it is (the other), then it is the same. Second, if the other is absolutely other, it is so by virtue of being absolutely not the same. But if the other is absolutely not the same, then it must be other *to itself* (for a self-identity would impose a sameness upon the other—this refers us back to my charge of crypto-subjectivity in the Introduction). It must be what it is not: which means that it must not be the other. Levinas does not question the metaphysical characterization of identity and difference in a way that unsettles its terms and points toward an alternate schema. Rather, he merely falls prey to logical inconsistencies that render his theory of alterity incoherent.

Given the incoherence of the Levinasian schema of same and other, we are forced to seek another solution. I consider it crucial to maintain the Levinasian insight that alterity exceeds totality and the attempts to subsume it into the same: that is, into a conscious field of representation, knowledge, and mastery. Alterity eludes such attempts, and it is only through the acknowledgment of this that there is any chance for ethics *qua* ethics. I also support Levinas's descriptions of self-relation, most broadly that of *jouissance*, and the ways that these descriptions attest to prereflective dimensions of the self that do not depend on consciousness or knowledge. However, I take Derrida's deconstruction of the Levinasian binary between infinite other and finite same to be decisive. We cannot affirm the picture that Levinas proffers in *Totality and Infinity*. I suggest, however, that the relation between

same and other can be more adequately theorized when we attend to alterity within the self. This is not a simple return to Hegel: although there are resemblances to the Hegelian schema in that same and other are inter-defined and reciprocally referential, I affirm that alterity must be deconstructively figured as a trace that eludes a binary between presence and absence and which therefore constitutes a remainder that cannot be thought from a standpoint of absolutization. This will be developed in the following chapter.

I take seriously Levinas's idea that alterity is an idea we have within that exceeds us, but I consider that this idea simply *is* alterity within, and cannot be considered a false alterity that would be opposed to true alterity. If we fully take into account the play that marks *jouissance* and the finite nature of the self, we must conclude that the self is not cut off from otherness, but always already in relation to it. In the following section of this chapter, I will note some possibilities for this idea already within *Totality and Infinity*. Chapters 2 and 3 will then develop my theory of what we have called in this chapter 'internal otherness,' primarily using Derrida and to a lesser extent drawing on Merleau-Ponty. Then, in Chapter 4, we will return to some of the issues we have considered here regarding the relation of the self to other beings, and will specifically revisit "Violence and Metaphysics," attending to some of the themes that were left untreated in this section but which are particularly instructive for what I will develop regarding intersubjectivity.

3. Possibilities of 'True Alterity' within the Self in Totality and Infinity

Once we reject Levinas's insistence on a distinction between false and true alterity, we can read Levinas against himself and note places already within *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas sketches intriguing possibilities for internal otherness. In the remainder of this chapter, I will pursue these sketches by reading *Totality and Infinity* against and beyond itself

before briefly addressing why I think this is a more promising tack than turning to Levinas's later work, particularly *Otherwise than Being*. I treat four moments in *Totality and Infinity* where I think such possibilities are opened up: 1) the fact that the idea of the infinite exists 'in us'; 2) Levinas's admission that interiority must be at once 'open' and 'closed' to the exterior; 3) the 'play of the same' of *jouissance*, refigured in the wake of the collapse of true vs. false alterity; and 4) the possibility of disjoining the 'self' from the 'same.'

1. Firstly, the trace of internal otherness is perceptible in Levinas's view of infinity. We have seen that Levinas follows Descartes in conceiving of infinity as an idea that we have but the concept of which necessarily overflows our idea of it. While infinity as such is unthinkable because it is beyond the bounds of our representation, consciousness, and knowledge, the 'idea of infinity' is nonetheless something that we have, *in us*. Levinas states, "Our analyses are guided by a formal structure: the idea of Infinity in us [*en nous*]."[97] What Levinas fails to acknowledge is that, if this idea is 'in oneself,' then alterity is 'in oneself.' In order for alterity to be found already within the self, it is not necessary for it to be anything more than an idea that is impossible to master through representation. In fact, the idea of infinity *must* attest to alterity already within the self: for, if this idea were not other (overflowing representation or knowledge by the consciousness of the subject), then it would merely be yet another idea that the subject had reduced to itself. The representation of otherness through self-consciousness and knowledge is the gesture of the same, and is counter to the very idea of alterity as Levinas figures it. For the idea of infinity to be an idea of infinity, it must be 'possessed' by the self as what exceeds possession by the self: that is, as other to the self even as it is within its scope.

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[97] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 79.

Levinas appears very close to admitting that the idea of infinity reveals internal otherness. Take his claim, for instance, the infinity is produced "as placed in *me* from its idea [*comme mise en* moi *de son idée*]," which indicates that the idea of infinity comes from outside the self.[98] By virtue of the idea of infinity, the I "contains in itself [*en soi*] what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its own identity," and therefore contains more than its identity can itself have produced through the movements of its interior life.[99] The idea of infinity designates the other even as the other is not encapsulated in it. This idea exists within the self as something that has not been constructed or created through the self through separation, psychism, or egoism. Here there is no analogy between true and false alterity; rather, the idea of infinity 'in us' is an outright acknowledgment of alterity within the self. Levinas, of course, resists this claim: he states that, because infinity resists integration by the same, "It is not the insufficiency of the Ego that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other [*Autrui*]."[100] Yet this is a false opposition. The insufficiency of the I and the infinity of the other cannot be opposed; rather, they are inextricably interwoven in the idea of infinity as something placed by the other within me. Levinas's view of infinity gestures toward this even while vehemently resisting it.

2. A second possible place where Levinas comes close to admitting alterity within the self is in a surprising and thorny passage in *Totality and Infinity* where he suggests an awareness of the very kinds of problems that Derrida will bring up in "Violence and Metaphysics" and with which we are concerned here. Here, Levinas grants that the ego must be both 'closed' and 'open.' After devoting many pages in *Totality and Infinity* to the constitution of the ego as a totality through what he calls 'separation' and 'psychism,' Levinas

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98 Ibid., 26. Trans. modified.
99 Ibid., 27. Trans. modified.
100 Ibid., 80. Trans. modified.

asserts that its separation must be 'ambiguous' and not total in order for the ego to be capable of relating to the infinity of the other. Prefiguring some of the very comments that Derrida will make in "Violence and Metaphysics," Levinas writes:

> The interiority that assures separation (without this being an abstract rejoinder to the notion of relation) must produce a being absolutely closed over upon itself, not deriving its isolation dialectically from its opposition to the Other [*Autrui*]. And this closure must not prohibit the exit outside of interiority, so that exteriority could speak to it, reveal itself to it, in an unforeseeable movement that the isolation of the separated being could not provoke by simple contrast. Therefore, in the separated being, the door to [*sur*] the exterior must be at the same time open and closed. The closure of the separated being must therefore be ambiguous enough that, on the one hand, the interiority necessary to the idea of infinity remains *real* and not only apparent, that the destiny of the interior being persists in an egoist atheism that nothing from the exterior refutes, that it persists without, in all of the movements of descent into interiority, the being descending into itself being related to exteriority by a pure play of the dialectic and in the form of an abstract correlation. But on the other hand, *in the interiority itself* dug out by *jouissance* [*que creuse la jouissance*] a heteronomy must be produced that incites to another destiny than this animal complacency in oneself. If the dimension of interiority cannot belie its interiority by the appearance of a heterogeneous element in the course of this descent into itself on the path of pleasure (a descent which, in reality, only digs out this dimension), it is nonetheless necessary that in this descent a collision is produced that, without inverting

> the movement of interiorization, without breaking the thread of the interior substance, furnishes the *occasion* for a resumption of relations with exteriority. Interiority must, at the same time, be closed and open.[101]

After initially reaffirming in this passage that the separation of the ego is not produced *because* of its relation to the other, but that this separation is rather completely, utterly closed in upon itself (and therefore, unrelated to the other), Levinas goes on to state that there must be something within interiority that can be called upon by the other in order for this closure to be possibly affected by exteriority. That is, interiority cannot be totally unrelated to what is exterior to it. If the closure of the ego were complete, it would be impossible for the ego to become aware of the other and responsive to it—hence, we get the paradoxical statement that the ego's door to the outside is both open and closed.[102]

Moreover, Levinas claims that the closure must be 'ambiguous enough' that interiority is *real* and not merely apparent, such that the very interiority of jouissance engenders a 'heteronomy.' After this statement, Levinas backtracks to claim that interiority cannot be denied through the admission of a heterogeneous element within it; but, at the same time, he affirms that the movement of interiority produces a 'collision' that allows for exteriority to break in and interrupt the separation of interiority. This paradox—"interiority must, at the same time, be closed and open"—is not one for which Levinas's own argument can account, given his interest in the absolute separation between same and other. However,

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[101] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 148-9. Trans. modified. All of the appearances of 'must' in this paragraph are translations of *Il faut*, with the exception of the final sentence, where 'must' translates *doit*.

[102] It would be fruitful to link back what Derrida writes about hospitality—a notion he develops out of his writings on Levinas—to this idea of the ego as having at once an open and a closed door. While this dissertation does not have the space to discuss hospitality more than briefly in the following chapter, it is something to which I plan to return apropos of these issues in a future project—not only the issues that emerge in this chapter, but also and even especially those considered in Chapter 5, where Beauvoir's ethic of reciprocity is discussed.

I claim that this ambiguity or openness of the ego to the outside is fully intelligible in a schema that grants that there is alterity within the interior life of the self. The paradox that the self is at once interior to itself and marked by otherness is true of the self's relation to the other and the necessary foundation for a coherent response ethics, even as Levinas's own discourse in *Totality and Infinity* cannot uphold it without contradiction.

The paradox that Levinas pinpoints in this crucial passage is one that he otherwise ignores in *Totality and Infinity*, preferring to posit the realm of separation as totally separate from that of the other (while still in relation to the other, as we have seen) and thereby to strictly demarcate same from other. In this passage, his concern with drawing out such a paradox is not the result of an acknowledgment of phenomenal heterogeneity within the ego; rather, it is the result of his sense that the very logic of his ethics depends on the ego being closed in upon itself, but not so closed that it cannot sense the face of the other. It is worth noting that Levinas repeatedly uses the phrase *« Il faut »*, translated here as 'must,' in this passage. It *must* be the case that—it is *necessary* that—the ego is both closed and open, is ambiguous, is genuinely separate from the outside in its interiority and yet always already marked by heteronomy. Levinas is not merely saying in this passage that the ego is in its own separate home, its *chez soi*, with the door open to the other. It seems to me that he is making both that claim and another related, but separate—and far more radical—claim: namely, that the very home of the ego in separation and *jouissance* is *necessarily* ambiguously heteronomous, related to its outside. This radical claim is precisely what Derrida argues in "Violence and Metaphysics," although Derrida does not attend to this fascinating passage from *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas's account generally leaves little to no room for considering the encounter with the other—with nothing to draw them together, no mechanism by which the same could recognize the other (even as other), Levinas places the other so outside the realm of

phenomenality that there could be no relation to the other such that the same could even be called upon by it. In this strange passage about the ambiguity of the openness of interiority, however, Levinas appears to acknowledge this—and yet, he does not reflect on the disastrous consequences that this would have for his same/other binary.

3. A third possibility for internal alterity in *Totality and Infinity* is in the 'play of the same' of interior life. Derrida addresses this in "Violence and Metaphysics" by claiming that alterity must be within the same in order for this movement to occur. How, Derrida wonders, could the modes of self-relation that Levinas identifies function if there were only apparent alterity rather than true alterity within the self? Contra Levinas, Derrida states that the same cannot be a closed totality, separated off from the world and having "only the appearance of alterity" through labor. He writes: "Without alterity in the same, how could the 'play of the Same' occur, in the sense of playful activity, or of dislocation, in a machine or organic totality which plays or works?"[103] It does not make sense to speak of the 'play of the same' without granting that alterity is present within this very play. How could the same have an internal play if it were not *really* different from itself? For Derrida, Levinas's discourse suffers from being unable to acknowledge the alterity already present within the ego. He writes, "according to Levinas there would be no interior difference, no fundamental and autochthonous alterity within the ego," because of Levinas's commitments to reserving alterity to the other. [104] The play of the same, so richly described in Levinas, cannot function

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[103] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 127.

[104] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 109. Derrida reproduces a similar argument in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, where he writes: "The at-home-with-oneself of the dwelling does not imply a closing off, but rather the place of Desire toward the transcendence of the other. The separation marked here is the condition of both the welcome and the hospitality offered to the other. There would be neither welcome nor hospitality without this radical alterity, which itself presupposes separation." Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford, 1999), 92.

with a mere appearance of alterity; rather, such a play requires alterity in order to be intelligible.

We have seen that Levinas grants two general forms of otherness to the *jouissance* of self-relation or interiority: 1) the transmutation of the 'other' of the material world into the ego in separation, and 2) the apparent alterity of the I that listens to itself think, surprises itself, and fears itself. As we have seen, neither of these, on Levinas's view, pertains to the alterity of the other, which ruptures the interiority of the same. Yet, given what we have laid out with respect to the false and true alterity distinction that Derrida problematizes in "Violence and Metaphysics," and the ambiguous aspects of egoism analyzed earlier in this section, can these forms of otherness in self-relation truly be considered distinct from the alterity of the other? Our task now will be to briefly argue, contra Levinas, that the interior life of the self must indeed be contaminated by 'genuine' alterity.' I will focus here on *jouissance*, which we have seen serves as a kind of umbrella term for self-relation in *Totality and Infinity*.[105]

The kind of alterity that is already present within interiority is clear in the phenomenon of *jouissance*. There could be no *jouissance* without alterity already within the self to make it possible. As we have seen, Levinas grants this to some extent: *jouissance* involves otherness: we experience the world exterior to us through eating, warming ourselves in the sun, and laboring. The self of interiority and psychism is surprised by itself and listens to itself think, and in this sense, appears to itself as 'other'. However, he claims that this movement of self-relation is ever only the play of the same disguising itself as the play

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[105] This could also be said of separation, psychism, and interior life. As always in Levinas, terminological distinctions are constantly made, and yet also resist clear demarcation when they are put to work in his texts: Levinas writes, "Psychism will be specified as sensibility, the element of *jouissance*, as egoism" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 59). This could also be shown with respect to Levinas's distinctions between need and labor, rhetoric and discourse, and teaching and maieutics.

between same and other. Yet we may see the movement of *jouissance* in fact is properly such a play between same and other—'other' here taken in all its senses—if we recall the untenability of the binary between true and false alterity. In undertaking this analysis of *jouissance*, I affirm that a) *jouissance* is a primary mode of self-relation, and b) self-relation is not necessarily bound up with self-knowledge. That is, self-knowledge requires taking the self as the 'same,' in that knowledge is a bringing of the other into the domain of representation and mastery. In Chapters 2 and 3, we will return to the idea that self-relation is not primarily a matter of self-knowledge, and will also treat Derrida's deconstruction of auto-affection, which will prove to be closely linked with what we are here discussing under the term *jouissance.* For now, however, I will demonstrate that *jouissance* is one way that we relate to ourselves *as other* to ourselves, and this orientation differentiates it from a model of self-relation as limited to consciousness and self-knowledge. This orientation is, thus, deeply inspired by Levinas; however, I differ from him in that on my view, *jouissance* exemplifies alterity within the self.

The way that I relate to myself as other in *jouissance* has a variety of registers, beginning with the bodily. Recall that Levinas uses the example of digestion: digestion occurs at an unconscious level that happens largely passively. In digestion, the body breaks down food and separates it into nutrients and waste. The traditional figure of digestion at least since Aristotle presumes that digestion is a turning of the 'other' into the same. Levinas takes on this conception wholeheartedly, stating that in eating food, "the ego again finds itself."[106] However, a closer look at the digestion body reveals that this is not the case. The digesting body hosts of all sorts of microorganisms that are 'other' to it, and these are crucial

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[106] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 147. Trans. modified.

for digestion.[107] These microorganisms, which constitute a community called a 'microbiome,' are defined by molecular biologist Joshua Lederberg as an "ecological community…of microorganisms that literally share our body space."[108] Moreover, one may view the digestive tract of the human body as a literal space that divides it and brings the outside in. Michael Gershon, who has pioneered research into what has come to be called the 'gut brain,' writes, "The open tube that begins at the mouth ends at the anus. Paradoxical as it may seem, the gut is a tunnel that permits the exterior to run right through us."[109] Digestion reveals the body's otherness to itself, both in its processes and in its anatomical structure. It provides a concrete example of the plurality within the self that is required for self-relation: in this case, the relation of microorganisms to one another, in interaction with incoming food and the flora of the gut. Thus, this example of self-relation does not work as an example of the transmutation of the other into the same as Levinas imagines it does. Rather, digestion precisely reveals the heterogeneity of the body, which is never one unto itself.

As for Levinas's second example, warming oneself in the sun, this requires that the sun remain something other to me. I may sit under the sun, but the sun itself is fixed and irreducibly separated from me—this is the condition for the possibility of my warming myself under it. Thus, warming myself in the sun is not a conversion of the sun into myself, but rather a relation to the sun in which I am affected by the sun even as it remains unimaginably far from me, unable to touch me, and unquestionably separate from me in

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[107] For a compelling analysis of these themes, see Elizabeth Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body* (Durham and London: Duke, 2004), and Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008).

[108] Joshua Lederberg and Alexa T. McCray. "'Ome Sweet 'Omics—a genealogical treasury of words," *Scientist.* 15:8 (2001). Molecular biologist Lederberg coined the term 'microbiome' to designate this community of microorganisms.

[109] Michael Gershon, *The Second Brain: A Groundbreaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders of the Stomach and Intestine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

affecting me. As for the response of my own body to the sun's warmth, my proprioceptive capacity is constantly regulating my body temperature, interacting with my skin in ways that are prereflective and outside of conscious control. When Levinas discusses the work of labor by which we transmute what is 'other' (*autre*) to us into the same, he speaks of it in terms of what we *live on* in a way that overlooks the fact that what we live on remains outside of the grasp of contact or subsumption by the self (let alone the cognitive grasp of consciousness or knowledge). Furthermore, he does not attend to the fact that it is the very irreducibility of otherness—which can now not simply be figured as 'within' or 'outside' the self—that make such *living on* possible.[110]

Levinas says that the ego that moves "toward itself" in *jouissance* remains rooted in what it lives on, and that this rooting is not the 'absolute distance' between same and other.[111] This ego of *jouissance* "remains in the non-ego [*non-moi*]; it is enjoyment of 'something else,' never of itself."[112] This 'something else,' I claim, cannot be distinguished from the alterity of the other. The 'true' and 'false' alterity binary that we have troubled, once troubled in this respect as well, reveal *jouissance* to depend on alterity and to be constituted through it. Levinas says of interior life: "Relation of life with life, love of life, is neither a representation of life nor a reflection upon life. The gap between me and my joy leaves no place for total refusal." The relationality and distancing to which he refers here can precisely be considered alterity within.[113] Self-relation, as we will see in Chapter 3, is not primarily representational or reflective, but this does not mean that it is not a relation between self and

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110 The requirement of internal alterity also goes also for the other kind of self-relation that Levinas describes—namely, thinking, taking fright at oneself, and surprising oneself.
111 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 143. Trans. modified.
112 Ibid., 143.
113 Ibid., 145.

other. The love of life is a coiling back of *jouissance* upon itself that cannot be distinguished from 'veritable foreignness' in a decisive or certain manner.

This coiling back of the self upon itself in the love of life is also related to the love of the other that Levinas puts forth in the *Totality and Infinity* sections on eros we will treat in Chapter 5: if *jouissance* is 'love of life,' there must be a gap between what is loved and what is lived. Moreover, even on Levinas's own terms, love relates to the other rather than being confined to the realm of apparent alterity: according to him, "love aims at the Other [*Autrui*]."[114] While Levinas grants that in *jouissance*, love's inclination toward the other can be turned back upon the self and thereby reduced to "fundamental immanence," nonetheless love remains dependent on "the total, transcendent exteriority of the other [*autre*]."[115] If *jouissance* takes love and folds it back into the self, then it only does so inasmuch as its relation to the other escapes this folding back into the self. This will be developed in the analysis of auto-affection in Chapter 2.

4. Finally, one can problematize the equivalency of 'ego' and 'same' on which *Totality and Infinity* deeply depends, thus showing that if selfhood is not necessarily sameness, then self-relation need not necessarily be confined to a 'play of the same.' Derrida points out in "Violence and Metaphysics" that a key component of the contradictions in *Totality and Infinity* arises out of the terminological conflation of 'same' and 'ego.' While in his earlier writings—namely, *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents*—Levinas did *not* equate the 'same' with the 'ego,' let alone the 'self,' he comes to consistently use the two terms interchangeably in *Totality and Infinity*. According to Derrida, "Without using these terms themselves, Levinas often warned us against confusing *identity* and *ipseity*, Same and Ego: *idem* and *ipse*. This

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114 Ibid., 256.
115 Ibid., 254.

confusion…returns as a kind of silent axiom in *Totality and Infinity*."[116] Derrida argues that this conflation of terms permits Levinas to contest not only the Ancient Greek conception of the great kinds Same and Other, but also the "most modern philosophies of subjectivity, the philosophies most careful to distinguish, as did Levinas previously, the Ego from the Same and the Others from the other."[117] Whereas the thrust of much of Levinas's early work was to counter the classical binary of same and other which formulates alterity as negativity (and remains within a totalizing logic), *Totality and Infinity* also attempts to counter those philosophies which, on his view, would overlook the radical interruption of alterity for which modern philosophies of subjectivity have not accounted. One disastrous byproduct of this conflation, however, is that alterity within the ego becomes insupportable: hence, Levinas is required to assert that it is merely apparent. For the early Levinas, there would be no need to emphasize that alterity within is not 'veritable' alterity, and indeed he does not do so.[118] In *Existence and Existents,* Levinas considers the I as originally "with itself" in a solitude that is not mere isolation but is rather "a dual solitude: this other than me accompanies the ego like a shadow," without the caveat that this duality within the self remains within the same.[119] In early Levinas, the ego is separated from itself by its existence in time, by being riveted to itself, by being bored with itself, by being bonded to itself—as we have seen, by being involved in a process of identification that is a becoming. Derrida notes that in this early work of Levinas, "interiority, the secret and original separation, had permitted the break with the classical use of the Greek concepts of Same and Other."[120] That is, Levinas's

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[116] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 109.
[117] Ibid., 110.
[118] Though, to be sure, this is not only due to his separation between the terms 'same' and 'ego in these early texts, but also because he is not as concerned with upholding a transcendent and infinite alterity.
[119] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 90.
[120] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 109.

descriptions of self-relation in his earlier work distinguished the ego from the same and thus did not need to deny that the negativity of this self-relation was alterity.

For a number of twentieth-century thinkers coming out of the 'death of the subject' tradition, the distinction between *ipse* and *idem* has been useful. Paul Ricoeur is the thinker who has made the most of this distinction: for him, *idem* identity, or 'sameness,' is not the kind of identity of the self. *Idem* identity is premised on a conception of the self as a substance on Ricoeur's view, and is characteristic of both qualitative and quantitative conceptions of personal identity. For Ricoeur, the self is figured as having an *ipse* identity rather than an *idem* identity.[121] *Ipse* or ego-identity is a sense of self or mineness (what we will consider in Chapter 3 in terms of the phenomenological 'first-person perspective) that does not demand an identity or sameness over time.

Ipse identity, unlike *idem* identity, lends itself well to an account of internal otherness, because it grants that there may be difference within the self (unlike *idem*, which is identity as the absence of difference). Self-relation in *jouissance*, thinking, surprising oneself, and the like require a certain modality of internal difference that *idem* (though not *ipse*) precludes. The *ipse* identity of the self in Levinas's earlier work is more coherent than that of *Totality and Infinity,* which presumes that the self has *idem* identity. Levinas's conflation of the ego with the same in this text grants not only ipseity but also identity as *idem* to the ego, which complicates or even renders impossible the analyses of self-relation he undertakes. As a result, Levinas finds himself treading a strange line in *Totality and Infinity*, amalgamating the ego and the same while simultaneously affirming the modes of self-relation that preclude the ego from being mere *idem*. This retention of the self-relation characteristic of the ego drives Levinas to

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[121] See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*.

consider the internal difference required for it to be merely 'apparent.' Levinas's ostensible solution to this problem is the claim that the internal difference in the 'play of the same' is merely apparent. Yet *idem* identity does not even allow for such apparent difference in the same. Even 'apparent' difference would be enough to rupture the self-identity required of *idem*. The identity that is characteristic of a thing in the world—take a cup, for instance—would be incoherent if it were to include such an internal difference. The cup is spatiotemporally unified. It does not have the modes of self-relation characteristic of an existent being: it does not eat or digest; it does not have an internal monologue; it does not die; it does not freely relate to its projects; it does not become bored with itself. The cup's identity is not an *ipse*, but rather an *idem*. There is no internal difference in the cup because it has no mode of egoism by which it separates itself from what is around it in order to hollow out a space of interiority. The only imaginable difference is a corporeal one: the cup is split in two, it breaks into pieces, or it shatters. In this case, the cup itself is shattered. It no longer exists. Its identity is not of the sort that can support internal difference. The conflation of same and ego that Levinas produces in *Totality and Infinity* renders the self-relation of the ego unintelligible, for such self-relation is not possible in the same.

Given that it seems that an account of internal otherness cannot coexist with an account of self-identity as *idem*, it might seem that *ipse* identity is what we would like to 'hang our hat on' in this dissertation. This is certainly the move of Ricoeur: the self cannot be thought of in terms of qualitative or quantitative sameness, and therefore its identity must be thought otherwise. Ipseity provides a possible alternative to the issues that arise when we consider the self as the same. However, I do not think that we need to disavow sameness in order to come up with a coherent and compelling account of internal otherness (with 'internal' now having to be taken quite non-literally). In the coming chapters, I will argue that

self-identity is the effect of a play of difference, such that sameness retains a certain status, has a certain role, but is not considered absolute or self-standing. That is to say, we need not let go of the idea of sameness altogether in order to come up with an account of selfhood that does not simply perpetuate substantialist models that characterize the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy. We will see that the problems that beset Levinas's conception of the other are resolved by acknowledging that 'true' alterity already contaminates self-relation, an acknowledgment that requires a rethinking of sameness but not an outright elimination of it. The problem of the false infinity, and the concomitant association of self-relation with false alterity, dissolves once we reconsider the relation of sameness and otherness, identity and difference, deconstructively. Here, the insufficient solutions that Levinas proffers in order to explain the difficulties that arise with the conceptions of the other and the same in *Totality and Infinity* become unnecessary: solutions that include the analogization of self-relation and relation to the other; the implicit distinction between true and false alterity, the insistence on the ego as a finite totality, and so forth.

Once we open up our conception of the self and acknowledge that the trace of the other is a necessary condition of the self, we are able to investigate modes of self-relation in far richer ways. It is structurally necessary for alterity to be present within the ego in order for the other to be a possible locus of encounter for the ego, and this alterity is attested to phenomenologically through specific modes and experiences of self-relation. This problem in Levinas sets up the nexus of concerns of this dissertation overall, in that my claims about the originary contamination of self and other will provide the basis for the rest of this work. Rather than being confined to proving that the internal difference required for self-relation is merely apparent or illusory and crafting rigid distinctions between the sameness of the self

and the otherness of the other, we are opened up to the entire range of questions regarding how we relate to ourselves. What are modes by which we incorporate senses our identity into what we might call the 'same,' and how are these made possible by the originary otherness of the self? How is it that the self, as well as otherness within the self, are not accounted for via a traditional conception of self-presence or, more generally, a binary between presence and absence? Exploring these questions will be the task of the chapters to come.

4. Beyond Totality and Infinity*: Why Substitution is Not the Answer*

Largely on the basis of the issues raised by Derrida in "Violence and Metaphysics," Levinas develops a theory of internal otherness in *Otherwise than Being,* his next major work after *Totality and Infinity*. Here, Levinas acknowledges that alterity calls the self prior to the self's constitution; he even goes so far as to say, "Subjectivity is the other in the same."[122] It would seem at first glance, then, that *Otherwise than Being* provides precisely the solutions we sought in *Totality and Infinity* and were left wanting. Levinas offers a detailed account of the otherness in the self, developing a theory of subjectivity in which the other obsesses the same, holds the same hostage, and persecutes the same. However, while this acknowledgment of alterity in the same is a great advance from the denial of it in *Totality and Infinity*, I contend that the way that Levinas conceptualizes internal alterity in *Otherwise than Being* is unsatisfactory. While many scholars have turned to *Otherwise than Being* as an antidote to the problems that arise with the absolute separation of same and other characteristic of *Totality and Infinity* and a valuable resource for theorizing ethical subjectivity, I do not see this

122 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1998), 25.

text as a solution. Rather, on my view, *Otherwise than Being* loses sight of what made the interior life described in Levinas's earlier work exciting, even as this later text more adequately accounts for the self/other relation through attention to otherness within.[123] Levinas by and large replaces the play of the same characteristic of *jouissance* and its concomitant modes of self-relation with a being held hostage to the other or being penetrated by the other.[124]

The violent tone of the passive hostage not only does not do justice to the range of self-relation in which subjects engage experientially, but also leaves Levinasian ethics in a strange celebration of victimhood of which we should be wary if we are to consider issues of social oppression and agency pertinent to ethics. Turning from the Herculean, active subject of Western metaphysics toward a subject of radical passivity and vulnerability is a mere reversal of the traditional conception, and thus suffers the obverse of the very same problems that plague traditional metaphysical accounts of the ethical subject. It is on the basis of such a radically passive account of subjectivity that what I perceive to be a major problem in contemporary continental ethics—that is, the displacement of the metaphysical sovereign subject onto the other—emerges. Here, I argue that Levinas undercuts the significance of his move toward internal otherness in *Otherwise than Being* in two ways: first, he retains the idea of egoism in *jouissance*; second, he models internal otherness via highly concerning metaphors of violence and persecution that gesture to a fundamental inability of

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123 I also do not consider Levinas's early work to be a solution; while Levinas's pre-*Totality and Infinity* writings offer rich resources for considering self-relation in ipseity without the problem of conflating the ego with the Same that plagues his later work, these early writings do not offer a fleshed-out conception of alterity, and I want to affirm his insight into the ethical exigency of alterity.
124 While he does discuss and preserve a theory of *jouissance* here, as we will see in the following paragraph, it is limited to a mere three pages and thus has a much smaller role than in *Totality and Infinity*; moreover, *jouissance* is not revised to account for internal otherness in *Otherwise than Being*. The brief section on it in this later text merely reaffirms the view of it from *Totality and Infinity*.

his ethical perspective to account for a wider range of self-relation beyond that of its absolutely passive, vulnerable, and receptive forms.[125] Levinas's conception of otherness remains *absolute*, but merely extends this absolute otherness into the self.

While in *Otherwise than Being,* Levinas does claim that the self is marked by the otherness of the other as opposed to the 'false alterity' of the play of the same, the very characterization of *jouissance* as such a play of the same persists in a manner that most who celebrate the innovations of *Otherwise than Being* overlook.[126] While many celebrate the installation of alterity within the heart of the self in this text, the fact that Levinas still considers this to be a process occurring on the basis of a primary and self-enclosed egoism generally remains unnoticed. Levinas still claims that the ego is not yet called upon by the other but rather remains "complacent in itself."[127] Levinas even still links this egoism to negativity as opposed to infinity: he writes, "The negativity in which the ego is detached from itself to look at itself is, from all points of view, a recuperation of the self."[128] It is only when the ego is obsessed by the other that it will actually break into the model of subjectivity exemplified by the psyche as the same in the other.

Thus, Levinas imports the very perspective on *jouissance* from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being* in whole cloth. A sleight of hand in terminology obfuscates this stubborn retention of egoism: in *Otherwise than Being,* Levinas no longer uses the term 'psychism' as a synonym for egoism, instead aligning the related word 'psyche' with the kind of internal

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125 Perhaps more importantly, although outside the purview of our discussion within this chapter, Levinas's language here also reveals a fundamental inability to account for harm and violation, a claim that other commentators have made. See Stacy Bautista Stacy and Adriaan Peperzak. "Unspoken Unity: I, Who Enjoy and Desire," in *Totality and Infinity at 50*, ed. by Scott Davidson and Diane Perpich, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 2012).
126 See the section "Enjoyment," Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 72-74.
127 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 73.
128 Ibid., 92.

otherness that he constructs with his conception of substitution. Levinas describes the psyche, along with the oneself [*soi-même*], as fundamentally non-self-coincident; furthermore, he explicitly states, "The psyche is the other in the same."[129] The psyche is the locus of relationship with the other insofar as the psyche is for-the-other."[130] Additionally, Levinas discusses subjectivity, the self, and the oneself [*soi-même*] in similar terms: he calls subjectivity "*the other in the same*," beyond classic tropes of intentionality and auto-affection, and characterizes the self as fundamentally responsible for the other and restlessly obsessed by it.[131] The other within that Levinas is granting here is precisely the other whose absence we bemoaned in *Totality and Infinity*. However, Levinas has merely extended alterity to the self and subjectivity, while the fundamental structure between same and other remains. Levinas allows otherness into the same or the self, but not into the ego. This bifurcation of self and ego recalls Levinas's early work, such as *Existence and Existents*, where he distinguished the self from the ego in order to show that interior life consisted in the distance and relation between the two.[132] There remains a disjunction between the ego—which seems to 'precede' the other—and the self, which seems to 'succeed' it. What might at first have looked like a breakdown of the distinction between true exterior alterity and false inward alterity in fact persists in *Otherwise than Being*, albeit in a narrower fashion: now, the former kind of alterity is granted to the self, but still not to the ego.

Furthermore, even if Levinas did not have a lingering emphasis on a self-enclosed ego that undermines his attempts at thinking self-relation otherwise than as merely apparent

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[129] Ibid., 112; see also 69.
[130] Ibid., 70.
[131] Ibid., 111. On the 'oneself' and the 'self', see pages 103-113.
[132] See, for instance, *Existence and Existents*, 16, 82-84, 89-90. "There is a duality in existence, an essential lack of simplicity. The ego has a self, in which it is not only reflected, but with which it is involved like a companion or a partner; this relationship is what is inwardness." Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 16.

alterity, the picture of otherness within the same in *Otherwise than Being* precisely lacks the playful and variegated qualities of the account he gives in *Totality and Infinity*. The two pages on *jouissance* in the later text serve merely to reinforce the existence of egoism, and lack the dimension of happiness he considers in his earlier work to be crucial for such *jouissance*. Gone are the rich examples of the play of the same in terms of digestion, loving life, thinking, fearing oneself, and surprising oneself; in their place are obsession, persecution, pain, and suffering. To be sure, these dimensions of self-relation are worth attending to; however, they are far from its dominant, let alone its only, dimensions.

Beyond the troubling connotations of the words Levinas uses in *Otherwise than Being* to describe the self's relation to the other, a more structural problem underlies his terminology. The idea of being 'hostage' to the other, as of those of obsession and substitution, install an originary passivity at the heart of the self that, when taken to be the primary dimension of subjectivity, falls into self-contradiction. The ideas of passivity and vulnerability are particularly popular among contemporary continental theorists in the tradition of response ethics, yet I do not see these ideas as the solution to the question of how to conceive of a poststructuralist notion of responsibility. While we will see later on in the dissertation that passivity and vulnerability are *part of* the story, the do not provide the basis of the self. In fact, when they are taken as such a basis (even if a kind of 'groundless ground), a problematic crypto-subjectivity emerges.

The problem with turning from the modern, active subject of agency to a postmodern, passive subject of vulnerability is that one is merely reversing the hierarchy while otherwise preserving a binary opposition. I have argued that the biggest problem for Levinas's conception of otherness is its *absolute* character. When Levinas theorizes otherness within the self in *Otherwise than Being*, he does not reconsider the absoluteness of this

otherness. Rather, he merely shows that the other (absolutely) enters into the domain of the same, even constituting it as the same, in a unilateral movement. (We will return to the question of unilaterality in Levinas in the final chapter of this dissertation.) Unlike Derrida's logic of contamination, which I will argue in the following chapter provides a salient way of accounting for otherness within the self while not doing away with selfhood altogether, Levinas's reversal of metaphysics leaves one with a would-be agential subject who is swept away, shattered, or destroyed by the (agential crypto-subject of the) other.

When rethought on the basis of 'genuine' alterity within the self, the broader 'play of the same' in *Totality and Infinity* could have preserved its variety while also having deepened its meaning in the wake of the abandonment of a true vs. false alterity distinction; instead, Levinas narrows the 'play of the same' to a hostage situation in which there is no hint of play. Levinas could have questioned the absolutizing character of otherness in order to resolve the issue of incoherence to which Derrida points vis à vis the question of infinity; instead, Levinas reverses the traditional metaphysical hierarchy of same and other while maintaining the binary opposition and preserving absoluteness of its terms. This leaves Levinas without a constructive account of the self who is able to respond to the other. We are left with a shattered subject of absolute passivity who is called upon by the absolute other—who has now taken on the role traditionally held by the modern, agential subject. I will argue in the coming chapters that Derrida's deconstruction offers a way to treat the question of the same and other that exceeds the binary oppositions of metaphysics while not doing away with sameness or otherness (a gesture that could be said to be in itself deeply metaphysical).

5. Conclusion

This chapter has comprised a sustained critique of the conception of the self one finds in Levinas through addressing the issues that arise from his strict distinction between the same and the other. I have claimed that the rigidity of this distinction does not hold up when we consider the binary between the infinite and the finite that constitutes its basic structure or Levinas's claim that the other is *absolutely* other. I have shown that Levinas's lack of attention to the internal otherness requisite for the forms of self-relation in interior life leaves his account of the self not only weak, but also unintelligible in that it provides no adequate explanation of how such a self could be called upon by the other. I have argued that, even in the text where Levinas explicitly formulates an account of internal alterity (partially in response to precisely the above criticisms), Levinas's theory of internal otherness is insufficient because it retains a minimal account of self-enclosed egoism, loses the attention to multifarious modes of self-relation that make his earlier work compelling, and does not reconsider the absolutization of otherness.

Levinas's conception of the self that relates to itself through *jouissance* and the various modes that this contains—such as digesting, loving life, surprising itself, frightening itself, and thinking—is something I will hold on to as we move to the following chapters. In Chapters 2 and 3, we will reconsider the relation of sameness and otherness and attend to dimensions of self-relation such as auto-affection, making decisions, the first-person perspective. Having argued against the idea that alterity within can be merely apparent, or strictly demarcated from 'external' alterity, Chapters 2 and 3 will closely attend to the alterity within from phenomenological and deconstructive perspectives. I will then turn to the issue of our relations with other beings, considering how the deconstruction of self-relation

offered in the subsequent two chapters sheds light on our intersubjective relations with other beings (Chapters 4 and 5).

2. Deconstructing Selfhood

"Again, it is a question of a relation to oneself as a relation to the other, the auto-affection of a *fort:da* which gives, takes, sends and destines itself, distances and approaches itself by its own step, the other's."

—Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card*[133]

Following Chapter 1, I have argued that otherness is constitutive of selfhood. One cannot reserve otherness for other beings, because selves emerge through relations to what is other to them, and remain necessarily caught in such relations. A self unmarked by otherness would be no self at all, for identity is a response to difference, and is inescapably haunted or contaminated by difference. In Chapter 1, we explored how Derrida deconstructs the binary between self and other and reveals that the self always already bears a trace of otherness. The self is finite, but cannot be a totality, because what is finite is precisely what is non-total. To follow Levinas in claiming that otherness is that which exceeds the domain of the same and resists representation or presence in fact requires rejecting Levinas's claim that otherness is not already present in the interiority of the self. Instead, traces of otherness always already constitute the self. In this chapter, we will explore these traces through considering the directions in which Derrida pursues the deconstruction of self and other. We will argue that Derrida allows us to think the self otherwise than it has been thought in the metaphysical tradition of substance and presence, but also than in the Levinasian and 'postmodern' traditions that have tended to underplay or eliminate the self. Deconstruction destabilizes metaphysical accounts of identity and difference and thus allows us to think the

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[133] Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 403.

relation between the self and what is other to it in a manner that not only illustrates the 'internal otherness' constitutive of the self, but also encourages us to think this beyond a metaphysics of presence that would be tempted to leave standing the binary between interiority and exteriority, self and other, identity and difference. This chapter will explore how, and in what manner, deconstruction encourages a thinking of the self as made up of 'traces,' such that the sameness or self-identity of the self is not dissolved, but is shown to be the product of the movement of *différance*.

My argument in this chapter will depend on a picture of the self that is non-substantial, non-dualistic, and embodied. The self is not a substance, whether material or immaterial. Nor is it an object. It is not *knowable*, even though what we generally call 'self-knowledge' is indispensable for reflective forms of self-relation (as we will see in our analysis of the decision at the end of this chapter). Perhaps most importantly, this view of the self will depend on a rethinking of the nature of sameness and otherness, or identity and difference: specifically, we will be following Derrida in showing that an attention to internal otherness is much aided by thinking it in terms of *différance*, wherein 'difference' writ large, in the singular, becomes displaced in favor of a multiplicity of differences. There is not *one* difference or *one kind* of difference, and difference is not absolute or infinite.

What can the work of Derrida, so noticeably silent on the question of subjectivity and so committed to a deconstruction that is not reducible to concepts and neatly packaged theories, offer a theory of selfhood? After all, Derrida claims in the 1989 interview "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject" that he has "rarely spoken of the 'subject' or of 'subjectivity,'" and states that he finds it useful to "forget the word to some extent," or at least to "rearrange it" so that it is no longer presumed to be at the center of its own

discourse.[134] Derrida is a surprising resource for a theory of selfhood, given that he has typically been taken to have nothing to say about it. However, in this chapter, I would like to suggest that, in a sense, Derrida does nothing *other* than deconstruct the binary between self and other throughout his writings. For Derrida, a self-identical, sovereign subject is a metaphysical myth. Any self or subject is contaminated by alterity. Derrida's work is explicitly concerned throughout his work in the 1960s and 1970s with deconstructing subjectivity—that is, with deconstructing that model of selfhood or consciousness that hopelessly reiterates the metaphysics of presence and overlooks the self-differentiating and necessarily deferred nature of the self. While much work has been done on Derrida's deconstruction of subjectivity in this period, and he is often associated with the 'death of the subject' that characterizes French thought at the time (particularly with thinkers such as Foucault and Deleuze), his later discussions of it are not sufficiently considered. Moreover, I think that from the beginning to the end of his career, Derrida articulates a deconstruction of the self or subject that does *not* amount to an elimination or disavowal of it, a point that has been widely neglected.

On my view, deconstruction is an exceptionally rich resource for conceiving of a self-relation that is not based on a metaphysically present subject. All too often, Derrida is quickly dismissed—or praised—because of the deconstruction of subjectivity that his work thematizes, at the expense of the multitude of references to a differential mode of self-relation and its relation to ethics.[135] Thus, the aim of this chapter is twofold: 1) to

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[134] Derrida, "Eating Well," 105.

[135] See, for instance, Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1992); Peter V. Zima, *Subjectivity and Identity*: *Between Modernity and Postmodernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Bryan Reynolds, *Transversal Subjects: From Montaigne to Deleuze after Derrida From Montaigne to Deleuze after Derrida* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Thea Bellou, *Derrida's Deconstruction of the Subject: Writing, Self, and Other* (Bern: Peter

demonstrate that Derrida has much to say about selfhood, and 2) to argue that what Derrida has to say about selfhood helps us to understand the constitutive otherness of the self in a manner that singularly avoids a number of misunderstandings that might emerge from a theory of selfhood considers otherness as constitutive of the self. Current debates about selfhood, responsibility, and otherness in continental philosophy and beyond can benefit immeasurably from turning to Derrida, who might at first seem like an unlikely 'champion' of self-relation.

As mentioned briefly above, Derrida did not consider himself as having had much to say on subjectivity at all, let alone the 'death of the subject.' At the same time, one can find references to the relation of self and other throughout his work. In "'Eating Well,'" Derrida does acknowledge the possibility of a deconstructive account of subjectivity. This account would be one to "reconstruct a discourse around a subject that would not be pre-deconstructive, around a subject that would no longer include a figure of mastery of self, of adequation to self, center and origin of the world."[136] This would instead "define the subject rather as a finite experience of nonidentity to self" which "comes from the other," and would be paradoxical and aporetic.[137] Derrida does not go on to say much more in his work about the deconstructive possibilities of the word 'subject.' He does, however, very frequently examine the alterity constitutive of the self throughout his works, which is a dimension of his writings that has not often been explored in secondary literature. In a number of texts throughout his career, from *Voice and Phenomenon* to *Rogues,* Derrida troubles

Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2013); Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005).

[136] Derrida, "Eating Well," 103. The term 'origin of the world' here will prove instrumental to Chapter 4 when we consider intersubjectivity, for Derrida makes a number of seemingly affirmative references to this term, which he associates with the Husserlian theory of the ego and alter ego.

[137] Ibid., 103.

traditional accounts of subjectivity and reveals instead a kind of self that is riven by *différance* and which has the structure of a trace, of a spectral presence that lies outside the binaries of presence/absence and life/death.

Moreover, in a sense, the entire work of deconstruction consists in showing that there is otherness in what passes for being the same. Every member of the series of that terms Derrida favors in his writings, terms which he considers 'quasi-transcendental' or 'non-synonymous substitutions,' are precisely terms that gesture toward the impossibility of selfhood figured as pure self-identity and self-presence.[138] It follows from Derrida's concern with showing the cracks within metaphysical thinking, which represents a totalizing project of absolute knowledge, that Derrida does not confidently posit a new 'master term' that is presumed to be fully self-identical or absolutely explanatory. Rather, Derrida posits general terms, or pulls them from the texts about which he writes, only to displace them in other writings with other terms that gesture at 'the same' thing. This tactic itself serves to disrupt a notion of 'sameness,' not in favor of absolute difference, but rather in favor of the contamination of sameness by difference. In this sense, Derrida's use of 'quasi-transcendental' terms or 'non-synonymous substitutions' at once do much in the way of performing the very destabilizing of identity and difference that concerns us here, even as they make it challenging to speak 'generally' about the matters at issue by the same token. These terms, which include but are not limited to *différance*, the trace, writing, iterability,

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[138] Derrida first uses the term 'quasi-transcendental' in *Glas,* (Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey and Richard Rand [Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986]). For considerations of the term in Derrida's work, see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), and Geoffrey Bennington, "Derridabase," in *Jacques Derrida,* by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993). The phrase 'non-synonymous substitutions' appears, for instance, in the essay "*Différance*," in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

pharmakon, autoimmunity, hospitality, and mourning, *all* draw attention to a self or self-relation that is contaminated by otherness.[139] Yet at the same time, because the 'quasi-transcendental' terms found in Derrida are not theories, structures—even 'words' or 'concepts'—that one would take in their generality, universality, or sovereignty and then 'apply' to particulars—in this case, the self—the task at hand has pitfalls at every turn.

A crucial touchstone for considering the question of selfhood in Derrida's work is Pleshette DeArmitt's recent book *The Right to Narcissism: The Case for an Im-possible Self-Love.* Here, DeArmitt draws attention to Derrida's above-quoted acknowledgment in "Eating Well" that there remains the possibility of a deconstructive account of subjectivity, and claims that such a redefinition of the subject or self is in fact perceptible—even integral—to Derrida's thinking already. She lays claim to a "Derridean philosophy of the 'self'" based on Derrida's remarks about narcissism and mourning.[140] Such a 'philosophy of the self' could not constitute an attempt to offer a comprehensive account denoting a clear set of features that characterize anything to be termed a 'self' and to oppose it to what would be a non-self. It would not even be *a philosophy* in the classical sense of the term, given that deconstruction will have called into question the self-identity of philosophy as such. Rather, and to choose just one of a number of possible ways of conceiving it, a "Derridean philosophy of the 'self'" would have to be a hauntology (a term to which we will attend later in this chapter) rather than an ontology. It would have to attend to the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence—and the concomitant hierarchical opposition between presence and absence—that characterizes philosophies of the self in the history of Western thought. It would have

139 Michael Naas avows this, stating, "deconstruction has perhaps never been anything but a deconstruction of the *autos.*" Michael Naas, *Derrida from Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 126.
140 Pleshette DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism: The Case for an Im-possible Self-Love* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 120.

to think the self otherwise than as a pure self-identity or self-presence. The self could not be considered a substantial entity or a given identity.[141] Nor could such an approach to selfhood consider the self as preexisting the relation to the other, as we have seen in Chapter 1.[142] In this chapter, it will be our task to outline a deconstructive account of selfhood. I will seek to show that, far from having little or nothing to say on the subject, Derrida offers many resources for an approach to the self that destabilizes and renders problematic many dominant views of, and debates about, selfhood.

A particularly useful term for introducing the deconstructive way of thinking about the self as constituted by otherness is *contamination*. Contamination, a word Derrida uses as early on as his 1954 doctoral thesis, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, gestures toward the way that entities, concepts, or experiences are never pure, separate, or self-standing. Rather, they are contaminated by what is other to them.[143] In the 1990 preface to his doctoral thesis, Derrida reflects on his decades-earlier use of the term contamination: "A law of differential contamination imposes its logic from one end of the book to the other; and I ask myself why the very word 'contamination' has not stopped imposing itself on me from thence forward."[144] What does this term or 'law' of contamination indicate? For

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[141] As Derrida states in *Monolingualism of the Other*, "an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures." Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin,* trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 28.

[142] Derrida claims in *On the Name* that "no relation to self can be sure of preceding…a relation to the other." Jacques Derrida, *On the Name,* ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 37.

[143] Derrida first uses this word in passing in the original 1954 introduction to his doctoral thesis (Jacques Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, trans. Marian Hobson [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003], xl). The term resurfaces with greater emphasis in *Of Grammatology* (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], 34). For a helpful overview of contamination in Derrida, see Dino Galetti's recent article "Re-Thinking What We Think About Derrida," *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 10:2 (2010): 43-60.

[144] Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis*, xv. If 'initial contamination of the simple' serves as a kind of generalized 'law' in Derrida's work, it also suggests the contamination of the general by the specific,

Derrida, "It is always a question of an originary complication of the origin, of an initial contamination of the simple, of an inaugural divergence that no analysis could *present*."[145] With respect to our purposes here, contamination offers a way to think about the relation between selfhood and otherness that neither absolutely separates them off from each other nor dissolves a distinction between them. Contamination provides a way of thinking about the relation between self and other that does not reduce them to a gray area or blurred line, but rather maintains the identity of sameness and otherness in difference—and does not only maintain it, but is in fact what produces the identity of each. Contamination, then, would precede sameness and otherness. The idea that the self is 'contaminated' by otherness does much in the way of reframing the relation of same and other on other terms than as a choice between a black and white distinction between self and other and an undifferentiated gray area between them. Contamination suggests that self and other receive their identities in relation to each other without being reduced to an undifferentiated unity, dissolved completely, or hypostatized into absolutes. The stakes and terms of this insight will become illuminated in the rest of this chapter.

Contamination also helps us to clarify a contention of Derrida's that will prove central to this chapter and to this dissertation overall: namely, that the condition for the possibility of any entity, concept, or experience is also the condition for its impossibility. This idea, apparently so at odds with classical logic, is that the condition for the possibility of something is at the same time what renders it impossible *as pure*. Purity denotes an absence of contamination by anything outside of itself; it implies self-constitution, full presence, and

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and therefore the unsatisfactoriness of upholding contamination as a 'general law' without attending to the deconstruction of the term itself. We will return to the deconstruction of the general by the specific or singular when discussing *différance* in the following section.

[145] Ibid., xv.

the essence of an '*as such*.' Whatever makes something possible is what makes it impossible *as pure*, on Derrida's view, and he shows this throughout his career in a variety of compelling ways (a number of which will concern us in the following pages). He articulates this challenging argument in particularly cogent terms in the well-known essay "Signature Event Context": here, he writes regarding the effects of the signature (which presumes self-presence but in fact works by operating in the absence of its signer) that the "condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity."[146] Here, we see that the condition of impossibility is the impossibility of *rigorous purity*. What makes the effects of the signature possible is at the same time what makes them impossible *as the same* apart from any other, from any impurity, from any contamination. This is the case, for Derrida for any effects or experience, concept or entity, anything whatsoever.

Another way of putting this double movement of the condition of impossibility as the condition of possibility and vice versa is in terms of 'threat' and 'chance.' Derrida pairs these two terms at various points in order to suggest that what threatens the self-identity of any being, concept, or identity is also what gives it its chance.[147] In the essay "As If It Were Possible, 'Within Such Limits,'" he writes: "Always, im-possibility—the possible as impossible—is linked to an irreducible divisibility that affects the very essence of the possible…For this *im*-possibility opens its possibility, it leaves a trace, both a chance and a

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[146] Derrida, *Margins*, 327.
[147] See, for instance, Derrida, *The Post Card*; Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*: *Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 53; Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 174; Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine,* trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). explorations of the chance/threat structure, see Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Naas, *Derrida from Now On*, 134; David Wills, *Matchbook*, *Essays in Deconstruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 48-49; Samir Haddad, *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 75-77.

threat, *in* what it makes possible."[148] The 'possible as impossible' refers to the idea that anything is possible only insofar as it is impossible *as pure*, as self-enclosed and self-identical, *as such*.[149] In this sense, what provides the 'chance' for anything also threatens it with what is other to it. Otherness provides both the threat and the chance of the self.

In contemporary philosophy, discourses on otherness and subjectivity today parrot facile versions of deconstruction while in effect repeating the very gestures of the metaphysics of presence that they fail to challenge. While, for Derrida, the task is not to escape metaphysics, for this would be naïve and impossible, one must attend to the cracks within metaphysics and solicit it from within (in the Latin sense of *sollicitare* that Derrida favors for describing Heidegger's relation to metaphysics).[150] Attention to the fact that the self is not purely self-identical, self-same, or self-constituting by no means amounts to a denial of the self. Nor does it amount to a joyful affirmation of the 'split subject,' a term which often attracts attention and alliance in contemporary continental philosophy without signifying much of anything at all. Deconstruction encourages us to think about the self as contaminated by otherness in a rigorous and compelling way. The self, on this view, is not pure, substantial, transparent, or static. Yet it will not suffice to conclude naïvely from this that the self is a pure play of difference in a self-undoing or ecstatic movement. Rather, a key insight offered by the work of Derrida is that the contamination of the self by otherness is *also what makes the self a self.* The condition for the possibility of anything, in deconstruction, is also the condition of its impossibility (as pure). In this chapter, we will be exploring this

[148] Derrida, *Paper Machine*, 88.

[149] It also refers to the idea that what is *impossible* goes beyond the conscious, calculable horizon of what seems 'possible' in the present, and that what goes beyond this horizon is in fact *the only* thing that is 'possible.' This other way of considering the possible/impossible structure will be treated later in this chapter when we discuss the decision.

[150] See Derrida, *Margins*, 21; Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: La Question de l'Être et l'Histoire: Cours à l'ENS-Ulm 1964-65* (Paris: Galilée, 2013), 209.

condition of possibility as condition of impossibility further, and showing that the self-identity of the subject is a product of *différance*, and the radical conclusions to which that leads us.

This chapter will comprise three sections, each of which is organized around two or more terms. In the first, I will treat two of Derrida's 'quasi-transcendental' terms in order to set the stage for a what the self might look like when considered deconstructively: *différance* and the trace.[151] Then, I will point out a series of other terms or places in Derrida's writing that also gesture toward the themes of selfhood, self-identity, and self-other relation, treating each of these briefly as a kind of road map of places where one might go in order to pursue these questions at greater length in Derrida's work (some of which commentators have already explored). Finally, I will turn to two other terms frequently used by Derrida that will more specifically or concretely highlight features of the self considered in its deconstruction: auto-affection and the decision. We will be considering the temporal, embodied dimensions of the otherness within the self most directly in this final section. The argument of this chapter will appear relatively exegetical, and draw copiously from direct quotation of Derrida. The reason for this is that so little work has been done on the theme of selfhood in Derrida that there is something of a contribution merely in pointing out that Derrida has something to say about it, and in what way. The proliferation of terms and citations in this chapter will keep us relatively close to the numerous terms we consider, but I hope that their ramifications for a theory of selfhood will be sufficiently clear.

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[151] This is not *when considered from a deconstructive standpoint*, for deconstruction would precisely be a deconstruction of the self-identity or presence of any standpoint as such, nor is this *when deconstructed*, for the self is not something 'to be deconstructed,' a structure one could dismantle, but a concept at which deconstruction is always already at work, as Derrida would say of any concept in general and of each concept, singularly, each time. This is the extent to which any deconstruction is an auto-deconstruction: but, as we will see, the self-identity of the *auto* will precisely be at issue, making any auto-deconstruction also an auto-hetero-deconstruction.

1. Différance *and the Trace*

The terms '*différance*' and 'trace' are two of the most recognizable terms to emerge from deconstruction. In this section, I will treat each of them in order to illuminate the nexus of issues that crystallize around them and which allow us to consider the relation between sameness and otherness figured by deconstruction. As with all of the terms on which Derrida alights, the meanings of these two terms are not self-enclosed or encapsulated into something that could constitute a recognizable 'theory.' If they are privileged, it is only in a temporary and provisional manner, making these terms 'quasi-transcendental' rather than transcendental or absolute. The difficulty with this is that to describe these terms is already doing a certain injustice to them, and also that so much of what we have said about these terms can equally be said of other terms that Derrida uses. We will see in the following section that there are a number of other terms that one could use to describe the structure or phenomenon which we are trying to make manifest. However, I draw attention to the two terms '*différance*' and the 'trace' here because they do much in the way of revealing the destabilization of the metaphysical opposition of sameness and otherness, or identity and difference, that concerns us here. One could see this section, then, as a 'formalization' of deconstruction that will then be considered in its 'application' in the final section of this chapter, even as the deconstruction of such a schema is implied by the very terms at issue.

1a. Différance

If we abolish the black and white distinction between self and other, what we get is *not* a mere gray area. Many critics of the work of Derrida accuse him of doing no more than overturning binaries or blurring the lines between them. This view is grossly misguided,

overlooking that which is most potent, challenging, and repeatedly affirmed in Derrida's thought. In laying out the insufficiency of any binary and demonstrating that the two terms of any binary are mutually contaminating, Derrida is not at all arguing that the two terms are indistinguishable or the same. Rather, in revealing that black and white opposition does not do justice to whatever is at issue, Derrida demonstrates a proliferation of differences. When it comes the question of selfhood, Derrida shows that, instead of one kind of absolute difference that we would simply extend to the self, a coherent account of difference must be one of *differences* in the plural. While internal otherness is genuine (as we argued in Chapter 1), it is not simply the same otherness as that of other beings, because *otherness is not singular*. Otherness is not absolute or uniform. The multiplicity of differences is figured by the term '*différance*.'

To begin with, it is necessary to note that everything we say about *différance* will fall into the trap of suggesting a presence, self-identity, and conceptuality the assuredness of which it is the merit of *différance* to disrupt. For Derrida, "*différance* remains a metaphysical name," even as *différance* is not a universal concept, sovereign authority, or general meta-structure that can be 'applied' to anything.[152] In the strictest sense, *différance is not*, does not exist, does not even mark a potential presence.[153] This being said, we may still proceed to make some general remarks about *différance*, granted we take into account that *différance* is not immune to *différance*, that its status as a self-identical term with certain effects is under erasure, and that our way of describing it will inevitably posit it as a metaphysical term with presence and identity and thus do violence to that which *différance* encourages us to think.

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[152] Derrida, *Margins*, 26.
[153] Ibid., 20-21.

Différance is what produces differences. As such, it is also what produces identities. Identities, for Derrida, are constituted through a play of differences: under the influence of Saussurian linguistics, we may say that identity is that which is produced through a system of marks in which one term is identified by its difference from every other term. In this sense, *différance* is the condition for the possibility of identity and differences. In the seminal essay "Différance," Derrida states, "*Différance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name 'origin' no longer suits it."[154] If *différance* is the origin of differences, it is an origin that is split by *différance* from the start, and therefore not a recognizable, traditionally metaphysical term of 'origin.' *Différance* is, more properly speaking, a movement that produces differences. As Derrida states in *Positions:* "the movement of *différance,* as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, is the common root of all the oppositional concepts that mark our language…*différance* is also the production, if it can still be put this way, of these differences" that are the condition of signification and structure."[155] *Différance* is the double movement of differing and deferral, at once spatial and temporal, through which differences are produced.

Différance is nothing outside the play of differences, and yet it is not merely reducible to these differences: while differences, in the plural, are in principle potentially present and countable, *différance* more clearly marks a resistance to any temporal and spatial positioning that would make *present* individual differences. Differences, thought through *différance*, could never be gathered up and analyzed, but rather mark what is necessarily absent, unconscious, or irreducibly other.[156] Thus, *différance* urges a rethinking of difference not merely as multiple

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[154] Ibid., 11.
[155] Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass and Christopher Norris (London: Continuum, 2002), 9.
[156] This would also be the distinction between *différance* and polysemia on which Derrida insists in his work on writing and language. On the idea that *différance* is nothing outside the play of differences, see Bennington, "Derridabase," 84.

differences, but as other to the very logic of singularity and plurality that limits philosophical treatments of identity and difference by remaining caught within the expectation of presence. While *différance* is what makes possible effects of difference and identity, it is not a *force* that does so, nor is it a structure—both of these would be 'present' entities. In Geoffrey Bennington's terms, *différance* is "not a force but what makes force possible while dividing it—there are only forces and differences in the plural."[157] *Différance* marks an interval or spacing between identities, instants, and entities that produces or differentiates while signaling that this production or differentiation is not representable or present.

If *différance* makes differences and identities possible, it also renders them impossible. Because identities are constructed in and through the play of *différance*, they are never pure or independent of what is other to them. *Différance* is a double movement of producing and barring identities. Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*, "Differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible."[158] A common misinterpretation of *différance* takes it to be a mere play of differences that rejects identity and all of the effects of identity (subjectivity, presence, consciousness, sameness, and the like). This could not be further from the truth. For Derrida, *différance* produces the effects of identity (subjectivity, presence, consciousness, sameness, and the like): to say that these effects do not exist in rigorous purity is not to say that they do not exist at all.

Even more strongly than this, *différance* cannot be opposed to identity, for *différance* is 'prior' to opposition. *Différance*, as Derrida puts it in *For What Tomorrow*, "is not a distinction, an essence, or an opposition, but a movement of spacing, a 'becoming-space' of time, a 'becoming-time' of space, a reference to alterity, to a heterogeneity that is not first a matter

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[157] Bennington, "Derridabase," 84.
[158] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 143.

of opposition."[159] All well and good: *différance* is not opposition, not a force, not a concept, not a master signifier, not anything that could be encapsulated through self-identity or presence. Yet, a crucial and frequently overlooked consequence of this is that *différance* is not contrary to sameness: after the passage from *For What Tomorrow* quoted above, Derrida states: "Hence a certain inscription of the same, which is not the identical, *as* differ*a*nce."[160] Thus, *différance* is not absolute alterity, distinguished or cut off from sameness. Instead, *différance* is a certain inscription of the same. A consequence of the non-oppositionality of *différance,* Derrida strikingly claims, is that *différance* is "a reaffirmation of the same, an economy of the same in its relation to the other, which does not require that the same, in order to exist, be frozen or fixated in a distinction or in a system of dual oppositions."[161]

Différance, then, not only is *not* opposed to sameness, but also is itself *another name for sameness*. A certain deconstructive affirmation of sameness runs throughout Derrida's work, and stems from the notion that the same is produced as the same through repetition (which indicates that the same is the same *as other* to itself). Sameness here is to be distinguished from a traditional conception of identity as pure unity: Derrida follows Heidegger in this respect, whose lecture *Identity and Difference* shows that what is the same is produced through a relation of two things that are considered 'the same' (A=A), and that identity or sameness is therefore a *relation* that therefore cannot be rigorously opposed to difference.[162] In Derrida's terms, the repetition of the same produces the same, and this distinguishes

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[159] Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow…A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 21.
[160] Ibid., 21.
[161] Ibid., 21.
[162] See Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*. Heidegger states (25), "Sameness implies the relation of 'with,' that is, a mediation, a connection, a synthesis…it is no longer possible for thinking to represent the unity of identity as mere sameness, and to disregard the mediation that prevails in unity."

sameness from what generally goes by the term 'identity.'[163] He notes this distinction, for instance, in "Plato's Pharmacy," in terms of the Greek word *pharmakon*, which means both medicine and poison and comes in this text to figure as a substitute for the term '*différance*.'[164] Here, he states that the *pharmakon* "refers back to a same that is not the identical," and later states that "the *pharmakon* is the *same* precisely because it has no identity. And the same (is) in supplement. Or in différance. In writing."[165] The *pharmakon* and *différance*, the supplement and writing—all of these non-synonymous substitutions that Derrida uses to figure the difference within sameness *also* figure sameness. Yet sameness here is to be thought of as non-identity. Derrida constructs a similar formulation in the interview "Implications," when he follows up a claim that *différance* produces oppositional things and concepts by stating, "*différance* is also the element of the *same* (to be distinguished from the identical) in which these oppositions are announced."[166]

This affirmation of *différance* as sameness is utterly foreign to the majority of critiques—in addition to many affirmative appraisals—of Derrida. It has profound consequences for our treatment of selfhood. Arguing that the self is constituted or marked by otherness is not to dissolve the self—even the self as selfsame—altogether. Rather, it is to show that the self as selfsame is never 'pure,' sovereign, or cut off from what is other to it.

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[163] Derrida figures the difference within sameness by holding onto the term 'sameness' and distinguishing it from the term 'identity'—this aligns with the spirit of Heidegger's claims about identity and difference, but not the letter of his text, in that Heidegger is interested in rescuing the term 'identity' from its metaphysical characterizations, whereas Derrida is content to leave that term aside and rescue only 'sameness.'

[164] "The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the differance of difference." Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 127.

[165] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 127, 169. Trans. modified.

[166] Derrida, *Positions*, 9. On this note, see also "Ellipsis" in *Writing and Difference*, where Derrida writes of the "exit from the identical into the same," and where translator Alan Bass cross-references the Heidegger lecture we have mentioned. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 295.

While we have noted that Derrida does not explicitly treat the philosophical topic of selfhood much at all in his work, even if his work constantly orbits around it, he does speak of subjectivity in terms of *différance* in a number of places. Unsurprisingly, given the generalizability of *différance*, Derrida considers subjectivity to be an effect of *différance* in the system of its play. He writes: "Subjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*."[167] More specifically, *différance* "confirms that the subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of *différance*, that the subject is constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral."[168] The subject is an effect of *différance*, and is unthinkable outside of its economy. The subject is not independent, autonomous, or self-constituting; rather, it is split open from the start by *différance*, which names the differing and deferring movement that at once produces the self and forever prevents it from being pure, isolated, or sovereign.[169]

Inasmuch as the subject is an effect of *différance*, which we have seen indicates both alterity and sameness, self-relation is inscribed in *différance*. It finds both its possibility and impossibility in *différance*. The self is able to relate to itself because its otherness to itself introduces the possibility of relation: there would be no self-relation if the self were purely

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[167] Derrida, *Positions*, 28. A similar formulation of this claim, but with respect to Husserl specifically, is found in *Voice and Phenomenon*: "This movement of différance does not supervene upon a transcendental subject. The movement of différance produces the transcendental subject." Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 71.

[168] Derrida, *Positions*, 28.

[169] As Derrida puts it in *Voice and Phenomenon* (59): "Must we not say that the concept of pure solitude—and of the monad in the phenomenological sense—is *split open* by its own origin, by the very condition of self-presence: 'time' rethought beginning from the différance in auto-affection, beginning from the identity of identity and non-identity in the 'same' of the *im selben Augenblick*? Husserl has himself evoked the analogy between the relation to the alter ego and the relation to the other (past) present such that it is constituted in the absolute actuality of the living present (*Cartesian Meditations*, § 52)."

self-identical. Yet, this otherness prevents self-relation from being separate or uncontaminated by relation to the other. Furthermore, the fact that *différance* is not merely the name for a metaphysical form of otherness (as other presence, as direct opposite to identity, etc.) indicates that the otherness within the self is not merely 'enclosed' or 'encapsulated' within it as a part of a whole, but rather that this otherness escapes or exceeds the self so fundamentally that the self cannot be thought of as entity, presence, or substance. Here, it is worth recalling that alterity escapes presentation—and escapes the present by marking a temporality that is not adequately figured by 'past-presents' and 'future-presents.' Considered in this way, self-relation *is différance*. Derrida says as much in "Eating Well," where he states, "The relation to self, in this situation, can only be *différance*, that is to say alterity, or trace."[170] Self-relation is *différance*, alterity, trace. Everything we will be saying about self-relation in this dissertation follows from such a claim.

In her book *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida*, Peggy Kamuf points out that, since his early writings on Husserl, Derrida has been concerned with questioning the space of interiority that is traditionally presented as an image of subjectivity. Such a model of interiority, Kamuf argues, "has traditionally supposed the condition of an intrapsychic relation that remains between me and myself, consciously or unconsciously."[171] *Différance*

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[170] Derrida, "Eating Well," 100. Intriguingly, this claim is found within a discussion of responsibility and obligation, gesturing toward the relation between the deconstruction of selfhood and ethics. The "in this situation" to which Derrida refers is relatively ambiguous: in the published version of the interview, it apparently refers to the *Zusage* in Heidegger that Derrida has explored in *Of Spirit* (Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question,* trans. Geoffrey Bennington [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989]), and which is "responsible without autonomy," thus interrupting a traditional discourse of subjectivity. In the original draft of the interview, however, the sentences quoted is preceded by the remark: "Pas d'identité, d'identité à soi, de sujet ou de qui que ce soit sans cette dislocation et la dissymétrie ouvertes par cette pré-affirmation responsable." Jacques Derrida Papers. MS-C01. Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California.

[171] Peggy Kamuf, *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 13.

undercuts the suppositions of this model, implying that the relation between 'me and myself' introduces alterity into its heart from the beginning. In contrast with the traditional model, which presupposes the "immediate, unmediated presence of a self to itself in 'solitary mental life,'" Kamuf shows that, for Derrida, "self-relation is possible and interiorizable as an effect only through differing from and deferring of some interior 'non-selfness,' that is, only through what he then began to refer to as differance."[172] The "interior 'non-selfness'" to which Kamuf refers is that towards which *différance* gestures. We might say that intrapsychic self-relation is already extrapsychic (or interpsychic). As we will see more fully in our discussion of auto-affection later in this chapter, self-relation is never removed from an other-relation; self-relation is a self-other-relation. This forecloses the possibility of a pure intrapsychic space of interiority or self-presence.[173]

Différance also forecloses the possibility that consciousness is an ultimate starting point, absolute ground, or unified origin. This is crucial to keep in mind for Chapters 3 and 4, where we will be considering the phenomenological first-person perspective followed by intersubjectivity. Derrida writes in *Voice and Phenomenon*, "différance is unthinkable starting from consciousness, that is, starting from presence, or starting simply from the opposite of presence, absence or non-consciousness."[174] We do not *start with* consciousness as irreducible and then derive *différance* from it: this should be clear from the foregoing remarks. At the same time, this quote equally guards against the temptation to think *différance* starting simply from absence or the unconscious. This would be an equally metaphysical move, tantamount

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172 Kamuf, *To Follow*, 13.
173 A consequence of this is that 'inner monologue' is never an inner soliloquy, but is already addressed to an imagined other—and ultimately, is an inner dialogue. Exploring this consequence fully will have to be deferred for a future project, but we will bring up a related idea briefly later in this chapter apropros of auto-affection.
174 Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 75.

to the mere preference for one term of an oppositional binary over another. Both consciousness/presence and unconsciousness/absence must be thought from *différance* rather than the other way around. *Différance* is *their* origin: and yet, we have seen that it is a split origin, a non-origin, in that it interrupts metaphysical pretensions to the originary as pure presence or unmoved principle of generation.

While *différance* signals the impossibility of consciousness, presence, or subjectivity as pure origin, it does not eliminate these altogether. These three terms are sometimes encapsulated by Derrida in the term 'here-now.' We will see in the following chapters that the 'here-now' becomes a way to think about the first-person perspective of phenomenology and the starting point for relating to other beings. Derrida does not *deny* that there is a here-now—that presence, consciousness, subjectivity exist—but rather denies that it exists as purely selfsame. In fact, he claims in *Specters of Marx* that there would be no *différance* without the here-now. "No differ*a*nce without alterity, no alterity without singularity, no singularity without here-now," he states; those who have thought that différance *only* means delay or deferral have overlooked the manner by which "in the incoercible differ*a*nce the here-now unfurls."[175] *Différance* is a way to think about sameness, selfhood, and the here-now, rather than being hopelessly opposed to them. The tendency to consider *différance* as wholly antithetical to the discourse of selfhood and subjectivity has resulted in an oversimplification of deconstruction that suggests that Derrida is merely reversing a traditional metaphysical opposition, despite Derrida's repeated remarks throughout his work that this is not the case.

Différance is a generalized term that suggests the singularity of differences. That is, it formulates the law that each difference is different. Because *différance,* as we have seen, *is*

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[175] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*: *The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37.

nothing, but rather exists by virtue of its relation to identities and differences, it not only cannot be considered a concept or sovereign master-word, but also cannot be generalized or universalized; or, rather, its generalization or universalization would precisely be *as* particular. Bennington suggests that, because *différance* does not 'exist' as such, but rather *is* only through these relations of differences and forces, "It follows that in its apparent generality it is always singular, being nothing outside *these* forces and *these* differences."[176] This generality that is never 'purely' general, but which instead puts into general terms that which is in each case singular, is itself a consequence of the 'logic' of *différance*. Far from placing Derrida in an awkward position of performative self-contradiction (something of which he was sometimes accused but which he did not find to be a trenchant or interesting accusation), the paradoxical singularity of what deconstruction is forced constantly to generalize is itself figured by the term '*différance*.'[177] The movement of *différance* is in each case finite, specific, and determinate (deconstruction is not an affirmation of indeterminacy, we will see later in this chapter when we consider undecidability). To consider it as having a generalizable, universalizable structure would be to unify or gather it together, which is precisely that against which *différance* warns. Such an idea would absolutize *différance* and to fall back into considering difference or otherness as *one*.

With this attention to *différance* and the proliferation of differences in mind, we are able to see how a recognition of internal otherness does not simply abolish a difference between oneself and other beings. It is not as if we are simply showing that the *same* otherness is present within the self as is present when one encounters another being. What is unified is the same. If otherness were unified, it would really just be the same. And if the

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176 Bennington, "Derridabase," 84.
177 In *Monolingualism of the Other*, for instance, Derrida calls the accusation of performative self-contradiction aa "puerile weapon." Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 4.

same were the other, we would fall into logical incoherence (as we saw in Chapter 1). Thus, the other is not other to me *like* I am to myself, because otherness is itself multiple.

Another consequence of this is that otherness is not a matter of degree. We cannot say that I am somewhat other to myself, and other beings are *more other* to me than I am to myself. This way of thinking about the problem is insufficient because it would promote a continuum of a singular form of otherness, when in fact what is in question is irreducible difference. Singular difference; difference each time; differences inscribed within a system of *différance* in which differences cannot be counted, reduced, or measured, but in which identity and differences are both produced as effects of *différance*.

The idea that *différance* proliferates, rather than being a singular or 'same' difference writ large, is borne out in Derrida's later work apropos of his increasing attention to the non-human animal. Derrida claims that the difference between the human and the animal, or the 'beast' [*la bête*] as he sometimes puts it, is not on a continuum of difference. There is a gulf between the human and the animal: not because animals are inferior beings, or non-beings, but rather because *différance* suggests a gulf between each 'singularity' that is itself only produced in and through difference. The difference between oneself and others, others and other others, human and nonhuman others, and the like, is not a matter of degree. This is what we might be tempted to call a 'central' feature of deconstruction, if it did not precisely gesture toward the instability of any 'centering': Derrida continually shows that two terms in an opposition are not, in fact, as opposed as one might think. They are *closer* to each other than they seem (e.g. speech and writing), and yet this closeness does not mean that the two terms are not distinguishable. Rather, deconstruction suggests the proliferation of differences. Far from eliminating difference, as Derrida writes of difference in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, "it is a matter, on the contrary, of taking that difference into account

within the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life forms, and of doing that without reducing this differentiated and multiple difference, in a conversely massive and homogenizing manner."[178] The idea that differences proliferate, such that absolute difference writ large is a misguided concept, is part and parcel of the idea that *différance* is different 'each time'—that is to say, of *différance* as a way of thinking singularity.

The singularity of *différance* is associated with its finitude. Just when we might be tempted to think *différance* as an *infinite* movement, insofar as it marks a proliferation of differences that are not in principle countable or present, Derrida reminds us that this is a misunderstanding. "*Infinite différance is finite*," he writes in *Voice and Phenomenon*.[179] The presence of the present is infinitely deferred, but at the same time this deferral only appears through the possibility of one's own death, which is the hallmark of finitude: as a result, infinite *différance* only appears in finitude.[180] We cannot with confidence say here, however, that infinite *différance appears* as finite but is *in reality* infinite: for, as we have seen, *différance* is nothing outside of the chain of its singular instantiations (and even to call these 'instantiations' is misleading, because it makes it sound as if *différance* shows up as such, as present, at various moments).

If *différance is not*, then we cannot establish some sort of existence for it outside of its 'appearances,' nor does it ever 'appear' as such within the realm of phenomenality. It appears as marking what is beyond presence or appearance. For this reason, infinite *différance* is finite. This line of argument aligns nicely with the question of the relation of infinity and alterity considered in the previous chapter. There, we showed that Levinas's affirmation of the other

[178] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 126.
[179] Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 87. For an illuminating treatment of the issue of finitude and infinity in Derrida, see Bennington, "Derridabase," 114-118.
[180] Ibid., 87.

as infinite results in incoherence. Instead, then, alterity must be thought in terms of finitude. And yet we must not hastily exclaim that deconstruction is all about finitude, and conclude that *différance* is another name for the finite! As Derrida states in *Of Grammatology*: "Differance is also something other than finitude."[181] To 'choose' finitude over infinity would "not mean a single step outside of metaphysics."[182] As usual, the deconstructive gesture is not to 'prefer' one term of a conceptual opposition over another, but to show the way that they are mutually contaminating and exceed their own purported self-identities. In the case of the finite and the infinite, then, we may be helped by the claim that "*infinite différance is finite,*" and yet we also must remember to pursue that suggestion that the two terms of the opposition (in this case, the infinite and the finite) is itself *différantial*: that is, each receives its chance from precisely what threatens it.

1b. Trace

The second 'quasi-transcendental' term to which we will attend in order to suggest a way of thinking the otherness of the self beyond a traditionally metaphysical opposition of identity and difference is the trace. This term, which Derrida adopts following Levinas, is another way of figuring that which is at issue in *différance*.[183] Like *différance*, the trace suggests the spatial and temporal dissemination of that which considers itself as present or identical:

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[181] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 68.
[182] Ibid., 68.
[183] Ibid., 70. "I relate this concept of *trace* to what is at the center of the latest work of Emmanuel Levinas and his critique of ontology: relationship to the illeity as to the alterity of a past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence. Reconciled here to a Heideggerian intention,—as it is not in Levinas's thought—this notion signifies, sometimes beyond Heideggerian discourse, the undermining of an ontology which, in its innermost course, has determined the meaning of being as presence and the meaning of language as the full continuity of speech."

indeed, Derrida even states in *Of Grammatology*, "*The (pure) trace is differance*."[184] The trace, as another word for what is at issue in *différance*, is not the trace of something potentially present, but rather the mark of what is in principle resistant to presence.[185] Following the fact that, for Levinas, the trace is the trace of alterity (that is, what resists presence, being, or consciousness), the places where Derrida uses the term tend to be ones where the question of otherness, and sometimes the traditional self/other binary, is particularly salient. For instance, he states in *Mémoires for Paul de Man* that the trace "is always the trace of the other."[186] The trace is "where the relationship with the other is marked," and produces itself not as a being or entity, but as a movement that "produces itself as self-occultation," beyond the grasp of presence, substance, or any other metaphysical characterization.[187] This trace as trace of the other is that which cannot be represented, comprehended, or integrated into consciousness and presence. It is always under erasure and at risk of disappearance (although, strictly speaking, it was never *apparent* to begin with—the trace is what troubles the binary between appearance and disappearance). For Derrida, "this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing."[188] Thus, like *différance,* the trace destabilizes identities, opening them up to difference—yet at the same time, there is no identity outside of this opening to difference(s) and the trace could therefore equally be said to be that which constitutes or produces identities.

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[184] Ibid., 62. Given what we have said about contamination, which has led us to what we might encapsulate in the formula 'nothing is pure,' Derrida's inclusion of the word 'pure' in parentheses is noteworthy and, at least for me, opaque.
[185] "It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude." Ibid., 62.
[186] Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 29.
[187] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 47.
[188] Ibid., 70.

As with *différance*, it would be misleading to take the trace to be a rejection or denial of sameness. The trace figures the other within the same, yet simultaneously suggests that the trace effaces or attempts to efface this otherness. In *Paper Machine*, for instance, Derrida writes: "The 'trace' is the movement, the process, in truth the experience, that at once aims and fails to make up for the economy of the other in the same [*à faire l'économie de l'autre dans le même*]."[189] The trace fails to do without otherness—this claim is one that will not be surprising on the basis of what we have seen above—but is also what *tries* to do without this otherness. In what sense should we understand this? The trace, we might say, marks an attempt to reach identity, self-enclosed return, and the like, even as the path to this identity is itself foreclosed by it. With respect to the relation between otherness and sameness in the trace, Bennington writes: "'Trace' attempts to name this entwinement of the-other-in-the-same which is the condition of the same itself [*le même même*]."[190] The same is only constituted as same by being related to what is other to it, and the trace helps us to understand both this attempt to deny this otherness as well as its failure to do so. As Françoise Dastur describes it, "the trace, which is *différance* itself, retains the other as *other* in the same."[191] The inability of the same to incorporate or subsume otherness relates back to our discussion in Chapter 1 and gestures toward what the rest of this dissertation will be defending. Specifically, the trace offers a way to conceive of otherness within sameness as not a substantial 'presence.' For Derrida, the trace is not presence, but its simulacrum. He writes in the essay "Différance," "Since the trace is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself,

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189 Derrida, *Paper Machine*, 151. Trans. modified.
190 Bennington, "Derridabase," 76.
191 Françoise Dastur, "Play and Messianicity: The Question of Time and History in Derrida's Deconstruction," *A Companion to Derrida*, ed. Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 182.

displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site—erasure belongs to its structure."[192] The trace is not merely the dislocation of presence, but also its simulacrum.

The trace is always under erasure, which means that it is not hovering somewhere between presence and absence, but rather that the vulnerability to absolute disappearance is a part of its structure. This vulnerability of the trace is linked to finitude. Derrida writes, "The trace is always the finite trace of a finite being. So it can itself disappear. An ineradicable trace is not a trace. The trace inscribes itself in its own precariousness, its vulnerability of ashes, its mortality."[193] If the persistence of the trace as trace were assured, the trace would be eternal and godlike: it would bring back all of the security of a master signifier, automatic self-subsistence, or totality. The trace would be infinite (indeed, Levinas's tendency to imply this is a major difference between Levinas and Derrida). Yet the trace, like *différance*, is finite. In order to be a trace, the trace must be erasable, that is, subject to loss or disappearance. Derrida argues that an "unerasable trace is not a trace, it is a full presence, an immobile and uncorruptible substance, a son of God, a sign of parousia and not a seed, that is, a mortal germ."[194] Given that the trace is precisely what signals the insufficiency of a logic of full presence, the trace itself is not a full presence. Because of this, it is necessarily prey to the possibility of its own disappearance: or, as Derrida also puts it, to its own death. If the trace is finite, it is also mortal. One can say, then, "As soon as there is a trace...it implies the possibility of its being repeated, of surviving the instant and the subject of its tracing, and it thereby attests to the death, the disappearance, or at the very least the mortality of that tracing. The trace always figures a possible death; it signs death."[195] The trace can disappear;

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192 Derrida, *Margins*, 24.
193 Derrida, *Paper Machine*, 159.
194 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 230.
195 Derrida, *Paper Machine*, 158.

the trace can die.

Even this language of disappearance or death, however, tends to wrongly connote substantiality. To say that the trace 'can' disappear or die is equally given to misunderstanding. One would have to say that if the trace can die or disappear, this is because it in a sense already has. The trace itself is what makes possible death or disappearance—and, following the logic we have sketched already, is also what makes 'pure' death or disappearance impossible.

This impossibility of a 'pure' death or disappearance follows from what we have said regarding *différance*. At the same time, however, this logic does not make of the trace an infinite movement. If nothing can ever die or disappear in rigorous purity, we equally cannot say that anything lasts, everlastingly, with the assurance of infinity. As Derrida states: "The trace is not a substance, a present existing thing, but a process that is changing all the time. It can only reinterpret itself and always, finally, it is carried away."[196] Like *différance*, then, the trace is not a substance, but rather a process or movement. This kind of formulation does much in the way of helping us to avoid substantializing the trace—and this will also be the case once we start speaking more explicitly of the self—but at the same time, we must be wary of not resting too happily into such a formulation. If the trace is a process, it is not one that may be reincorporated into the metaphysics of presence (as we might want to say of 'process philosophies' such as those of Whitehead and his followers, and possibly Bergson). If the formulations of the trace and *différance* can never be said to escape or be outside the metaphysics of presence, they are not entirely captive to its logic, either. When it comes to

[196] Ibid., 159. As Bennington puts it: "The trace must necessarily be able to pass unperceived, or rather, for the trace is not a phenomenon, efface its effacement, not get itself remarked." Bennington, "Derridabase," 308.

the trace, "*no concept of metaphysics can describe it.*"[197]

'The trace' is itself made up of traces. The trace is not the trace of a substance that would be singular and present but which is itself a nonsubstantial 'process.' Rather, "There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces."[198] Any presence or absence, then, is a simulacrum of a presence or absence—that is to say, a trace. The trace-structure is generalizable to everything, then, not least of which to living things: "What I say about the trace goes for any 'living thing,' for 'animals' and 'people,'" Derrida writes.[199] All that exists, then, are traces, which are the traces of traces. If traces are all that exist, though, then we cannot say of these traces that they 'exist' in the usual metaphysical sense. Rather, "*The trace itself does not exist.* (To exist is to be, to be an entity, a being-present, *to on*.)"[200] There are only traces of traces, but the trace does not exist. Are we then to conclude that nothing exists? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that 'existence' implies a plenitude of presence, assured self-identity, and substance. No, in the sense that Derrida is far from a nihilist: the idea that the trace does not exist is in fact the condition for the possibility of the existence of all things, as traces. There would be no existence without the trace, even as the trace is what disrupts the possibility of anything ever existing fully, in the present, as such. Derrida writes, "*The trace is the differance* which opens appearance [*l'apparaître*] and signification."[201] The trace, then, opens up appearance but is not itself subject to appearance. For the trace to appear would be for it to be back in the realm of presence. A consequence of this resistance to presence is also the failure for the trace to appear within consciousness: "there are no conscious traces," Derrida

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[197] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 65.
[198] Derrida, *Positions*, 26. Also see Bennington, "Derridabase," 75: "Every trace is the trace of a trace. No element is anywhere present (nor simply absent), there are only traces. These traces are not, as the word might suggest, traces of a presence or the passage of a presence."
[199] Derrida, *Paper Machine*, 159.
[200] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 167.
[201] Ibid., 65.

parenthetically remarks in the essay "Différance."[202]

What we have described with the trace has profound consequences for a theory of selfhood. One of these consequences is that the self is a trace. Derrida states this explicitly early in his career in *Voice and Phenomenon*: "The self of the living present is originarily a trace."[203] And if the self is a trace, then it, like every trace, is made up of traces of traces. When it comes to the self, we can perceive the same paradox of the trace as we outlined in the above paragraph: the self exists as trace, which is also to say that it does not exist as present, as such: the self is at once produced as trace and displaced by the trace. This latter element is one highlighted by Derrida in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," where he writes, "The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance."[204] On the one hand, the trace opens the possibility and inevitability of the erasure of the self and self-presence. Yet on the other hand, we can equally say that the trace opens the possibility of the self. If the trace is the erasure of selfhood, then it is also its inscription.

These analyses of *différance* and the trace have laid the groundwork for a deconstructive account of selfhood. These two terms help us to perceive as misguided the idea that deconstruction eliminates selfhood, subjectivity, sameness, and/or consciousness. Once we see this, we may see that deconstruction has much to offer a theory of selfhood. Insofar as deconstruction attends to the absence or difference that has been consistently occluded by the history of Western philosophy as metaphysics of presence, it can help us to

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[202] Derrida, *Margins*, 21. It is because of the emphasis on consciousness that Derrida views phenomenology as "inadequate" for describing traces, and why he considers phenomenology a "metaphysical discourse."
[203] Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 73.
[204] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 230.

rethink the issue of selfhood not 'outside' metaphysics, but at its edges, in a manner that baffles the metaphysical overdetermination of presence, substantiality, and essence. It helps us to conceptualize selfhood as constituted through a play of difference, but not in the oppositional manner of a Hegelian dialectic. It helps us to argue that the self is not self-enclosed or static, but rather originarily marked by absence and otherness: of temporality, of other beings, of its own unconscious, etc. At the most basic level, the self achieves self-identity through spacing or repetition, which introduces alterity into its own self-identity. We will explore this in more detail in the rest of this chapter.

On Derrida's view, the discourse around subjectivity has been grounded in the philosophical determination of temporality as *presence*. This has resulted in an equation of subjectivity with "identity to self, positionality, property, personality, ego, consciousness, will, intentionality, freedom, humanity, etc."[205] For Derrida, "It is necessary to question this authority of the being present" if we want to reconsider the question of subjectivity.[206] My contention in this section has been that we can use Derrida's 'quasi-transcendental' terms *différance* and the trace to question precisely this authority, and then to think selfhood otherwise than on the basis of presence. My sense is that this provides the groundwork (itself subject to the trace-structure) for a theory of selfhood that unsettles traditional accounts of the self/other relation but that at the same time offers a cogent and robust way to think about the nature of selfhood, obviating the trend of considering the self a passé term or vertiginous relic of metaphysics. My motivation for preserving a sense of selfhood by offering an account of it informed by Derrida's deconstruction is not a conservative one: we are not holding on to the self as a raft or ruin in the flood of the wake of metaphysics.

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205 Derrida, "Eating Well," 109.
206 Ibid., 109.

On the contrary, I have argued in the Introduction that it is only if we offer a new account of selfhood that we may have any chance of not blindly repeating the gestures of modern philosophy that uphold the transparency and sovereignty of the Cartesian *cogito*. An ecstatic affirmation of the dissolution or death of the self is as metaphysical as the sober affirmation of its living presence.

2. Other 'Quasi-Transcendental' Terms for the Otherness of the Same

Before moving on to explore two facets of the self-othering at work in experience—auto-affection and the decision—I would briefly like to call attention to a few other 'quasi-transcendental' terms used by Derrida that relate to the questions of selfhood and otherness that concern us here. These terms will not be exhaustively treated, but I note them here in order to suggest further the richness of Derrida's work for the issues that concern us. They comprise a number of directions one could go for pursuing the questions of selfhood and otherness that we are treating, and overlap with the two terms we have treated so far.

1. *Iterability*: iterability is the structure that produces the same, through repetition, as other to itself as a result of the displacement or alteration in any repetition. A term especially associated with Derrida's texts on writing and signs in the early phase of his career, most notably "Signature Event Context," 'iterability' comes from the Sanskrit *itara*, meaning 'other,' an etymology Derrida repeatedly points out. Derrida refers to this term throughout his work as a way of considering the repetition that makes singularity possible (recall our earlier reference to the A=A repetition in Heidegger's work on identity). As Derrida puts it in *Paper Machine*: "there is no incompatibility between repetition and the novelty of what is different. In a tangential and elliptical way, a difference always causes repetition

to deviate. I call that *iterability*, the other ([Sanskrit] *itara*) appearing in reiteration. The singular always inaugurates, it even 'comes about' unforeseeably, like the new arrival, via repetition."[207] Iterability is linked with alterity and repetition while also making identity possible. In "Signature Event Context," Derrida writes of unities that "the very iterability which constitutes their identity never permits them to be a unity of self-identity[.]"[208]

2. *Autoimmunity*: Autoimmunity signals the lack of sovereignty of the *autos*, and is generally used in the later writings where Derrida treats the question of politics. Autoimmunity, for Derrida, suggests "a space where all self-protection of the unscathed…must protect itself against its own protection…in short against its ownness, that is to say its own immunity."[209] As Michael Naas claims apropos of Derrida's use of the term autoimmunity in *Rogues*, "*autoimmunity*," unlike other *autos* words, which generally bolster an illusion of sovereignty, "evokes the powerlessness, vulnerability, dependence, and instability of every self or *autos*."[210] From a biological standpoint, autoimmunity is the self's own attempt to remain immune to hazards from the outside that have gone awry, turning its protective mechanisms back upon itself in a self-threatening manner. The immune system demarcates the self from its surroundings and gives it its "chance" of survival; at the same time, autoimmunity threatens the self-identity of any being, living or nonliving, with its own destruction.[211] For Derrida, any immunizing movement

[207] Derrida, *Paper Machine*, 136.
[208] Derrida, *Margins*, 318.
[209] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," trans. Samuel Weber. In *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 44.
[210] Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, 125.
[211] In *Rogues*, Derrida links the "question of autoimmunity" to "a *double bind* of threat and chance, not alternatively or by turns promise and/or threat but threat *in* the promise itself." Derrida, *Rogues,* 82.

"is always threatened with becoming auto-immunizing, like every *autos*, every ipseity."[212] Moreover, autoimmunity "consists not only in compromising oneself but in compromising the self, the *autos*—and thus ipseity."[213] Martin Hägglund notes that autoimmunity requires that "temporal alterity constitutes my self-relation" insofar as autoimmunity implies a vulnerability or openness to my own self, which "exceeds my given identity."[214] Autoimmunity is closely linked with auto-affection, which we will treat at length shortly—Derrida writes of "that threatening auto-affection that is called autoimmunity," suggesting that autoimmunity is a particular case of auto-affection.[215]

3. *Hauntology*: this play on the word 'ontology' figures a logic of spectrality that is not in between, but which rather deconstructs, the relation between presence and absence. The specter is always a *revenant*, one who 'comes back,' and thus offers another way to think the repetition of iterability.[216] We might see the self as a ghost of itself: self-identity is never present, but is rather produced through the repetition or coming back of spectral selves. In writing of Stirner in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida comes up with the formulation, "Ego=ghost," and goes on to say: "Therefore, 'I am' would mean 'I am haunted': I am haunted by myself who am

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212 Derrida, *Animal*, 47. See also "Faith and Knowledge" and *Rogues*.
213 Derrida, *Rogues*, 45.
214 Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 31.
215 Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 75. For an excellent treatment of the role of autoimmunity in Derrida's thought, see Naas, "One Nation…Indivisible" chapter in *Derrida From Now On*. As Naas points out in his essay, *Rogues* treats a number of autos- words, particularly also autonomy; we might add to this other autos- words in Derrida's work including autobiography, automobile, automaticity, and so on, which we do not have the space to discuss here. See also Bennington, "Auto-," in Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). As Bennington points out, Derrida first uses the term 'auto-immunity' in *Specters of Marx* and *The Politics of Friendship*, and then develops it more fully in "Faith and Knowledge" (Bennington, *Not Half No End*, 2-3).
216 Derrida, *Specters*, 11.

(haunted by myself who am haunted by myself who am…and so forth).”[217] Derrida then generalizes this formulation to the ego in Descartes, Kant, and phenomenology (a triad often brought together when Derrida writes of classical conceptions of the ego or subjectivity).[218] If to be is to be haunted, then it is also to be haunted not by a single ghost, but by a whole host of them: Derrida repeatedly points out in *Specters of Marx* that the specter is never a singular figure, but always multiple, and “in him outside of him,” an idea to which we will return in Chapter 4.[219]

4. *Narcissism*: Derrida mentions narcissism in a number of texts, going so far as to say in *Specters of Marx* that the aporias of narcissism are “the explicit theme of deconstruction.”[220] Narcissism, on Derrida’s view, reveals the mediated character of selfhood and the manner by which self-relation is possible only by having alterity within it, as Narcissus’s self-love is made possible by Echo. DeArmitt argues that narcissism cannot be, for Derrida, “equated with any simple speculation or classical form of subjectivity, since narcissism, even armed with all its tricks, is unable to reduce the other, whether dead or alive, to the structures of the same.”[221] Rather, Derrida asserts that narcissism must be understood anew as inextricably related to love of the other.[222] There would be no possible relation to

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[217] Ibid., 166.
[218] This idea of the self as a ghost of itself is one that I find particularly compelling and intend to explore further in a future project. It also pertains to Naas’s claim that the self is a phantasm, on which I will touch at the end of this chapter.
[219] Derrida, *Specters*, 132.
[220] Ibid., 122.
[221] DeArmitt, *Right to Narcissism,* 118.
[222] Derrida states in *The Right of Inspection*: “One will never have understood anything about the love of the other…without a new understanding of narcissism, a new ‘patience,’ a new passion for narcissism. Jacques Derrida and Marie-Francoise Plissart, *The Right of Inspection*, trans. David Wills (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999), 80.

the other if there were not also a relation to the self that one might head under the word 'narcissism.' One does not have a choice between narcissism and love of the other; rather, Derrida says in a radio interview:

> 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 but the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more *open to the experience of the other as other.*…The relation to the other—even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible re-appropriation—must trace a movement of re-appropriation in the image of oneself, for example.[223]

In her book on narcissism, DeArmitt argues that the theme of narcissism is crucial to Derrida's work and offers a way to think deconstructively about selfhood. DeArmitt suggests that, while narcissism as a *topic* or *theme* is one that Derrida treats only occasionally, "the aporias of narcissism are integral to the movement of 'deconstruction' itself and are thus made 'explicit' in each Derridean text."[224] On her view, Derrida's claim that narcissism is the explicit theme of deconstruction is therefore not a curious offhand remark, but rather a key formulation that illuminates all of those texts signed in Derrida's name.

5. *Mourning*: one of the most frequent themes of Derrida's writings, mourning is an aporetic relation to the other whom one incorporates into the self but *as* other. Complicating the Freudian psychoanalytic distinction between 'normal' and

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[223] Jacques Derrida, *Points…: Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf & others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 199.
[224] DeArmitt, *Right to Narcissism,* 92.

'pathological' mourning, the dead other whom I mourn is the other within myself for Derrida. Though Derrida's work on mourning concerns mourning others who have died, particularly as the occasions for his writings on the subject are generally the deaths of loved ones, he exhibits the 'always already' structure of mourning, which entails an acknowledgment of mourning even when one is not mourning a dead loved one. For Derrida, "This carrying of the mortal other 'in me outside me' instructs or institutes my 'self' and my relation to 'myself' already before the death of the other."[225] Mourning individualizes us, bringing about self-relation while also suggesting that self-relation is always already self-other relation. DeArmitt makes much of Derrida's use of mourning, in addition to drawing attention to narcissism: according to her, a "Derridean philosophy of the 'self'" would have Derrida's claim "I mourn therefore I am" as its 'first principle.'[226] This mourning is also a half-mourning (*demi-deuil*) insofar as mourning is never successful: the process of incorporating the other into oneself is in principle doomed to failure.[227] This failure is necessary in order for self-relation as self-other relation to be possible.

6. *Hospitality*: On the one hand, Derrida asks, "Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?" and yet, on the other, he shows that, following Levinas, subjectivity itself is hospitality insofar as the subject is the host who welcomes the other. [228]

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[225] Derrida, *Points.*, 321.
[226] DeArmitt, *Right to Narcissism,* 120.
[227] See, for instance, Derrida, *Points,* and *The Post Card*. For a helpful treatment of half-mourning in Derrida's work, see Bennington, *Not Half No End*.
[228] Derrida, *Adieu*, 51, 54. Self-interruption is a term Derrida uses from his early work on Husserl through his later writings. The term is generally linked in Derrida's writings to phenomenology: most specifically, to the self-interruption of phenomenology that Derrida sees at work in Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity, where Husserl claims that the alter ego presents itself to the ego as what exceeds

In French, the word *hôte* means at once guest and host: one is a guest in one's own home. This means that, at the heart of interiority or the *chez soi* of selfhood, one is not at home. For Derrida, "the welcoming *hôte* who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers *in* his own home; he receives it *from* his own home—which, in the end, does not belong to him."[229] Contra Levinas, being at home with oneself in the domain of interiority is not a return or closed circle; rather, the *chez soi* is marked by its transcendent relation to the other from the very beginning. (This logic follows quite closely from what we developed in the foregoing chapter, even though the word 'hospitality' was not thematized there.) Thus, hospitality is an interruption of the self that would claim to be isolated from the other; at the same time, this interruption is an interruption of the self *by* the self—which is to say, by the other.[230]

7. *Monolingualism*: the monolingualism of one's mother tongue provides the dwelling or *chez soi* for the self, and yet this dwelling is given by the other. For Derrida, "this monolingualism is me," and "it feels like one to me," comprising an "inexhaustible solipsism" or domain of interiority.[231] Yet at the same time, one's language—and by extension, one's dwelling, interiority, solipsism—is never one's own. One receives one's mother tongue from others (as is suggested even in the phrase 'mother tongue'), and one therefore can never claim ownership over one's language. It is inherited. Thus, Derrida states, "anyone should be able to declare

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direct presentation (and thus, phenomenality). We will treat this theory in the following chapter, although we will not return to self-interruption explicitly.

229 Derrida, *Adieu*, 41.

230 Derrida, *Adieu*, 51-2.

231 Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 2.

under oath: I have only one language and it is not mine; my 'own' language is, for me, a language that cannot be assimilated. My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other."[232] The lack of ownership of one's mother tongue does not, however, suggest that the mother tongue is *foreign* to oneself: after all, one does dwell in the mother tongue.[233] The *chez soi*—and we might also say by extension, interiority, solipsism, subjectivity, consciousness—is not merely an illusion. It is, however, constituted through inheriting what is given from the other, made up of traces of the language of the other. As a result, Derrida talks about monolingualism in terms of a "uniqueness without unity."[234]

3. Auto-Affection and the Decision

Following from our analyses of *différance* and the trace and briefer considerations seven other terms in Derrida that suggest the contamination of the self by the other, the remainder of this chapter will comprise an exploration of two other 'quasi-transcendental' terms in Derrida's work which more specifically disclose the experience of the otherness of the self. The first, auto-affection, suggests that any 'self-touching' is already a touching of or by the other. Touching oneself is only possible insofar as there is otherness already 'within' the self. In addition, this self-touching is the necessary basis for any experience in general, most notably the relation to other beings. Auto-affection, then, is one of the most salient terms for understanding the self-other relation taken deconstructively. It also provides a way

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[232] Ibid., 25.
[233] "When I said that the only language I speak is *not mine*, I did not say it was foreign to me. There is a difference." Ibid., 5.
[234] Ibid., 68.

to show similarities and differences between the deconstructive and the phenomenological projects, insofar as auto-affection is a term used in phenomenology (for instance, in Merleau-Ponty), and will therefore provide a useful point of departure for our considerations of phenomenological matters in Chapters 3 and 4. The second term, the decision, more explicitly foregrounds the temporal dimension of self-othering, as well as setting up the idea that self-relation does not primarily occur on the cognitive level of knowledge. Derrida's writings on the decision manifest the heterogeneity of the self-other relation to knowledge, which will provide a helpful way for us to think about the otherness within the self in this chapter, and to which we will return in Chapter 4 when we discuss intersubjectivity.

3a. Auto-Affection

Derrida's writings on auto-affection vividly render the constitutive otherness of the self-relation. The term 'auto-affection,' coined by Heidegger to describe temporality in Kant, is one that interests Derrida throughout his career, and which will provide an extremely useful point of departure for us here. For Derrida, "*Auto*-affection constitutes the same (*auto*) by dividing it. Privation of presence is the condition of experience, that is to say of presence."[235] If the *autos* is linked with presence and sameness, it is made possible by a privation of presence and by difference. Like the other terms we have considered so far, auto-affection is what constitutes the same and yet, as such, also what divides it. "Auto-affection is not a modality of experience that characterizes a being that would already be itself (*autos*). Auto-affection produces the same as the self-relation in the difference with itself, the same as the non-identical."[236] Self-relation is thus self-relation in difference. If the

[235] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 166. Trans. modified.
[236] Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 71.

self were not already other to itself, there would be no way for it to affect itself. Thus, the repetition or duality of the self inaugurated by the movement of auto-affection is at once the production and the rupture of identity. If the 'A is A' of auto-affection produces identity by allowing one to recognize A as *the same as* A, it also doubles A, producing two *different* As (as we have seen earlier in this chapter with reference to Heidegger's "The Principle of Identity"). The same produces itself *as itself* by introducing difference into itself. This basic idea drives deconstruction. As a result, any auto-affection is also a hetero-affection. Auto-affection produces the same (as other to itself).

This deconstruction of auto-affection contrasts with the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy, on Derrida's view. This tradition casts the affecting and the affected as entirely self-identical, and therefore retains a purity that the deconstruction of auto-affection reveals as illusory (we will see a contemporary version of this insistence on purity in the following chapter in Dan Zahavi). Derrida attends to this ideal of pure auto-affection particularly in Rousseau and Husserl. He states in *Of Grammatology* that, for Rousseau, "What is touching is touched, auto-affection gives itself as pure autarchy."[237] There is no detour 'outside' the self in auto-affection for Rousseau, Derrida claims; rather, there is a perfect identity of the touching and the touched within the interiority of the self. There would be no fissure of otherness or difference between the affecting and affected; rather, they would be perfectly continuous and unified. According to this model of pure auto-affection, speech and consciousness do not admit of any internal difference; as such, they "are the phenomenon of an auto-affection lived as suppression of differance."[238] It is this suppression of *différance* that Derrida reads through the history of philosophy and reveals as subject to deconstruction.

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[237] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 154.
[238] Ibid., 166.

Catherine Malabou, who discusses auto-affection in her recent book *Self and Emotional Life*, aptly points out, "Derrida does not challenge autoaffection as such—there is an unmovable autoaffective dimension of subjectivity—but he criticizes the way in which philosophers always present it as pure (i.e., as purified of any heteroaffection)."[239] Auto-affection is never pure from hetero-affection, and the history of philosophy that has striven to overlook this has failed to comprehend the trace of otherness in any auto-affective movement, and therefore in any self-identity.

This desire for pure self-identity is a desire Derrida perceives in Husserl's account of self-presence. In *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida shows that Husserl's phenomenology seeks to affirm a pure domain of solitude and immediacy—of auto-affection without hetero-affection—that is, strictly speaking, impossible. Hearing oneself speak in solitude, even if only 'mentally' in the silent domain of thought, already produces a distinction between the speaker and the listener. Echoing the argument produced in *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida later writes in *The Post Card* that the self (*soi-même*) "calls (to) itself as an other in auto-affection."[240] Calling to oneself as another is a feature of auto-affection as contaminated by hetero-affection.

This distinction between speaker and listener 'within' thinking demonstrates an alterity within the auto-affection of what takes itself to be pure interiority. On Derrida's reading, this is *a fortiori* the case for Husserl's account of inner time-consciousness. We have noted that Heidegger characterizes temporality in Kant as a movement of auto-affection. Derrida suggests that this is also an apt characterization of temporality in Husserl, specifically tracing an auto-affective dimension in Husserl's well-known theory of internal

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[239] Johnston, Adrian, and Catherine Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 19.
[240] Derrida, *Post Card*, 359.

time-consciousness. On Husserl's theory, the 'present' has a horizon of the past through 'retention,' and a horizon of the future through 'protention.' Husserl's key insight into philosophies of temporality is that the present cannot be considered a point or pure instant, such that the passing of time would be a succession of such points strung together.[241] Rather, the present preserves awareness of the past through retention, and orients itself toward the future through protention.

It might seem at first glance, then, that Husserl's theory of internal time-consciousness is opposed to an auto-affective conception of temporality: in Husserl, there is not a neat distinction between presents that would make auto-affection possible. Instead, there is a continuity or duration of temporality. Yet, insofar as Husserl describes the passing from the 'now' to the retention of this 'now' in a new 'now', Derrida claims that it is auto-affective. He writes: "The process by means of which the living now, producing itself by spontaneous generation, must, in order to be a now, be retained in another now, must affect itself, without empirical recourse, with a new originary actuality in which it will become a non-now as a past now, etc.; and such a process is indeed a pure auto-affection in which the same is the same only by affecting itself with an other, by becoming the other of the same.[242] Husserl's theory of temporality is subject to the effect of auto-affection—meaning that it is subject to hetero-affection in the sense that each now is not purely self-identical to the previous now, but different from it. Husserl's attempt to introduce the past and future into the 'now' through protention and retention cannot hold at bay the effects auto-affection as

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241 While Husserl is not the first to argue something of this sort—and, around this same period, such a disagreement with temporality as a succession of points had already been developed by Bergson—Husserl's account is highly influential for twentieth-century philosophy, and particularly so for Heidegger, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, and others.
242 Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, 73.

différantial, and which introduce non-identity into the identity of time, consciousness, and subjectivity.[243]

The purported purity of internal time-consciousness in Husserl overlooks the otherness indicated by every rupture between 'nows.' There is no possible self-presence according to Derrida that is not haunted by absence; no interior that is not haunted by its exterior (and no rupture between 'nows' that not only attests to a non-presentable otherness, but also to a non-representable past not figured as a *past present*.) As a result, Derrida asks, "Must we not say that the concept of pure solitude—and of the monad in the phenomenological sense—is *split open* by its own origin, by the very condition of its self-presence: 'time' rethought beginning from the differance in auto-affection, beginning from the identity of identity and non-identity in the 'same' of the *im selben Augenblick*?"[244] As auto-affection, time is not pure or set off from what is other to it. The same goes for the voice of self-presence. The identity between the affecting and the affected always already produces a gap foreclosing pure identity—and from here, all the implications of *différance* and the trace follow.

Auto-affection in Derrida's early work is linked with both hearing oneself speak and with auto-eroticism. These links persist more or less explicitly in his later writings, where auto-affection is mentioned frequently in passing and treated at some length in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, where the dimension of auto-affection as embodied touch is foregrounded. As we have already noted how auto-affection works in terms of hearing oneself speak and temporality in *Voice and Phenomenon*, we will now consider the auto-

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[243] Ibid., 59.
[244] Ibid., 59.

affection of auto-eroticism that emerges in the reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* before turning to *On Touching*.

In "…That Dangerous Supplement…," Derrida examines the role of masturbation in Rousseau's *Confessions* and the *Émile*, where it is viewed as a dangerous perversion or evil supplement to nature. In auto-eroticism, one touches oneself by oneself, thereby perverting the natural sexual relation that involves another person. For Rousseau, masturbation is a corrupting practice of perversion. Derrida writes, "in affecting oneself from another presence, one *adulterates* oneself."[245] For Rousseau, masturbation is therefore a shameful, sinful act. It corrupts a self that would otherwise be pure. Rousseau is unable to think, in Derrida's words, "that this adulteration does not simply happen to the self, that it is the self's very origin. He must consider it a contingent evil coming from without to affect the integrity of the subject."[246] Rousseau must perceive the adulteration of the self as a danger to be guarded against, rather than as a structural necessity not only for the possibility of giving oneself pleasure but of being, or having, a self.

The auto-affection of masturbation, however, already in Rousseau includes the haunting presence of others: whether the imagined other about whom he fantasizes as a boy, the moral judge of the other, and so on. In auto-eroticism, "the possibility of auto-affection manifests itself as such: it leaves a trace of itself in the world."[247] Derrida extends the auto-affection of masturbation to auto-affection more broadly. He writes: Within the general structure of auto-affection, within the giving-oneself-a presence or a pleasure [*jouissance*], the operation of touching-touched welcomes the other in the slight difference that separates

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[245] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 153.

[246] Ibid., 153. Trans. modified (the use of 'adulterate' rather than 'corrupt,' as it's rendered in Spivak's translation, comes from Bennington's translation in *Not Half No End*, 1).

[247] Ibid., 165.

doing from suffering [*l'agir du pâtir*]. And the outside, the exposed surface of the body, signifies, marks forever the division that shapes auto-affection.[248] Giving oneself pleasure requires a division within the self. Auto-eroticism is auto-hetero-eroticism. Inasmuch as Derrida suggests in this quote that the act of giving oneself pleasure through masturbation is a generalizable figure of auto-affection, we can so too say that auto-affection is auto-hetero-affection—a term that Derrida will later himself use in *On Touching*.[249] The otherness of the self is at once what makes it possible to give oneself pleasure and what makes it impossible to say that the self, in its own purity and self-presence, is giving *itself* pleasure. The self gives itself pleasure from the other, as other.

These effects of auto-affection, then, proliferate outside of the context of auto-eroticism: Derrida writes, "sexual auto-affection, that is auto-affection in general, neither begins nor ends with what one thinks can be circumscribed by the name of masturbation."[250] Sexual auto-affection is not merely masturbation, and sexual auto-affection is not merely sexual, but already 'auto-affection in general.' Moreover, Derrida does not limit these effects of auto-affection to time and selfhood. The logic of auto-affection in fact holds for *any experience* on his view. Derrida states: "Auto-affection is a universal structure of experience. Every living thing has the potential for auto-affection. And only a being capable of symbolizing, that is to say of auto-affecting itself, may let itself be affected by the other in general. Auto-affection is the condition of an experience in general."[251] In a similar vein, in

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[248] Ibid., 165. Trans. modified.
[249] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 180, 292. While we do not have the space to do so here, it would be worth linking this back to the discussion of *jouissance* in Chapter 1: we could relate the auto-affective structure as auto-hetero-affective to Levinas's analysis of interiority as a domain of *jouissance* to further argue that alterity must always already mark the interior space that Levinas wants to claim is cut off from it.
[250] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 154-5.
[251] Ibid., 166. Trans. modified.

an unpublished 1993-4 seminar, Derrida calls auto-affection "the mark of any living being in general."[252] Auto-affection is a generalizable or 'quasi-transcendental' term for the structure of experience.

What does it mean to say that auto-affection makes experience possible, and that it marks any living being? The key to this idea is in taking experience itself to be an affection of the self by the other. In *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, Derrida considers auto-affection in light of a more general kind of self-touching than that of auto-eroticism, which will do much in the way of clarifying the claim above that auto-affection is the condition of any experience. Derrida writes here of "The law of 'self-touching,'" which "produces *and* interrupts—it punctuates by the same token all the syntaxes of narcissism."[253] Any self-touching is also a self-other touching: auto-affection both produces and threatens the pure return to self figured by something like narcissism. On Derrida's account, "No doubt, there would be some auto-affection 'effects,' but their analysis cannot escape from the hetero-affection that makes them possible and keeps haunting them," even where hetero-affection appears completely absent (as in the first-person perspective we will consider in the following chapter).[254]

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[252] Jacques Derrida, *Témoignage*: Séminaire 1993-94 (Séance 3, 1 décembre 1993, 6), Fonds Jacques Derrida—IMEC (my translation). Auto-affection is "la marque de tout vivant en général."
[253] Derrida, *On Touching*, 271. It is also worth pointing out that Freud precisely frames his discussion of narcissism in the seminal paper "On Narcissism: An Introduction" in terms of self-touching—and, specifically, sexual self-touching. He begins this paper by writing, "The term narcissism is derived from clinical description and was chosen by Paul Näcke in 1899 to denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated—who looks at it, that is to say, strokes and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities." Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV,* ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 67.
[254] Derrida, *On Touching*, 180.

The idea that auto-affection is 'haunted' by hetero-affection confirms what we have said up until now. Yet, in addition to this, Derrida also turns the tables: that is, he considers the necessity of self-touching in order for the touch of the other to be possible. He states: "But of course, in order for me to be touched in this way by you, I have to be able to touch *myself*. In the 'self-touching-you,' the 'self' is as indispensable as you. A being incapable of touching itself could not bend itself to that which absolutely unfolds it, to the totally other who, as totally other [*comme tout autre*], inhabits my heart as a stranger."[255] Without auto-affection, there would be no possible relation to the other. Without a possible relation to the other, there would be no experience. One must be always already in relation to oneself through auto-affection in order to be affected by the other. Again, we see the reminder that Derrida is not simply prioritizing what is different, absent, or split over what is the same, present, and unified. The *self* is as indispensable as the *you*: the *auto* is as indispensable as the *hetero*. The two are contaminated and structured as the mutual conditions for the possibility and the conditions for the impossibility of each other's identities.

Thus, auto-affection is at once a threat to experience, and what gives experience its chance. Experience is an affecting of the self by what is other to it, and thus a hetero-affection; but this hetero-affection does not happen to a previously constituted subject in a kind of pure auto-affection. There is no auto-affection without hetero-affection, then, and no experience without auto-affection, insofar as 'experience' can be taken as an affecting from the other.[256] Peggy Kamuf writes of the way that deconstruction figures experience as the experience of the other in me: "'My' experience returns to me, recurs to me, if it does, as

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[255] Ibid., 291.

[256] Bennington states in *Not Half No End* (6) that 'experience,' at least in Derrida's work from the 1980s and later, "comes apparently to name the opening (without horizon of expectation) to the other in general, and thereby to the event which by definition interrupts 'traumatically' the ordinary course of experience in the sense deconstructed in the *Grammatology*."

the experience of another, at once another 'me' and absolutely other, uncanny therefore."[257] Any pure specularity or auto-affection of experience is contaminated by the otherness of experience; that is, of experience as experience of the other. This contamination also 'goes the other way': it is through auto-affection that I am able to encounter other beings—and experience anything in general. The auto- and the hetero- are mutually intertwined, each providing the threat and chance of the other.

This point has been widely underplayed by critical assessments of Derrida's work. Although, for Derrida, the self is the result of a play of differences subject to the logic of *différance* and the trace, this does not mean that there is no self; rather, the self is not the pure, self-constituting origin of itself, but relating to the other would be impossible if there were no self. Insofar as any experience is an experience of otherness, rupturing the very interiority of self-relation that it also makes possible, *experience would be impossible if there were no self*. This reversal of the claim explored in Chapter 1—namely, that the self could not relate to others if it did not already have otherness 'within' it—is the other side of the same coin. No self without other, but also no other without self. If self-relation is always a self-other relation, then a relation to the other is also a self-other relation.

As we have briefly noted earlier, in *On Touching* Derrida also describes auto-affection as being 'haunted' by hetero-affection. It is worth reminding ourselves here that the otherness of auto-affection is not *present*, but itself already a trace. We must retain the insights offered by our earlier analyses of *différance*, the trace, and the other non-substitutable, synonymous terms, rather than lapsing back into a metaphysics of presence in speaking of auto-affection. This is particularly important when considering the materiality of the body,

[257] Kamuf, *To Follow*, 77.

that organism which we might be tempted to think of as purely present, active, living, and auto-affective. Thinking about the body as *haunted* by otherness may be helpful in this vein.[258] Moreover, we must not fall into imagining that there is a singular, selfsame otherness that haunts the *autos* of auto-affection. Rather than distinguishing "pure auto-affection of the body proper" from hetero-affection, Derrida wonders: "shouldn't one rather distinguish between several types of auto-hetero-affection without any pure, properly pure, immediate, intuitive, living, and psychical auto-affection at all?"[259] Within the most secret domain of interiority within the self, the other is already there, dwelling—but "as a ghost."[260]

In the following chapter, we will go into the most prominent bodily example of auto-affection that Derrida considers in *On Touching*: one hand touching the other. This example will be reserved for Chapter 3 because it hinges on the phenomenology of the first-person perspective that we will be considering there. Here, we will focus on another bodily organ discussed in *On Touching*—the heart. In this text, dedicated to Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida depicts the heart as an auto-affective organ the bears the trace of the other within it. In Nancy's case, this trace of the other is quite literal: Nancy had received a heart transplant by the time that Derrida wrote *On Touching*, a fact that Derrida emphasizes. Nancy's heart is literally not his own, but is instead the gift of an (unknown) other.

For Derrida, the idea that the heart is the heart of the other is not a mere special case or rare contingency characteristic of those who have had heart transplants. Due to the structure of auto-affection, even the heart of one who has not received a heart transplant is

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258 Derrida writes apropos of Husserl: "I ask whether there is any pure auto-affection of the touching or the touched, and therefore any pure, immediate experience of the purely proper body, the body proper that is living, purely living. Or if, on the contrary, this experience is at least not already *haunted*, but *constitutively* haunted, by some hetero-affection related to spacing and then to visible spatiality." Derrida, *On Touching*, 179.
259 Ibid., 180.
260 Ibid., 180.

nonetheless the 'heart of an other.' For one, when the heart is taken in a metaphorical sense as the seat of love and emotion, we can see how the 'matters of the heart' concern our relations to other beings. One generally only speaks of 'my heart' when speaking to another of one's feelings for him or her: there would be no love "without a certain 'stolen heart'"; therefore, "Even *self*-touching touches upon the heart of the other."[261] One feels love for the other, and thus only ever feels one's own 'heart' as a response to the other.

Another feature of the heart is that it is an organ that one never 'touches' oneself, at least with one's own hand, or from the outside surface of the body. The heart is not only a metaphorical seat of love and emotion, but also a bloody, bodily organ that is beating all the time. It is not only a figure "of the center or of secret interiority," but also "the sensible heart, the rhythm, respiration, and beating of the blood."[262] This sensible, beating heart is not one that we can see or even touch from the exterior surface of the body. Derrida writes: "The heart is one of those interior surfaces of the body that, in principle (unless one performs the unimaginable, at least for now, operation of open-heart surgery on oneself), no 'self-touching' can ever reach—what might be termed the heart's hide."[263] As a result, the heart is to a certain extent hidden from us, not felt or seen directly or immediately. In addition, the heart is an organ that processes and transforms blood coursing from the rest of the body. The heart transmutes and changes the body, and it performs these tasks outside of conscious control. In addition, the heart is an anatomically double organ: it has two chambers, each of which is divided into a ventricle and an atrium.

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[261] Ibid., 273.
[262] Ibid., 267.
[263] Ibid., 267. One could accuse Derrida here of a kind of haptocentrism of the hand: Derrida imagines that self-touching the heart would have to be done by the hand, rather than acknowledging that the heart is already in contact with other organs on the interior of the body.

Furthermore, the heart beats in a rhythm. Rhythm is an auto-hetero-affective movement, a classic case of iterability and the auto-affective structure of time.[264] The rhythm of the heart cannot be located in a single beat; rather, the compounding of heartbeats results in a rhythm, each beat 'touching' the other, previous beat, the repetition of the same 'beat' each time establishing a new beat and contributing to the rhythm. The rhythm of the heart introduces *différance* into the seemingly self-enclosed space of the heart. Derrida writes: "You, metronome of my heteronomy, you will always resist that which, in my 'self-touching,' could dream of the reflexive or specular autonomy of self-presence…or of self-consciousness."[265] The heart keeps time, which is always the time of the other.

As a result, the heart is an exceptional locus of auto-affection. On the one hand, it is an "absolute inside" and an "untouchable self-interiority…And yet nothing appears at least to be more auto-affective than the heart."[266] The heart, as metaphorical locus of interiority, is at the same time not a singular indivisible entity. Its spatiality is doubled, its temporality punctuated, spaced, and stretched, its functions—whether taken as the transmutation of blood or the impulse to love and desire—transcending its location within the inside of the body. To say 'my own heart' is already to say 'the heart of the other.' "And touching one's own heart? As the heart—like the heart—of the other?"[267] Following the track of Nancy, Derrida states, "the *selfsame* heart *itself,* in every possible sense of the self and the same, is the place where the selfsame itself exappropriates itself, at the same instant when I am invisibly touched by the other, without any possible reappropriation."[268] The heart implies an exit

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[264] 'Rhythm' is an important word for Derrida. He writes of rhythm in a number of places, stating in *Monolingualism of the Other* (48), "I think that all in all, it is upon rhythm that I stake everything."
[265] Derrida, *On Touching*, 290.
[266] Ibid., 267.
[267] Ibid., 108.
[268] Ibid., 305.

from interiority, relating one to what is apparently outside oneself. It is an organ of exappropriation in its *selfsameness*.

In the first year of his late seminars on the death penalty, Derrida treats the matter of the heart at length, offering vivid descriptions of one's own heart as the heart of another that suggest that the heart is an other within the self. I will quote at length a passage from this seminar that touches upon a number of the issues that concern us:

> Only a living being as finite being can have a future, can be exposed to a future, to an incalculable and undecidable future that s/he does not have at his/her disposal like a master and that comes to him or to her from some other, from the heart of the other. So much so that when I say "my life," or even my "living present," here, I have already named the other in me, the other greater, younger, or older than me, the other of my sex or not, the other who nonetheless lets me be me, the other whose heart is more interior to my heart than my heart itself, which means that I protect my heart, I protest in the name of my heart when I fight [*en me battant*] so that the heart of the other will continue to beat [*battre*]—in me before me, after me, or even without me. Where else would I find the strength and the drive and the interest to fight [*me battre*] and to struggle [*me débattre*], with my whole heart, with the beating [*battant*] of my heart against the death penalty? I can do it, me, as me, only thanks to the other, by the grace of the other heart that affirms life in me, by the grace of the other who appeals for grace and pardon or appeals the condemnation, and with an appeal to which I must respond, and that is what is called here, even before any correspondence, responsibility. It is my own interest, the interest of my life, of the heart of the

> other in me, that makes me responsible both for the other and before the other who is in front of me before me [*devant moi avant moi*]. Even when the other is beside me, or right up against me, or close to me, the other is first of all in front of me before me in me.[269]

Here, Derrida suggests that the 'will to live' is a sign of the other in oneself. One derives the impulse to survive from the other inasmuch as the heart beating within oneself is the heart of the other. One survives—lives even—by the grace of the other.

Responsiveness to otherness happens at the very 'heart' of the self. The other is 'first of all' within oneself. The heart is the other within the self, and is 'greater' than the self 'itself': it will not do, on Derrida's view, merely to show that the other within is a part, large or small, within a whole. Rather, the idea that the other within is 'greater' than the self interrupts the logic of interior and exterior that has proven to be insufficient or misleading for figuring a deconstructive account of selfhood. Derrida also interrupts the logic of interiority by stating in the quote above that the heart of the other is 'more interior' to oneself than 'my heart itself': otherness constitutes the self to such a degree that degree itself, that a logic of part and whole, of interiority and exteriority, is shown to have it all wrong, because the otherness within the self is closer to the self than anything else. While we have found it useful in this dissertation to speak of the otherness of the self as an 'internal' otherness, Derrida gestures toward the insufficiency and metaphysical overdetermination of this terminology through the suggestion that the other 'within' the self is 'greater' than the self. Speaking of 'internal otherness,' as I do here, is helpful but misleading. Heuristically, it offers a helpful image of what we are talking about here, and yet it does not accurately depict

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[269] Derrida, *The Death Penalty, Volume I*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 257.

the phenomenon in question (at least partly because what follows from *différance* and the trace is that what we are talking about is not, strictly speaking, a 'phenomenon').

Another element that emerges from the passage quoted above is the idea that one's exposure to an unforeseeable future is also the other 'within' the self. Finitude entails the unforeseeability of the future, and the future entails otherness insofar as it marks what cannot be mastered or controlled by a sovereign or transparent self. This future, Derrida says in this passage, comes from (the heart of) the other. The emphasis on the temporal dimension of otherness 'within' the self is helpfully laid out in Derrida's writings on the decision and undecidability, to which we will turn next.

3b. Decision

The process of making a decision attests to otherness within the self insofar as it troubles the identity of the subject and suggests the irreducibly temporal, dynamic, and ecstatic situation of the self. While auto-affection has illustrated the embodied dimension of self-othering, the decision foregrounds a cognitive and at least partially reflective process that is typically seen as pertaining to the consciousness and agency of the subject. Since Aristotle, decision making has generally been considered a kind of rational calculation or 'deliberation,' in which an individual weighs various options for acting. Derrida's writings on the decision reveal that this is only part of the story. The decision, for Derrida, does not follow from a process of calculation. Rather, even the most calculated decision is contaminated by the incalculable, and receives the condition of its possibility from what makes it, as such, impossible: that is, undecidability. Undecidability offers a useful way to think about the otherness of any process of reflection or choice made by the self. Later in

the dissertation (Chapter 4), we will see that it also allows us to think differently about the relation between oneself and other beings.

Derrida becomes increasingly attentive to the question of the decision in his work of the 1990s. How are decisions made, and what makes them possible? Deconstruction turns the usual answers to these two questions on their head, unsettling traditional explanations of decision-making. Throughout the history of philosophy, the decision has been more or less explicitly aligned with an active, self-conscious subject. The enactor of the decision, whether that of Aristotelian deliberation, Kantian autonomy, or Sartrean freedom, has been associated with activity—and, as Derrida sees it, sovereignty. The phantasms of pure agency, subjectivity, and self-presence form the basis of metaphysical theories of the decision. These theories of the decision, then, are as equally self-deconstructing as the theories of subjectivity and self-presence on the basis of which they are formed. To answer the question 'How are decisions made?', Derrida says the following: decisions are made by the other. That is, decisions are not made by a self-conscious rational agent who seamlessly comes to a decision as the culmination of a process of deliberation. Rather, for Derrida, it is the *other* rather than the self, same, or subject who makes a decision.

As for the question, 'How are decisions possible?' we would have to say that decisions are possible precisely by means of that which makes them impossible (as pure): every decision is made possible, but is also haunted by, undecidability. In contrast with the decision-making process that philosophy has tended to consider a conscious, freely chosen weighing of options resulting in autonomous action, Derrida interrupts the pretensions to sovereignty and subjective agency in the decision. For Derrida, any decision must go through the ordeal of the undecidable, and must be made *by the other*. Inasmuch as metaphysical models of subjectivity are marked by an assumption of transparency, self-identity and self-

coincidence, they fail to recognize the irruptive nature of the decision.[270] It is thus through the structure of alterity within the self that the decision is made possible.

Let us explore the deconstructive answers to these two questions at greater length. First, we might wonder what it means to say that the decision is made by the other. Why does Derrida deny that the subject or self makes the decision, through a freely projected movement or sovereign choice? If the self were purely self-identical, there would be no principle of differentiation within it that would make any decision possible. The decision requires self-interruption.[271] As a result, Derrida states in *The Politics of Friendship*, "Undoubtedly the subjectivity of a subject, already, never decides anything; its identity to itself and its calculable permanence make of every decision an accident that leaves the subject indifferent. *A theory of the subject is incapable of accounting for the slightest decision*."[272] No theory of the subject would be capable of understanding the decision *as* decision. Alterity is required 'within' in order for any decision to be possible: the decision is "the decision of the other. Of the absolute other in me, the other as the absolute other that decides on me in me."[273] In other words, then, the decision is only possible by virtue of a lack of self-coincidence: it is an other 'within' who decides, insofar as the decision is something that one makes and yet does not do so out of the fully conscious presence of a self-identical subject. For Derrida, the decision is possible because of the division or otherness within the self. Without the alterity that contaminates the self-presence of the decider, the decision could

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[270] Derrida, *Politics of Friendship,* 68.
[271] Derrida states in the interview "Hospitality, Responsibility, and Justice," "there would be no responsibility or decision without some self-interruption." Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 81.
[272] Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 68. Trans. modified.
[273] Ibid., 68.

not be made: so much so that we can say that it is not the self, but the other ('in me'), who makes the decision.

It should be clear from the foregoing that the 'other in me' is not to be taken as a substance or entity. The other in the self is necessarily multiple, nonsubstantial, and a trace or specter. It is marked by *différance* rather than by a metaphysical notion of absolute identity and difference. Derrida guards against the homunculus-interpretation of the decision as the decision of the other in me in a brief article from 2000 entitled "Performative Powerlessness—A Response to Simon Critchley." Here, he states that the argument that the decision is 'the decision of the other in me' "does not mean that I have someone in me, like a sort of little machine, a ventriloquist, who takes action in my place."[274] While Derrida does not expand on this, we may of course see this model as problematic insofar as it refers back to the very ideas of consciousness, pure self-presence, mastery, and the like that precisely occlude the alterity within self-relation. Merely arguing that there is an other (entity, subject, master) within the self is far from a satisfying way of fleshing out the notion of internal otherness to which this dissertation attends.

Rather than falling into this homunculus model of the decision, Derrida instead outlines the very different nature of this argument that the decision as that of the 'other in me'. He suggests that this other conception of the decision "means that the decision itself corresponds to the other, and that I am myself only from this infinite responsibility which the other places in me. The other who is in me is greater than I. I can only gain access to my selfhood (*ipséité*), my egoity, etc., from this relation to the other in me, but the other in me

[274] Jacques Derrida, "Performative Powerlessness—A Response to Simon Critchley," trans. James Ingram, *Constellations* 7:4, 468.

can nevertheless not be incorporated or introjected – who is in me, greater than I."[275] This quotation signals the insufficiency of the 'in' contained within the phrase 'other *in* me,' and which we have found a misleading, though at times necessary, word to use throughout this project. That is, as with the idea that the heart of the other within is 'greater' than one's own heart, this conception of the decision also troubles the logic of interiority and exteriority, such that 'other in me' is an illuminating phrase for highlighting the otherness that constitutes the self yet also misleading if it leads one to forget that it is not merely *an* other lodged *within*. Derrida guards against this tendency of thinking by considering the other within as 'greater than I', hinting at the insufficiency of a spatial or material conception of the self (and other) as substance.

Derrida also notes in the same article that the structure of the decision is closely related to that of the event. "The question of the decision…has to be connected" to that of the event, inasmuch as both gesture toward an "absurdity" or inconceivability that is heterogeneous to the calculable order of knowledge.[276] The event is that which arrives, ruptures all foreseeability, continuity, or horizon, and inaugurates novelty through the irruption of what is *other* into the sphere of what appeared to be the same. Both the decision and the event require alterity. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida even suggests that "the decision makes the event" [*la décision fait événement*].[277] The decision is the "condition of the event," and the event "is always in me, structurally, another event, a rending decision as the decision of the other."[278] Following the logic we traced in the previous chapter, by which a

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[275] Derrida, "Performative Powerlessness," 468. The distinction between 'incorporation' and 'introjection' pertains to Derrida's writings on mourning vis à vis psychoanalysis, on which we will touch in Chapter 4.
[276] Derrida, "Performative Powerlessness," 468.
[277] Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 68. "La décision fait événement…"
[278] Ibid., 68.

purely isolated subject could not be affected by the other if it were not already in a sense open to the other by bearing otherness 'within' it, here we can say that the decision and the event—insofar as they disrupt, transform, surprise—indicate alterity. Contrasting Derrida's writings on the decision with those of of classical theories of the subject, Bennington writes: "Derrida is trying to 'eventise' the decision, and this means it can no longer by quite *my* decision. On this view, decisions are taken *by the other*, my decisions, my most sovereign decisions, cannot be decisions if they are taken by some self-coincident agency, but are decisive only if there is a diremption between 'me' and the decider (in me)."[279] Like the event, the decision would not be a decision as such if it were the mere application of a program (a feature we will explore further shortly). Both the event and the decision occur by virtue of an interruption of self-coincidence or continuity. Bennington notes that this account of the decision "is in fact a rigorous consequence of the quasi-concept of *différance*, at least as developed through the notion of the 'trace' in *Of Grammatology*."[280] The quasi-concepts of *différance* and the trace, as we outlined earlier, signal the foreclosure of any purity or self-identity. A theory of the decision thought through *différance* and the trace is one that must take into account the non-presence, otherness, and 'diremption' between the process of decision making and the decision itself.

This helps to clarify the second question with which we began this section: that is, what makes the decision possible? What makes the decision possible is what also makes it impossible: namely, undecidability. This is also a direct consequence of the deconstructive track we have been following in this chapter so far. An impossible decision is the only possible decision. On Derrida's account, a 'possible' decision would be one that merely

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[279] Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 27.
[280] Ibid., 28.

continued a program or plan carried out on the plane of knowledge. This decision would be 'in the realm of possibility': it would be realistic, continuous, following directly from options previously laid out and considered. However, this is not the character of the decision. Rather, because of its event-like character, the decision is *heterogeneous to knowledge*. This idea of the heterogeneity to knowledge is crucial for our discussion here, and will also be taken up again later in the dissertation. In essence, we might see it as a causal claim: there is no guaranteed continuity from knowledge as cause to decision as effect: as a result, we cannot say that the knowledge 'caused' the decision (just as we cannot say that the subject 'caused' the decision, either). As Derrida puts it in the interview "Nietzsche and the Machine":

> As to a decision that is guided by a form of knowledge—if I know, for example, what the causes and effects of what I am doing are, what the program is for what I am doing, then there is no decision; it is a question, at the movement of judgment, of
> applying a particular causality. When I make the machine work, there is no decision; the machine works, the relation is one of cause and effect. If I know what is to be done, if my theoretical analysis of the situation shows me what is to be done—to this to cause that, etc.—then there is no moment of decision, simply the application of a body of knowledge, of, at the very least, a rule or norm. For there to be a decision, the decision must be heterogeneous to knowledge as such. [281]

[281] Derrida, *Negotiations*: *Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 231.

A decision guided by knowledge would be machine-like: the cause leads to the effect with perfect regularity. This is not how the decision works. There is no guaranteed, machinic implementation of a rule when it comes to the decision.[282]

Derrida frequently draws on Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, claiming that 'the moment of decision is madness.'[283] Derrida recalls Abraham's leap of faith in deciding to kill Isaac as well as Kierkegaard's claim that this action is inexplicable from the universal realm of ethics in which actions are justified and explained through reason. The decision is made possible by its own impossibility (the impossibility of the decision's justification through knowledge). Derrida writes: "These are the only decisions possible—impossible ones. Think here of Kierkegaard: the only decision possible is the impossible decision. It is when it is not possible to *know* what must be done, when knowledge is not and cannot be determining that a decision is possible as such."[284] The lack of knowledge to determine the decision suggests an absence of determination of the decision more generally. The decision is not simply *indeterminate*—"undecidability is not indeterminacy," he states—inasmuch as there are determinate aspects to the knowledge and choices that prepare the decision. However, we cannot say that the determinacy of the decision is guaranteed. The decision does not unfold as the 'logical next step' of what has gone before in a pure causal chain.[285]

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[282] Although the auto-deconstruction of the regularity of the machine itself is not to be overlooked here, either.

[283] See especially Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For a discussion of Derrida's use of this phrase, see Bennington, *Scatter I: The Politics of Politics in Foucault, Heidegger, and Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), Chapter 4.

[284] Derrida, *Points*, 147.

[285] Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility," 79. See also Bennington, *Scatter I* (158)*:* in the moment of decision as Derrida develops it in *Force of Law*, "something interrupts any causal sequence."

Abraham's inability to reason his decision is the character of any decision whatsoever on Derrida's view. Derrida notes that Abraham "decides, but his absolute decision is neither guided nor controlled by knowledge. Such, in fact, is the paradoxical condition of every decision; it cannot be deduced from a form of knowledge of which it would simply be the effect, its conclusion or explicitation. It structurally breaches knowledge," this breach constituting what Derrida calls in *Rogues* "a leap between two discontinuous and radically heterogeneous orders."[286] If the decision were the simple effect of knowledge, it would not be a decision. The order of knowledge is one of calculability, whereas the decision itself, *qua* condition of the event, is incalculable. It is *other* to the realm of knowledge.

To say that there is a breach between knowledge and the decision is not to say that the role of knowledge is disavowed in decision making altogether. Derrida does not set out to eliminate knowledge from the decision in order to say instead that every decision should be made blindly without the help of any knowledge. Indeed, making a decision requires knowledge: I gather information, perhaps through a process of deliberation, that makes me believe that this decision is a good idea for me. Imagine I am buying a car, for instance. In order to make a decision about which car to purchase, I do research on various companies, models, and makes. I weigh options: cost of the car versus gas mileage, reputation for durability as opposed to frequent repairs, aesthetic desirability of the car's shape and form, safety. I calculate and reason; I consider possibilities. These calculations are, broadly speaking, a part of the decision making process. A deconstructive account of the decision

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[286] Derrida, *Rogues*, 145. He states here: "A 'responsibility' or a 'decision' cannot be founded on or justified by any *knowledge as such*, that is, without a leap between two discontinuous and radically heterogeneous orders."[286] Variations on this statement can be found in a variety of other texts as well, including *The Gift of Death*, "Hospitality, Responsibility, Justice," and Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," trans. Mary Quaintance, *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1989-1990).

does not disavow knowledge completely. I should not conclude, 'there is a breach between knowledge and the decision, so I will just choose a car blindly or at random.' On the contrary, "It is *necessary to know*, to be sure…we need to have knowledge, the best and most comprehensive available," Derrida writes, "in order to make a decision or take responsibility."[287] We need merely to point out that this preparatory knowledge is not *itself* what decides. There is a rupture between this preparatory knowledge and the actual decision that is made, and it is this rupture that makes of the decision a kind of madness. It is also this irruption that suggests that alterity is required for any decision made by a self. When the decision is made, it supervenes upon what went before as a kind of cut, a cut that is urgent and decisive. Here, we can understand the previous claim that a theory of the subject cannot account for the decision here in the sense that neither self-enclosed subjectivity and a domain of knowledge as 'realm of possibility' can explain the caesura or leap between heterogeneous registers that makes a decision a decision. The decision is heterogeneous to knowledge and, inasmuch as knowledge has to do with deliberative reasoning, representation, and consciousness, the decision is also heterogeneous to the subject.[288]

When I finally make the decision to buy a car, this decision is heterogeneous to the calculative process that seems to culminate in this choice. It would be a mistake to consider this leap that constitutes the decision merely as a temporal interruption, by which the instant of the decision ruptures with what went before. While this, we have seen, is a crucial aspect, it does not do justice to the more general point about undecidability that Derrida foregrounds, and which provides another way of thinking about the otherness required in any decision-making by a self. This general point about undecidability is as follows: any

[287] Derrida, *Rogues*, 145
[288] In the following chapter, I will argue that, like the decision, the distinction between oneself and other beings is heterogeneous to knowledge for the same reasons.

decision is haunted by undecidability. The decision that is made could have been made otherwise, and had to be made without assurance of itself through knowledge. Undecidability is not paralysis in the face of the need to decide, nor is it indeterminacy.[289] Rather, the necessity of deciding, and the determined context of the decision, are the conditions for the possibility of the decision. At the same time, this necessity and this context do not themselves encapsulate or even cause the decision. There is no saturation, plenitude, or assurance in the conditions for the decision such that the decision follows clearly as in a program. Derrida writes: "The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions, it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged—it is of obligation that we must speak—to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. A decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process."[290] Any free decision must go through 'the ordeal of the undecidable' in order to be a decision. A decision that merely applied a rule—whether the categorical imperative of deontology, the Christian adage to "love your neighbor as yourself," a cost-benefit analysis, or the maximization of good—would not be a decision worthy of the name. Rather, it would be mere application, and therefore not a decision at all. Undecidability must constitute the ground of a decision in order for it even to *be* a decision. The interests of 'decision theory' that would seek to analyze the tendencies of agents to choose certain things over others would bypass the real problem of the decision. Derrida is concerned with the absence of determinism or universal rule in any true theory of decision.

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289 Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility," 66, 79.
290 Derrida, "Force of Law," 963.

In "Force of Law," Derrida argues that the "ghost of the undecidable" haunts every decision.[291] The decision is impossible because it must 'go through the ordeal of the undecidable' in order to be enacted; therefore, the decision is never a pure decision. It is marked by its other. As mentioned previously, this is not merely an empirical claim about how, prior to making a decision, it is not determined that one may choose one decision over another (including the decision not to make a decision), but is a stronger structural claim about the very nature of the decision. Derrida is not saying that there is uncertainty prior to making a decision, but that this vanishes once the decision is made. Even after the decision is made, rather, the possibility of a different decision's having been made 'haunts' it like a ghost.

This is the case even for decisions are made repeatedly: as going to the gym is not a one-time decision, but a repeated and, likely, increasingly habitual one. Derrida states, "An always perilous transaction must thus invent, each time, in a singular situation, its own law and norm."[292] Each situation is singular, going beyond the realm of universally applicable law and norm. Say that this time, I am not making the decision to buy a car, but rather making the decision to start going to the gym three times a week. Three weeks in, I can happily look back and see that I have gone to the gym every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday since making my decision. However, it obviously remains the case that I could fail to keep this decision in the future: I could go twice, or once, or not at all this coming week. But this is not all. Even though I have successfully kept my resolution so far, *it remains possible that I could have done otherwise*, and therefore, it was always already possible that I did not go to the gym, and remains so even after I actually have. My choice to go the gym three times a week is

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291 Ibid., 963.
292 Derrida, *Rogues*, 151.

haunted by undecidability. Finally, and even more significant, is the consequence of iterability: even though, each time I go to the gym, I make the *same* decision as I did the last time ("I will go to the gym three times a week"), each of these decisions is singular and invented each time. Making the same decision repeatedly is also making the same decision *differently, each time.*

We can add to this the idea that, even when a decision is made singularly, anew, and each time, the decision is not the decision of the present. Just as, for Derrida, the decision is not the decision of the self but of the other within the self, so too might we say that the decision not the decision of the present (insofar as Derrida aligns subjectivity and the presence of the present throughout his work). If the moment of decision is madness, then it cannot be directly 'experienced' by a subject.[293] While this structure would hold for the decision in general, it is especially evident in long-term resolutions in which the same decision is repeatedly made, such as the above example of going to the gym three times a week.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has considered Derrida's deconstruction as a basis for a novel theory of selfhood. Far from eliminating the self, deconstruction encourages us to think it otherwise. Deconstruction allows us to think about the self as contaminated by otherness and constituted in and through it. Self-identity is possible only on the basis of this otherness, we have argued. In taking seriously *différance* and the trace, we have considered sameness and otherness, as well as identity and difference, not as oppositional, but as related; not as related

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[293] For a helpful analysis of the interruption of the self or experience in the decision, see Bennington, *Scatter I,* particularly Chapter 4, where Bennington relates the moment of decision in Derrida to Derrida's reflections on the *Augenblick* in Husserl.

through a plenitude of presence, but as related through the absence that makes presence possible (and never as pure presence).[294] We have seen that self and other are *contaminated*: they are intertwined such that sameness receives its identity from otherness but nonetheless receives some identity from this contamination.

Moving forward to the next chapter, I'd like to articulate a conclusion that follows from this chapter and that will set up the following chapters: *We respond to ourselves as if to another*. A starting point of the foregoing analyses of the contamination of the self by otherness is that the irreducible alterity figured by Levinasian response ethics is already present within the self. However, we have shown that there is not 'one kind' of otherness, but rather that a consequence of *différance* is a proliferation of differences and otherness(es). Otherness has been seen to be antithetical to a traditional metaphysics of identity and difference inasmuch as it does not figure something present or potentially present, original or derivative, but which rather marks a 'split', 'doubled', and 'absent' origin of both sameness and otherness. This also indicates that otherness cannot be figured in terms of degree. To consider it as such would be to imply that there is one kind of otherness that exists more or less within the self and other beings.

One consequence of this view is that the relationality of self-relation cannot be rigorously cut off from the relationality of the self to other beings. Rather, in responding to ourselves, we respond as if to another. This happens on a variety of levels in countless ways, from the responsiveness of the body in proprioception to its own temperature regulation, to the decision making process we have outlined above, to emotive phenomena such as self-love and self-hatred. I say that we respond to ourselves 'as if' to another so as not to

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[294] This 'relation,' it bears noting, would also have to be considered as a *relation without relation,* following the 'x without x' logic that Derrida pursues in a number of texts and which is adapted from Levinas and Blanchot.

undermine a distinction between oneself and other beings: as I will argue in Chapter 4, the logic we are pursuing here does not amount to a denial of the difference between oneself (as other to oneself) and other beings. We are always already implicated in responding to otherness, both 'within' and 'outside' of ourselves. The self is made up of traces of others, which are in turn themselves traces. To say that we respond to ourselves 'as if' to another is a way of saying that experience itself is responsiveness to alterity; it is to say that this is the case regardless of whether we are other to ourselves 'as such' or not.

The idea that we respond to ourselves 'as if' to another is inspired by Michael Naas's remarks about an 'as if,' or *comme si*, perceptible within deconstruction. Naas argues that much of Derrida's work consists in the attempt to show that what passes itself off as an 'as such' is in fact an 'as if'—this is the structure of the phantasm.[295] One of the examples that Naas uses for this structure is the self: the self is a phantasm, an 'as if' that is generally taken for an 'as such.' The danger of the phantasm is to hypostatize the 'as if into an 'as such,' to take the illusion for a stable, actual reality with essence and self-presence. It follows from what we have said about self-relation as self-other-relation that our relation to ourselves is a relation to another (to take a phrase from Ricoeur).[296] We respond to ourselves as other to ourselves. Yet the 'as if' is helpful here for reminding us that what we are speaking of has a spectral nature or presence, and cannot be hypostatized back into the black and white logic of modern metaphysics. Auto-affection is auto-hetero-affection; one's own heart is the heart of another; the self is a trace, traces of traces. Self-relation is self-other relation. It is *as if* this were the case.

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[295] Naas, *Derrida From Now On,* 188.
[296] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*.

3. Deconstructing the First-Person Perspective

In the previous chapter, we pursued a deconstructive account of selfhood. Here, I would like to further that pursuit with a slightly different focus: a deconstructive account of the first-person perspective. Whereas the previous chapter stayed very close to Derrida's writings, often focusing on quite specific terms, here we will be less reliant on these texts and terms and more concerned with showing the implications of deconstruction for the 'first-person perspective,' the basic feature of subjectivity for phenomenology and much of the philosophy of mind. This argument will go over many of the tracks laid in the previous chapter and further demonstrate the resources that deconstruction provides for an account of selfhood and self-relation. Broadly, the argument will thematize the contention between phenomenology and deconstruction on the question of whether or not the first-person perspective is internally fractured or split. We will draw especially on Dan Zahavi's criticisms of Derrida in *Self-Awareness and Alterity*. Defending Derrida against Zahavi's claims will lead us to claim that there is a fracture within the first-person perspective. We will then turn to exploring this fracture within the work of Merleau-Ponty, whom I claim is much closer to Derrida on this point than Derrida grants. I will argue that Merleau-Ponty offers a phenomenological account of first-person experience that suggests its contamination by alterity, and that, in so doing, Merleau-Ponty provides resources for a deconstructive moment within phenomenology.

1. Deconstruction and the First-Person Perspective

The term 'first-person perspective' is frequently used in phenomenology, especially its recent Anglo-American strands, and in the philosophy of mind. It signifies the irreducible

ground of subjective experience, often termed 'mineness,' that cannot be had by anyone other than oneself. Thomas Nagel describes it as the 'what it is like' of experience, while Dan Zahavi describes it as a "mode of givenness" experienced "from within."[297] Phenomenologists are concerned with showing that the first-person experience, at least on a phenomenal level, is not grounded in anything other than itself: it is the experiential ground-zero for consciousness, and need not rely on anything other than itself in order to be confirmed. This first-person perspective, sometimes closely or entirely linked with the ability to use the pronoun 'I,' is characterized by what is termed 'immunity to error through misidentification,' which denotes the impossibility for someone to inaccurately ascribe a first-person, subjective experience to him or herself. While it is possible to be wrong in ascribing something to myself that pertains to me as *object*—for instance, 'I am bad at math' or 'I am allergic to gluten'—it is impossible for me to ascribe something to myself that pertains to me as *subject*—for instance, 'I am in pain.'[298] This immunity to error through misidentification goes back to Descartes' *cogito*: no matter whether I am mistaken about the content of a proposition or experience, I cannot be mistaken that it is *I* doing the proposing or experiencing.

For Zahavi, who follows a broadly phenomenological trajectory on this point, the first-person perspective cannot be founded on anything other than itself, because this would either 1) result in an infinite regress, or 2) be guilty of begging the question. Zahavi takes what he calls 'reflection theory' as his primary antagonist, claiming that its variants fall into

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[297] Thomas Nagel, "What is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83:4 (1974); Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 12.

[298] Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity,* 5. This latter form of self-reference is closely linked to self-awareness: "In order to have *self*-awareness, it is not enough that I am *de facto* thinking of myself; I also need to know or realize that it is my*self* that I am aware of." Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity,* 17.

one or both of these problems. According to the reflection theory (generally denoted in Analytic literature as the higher-order theory of consciousness), consciousness requires the present of a second-order mental state that reflects on a first-order mental state. Consciousness occurs when a higher-order state takes a first-order state as its object. Higher-order theorist David M. Rosenthal, who subscribes to a 'higher-order thought' (HOT) theory of consciousness, puts it as follows: "On the HOT theory, every conscious mental state is accompanied by a HOT about that state…A mental state is conscious only if it is accompanied by a HOT."[299] To be conscious is to have a higher-order reflection on one's mental state.[300]

This demand that a higher-order mental state reflect on the first-order mental state as its object leads to an infinite regress, Zahavi claims. Zahavi takes inspiration here from Sartre, who argues against a reflective theory of consciousness using an infinite regress argument in the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, but Zahavi also claims that this view is also perceptible (though generally overlooked) in Husserl. If my awareness of the color blue requires my awareness of (my awareness of the color blue), then my awareness of (my awareness of the color blue) in turn requires my awareness of (my awareness of [my awareness of the color blue]), and so on.[301] If any conscious mental state is the product of a higher-order reflection on that mental state, then there is an endless chain of confirmations required for a state to be considered 'conscious.'

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[299] David M. Rosenthal, "A Theory of Consciousness," in *The Nature of Consciousness*, ed. N. Block, O. Flanagan, and G. Güzeldere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 742.
[300] It is worth pointing out here that the HOT theory of consciousness pertains generally to consciousness rather than specifically to self-consciousness. Zahavi sometimes conflates what he takes to be consciousness and self-consciousness for the reflection theory. This conflation emerges from the fact that Zahavi is attempting to map Sartre's criticisms of a reflection theory of *self-consciousness* to a higher-order theory of *consciousness*, and does not delineate between the two in his criticisms even as the distinction is crucial for Zahavi's own view.
[301] Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity,* 34.

Reflection theorists have a simple answer to this charge of infinite regress: the higher-order state need not itself be conscious. Rather, one can accept the existence of non-conscious mental states. Zahavi is equally unsatisfied with this answer, however, as he claims that there is no good reason to believe that the coupling of two non-conscious mental states would produce consciousness. Zahavi claims that, in order to recognize a state as 'conscious,' one needs to be conscious already, on a pre-reflective level. This is the second charge, that of begging the question. On Zahavi's view, the reflection theory begs the question when it claims that consciousness emerges from higher-order reflection on a non-conscious state, when in fact consciousness is only recognizable as such because one has a pre-reflective acquaintance of it.[302] In order for something to be recognizable as conscious, there would need to be some pre-reflective acquaintance with it to begin with.

The problem here arises in the necessity for reflection theory to show that the reflected and the reflecting are *identical*. The duality of states in reflection theory must be overcome by showing that the two states are identical—"otherwise we would not have a case of *self*-awareness."[303] On Zahavi's view, one would only be able to grasp the thematized consciousness and the thematizing consciousness as identical if one were already pre-reflectively acquainted with oneself via self-consciousness. Why would a second-order state confer consciousness if that consciousness were not originally there already, Zahavi

[302] One might wonder here whether it is Zahavi himself who is begging the question.
[303] Ibid., 17. While Zahavi is himself moving the goalposts here by now limiting reflection theory to a theory of *self*-awareness whereas he had been speaking more broadly about the reflection theory of awareness or consciousness more generally, we will give him the benefit of the doubt here and presume that this problem of identification also goes for consciousness and not merely self-consciousness. This slippage between consciousness and self-consciousness in Zahavi's critique of the reflection theory emerges from the fact that he is appropriating Sartre's arguments against reflection theory from the Introduction of *Being and Nothingness*, which pertain specifically to a reflection theory of *self*-consciousness, for the sake of arguing against the contemporary HOT theory, which pertains to consciousness generally.

wonders? Why the mere doubling of two states that, taken separately, are non-conscious, would lead to consciousness is a mystery that the reflection theory fails to answer convincingly. This is especially the case when we move from consciousness to self-consciousness: in order for the second-order state to constitute *self*-consciousness rather than a mere consciousness of an object (or object-intentionality), this consciousness must also "be grasped as being *identical* with the thematizing act" of reflection.[304] This presumption of identity between the two acts, however, all the more requires that one is pre-reflectively acquainted with oneself such that one could identify a mental state as being had *by oneself*.

As a result, Zahavi roundly rejects reflection theory. He writes: "Reflection operates with an epistemic duality, and to introduce that duality into the core of consciousness has aporetical consequences. We would either have to face an infinite regress or accept an unconscious starting point, i.e., an act of reflection which itself remained unconscious. Since both options fail to explain how self-awareness is brought about, they must be rejected."[305] The first option for the reflection theory is to face an infinite regress, and the second is to accept non-conscious mental states. The second option is the clear position of reflection theorists; for Zahavi, however, it is guilty of begging the question because, in order to be considered consciousness, one would need to have a pre-reflective acquaintance with what consciousness is already in order to recognize the state as conscious. Outside of this, there is no reason to believe that a non-conscious state would produce consciousness. The reflection theory fails because it gives rise to one or both of these problems.

At the root of both of these problems is the 'epistemic duality' that reflection theory introduces into the core of consciousness. Reflection theory both introduces a duality into

[304] Ibid., 17.
[305] Ibid., 52.

consciousness and implicitly takes this duality to have a subject-object structure (in which the subject is the second-order state and the object is the first-order state), and this creates unresolvable problems for it. As a result, Zahavi rejects any theory of consciousness that introduces a duality into it.

Zahavi's alternative to the reflection theory is a theory of pre-reflective self-awareness. The reflection theory generally implies that consciousness is a form of object-intentionality; it does not foreground a distinction between object-intentionality and self-awareness, a distinction Zahavi claims all of the major figures of phenomenology make. There is a distinction, that is, between consciousness (as consciousness *of*, following a classical Husserlian theory of intentionality) and self-consciousness. Zahavi claims that this distinction must be preserved in order for consciousness not to be subject to an infinite regress. As I have mentioned, this argument is taken from Sartre's Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre, whose formulations are often clearer than Zahavi's, writes: "Consciousness of self is not dual. If we wish to avoid an infinite regress, there must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself."[306] Self-awareness is not the product of reflection; rather, it is the irreducible ground of both reflection and the awareness of objects (object-intentionality).[307] At most, reflection offers an explicit knowledge of oneself that is not given by pre-reflective self-awareness, but the former is a derivative of the latter.[308] Instead of the "duality of moments" required for the production of self-consciousness on the reflection theory view, Zahavi posits "the existence of an immediate, tacit, and

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[306] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Citadel Press, 1956), lii-liii.

[307] This is what Sartre calls the 'pre-reflective cogito,' which is similar to what Merleau-Ponty will call the 'tacit cogito' in *The Phenomenology of Perception.*

[308] Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, 19.

nonthematic kind of self-awareness."[309] This view, he claims, is taken by the major thinkers of the phenomenological tradition, including Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Henry. Taking pre-reflective self-awareness as the indivisible ground of subjectivity is essential in order not to fall into the mistakes of the reflection theory.

1a. Zahavi's Critique of Derrida

Zahavi's account interests me because it presents a challenge to the Derridean view of the self we have been developing so far. Does Derrida make the mistakes of reflection theory—and are they mistakes? Does a deconstructive account of self-relation preserve the first-person perspective of pre-reflective self-awareness? Does it fall into the problems of infinite regress and/or begging the question? Does it take self-consciousness to be a kind of object-intentionality? Zahavi considers Derrida's deconstruction of subjectivity to be guilty of the same problems as reflection theory. Here, I will briefly consider a couple of claims that Zahavi makes about Derrida on this subject; then, I will pursue my own conclusions to the above questions. I will claim that the deconstruction of selfhood and subjectivity does not fall into the problem of infinite regress that Zahavi claims, because it does not conceive of self-consciousness as an object of knowledge in the way that reflection theory does. Nor does it fall into the charge of begging the question, because the duality figured by deconstruction is not analogous to the subject-object duality presupposed by reflection theory. I will then affirm that the first-person perspective is subject to deconstruction, *pace* Zahavi's insistence on its irreducible and nondual character. The first-person perspective cannot be what it is—the indeclinable origin of experience—without being haunted by

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309 Ibid., 17 and 21.

second- and third-person perspectives. The first-person perspective, as origin of the world, is split or fractured.

In *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, Zahavi follows Derrida to a certain extent but also finds his formulations "too excessive."[310] For one, Zahavi finds that Derrida's deconstruction of presence threatens to render pre-reflective self-awareness meaningless. Although Zahavi, like Derrida, grants that self-awareness is inextricably intertwined with awareness of what is other to it (for Zahavi, object-intentionality), he retains the notion that self-awareness is not grounded in anything other than itself. "To claim that self-awareness is not a manifestation *sui generis*," Zahavi writes of Derrida, "but the product of a decentered play of unconscious structural differences, is basically to face all the problems of the reflection theory once again."[311] The reason for this is that, as we have seen, the reflection theory gives an unconvincing account of how self-consciousness emerges by claiming that it does so through the doubling of two states of awareness. For Zahavi, if self-consciousness were not there already (on a pre-reflective level), then there would be no reason to posit its introduction through the coupling of two other states. On this view, Derrida's claims are equally unconvincing: what good reason would there be to claim that differences produce identities? Why would traces of otherness produce a self?

Another point on which Zahavi takes issue with Derrida is the relation between auto-affection and hetero-affection which we treated in this chapter. Zahavi goes along with Derrida in asserting that auto- and hetero-affection are interdependent. The way Zahavi conceives of the relation between the two, however, is quite different from Derrida. Auto-

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[310] Ibid., 135. For another attempt to defend Derrida against Zahavi's critiques in *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, see Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, especially Chapter 2.

[311] Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, 86. Interestingly, Zahavi points out that Husserl himself "anticipated Derrida's line of thought" and at times seriously considered it, but rejected it in *The Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness*.

affection, or, as Zahavi puts it, self-affection, is an accurate description of pre-reflective self-awareness. Like self-awareness, self-affection is immediate and nonrelational on Zahavi's view; concomitantly, it "involves no difference, distance, or mediation between that which affects and that which is affected."[312] There is an identity between the affecting and the affected. It is, we might say, pure or uncontaminated by hetero-affection (unlike Derrida, Zahavi does not grant that the coupling of the affecting and the affected necessarily entails a minimal hetero-affection). At the same time, however, Zahavi grants that self-awareness and auto-affection are inseparable from hetero-affection, 'hetero-affection' here designating "the (pre)givenness of a foreign (proto)object."[313] Zahavi views the inseparability of auto-affection and hetero-affection, a view he argues is also supported by Husserl, as a moderate and defensible position. He takes issue with Derrida's radicalization of it—namely, Derrida's "conclusion that the structure of self-awareness contains a fracture."[314] Zahavi thinks that the auto-affection of self-awareness is *accompanied* by hetero-affection, but does not contain hetero-affection within it. That is, Derrida goes further than what I will call Zahavi's 'accompaniment thesis' and pushes a 'contamination thesis': namely, the idea that the inseparability of auto-affection and hetero-affection amounts to a contamination of the one by the other. This 'contamination thesis' admits a fracture, duality, or split origin within the first-person perspective of self-consciousness. As we have seen at length in the previous chapter, for Derrida the self-identity of auto-affection is fractured from the start: indeed, this fracture is what produces the identity of auto-affection. It is at once the condition for its possibility and the condition for its impossibility *as pure*.

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[312] Ibid., 111. Zahavi is describing Henry's theory of self-affection here, with which he has some issues, but the description quoted above applies both to Henry's and Zahavi's views of self-affection.
[313] Ibid., 110.
[314] Ibid., 134.

Above, we quoted Zahavi's claim that Derrida faces the problems of the reflection theory by positing that self-awareness is the product of a play of differences. Notably, later in *Self-Awareness and Alterity* Zahavi makes a near-identical claim, this time replacing 'the product of a decentered play of unconscious structural differences' with 'the result of a mediation.' He writes: "To claim that self-awareness is not a manifestation *sui generis*, but the result of a mediation, is basically to face all the problems of the reflection theory once again."[315] Whereas above, Zahavi took issue with what he perceived to be an 'unconscious' origin of consciousness, here he takes issue with a supposed 'mediation' of auto-affection by hetero-affection. Zahavi's use of the word 'mediation' obscures more than it clarifies, because 'mediation' would not be a synonym for 'contamination' on Derrida's view; however, let's take him to mean something like contamination in order to give his argument the fullest weight against Derrida's view.[316] In doing so, the question would arise: does the contamination of auto-affection by hetero-affection give rise to the infinite regress and/or question-begging of the reflection theory? More generally, does denying a pure, self-identical, ground-zero to consciousness gives rise to these problems?

The answer to both of these questions is 'no.' Let us first argue against the infinite regress contention, which is easy to dismiss, and then consider the contention of question-begging. Recall that the issue of infinite regress with respect to the reflection theory is rooted in the idea that consciousness requires the presence of two mental states: a first-order and a second-order state. Might we not say that the same is true of Derrida? For Derrida, self-consciousness is comprised of traces, which are in turn traces of traces, and so forth. These traces, however, are not themselves conscious. The charge of infinite regress, then, is easy to

[315] Ibid., 135.

[316] I suspect that mediation, with its dialectical resonances, would relegate the relation between auto- and hetero-affection to one of *presence*.

banish, because we might easily place Derrida on the side of HOT theorists such as Rosenthal, who avoid this charge by claiming that a conscious state may have its origin in a non-conscious state. After all, the trace is not 'conscious' for Derrida.[317]

In light of this dismissal of the charge of infinite regress, we would also have to defend Derrida against the issue of question-begging that Zahavi perceives with the HOT theory's acceptance of non-conscious mental states. From the phenomenological perspective, Zahavi claims, it is "quite unclear how a mental state without subjective or phenomenal qualities can be transformed into one with such qualities, i.e. into a subjective experience with first-personal *mineness*, by the mere relational addition of a non-conscious meta-state having the first-order state as its intentional object."[318] Zahavi's extension of this issue with the reflection theory to Derrida's deconstruction of subjectivity is sloppy and inaccurate. Zahavi merely suggests that Derrida's claims about the duality or internal difference of consciousness—for instance, the hetero-affection that marks any auto-affection—would be subject to the issues of the reflection theory. Once one actually returns to these issues in light of Derrida's remarks, however, they are proven to be on quite different ground from Derrida's claims about the fracture of selfhood and consciousness. We will treat the case of auto-hetero-affection, because this is specifically where Zahavi goes for his argument against Derrida. We have also seen in the previous chapter that auto-affection is a particularly illuminating way of thinking about self-relation deconstructively as

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[317] It would also be worthwhile to link this infinite regress argument back to our discussion of infinity in Chapter 1. The trace, it could be argued, offers a solution to an infinite regress (the 'bad infinity' modeled on succession) while also offering an alternative to Hegel's 'good infinity,' in which difference collapses into sameness, and everything is subsumed into identity.

[318] Gallagher, Shaun, and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 56.

a self-other relation, and so what we say of auto-affection may be said of a deconstruction of selfhood more generally.

At bottom, Zahavi fails to conceive of deconstruction as anything other than a reversal of the traditional privileging of the origin as selfsame. He leaves unquestioned a metaphysical conception of the origin as absolute, indivisible, and self-present, not only missing the point in his remarks about Derrida, but also failing in his attempt to retain an internal differentiation within pre-reflective self-consciousness. While the latter, stronger contention is something which we will develop in the following section, it suffices here merely to state that the notion that the auto-affection of self-consciousness could be *accompanied* but not *contaminated* by hetero-affection is a weak and indefensible claim insofar as it offers no sufficient explanation of the relation between auto-affection and hetero-affection in this 'accompaniment.' With respect to his claims about Derrida specifically, Zahavi persists in a metaphysical conception of origin by presuming that an origin must be absolute and pure. Zahavi misses the deconstructive insight into the iterability of the origin: namely, that the origin is only origin by being *repeatable*, and there is thus a necessary duality or fracture at the heart of any origin. The origin is origin by not being pure origin.

Moreover, Zahavi fails to acknowledge that, if Derrida grants a kind of 'duality' in the heart of auto-affection or self-consciousness, this is not a subject-object duality and is thus not comparable to the duality that gives rise to the issue of question-begging for reflection theory. The only kind of duality at the heart of consciousness against which Zahavi sufficiently argues is the subject-object duality of reflection theory. Indeed, he himself grants that there is an internal differentiation within self-awareness, but he offers no argument for why this could not simply be considered a duality. If there is a duality within self-consciousness on Derrida's view, it would be a duality on the order of *différance*,

iterability, contamination, the trace, etc., and would in no way correspond to a subject-object duality.[319] Here, it would be sufficient to recall the remarks we have made about Derrida's 'quasi-transcendental' terms in the foregoing chapter.

The reflection theory's general position is that consciousness is the result of a higher-order mental state taking a first-order mental state as its object. The form of objectification figured by reflection is *cognitive*, Zahavi points out, and this theory of self-consciousness therefore operates on the model of knowledge. Ultimately, the reflection theory figures consciousness as the explicit result of the combination of two mental states, one of which implicitly is taken to be the 'subject' and the other of which is implicitly taken to be the 'object.' The fact that the reflection theory implies that one of these mental states is the 'subject' (namely, the higher-order mental state) begs the question insofar as subjectivity is aligned with consciousness. This model and the problems into which it falls could not be farther from the kind of self-relation we have shown to operate in the deconstructive accounts of selfhood through auto-hetero-affection, the decision, and so on. If Derrida argues that there is a fracture within self-consciousness, this fracture is not cognitive or explicit. Nor does Derrida imply that self-consciousness is a kind of object-intentionality. There is nothing in Derrida that would suggest this. Rather, the idea that one could 'observe' one mental state from a detached, second state that could then be considered to produce consciousness is wholly antithetical to the trace-structure laid out and explored in detail through auto-affection and the decision. To take just one point of difference here, consider that of knowledge: the decision, we have seen, is heterogeneous to knowledge. The consequences of this heterogeneity to knowledge include the idea that self-relation is not

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[319] In addition, Gasché has convincingly argued that a form of the 'reflection theory' is what Derrida's work targets over and over again, and which deconstruction encourages us to think differently. See Gasché, *Tain of the Mirror*.

first and foremost cognitive. In fact, a traditional account of subjectivity on Derrida's view cannot account not only for the decision but also for the event-structure constitutive of temporality. Auto-affection, too, was not a matter of knowledge or cognition. Therefore, this fundamental aspect of the reflection theory has no bearing on the deconstructive insight that selfhood is contaminated by alterity, and the problems that arise for the former therefore are not an issue for the latter.

1b. Contamination of the First-Person Perspective

Once we let go of Zahavi's misguided assertion that Derrida makes the same mistakes as the reflection theory, we are able to see some compelling points of overlap between Zahavi and Derrida that might point the former, against the letter of his text, in a more radical direction that is even quite deconstructive. Zahavi avows that 1) pre-reflective self-awareness is internally differentiated, 2) pre-reflective self-awareness is not intentional or epistemic, and is not primarily a matter of knowledge, 3) reflection presupposes a pre-reflective ground that it is unable to objectify. These three claims are compatible with deconstructive insights into selfhood and subjectivity. Moreover, they push Zahavi beyond where he wants to limit his analyses, and gesture toward a deconstruction of the first-person perspective that it is now our task to develop.

Like Zahavi, we agree that the first-person perspective is requisite for experience. Any experience is experienced *by someone*: that is, there is a subject of the experience. First-person experience is ineliminable. This phenomenological insight is one that I defend. I also defend Zahavi's claim that pre-reflective self-awareness is requisite for experience. It is a consequence of stating that experience is experienced *by someone* that that person has an acquaintance with the experience *as his or her own*. This is not a question of the doubling of a

conscious state in order to recognize reflectively that the experience is had *by me*; there is no subject-object duality here, and the absence of this particular duality is what makes self-awareness pre-reflective. Self-awareness is not a matter of knowledge or proposition. However, with Derrida, I claim that this self-awareness, subjectivity, or first-person perspective is not self-constituting in a pure plenitude of presence and identity. It is not its own origin; it is not pure. The fact that the first-person perspective is contaminated by alterity does not mean that it does not exist as self-identical; its identity is derived from its difference. There is not a doubling of subject and object occurring on a reflective or conscious level; nonetheless, there is a doubling within pre-reflective self-awareness. This is what I have earlier called the 'contamination thesis.' We can defend this thesis in a number of ways; here, we will pursue two. First, we will claim that the immediacy and self-presence of the first-person perspective is contaminated by absence in the same way that auto-affection is contaminated by hetero-affection. Second, we will claim that the first-person perspective is haunted by the second- and third-person perspectives and constituted through them. The second- and third-person perspectives are the condition for the possibility—and the impossibility—of the first-person perspective. This secod of the argument takes its force from the possibility/impossibility structure we laid out in the previous chapter, and also specifically makes use of Derrida's idea that any unity is haunted by duality, which is haunted by plurality.

On my view, the main difference between Zahavi's view and Derrida's is that the former considers self-awareness irreducible, and implies as a result that self-awareness is the origin of all experience. While Zahavi does not thematize the term 'origin' as a descriptor of self-awareness, it is clear from his analyses that self-awareness—and, more specifically, pre-reflective self-awareness—plays precisely this foundational role. He frequently uses the term

'original' and 'originally' in his descriptions of pre-reflective self-awareness, giving rise to the idea that pre-reflective self-awareness is, to use a term Zahavi employs multiple times in his text, "original self-awareness."[320] Pre-reflective self-awareness is, for Zahavi, the condition for the possibility of any form or content of experience. It is original, given, and immediate. Because of this basis of Zahavi's views, it is no wonder that he finds Derrida's formulations 'too excessive.' Zahavi is concerned with showing that subjectivity is originally unified and self-present, and any duality admitted into the heart of it threatens the very nature and consistency of subjectivity on his view.

The line of argument that deconstruction would take here, however, would be to show that the self-presence, unification, and immediacy of pre-reflective self-awareness are made possible through what is other to pre-reflective self-awareness (*différance*, the trace, etc.). The claim that pre-reflective self-awareness is the condition for the possibility of experience is not one that I think Derrida would deny: in fact, I think we can say that Derrida would be in line with Zahavi's argument, contra reflection theory, that reflective self-awareness "always presupposes a prior unthematic and prereflective self-awareness as its condition of possibility."[321] Derrida might also agree that this pre-reflective self-awareness is not a matter of object-intentionality. Yet, for Derrida, this pre-reflective self-awareness is not itself assured as a simple origin or condition of possibility for experience. Zahavi's resistance to the idea that self-awareness is contaminated by what is other to it—which emerges specifically in his disagreement with Derrida as to whether auto-affection is always already contaminated by hetero-affection—fails to think subjectivity on grounds other than the traditional metaphysics of presence. "No matter how differentiated the structure of self-

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320 For instance, see Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, 33, 53, 129.
321 Ibid., 33.

awareness is ultimately shown to be, if the account given reintroduces a duality in the core of self-awareness," Zahavi claims, "it has failed."[322] The core of self-awareness is unified and pure, Zahavi implies again and again.

Even if, for Zahavi, self-awareness is always *accompanied* by what is other to it, it is not *contaminated* by otherness. One might ask here: how could this be the case? It seems to be Zahavi's position that avowing that self-awareness is accompanied by otherness maintains the self-identity, originarity, or purity of self-awareness—which, as we have seen, is immediate, given, and nonthetic. The 'accompaniment thesis' offers a way to show the inextricability of self-awareness and otherness without threatening the purity of the former. It is clear from our analyses in the previous chapter, however, that this accompaniment could not be coherently opposed to contamination. If self-awareness is marked by otherness, this does not leave self-awareness pure or free from the influence of otherness. Moreover, following the line of argument developed in the previous chapter, if pre-reflective self-awareness is the condition for the possibility of experience, then it is also the condition for its impossibility (as pure). If self-awareness makes subjective experience possible, it also signals that this experience is not purely cut off from the otherness that threatens its purity.

There are many directions in which one might take this deconstruction of subjectivity or pre-reflective self-awareness. One might choose to investigate further Derrida's remarks about internal time-consciousness in Husserl. One might return to the remarks on the trace as resistant to presence, or to the account of auto-affection as hetero-affection, developed in the previous chapter. Here, I would like to generalize what Zahavi says about pre-reflective self-awareness to the 'first-person perspective,' and argue that this

[322] Ibid., 42.

perspective is haunted by the second- and third-person perspectives. I think we can justifiably take Zahavi's term 'pre-reflective self-awareness' as a description of what is more frequently termed in phenomenology and the philosophy of mind the 'first-person perspective.' For one, what Zahavi usually indicates by the former term is precisely what is indicated by the latter: that is, an immediately given, nonthetic, direct acquaintance with one's experience, or sense of 'mineness'. Moreover, Zahavi himself suggests the equation of the terms, stating, for instance: "To be self-aware is not to apprehend a pure self apart from the experience, but to be acquainted with an experience in its first-personal mode of givenness, that is, from 'within.' The subject or self referred to in *self*-awareness is not something apart from or beyond the experience, nor is it a new and further experience, but simply a feature or function of its givenness. If the experience is given to me originarily, in a first-personal mode of presentation, it is experienced as my experience, otherwise not. In short, all the experiences of which I am self-aware are necessarily *my* experiences."[323] As we have seen, Zahavi grants that this original givenness of the first-person perspective is not a matter of knowledge. This leads him to grant that "the self-awareness in question might very well be accompanied by a fundamental *ignorance*," and that it is therefore not opposed to something like an account of the unconscious.[324] The acquaintance that the subject has with his or her own experience is not cognitive; this provides a point of overlap with our own account. All the same, Zahavi does not grant that the mineness of an experience, even if one does not 'know' how it might be coming about, itself admits of any non-present or split

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[323] Ibid., 12.
[324] Ibid., 206.

origin.[325] He holds on to the phenomenal immediacy of self-awareness while granting that this does not amount to an epistemic transparency.[326] Self-awareness is irreducible.

In contrast with this view, I argue that the first-person perspective is haunted by second- and third-person perspectives. This follows quite directly from the analyses laid out in the previous chapter, but requires some defense here. Why do I reject Zahavi's idea that the first-person perspective of pre-reflective self-consciousness is self-grounding, immediate, and not internally fractured? Why do I find what I have called Zahavi's 'accompaniment thesis' and rejection of Derrida's 'contamination thesis' untenable? Zahavi grants that the first-person perspective is internally differentiated. Following Husserl, for whom temporality is essential to the structure of subjectivity, and forwarding Zahavi's own thesis that auto-affection is accompanied by hetero-affection, Zahavi claims: "Due to its intrinsic temporal articulation and differentiated infrastructure, prereflective self-awareness cannot be conceived as a pure and simple self-presence."[327] This claim flies in the face of the depiction we have offered so far of the purported purity, unity, and presence that Zahavi wants to give to self-awareness: here, he claims that this is far from the case. However, despite his protestations to the contrary, Zahavi's refusal to admit otherness into the first-person

[325] For an exploration associated with Zahavi's use of 'mineness' in a different register, see John Lysaker, "Living Multiplicity," in the forthcoming *Where do We Find Ourselves: Essays After Emerson* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, forthcoming). Here, Lysaker argues that the term 'mineness' is not a helpful term for pre-reflective self-consciousness because it presumes an initial encounter with experiences that could be one's own *or* someone else's, an option that belies the nature of pre-reflective self-consciousness; additionally, Lysaker shows, Zahavi's claim that mineness is a *quality* is misguided. In future work, I would like to investigate futher the use of the term 'mineness' in recent phenomenology and the philosophy of mind and link it with the substantialist model of the self and the legacy of individual possession inherited from the Enlightenment account of subjectivity.
[326] He states, for instance, "one should distinguish between the claim that our consciousness is characterized by an immediate self-awareness and self-luminosity and the claim that consciousness is characterized by self-transparency. One can easily accept the first and reject the latter." Ibid., 211.
[327] Ibid., 199.

perspective any further than as 'accompanying' or *next to* this perspective, in fact place him squarely on the side of purity and presence despite his own protestations to the contrary.

In contemporary philosophy, the term 'first-person' is used not to suggest an account of personhood or selfhood, but rather to indicate a basic sense of mineness constitutive of subjectivity (that is, it need not correspond with any particular theory of the nature of the self or of personal identity). The first-person perspective comprises what one cannot mistake for one's own experience, as we have seen already. It is an irreducible 'here and now.' Following the line of argument developed in the dissertation thus far, I do not think that recourse to the 'first-person perspective' is meaningless, nor do I claim we should eschew this term and its connotations. The first-person perspective offers a useful way to mark the singularity of experience. Derrida writes in *Specters of Marx*: "No difference without alterity, no alterity without singularity, no singularity without here-now."[328] There would be no difference or alterity without singularity—which requires a 'here-now.' I merely want to point out that this 'here-now' of the first-person perspective is not self-constituting. Rather, it is constituted through what is other to it and remains marked, or contaminated, by it. This means that we cannot take the first-person perspective to be a pure, unfractured origin: "But the here-now does not fold back into immediacy, or into the reappropriable identity of the present, even less that of self-presence."[329] Zahavi, on the surface, might agree: he claims, as we have seen above, that pre-reflective self-awareness is not a matter of self-presence or purity. And yet, in positing the immediacy and lack of contamination in this self-awareness, Zahavi fails to measure the radical consequences of his own position.

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[328] Derrida, *Specters*, 37.
[329] Derrida, *Specters*, 39.

The first-person perspective is always already marked by the second-person perspective. The 'I' is an 'I' by virtue of also being a 'you.'[330] In thinking, for instance, there is a self-doubling: one thinks, and one 'hears' oneself thinking. Derrida most fully develops the idea that thinking implies a self-doubling in *Voice and Phenomenon*, a text which in which auto-affection figures explicitly. Any time one speaks, or speaks to oneself in thinking, one also *hears oneself thinking*. In order for one to *understand* what one is saying or thinking (the double meaning of the French *entendre*, as both 'to hear' and 'to understand,' directly implies this, but the same structure holds without the convenient bivalence of this word), one must also be hearing or receiving the thoughts.[331] There is an auto-affective structure to thinking—and, more generally, to consciousness. The 'I' of subjective, first-person experience is auto-affectively doubled into an 'I' and a 'you', and this is the condition for the possibility of the 'I.' [332] It is also the condition for the impossibility of the 'I' *as pure*. Within the seemingly singular or unified domain of interiority, there is already a duality. The first-person perspective is constituted in and through the second-person perspective that it implies and requires for its own self-identity.

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[330] This argument, while making use of the terms 'I' and 'you,' is not limited to language and the attributability of 'I' and 'you' to oneself.

[331] See, for instance, Derrida's remark in *Voice and Phenomenon* (67): "It is implied in the very structure of speech that the speaker *hear himself*: that he at once perceive the sensible form of the phonemes and understand his own intention of expression." Since, on the following page, Derrida states, "The voice *is* consciousness," we can generalize here from speaking to consciousness (68).

[332] Another fruitful direction for this line of argument is found in Derrida's writings on the duality of the self as an 'inner witness' in his unpublished seminars of the early 1990s on bearing witness and the secret. I plan to undertake an exploration of this theme in these seminars in a later project. This inner witness, which he traces in Augustine as well as in Heidegger's call of conscience, is "entirely other than me in me," and has an "alteregological" structure which establishes a gap within self-relation. Jacques Derrida, *Répondre—du secret:* Séminaire 1991-92 (Séance 10, 11 mars 1992, 12), Fonds Jacques Derrida—IMEC (my translation).

If the first-person perspective is always already contaminated by the second-person perspective, it follows that it is also contaminated by the third-person perspective.[333] The 'third' haunts any relation between two.[334] The term 'third' (*terstis, testis*) is most frequently used by Derrida in the early 1990s, and is closely linked with the witness (*témoin*). Specifically, any time one bears witness, even if it is only to one other person, this witnessing is iterable, or in principle repeatable to countless others (especially in the 'objective' realm of justice or law). As Derrida states in his 1992-1993 seminar "Répondre du secret: Témoigner," "intervenes here in the interstice between two, and thus also wherever the contemporaneous is divided or fractured by the instant. Everywhere where the present is not one with itself in the now, there is, in this gap with itself [*écart avec soi*], some third."[335] Yet this deconstruction of the dual relation as being haunted by a third in auto-affection in fact goes back to *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida states, "the experience of the touching-touched admits the world as a third [*en tiers*]."[336] Just as the 'second' already haunts the 'first' in the subjective experience of the first-person perspective, so too does the 'third' haunt the relation. This is also the law of iterability, in which sameness is derived from repetition, and any 'singularity' is in principle repeatable. "The interstice of the third intervenes as soon as there is iterability," he states.[337]

Derrida's writings on Levinas in particular foreground the idea that any dual relation implies a third. On Levinas's own schema, the 'third' is figure who imposes upon the dual

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[333] Catherine Malabou also argues that auto-affection in Derrida necessitates a third-person perspective within the first-person perspective, drawing on neuroscientific research for this argument. See Johnston and Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life*, 55.
[334] Such an argument goes back at least to Plato's *Timaeus*, in which the title character claims that any bond between two must have some binding agent, and therefore a third.
[335] Jacques Derrida, *Répondre du secret: Témoigner*: Séminaire 1992-93 (Séance 3, 2 décembre 1992, 16), Fonds Jacques Derrida—IMEC (my translation).
[336] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 165. Trans. modified.
[337] Derrida, *Répondre du secret*, (Séance 5, 6 janvier 1993, 12).

face-to-face encounter of ethics and opens the doorway to justice and law. From the originary ethical relation between two parties (which we will explore further in the following chapter), the entrance of the third party presents a set of competing needs that force the self to weigh, distribute, and measure, taking one into the domain of justice and law. For Derrida, the dual relation of the face-to-face is always already haunted by the third. The face-to-face ethical encounter between two always already opens onto the pluralistic dimension of justice and law, and Levinas's attempt to maintain the two in distinction fails. Derrida claims, for instance, "For the third does not wait; it is there, from the 'first' epiphany of the face in the face to face."[338] Derrida even goes so far as to say, "The second is a third."[339] Because the 'third' to which Derrida refers here apropos of Levinas is the presumed onlooker, the figure that makes a community of what was presumed to be a merely dual relation, the figure who inaugurates some semblance of objectivity or mediation into a relation previously presumed to be direct, this 'third' has the very same connotations of the 'third-person perspective.' Both the Levinasian third and the third-person perspective most frequently thematized in writings on narrative imply some universality or objectivity.

The first-person perspective is haunted by both the second-person perspective and the third-person perspective. The 'I' is contaminated by the 'you' from the beginning, and is therefore also contaminated by the 'one' of the third-person. The 'I' is self-objectifying through its very auto-affective structure. We may say that the self is doubled, but that the doubling does not stop here: the self is in principle haunting by a tripling, and a continual multiplication. If the self is not singular, but already double, then it is also more than double. Because the relation between two is already haunted by the third, so too is the domain of

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[338] Derrida, *Adieu*, 30-31.
[339] Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility," 69. Trans. modified.

interior life where there would seem to be only one.

The first-person perspective, as origin of subjective experience, is always already split. It is contaminated or haunted by the second- and third-person perspectives. In turn, this contamination renders calculating these perspectives insufficient. Experience is not unified—and the deconstruction of this seeming unity also implies the deconstruction of experience considered as a plurality. We would remain caught in a metaphysics of presence were we simply to multiply the first-person perspective and show that it is dual or plural (this move is what Zahavi wrongly considers Derrida to be making). Rather, the division of first-person experience opens itself up to the incalculable. It follows a 'n+1' or '1+n' logic, formula that Derrida uses in "Faith and Knowledge." Here, Derrida states, "the more than One (*plus d'un*) is at once more than two."[340] Because of the iterability of the origin, any duality is haunted by further splitting. This splitting does not amount to a further division into (self-present, individual, countable) *pieces*, but rather, by virtue of the trace, signals the incalculability of such a division. Derrida articulates precisely this point in his writings on auto-affection in *On Touching*: "The *self-touching-you* remains incalculable. It weighs, but thinking it exceeds its calculation. It is neither *one* (monadic), a single one, a unique self-touching-oneself, nor the *double*, symmetrical, and above all immediate relation of a reciprocal self-touching-one-another whose impersonal law could be uttered in the third person."[341] This quotation encapsulates a number of the things we have been saying here: the self-touching self, always already a self-touching *you* in the second person; the disruption of the oneness or singularity through auto-affection; the disruption of the immediacy of the relation between two in the touching-touched; the the incalculability opened up by the

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[340] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 65.
[341] Derrida, *On Touching*, 281.

doubling of the touching-touched such that even limiting it to the 'third person' remains insufficient.

Zahavi is critical of philosophies that would make the first-person perspective the derivative of a third-person perspective that is then turned toward oneself. Zahavi associates this theory with Ernst Tugendhat, but it is also one espoused by a number of twentieth-century thinkers as diverse as George Herbert Mead and Louis Althusser. For Mead, self-relation is inaugurated by the adoption of the attitudes of others onto oneself. The self is a social emergent, and self-relation is a relation between the self as subject and the self as object. For Althusser, the 'I' is interpellated by the address of the other such that one's self-ascription is an ideological construct produced through capitalist modes of subjectivation. Given that we have been following a deconstructive line of argument that avows the fracture or *différance* at work in any origin, it should be clear that our view of selfhood and self-relation is not merely that of an adoption of a third- or even second-person perspective on oneself. Whereas Mead and Althusser straightforwardly posit the third-person perspective as the origin of the first-person perspective, a Derridean deconstruction of selfhood would instead show the contamination of these perspectives by each other. We are not reversing the phenomenological account of the irreducibility of the first-person perspective by positing the irreducibility of the third-person perspective. Rather, in attending to the contamination or hauntology of experience, we are showing that the first-person perspective, as origin of experience, is not rigorously pure or separate from the second- and third-person perspectives. It is a split, contaminated, haunted origin.

2. Merleau-Ponty on the First-Person Perspective

In the previous section, I argued that the first-person perspective of phenomenology cannot be rigorously cut off from the second- and third-person perspectives, but rather is always already haunted by them. I have contested the phenomenological notion that the first-person perspective of subjective experience is irreducible and immediate, and defended Derrida against Zahavi's accusations of infinite regress and begging the question. I have rejected Zahavi's 'accompaniment thesis' as an explanation for the relation of pre-reflective self-awareness to alterity, and argued in favor of Derrida's 'contamination thesis' as a way of explaining this relation. Now, I would like to turn to another representative of the phenomenological position, Merleau-Ponty, in order to consider the question of selfhood and alterity from a slightly different angle. Like Zahavi, Merleau-Ponty articulates a phenomenological perspective that foregrounds first-person experience but does not make it a matter of reflection or knowledge. Merleau-Ponty, however, admits alterity into first-person experience more than Zahavi does. I will argue here that Merleau-Ponty espouses some version of what I have called Derrida's 'contamination thesis,' and that his phenomenology is therefore closer to deconstruction than Zahavi's. My argument will take issue with Derrida's claims that Merleau-Ponty is not a thinker of alterity or difference. I claim that, in his remarks about Merleau-Ponty in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy,* Derrida exaggerates what he takes to be a reduction of otherness to sameness in Merleau-Ponty and thereby overlooks their affinity.

Exploring the deconstruction of the 'here-now' of the first-person perspective further through Merleau-Ponty will both round out the deconstruction of the first-person perspective that concerns us in this chapter and provide a pivot into the following chapter's consideration of intersubjectivity. We will first consider the preservation of what the later

phenomenologists call the 'first-person perspective' in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, and then turn to the scene of two hands touching, an example that Merleau-Ponty famously treats as the model for the relation to other people. Merleau-Ponty, who takes this example from Husserl, fleshes it out in a compelling manner that Derrida treats in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Attention to the way that this example works in Merleau-Ponty and the shortcomings that Derrida finds with it will round out our deconstruction of the first-person perspective and show that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology gestures more toward such a deconstruction than Derrida grants. Derrida worries that Merleau-Ponty rehabilitates otherness in a way that models it on a self-relation of self-coincidence and presence. I will argue that Derrida does not give Merleau-Ponty enough credit for thinking alterity. In asserting that Merleau-Ponty reduces the other to the same, Derrida misunderstands Merleau-Ponty and, by the same stroke, fails to see their proximity.

2a. The Contaminated First-Person Perspective in the Phenomenology of Perception

One of Merleau-Ponty's major contributions to phenomenology is the way he reframes the question of lived experience in terms of an embodied, ambiguous relation between self and world that supersedes the subject-object duality more or less maintained by Husserl. Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the imbrication of self and world, such that the self is constituted in and through its lived body and environment. The body, for Merleau-Ponty, is neither subject nor object, but a *third genre* of being. The body as 'third genre' constitutes a kind of being "between the pure subject and the object," and renders lived experience non-transparent to itself.[342]

[342] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 366.

This articulation of the lived body as *between* subject and object at first blush appears incommensurable with a deconstructive logic of contamination or *différance*. This dissertation aims to show that the contamination between self and other is *not* a blurring of lines (as we will see especially in the following chapter). Moreover, Derrida is clear in arguing that the trace is not tantamount to ambiguity. Ambiguity, for Derrida, holds on to the metaphysical terms of any binary, situating itself between them but not unsettling the binary's claims to presence and opposition. As Derrida puts it, "the word 'ambiguity' requires the logic of presence, even when it begins to disobey that logic": that is, the logic of ambiguity would preserve traditional metaphysical binaries, whereas the trace unsettles them.[343] While Merleau-Ponty happily upholds the term 'ambiguity'—along with Beauvoir, he is one of its main philosophical champions—I do not think that his conception of ambiguity, and of the body as 'between' subject and object, undermines his affinity with Derrida more generally. While Merleau-Ponty does consider the lived body 'ambiguous,' I will show that he also offers a way to consider the self outside of a reliance on the metaphysics of presence that Derrida associates with the term 'ambiguity.' Rather, Merleau-Ponty may be considered as a philosopher of the contamination between self and other even as his terminology does not formulate this as radically as Derrida's. I think this is not only true of Merleau-Ponty's later work, especially *The Visible and the Invisible*, but also even of the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Having justified our turn to Merleau-Ponty as a thinker of contamination by way of these introductory comments, we may now turn to the first-person perspective formulated in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Here, Merleau-Ponty articulates what is called the first-person perspective in contemporary phenomenology in terms of a 'lived solipsism.' In the chapter

[343] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 71.

entitled "Others and the Human World," Merleau-Ponty considers the problem of solipsism and defends the idea that there is a "lived solipsism that is insurpassable [*dépassable*]."[344] This 'lived solipsism' is not a pure, subjective domain of transcendent or transparent self-experience, but rather an undeniable sense that one's own experience, while not pointing to a substantial (or even personal) 'I', nonetheless is not purely impersonal or undifferentiated from that of others. Merleau-Ponty articulates his version of the first-person perspective when he writes: "Surpassed from all sides by my own acts and drowned in generality, I am nevertheless the one through which these acts are lived."[345] The self is not master of its own actions, and is saturated by a world that it did not create and that is not its own; and yet, one's own actions, and this generalized world, are *lived through by me*. The origin of my experience is this sense of mineness, which 'cannot be transcended.' I cannot live or experience anything except by virtue of this solipsism. For Merleau-Ponty, the other "is never an Ego in the sense in which I am one for myself."[346] First-person subjectivity is an essential feature of experience.[347]

The centrality of the first-person perspective for Merleau-Ponty is further borne out in his theory of the 'tacit cogito' in 'The Cogito' chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. The tacit cogito is a pre-reflective self-awareness that provides the basis for any conscious experience. It is an "indeclinable subjectivity" that provides the pre-personal background to

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[344] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 374. Trans. modified.
[345] Ibid., 374. Trans. modified.
[346] Ibid., 368.
[347] In this section, Merleau-Ponty also notes that it is only if we take first-person experience to be indeclinable that there is even a difference between oneself and others. To consider the third-person perspective as the origin of experience would be to overlook the difference between the self and other beings. If we were to "level out the I and the you in an experience-shared-by-many" and talk about an impersonal 'we' rather than individuals, he asks, "in this general conflation, have we not caused the alter Ego to disappear along with the Ego?" Ibid., 372.

any reflective consideration of self and world.[348] The theory of the tacit cogito is very much in line with the position we have seen Zahavi develop. Like Zahavi's Sartrean arguments against reflection theory, Merleau-Ponty also contends that, without pre-reflective self-awareness, there would be no reflective consciousness, and the 'tacit cogito' is his preferred term for the former. He states: "It cannot be said that I am the consciousness that I discover through reflection," because this consciousness is not an object but rather what allows us to constitute our awareness of objects, what allows us to experience.[349] Precisely prefiguring what Zahavi will develop as a 'question-begging' contention to reflection theory, Merleau-Ponty suggests that a theory of self-consciousness based upon reflection would offer no satisfying reason to believe that self-consciousness would spring out of what originally was unconscious: "We do not want to claim that the primordial I is unaware of itself. If it were unaware of itself, it would indeed be a thing, and nothing could subsequently make it become conscious."[350] There is a pre-reflective self-awareness that is to be distinguished from object-intentionality and a reflection model.[351]

For Merleau-Ponty, the tacit cogito suggests an originary givenness of experience that suggests that the self is in contact with itself prior to the act of reflection. He writes: "It

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[348] Ibid., 426.
[349] Ibid., 375.
[350] Ibid., 427.
[351] Recall that Zahavi's/Sartre's other argument against the reflection theory was the accusation of infinite regress. Merleau-Ponty scholar Scott Marratto claims that Merleau-Ponty, too, argues against the problem of infinite regress in his "Temporality" chapter in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. See Scott Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self*: *Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 127: "What necessitates the thesis of an ultimate consciousness is, for Merleau-Ponty as it is for Husserl, the threat of an infinite regress. If reflection is ever to be possible, then, both Merleau-Ponty and Husserl argue, it must be the case that I am tacitly self-aware (pre reflectively self-*conscious*) before I begin to reflect, and we cannot look to another level of self-consciousness to subtend *that* self-consciousness." Marratto's textual evidence, however, hinges on a passage in which Merleau-Ponty is talking about a *temporal succession* of self-consciousness, which I do not find to be necessarily analogous to reflection theory's emphasis on higher-order thoughts and which therefore is dubious as an example of an anti-infinite regress argument against the reflection theory.

is this given background of existence that the *cogito* confirms: every affirmation, every engagement, and even every negation and every doubt takes place in a previously opened field, and attests to a self in touch with itself [*qui se touche*] prior to the particular acts in which it loses contact with itself."[352] While Merleau-Ponty does not use the term here, reserving discussion for the sections in the *Phenomenology of Perception* on temporality, the 'self in touch with itself' is precisely the self of auto-affection.[353] We will see in the following section how auto-affection, for Merleau-Ponty, is also a hetero-affection.

Now, I would like to turn to the question of ignorance and knowledge in Merleau-Ponty's claims about the tacit cogito before arguing that that we can perceive the contamination of the first-person perspective in the work of Merleau-Ponty. Like Derrida and Zahavi, Merleau-Ponty is clear about the non-cognitive character of pre-reflective self-awareness. More strongly than Zahavi, who says that the non-cognitive character of this self-awareness suggests that it *can be* accompanied by ignorance, Merleau-Ponty shows that it *is* an ignorance of oneself. He states that, before reflection on the self, there is a "previous ignorance of this myself, which is more truly myself than I am."[354] Self-knowledge is not the primary form of self-relation for Merleau-Ponty, but is instead derivative from the pre-reflective self-awareness of the tacit cogito.[355] This originary ignorance of the tacit cogito is

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[352] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 374. Trans. modified. Notably, given our interest in the figure of the witness in Derrida, Merleau-Ponty goes on to describe this tacit cogito as "the witness" of any communication—and this is only one of a number of places in the *Phenomenology of Perception* where Merleau-Ponty uses the language of witnessing in a way that, on my view, gestures toward the internal differentiation of self-relation. Developing this will have to be deferred for a future project.
[353] For self-affection in the *Phenomenology in Perception*, see 448-9 and 561n31. Merleau-Ponty does mention self-affection in 'The Cogito' chapter (426), but only as a passing reference to a reflective model of the cogito as 'pure self-affection' as 'thinking of 'thinking.'
[354] Ibid., 375.
[355] Whether or not the tacit cogito is *relational*, such that we could consider it a site of self-relation, is up for debate. However, I think the p. 374 quotation from the *Phenomenology of Perception* cited two paragraphs above, where Merleau-Ponty writes of a 'self in touch with itself' prior to reflection, strongly suggests that the tacit cogito is (self-)relational.

the product of the situatedness of human experience, which for Merleau-Ponty is figured by the term 'ambiguity.' "If we are situated," he writes, "then we are surrounded and cannot be transparent to ourselves, and thus our contact with ourselves must only be accomplished in ambiguity."[356] One's contact with oneself is 'accomplished in ambiguity' insofar as it occurs on a pre-reflective level that is not one of knowledge.

We have seen that, for Merleau-Ponty, first-person experience is indeclinable. The issue now becomes whether this indeclinability is unified, irreducible, and immediate, as in Zahavi, or contaminated, as in Derrida. To be sure, Merleau-Ponty claims that the self is not transparent or at one with itself.[357] He insists that the temporal and situated character of the self prevents it from ever linking up with itself, such that self-understanding is perpetually deferred.[358] The temporal, embodied nature of lived experience automatically forecloses any purported transcendence or transparency of the subject, and this foreclosure is one of the most consistent moves in Merleau-Ponty's *oeuvre*. However, does this lack of purity or transparency extend from the lived body and the freedom of the individual to the tacit cogito, which figures subjective experience at its barest and most immediate? What do we make of the fact that Merleau-Ponty describes the tacit cogito as the "presence of self to self"?[359] I will argue here that Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of lived experience in the *Phenomenology of Perception* do not remain trapped in a metaphysics of presence, but rather suggest the contamination of the first-person perspective by otherness, absence, and generality that we will see further developed through the notion of reversibility in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

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[356] Ibid., 402.
[357] As one of many textual examples, take the particularly clear formulation on p. 362 of *Phenomenology of Perception*: "I am never at one with myself."
[358] See, for instance, Ibid., 362.
[359] Ibid., 426

Merleau-Ponty affirmatively uses the term 'presence' frequently in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, even claiming that "the subject as absolute self-presence is rigorously indeclinable."[360] Given that I am trying to show an affinity between Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on the contamination of selfhood and alterity, the terminology of 'absolute self-presence' appears to be a real obstacle for my account. If Derrida has shown us anything, it is that self-presence is never absolute. I do not want to undermine the incommensurability of this terminology with deconstruction. However, on my view, Merleau-Ponty's analyses of consciousness—in both his later work and also in the *Phenomenology of Perception*—do evince a contamination of the first-person perspective even as they remain caught within an overly 'presence'-laden language. In this vein, my account is in line with that which Scott Marratto develops in his book *The Intercorporeal Self: Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity*. Here, Marratto argues that the undeniable privileging of the present in Merleau-Ponty must be read alongside Merleau-Ponty's "doctrine of auto-affection," insofar as Merleau-Ponty develops an account of temporality that suggests the haunting of the present by the non-present.[361] Marratto writes: "what is missing in the 'metaphysics of presence' interpretation is an appreciation of the constitutive non-presence, or spectrality, at the heart of the present. The very presence of the present (as auto-affection) is dependent upon the spacing or difference, opened up by the non-presence of the original past."[362] Connecting Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of temporality in the *Phenomenology of Perception* to the remarks on the 'absolute self-presence' of experience, for Marratto, weakens the accusation that Merleau-Ponty falls into a metaphysics of presence.

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[360] Ibid., 450. Trans. modified.
[361] Marratto, *Intercorporeal Self*, 119.
[362] Ibid., 119.

I agree with Marratto that the *Phenomenology of Perception* does not offer an account of lived experience that merely emphasizes absolute self-presence. I think, however, that we need not even look to connect the chapter on 'Temporality' with Merleau-Ponty's more explicit explorations of subjectivity in the *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to find a theory of the constitutive non-presence of what I have been calling the first-person perspective. Merleau-Ponty illustrates the contamination of first-person subjective consciousness by what is not immediately present to it throughout this text. Take, for instance, his analysis of an example that has become commonplace in phenomenology and the philosophy of mind for describing first-person experience: seeing the color red. Merleau-Ponty shows that one can never perceive the color red in anyone else's place, and that this perception therefore has an irreducible singularity to it. However, this experience nonetheless is made possible by the situation in which we find ourselves, and can by no means be considered *outside* of social determinations and the realm of generality. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> Who perceives this red? It is no one who could be named or who could be placed among other perceiving subjects. For, between this experience of red that I have and the experience of red described to me by others, no direct confrontation will ever be possible. Here I am within my own point of view and, just as every experience— insofar as it has to do with impressions— is in the same way strictly mine, it seems that a unique subject without double [*un sujet unique et sans second*] envelops them all. I formulate a thought, for example, I am thinking of Spinoza's God; this thought, such as I live it, is a certain landscape to which no other person will ever gain access, even if I otherwise succeed in starting up a conversation with a friend on the question of Spinoza's God. And yet, the individuality of even these experiences is not pure. For the thickness of its red, its *haeccity,* the power it has of filling me and of reaching me,

> comes from the fact that it solicits and obtains a certain vibration from my gaze, and presupposes that I am familiar with a world of colors of which it is a particular variation. Thus, the concrete red stands out against a background of generality, and this is why, even without passing over to the other's point of view, I grasp myself in perception as *a* perceiving subject and not as a consciousness without equal…Likewise, my thought of Spinoza's God is only in appearance a rigorously unique experience, for it is a concretion of a certain cultural world—Spinozist philosophy—or of a certain philosophical style, in which I immediately recognize a 'Spinozist' idea.'[363]

The experience of perceiving red or thinking of Spinoza's God present themselves as unique and as 'mine': no one else can perceive or think them *for me*. At the same time, these experiences presuppose familiarity with the world, and thus a world beyond the subject's own direct experience: the world of colors, the horizon of my past perceptions, the horizon of other perceptions that I am having, and the sense that other people would perceive this red in a similar way to myself, even as we can never be in each other's positions. This immersion in the world is requisite for first-person experience, and thus provides the condition for its possibility. Put in deconstructive terms, this immersion in the world is also the condition for the impossibility of first-person experience *as pure*. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, experience is only 'rigorously unique' in the way it appears to us, but this itself is undergirded by the general. It is notable that Merleau-Ponty explicitly uses the language of purity to describe this experience: 'the individuality' of experience is 'not pure' on his view. Put into the Derridean terminology we have been using, it is *contaminated*.

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[363] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 477. Trans. modified.

In the chapter on "Freedom" in *The Phenomenology of Perception* in which the example of seeing red is used, Merleau-Ponty further considers the way that generality intervenes within the particularity of subjectivity in a way that contaminates it. For Merleau-Ponty, self-presence is something with which each of us is immediately acquainted; yet, this immediate acquaintance is merely on a phenomenal level. In an ontological or properly phenomenological sense, our presence to ourselves is fundamentally mediated by our relation to what is outside of ourselves. The natural attitude that leads us to interact with our world in a way that is experienced as singular and subjective, is in fact shot through with what is other to it. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Generality already intervenes, our presence to ourselves is already mediated by it."[364] On this view, the particular social situation in which we find ourselves mediates our self-presence "from the moment we exist," preventing us from ever living as a pure consciousness.[365] Even when one does not recognize that this mediation is constitutive of the first-person perspective on the world that makes up one's lived experience—which indeed, is the case the vast majority of the time—it contaminates our consciousness through and through. Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of lived experience, especially in the 'Freedom' chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, suggest the contamination of the first-person perspective by the second- and third-person perspectives of generality. As a result, I think Merleau-Ponty goes further than Zahavi, who aims to maintain an 'accompaniment thesis' that states that pre-reflective self-awareness is accompanied by otherness while not itself being contaminated by it.

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[364] Ibid., 476.
[365] Ibid., 476.

2b. A Defense of Merleau-Ponty on Reversibility

In the above section, I have argued that Merleau-Ponty at once preserves the first-person perspective of phenomenology as the basis of experience and shows that this first-person perspective is contaminated by otherness. As a result, I consider Merleau-Ponty closer in line with Derrida than with Zahavi. Derrida himself, however, does not take Merleau-Ponty to be a particularly welcome bedfellow. In this section, I will consider Derrida's critical remarks about Merleau-Ponty in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. I will argue that Derrida's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty relies on a misunderstanding of the notion of reversibility that Merleau-Ponty develops in *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which reversibility is the structure of both intersubjective and intrasubjective relationality. Revisiting Merleau-Ponty's remarks about reversibility will demonstrate the affinity of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida with respect to the contamination of selfhood by otherness. I will demonstrate that Merleau-Ponty argues that there is a gulf between self and other that holds already for the self's relation to itself. Like Derrida, Merleau-Ponty radically undercuts the possibility of a self-coincident subject and instead reveals the division or alterity requisite for self-relation.

Throughout his career, Derrida touches only rarely on the work of Merleau-Ponty.[366] This is surprising, given their shared philosophical lineage and particular interest in Husserl; moreover, many have remarked that Derrida and Merleau-Ponty are quite close on a number of key points of their philosophy, especially considering the reassessment of identity and difference in Merleau-Ponty's late work.[367] Derrida himself, however, does not explore this

[366] See Derrida, *On Touching—Jean Luc Nancy;* Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" in *Writing and Difference;* Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*: *The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
[367] For instance, Merleau-Ponty's notions of 'the flesh' and 'the chiasm' resonate with deconstruction. See for instance: Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004); the work of Leonard Lawlor, especially *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), and Lawlor and Fred

potential affinity, his references to Merleau-Ponty usually consisting in offhand contestations of the phenomenologist's interpretation of Husserl.[368] As Bennington explores in his essay "Handshake," Derrida's tendency to dismiss Merleau-Ponty is particularly surprising, given that "one might be tempted to see in Merleau-Ponty's apparent attention to a certain implication of alterity within the selfsame a gesture of thought that would at least be Derrida-friendly."[369] This is certainly the case with Derrida's most extended discussion of Merleau-Ponty, in "Tangent III" of *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Here, Derrida takes issue with Merleau-Ponty's analysis of one hand touching the other, an example from Husserl intended to demonstrate the primacy of touch and the 'double sensation' that characterizes it with respect to one's own body.[370] According to Derrida, Merleau-Ponty attempts to radicalize Husserl's position in order to demonstrate alterity within the same. This move, which we can imagine based on the previous two chapters would seem 'Derrida-friendly,' is rejected on the argument that Merleau-Ponty ends up, on the contrary, modeling the relation to the other on the relation to oneself. As a result, Derrida says that reading Merleau-Ponty makes him "uneasy."[371] Merleau-Ponty is not a thinker of alterity with respect to others *or* to oneself, on Derrida's view, because he undercuts the radical implications of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity in his own description of the hand touching itself (we will be exploring

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Evans's Introduction to *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of the Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, Albany, 2000); Ann V. Murphy, "All Things Considered: Sensibility and Ethics in the later Merleau-Ponty and Derrida," *Continental Philosophy Review* 42 (2010); Rodolphe Gasché, "Deconstruction as Criticism," in *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); David Farrell Krell, *The Purest of Bastards: Works of Art, Affirmation and Mourning in the Thought of Jacques Derrida* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000).

[368] See Bennington, "Handshake," in *Not Half No End*, for some helpful remarks on Derrida's readings of Merleau-Ponty.

[369] Bennington, "Handshake," in *Not Half No End*: *Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida*, 68.

[370] Husserl's account of the two hands touching can be found in *Ideas II* and the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations*.

[371] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching,* 211.

this theory of intersubjectivity in the following chapter). Like Levinas, Merleau-Ponty turns out to be less of a thinker of alterity than the master whose thought he purports to radicalize.[372]

Derrida's charge against Merleau-Ponty raises a broader issue not only with respect to this chapter but also to the project of this dissertation overall. I have set it out as my aim to defend the position that the self is always already other to itself. Derrida's primary point of contention with Merleau-Ponty is premised on the idea that Merleau-Ponty sets out a very similar aim, but fails because in attempting to achieve it, he proves precisely the opposite and ends up revealing a preference for coincidence over non-coincidence. Could not the same be said of this dissertation? That is, insofar as I am arguing that self-relation is *already* a relation to an other, and therefore that intersubjectivity holds with respect not only to the relations with other beings but also in the relation to oneself, am I not revealing a preference for the self over the other that translates to a preference of coincidence over non-coincidence? My position avoids this problem because of its emphasis on difference as *différance*, which helps us to rethink identity and difference otherwise than in the traditional metaphysical picture that posits them as binaries. I will claim here that Merleau-Ponty's position largely avoids this problem as well, although Derrida does not acknowledge this: Merleau-Ponty, too, does not consider the self as a substance over and against what is other too it, and rethinks identity and difference on this basis. Let us now consider how this works in terms of the scene of two hands touching, the description of which provides the occasion for Derrida's critical remarks about Merleau-Ponty.

[372] In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida mentions Merleau-Ponty and states in a footnote that alterity in Merleau-Ponty is thought through temporalization. He writes; "It is true that for Merleau-Ponty—differing from Levinas—the phenomenon of alterity was primordially, if not exclusively, that of the movement of temporalization." Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 314fn36.

The example of one hand touching the other is a vivid and frequent one in Merleau-Ponty's work. Following Husserl, who uses this example briefly in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the way one relates to other beings can be considered on the model of the way that the two hands of one's own body relate when in contact with each other. Merleau-Ponty uses this example as early as the *Phenomenology of Perception* but more thoroughly develops it in "The Philosopher and His Shadow" and *The Visible and the Invisible*. The scene goes as follows: when I touch my right hand with my left, I feel my left hand as touched. Yet this sensation can be reversed, leading to my left hand touching my right hand, which becomes the 'touched'. This experience allows one to understand that there are multiple loci of experience.[373] This understanding is made possible by what, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty begins to call 'reversibility': the identity of the 'touching' hand and the 'touched' hand can be reversed. In Husserlian terms, they are characterized by a 'double sensation.' In a well-known and contentious move, Merleau-Ponty then goes on to extend this relation between the two hands touching to the relation between oneself and others.[374] He writes, "It is in no different fashion that the other's body becomes animate before me when I shake another man's hand or just look at him."[375] Through the experience of my left hand touching my right, "I prepared myself for understanding" that there are other people.[376]

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373 "My right hand was present at the advent of my left hand's active sense of touch." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 168.
374 This move is made in the later work—"The Philosopher and His Shadow" and *The Visible and the Invisible*—but not in *The Phenomenology of Perception*.
375 Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 168.
376 Ibid., 168. It is also worth noting that Merleau-Ponty's conception of intersubjectivity outside of the context of the metaphor of one hand touching the other consciously evokes Husserl's account of analogical appresentation, which we will be considering in the following chapter. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty radicalizes Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity: for one, Merleau-Ponty's robust

Given the fact that I have grounded the project of this dissertation on an agreement with the insight from response ethics that the other is phenomenologically and ethically inaccessible to oneself, anyone going along with me on this line of thought might have an eyebrow raised. Modeling the relation to the other on the relation to oneself is a dangerous move, because understanding the other in terms of the self generally results in denying alterity by subsuming the other into the same.[377] Derrida, a thinker of alterity deeply marked by his relation to Levinas on this point, is tempted to dismiss Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity precisely because of what he perceives to be this result of it. This is particularly salient given that earlier in this chapter, we have explored Derrida's rejection of access to the experience of the other on the basis of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity. In *On Touching*, Derrida argues that the scene of two hands touching ends up reinscribing the other into the same by modeling the relation to others on self-relation. Specifically, Derrida interprets Merleau-Ponty to be taking the experience of two hands touching as an experience of *confusion between perspectives*—while each hand is at once touching and touched, the boundaries or borders between them are unclear. Derrida quotes Merleau-Ponty as saying that corporeality pertains to "both transitivity and *confusion* of self and other."[378] For Derrida,

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account of the lived body offers a far less Cartesian version of Husserl's theory of two 'psychophysical subjects.'

[377] Debates over whether Merleau-Ponty leaves adequate room for alterity have proliferated within scholarship in recent decades. The most well-known position is Claude Lefort's claim that Merleau-Ponty does not adequately figure the relation to others because reversibility overlooks the asymmetry in these relations (Claude Lefort, "Flesh and Otherness," in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Johnson and Smith [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990]). For direct defenses of Merleau-Ponty against Lefort's position, see Gary Madison, "Flesh as Otherness," Martin Dillon, "*Ecart*: A Reply to Lefort's Flesh and Otherness,"' both in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Johnson and Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990). An overview of this debate can also be found in J. Bell, *The Problem of Difference: Phenomenology and Poststructuralism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). Intriguingly, the debate hinges on the question of asymmetry and reciprocity in relation to the other, themes we will explore in Chapter 5. In a future project, I would like to connect Merleau-Ponty's account of reversibility directly to what I perceive to be an ethic of 'asymmetrical reciprocity' in Beauvoir.

[378] Derrida, *On Touching*, 193, quoting Merleau-Ponty *Signs,* 174 (Derrida's emphasis).

such a confusion between perspectives forecloses the possibility of relating to the other *as other*, not to mention that it is an inaccurate reading of Husserl, from whom Merleau-Ponty's example claims to take inspiration (Husserl's own position on intersubjectivity will be considered in the following chapter). Merleau-Ponty implies that there is no distinct difference between self and other, and this is fallacious.[379]

On Derrida's view, this more generally suggests that Merleau-Ponty retains a traditional attachment to self-coincidence and sameness that precludes an openness to alterity. The reason for this is that Merleau-Ponty always *prefers coincidence to noncoincidence*; more specifically, he prefers "'coincidence' (of coincidence with noncoincidence) to 'noncoincidence' (of coincidence with noncoincidence)."[380] In attempting to radicalize Husserl's casting of the same-other relation, Merleau-Ponty reinscribes a conservative discourse of the same. Thus, Merleau-Ponty undercuts the very force of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity, which we will see in the following chapter strongly resists the idea that one can 'substitute' one's self-relation for the relation to the other. Husserl preserves an irreducible alterity in his theory of intersubjectivity that Derrida worries Merleau-Ponty waters down. Derrida writes: "at the moment when it is a matter of orienting Husserl and making him take the other into account in a more audacious way (the other who is originarily in me, and so forth)—at the expense of a Husserl who is more classical, more ego-centered, and so forth—there is a risk of the exact opposite resulting."[381] One risks forgetting the indirection, mediation, and lack of access to the other that Husserl constantly foregrounds in his writings on intersubjectivity. Because Merleau-Ponty's account of the two hands touching

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[379] For a helpful analysis of Derrida's reading of Merleau-Ponty apropos of the two hands touching, see Murphy, "All things considered." Murphy also points out that Derrida overlooks an affinity between himself and Merleau-Ponty.
[380] Derrida, *On Touching,* 211.
[381] Ibid., 191.

models the relation to the other on the relation to oneself, it implies that one has immediate access to the other. In so doing, it overlooks the separation between self and other highlighted by Husserl, and "runs the risk of *reappropriating* the alterity of the other more surely, more blindly, or even more violently than ever."[382] Derrida thus argues that Merleau-Ponty does not do justice to alterity but instead perverts a Husserlian example in order to show the likeness of the other to oneself.

However, this move toward demonstrating the lack of immediacy in one's own self-relation is not in fact opposed to Merleau-Ponty at all. On the contrary, the claims that the two hands touching each other demonstrates an "irreducible gap…Even between me and me" is *the very conclusion* that Merleau-Ponty draws from his account of reversibility. Merleau-Ponty argues that this experience demonstrates a multiplicity of perspectives as well as an internal otherness already present within self-experience, as I will develop below. It is also worth noting that Derrida quotes Merleau-Ponty out of context in stating that there is a "confusion" between same and other: this is a position Merleau-Ponty identifies with the young child but not of intersubjectivity among adults, and he explicitly calls this position an "illusion."[383] While Merleau-Ponty uses the example of one person's two hands touching each other as a figure for both self-relation and the relation to others, his position is very far from the version described by Derrida, in which the other is brought under the rubric of the same. In fact, Merleau-Ponty's position is entirely in line with Derrida's suggestion that the scene of the two hands touching demonstrates a lack of internal coincidence, and an originary mediation or gap within self-relation.[384]

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382 Ibid., 191.

383 Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 174.

384 Jack Reynolds also warns against the idea that Merleau-Ponty advocates a confusion of perspectives. See Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida*, Chapter 8.

At first blush, Merleau-Ponty's extension of the reversibility of two hands touching to the relation between self and other may seem to make the other into the same. Yet Merleau-Ponty's own definition of reversibility precisely guards against this interpretation, because reversibility is *not* for him a matter of coincidence. Merleau-Ponty's account of reversibility is motivated by an attempt to reconcile two apparently contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, there is the fact that I have first-person access to my own body in a manner that I do not have with respect to other beings: "The body always presents itself 'from the same side.'"[385] Yet, this idea (which is "apparently contrary to reversibility") is counterbalanced on the other hand by the fact that even my own access to myself does not produce full coincidence or transparency.[386] Reversibility reveals the *impossibility* of coincidence, whether with self or other, because the moment of reversibility is not one that can be experienced. It is a structure that holds in principle but not in fact. Merleau-Ponty states, "*reversibility* is not an actual *identity* of the touching and the touched. It is their identity in principle (always unsuccessful *[manquée]*)."[387] Reversibility does not amount to the identity between the two reversible things in question, whether one's own two hands or oneself and another. Identity between the two sides—in this case, between the touching and the touched—is impossible to realize. There is, then, a certain irreversibility that constitutes reversibility. This is not a failure, but a necessary consequence of the fact that, even as individuals are constituted out of the same 'flesh' of the world, it is impossible for each to

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[385] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 272.
[386] Ibid., 272
[387] Ibid., 272. Trans. modified. Zahavi points out what I would consider a parallel ambiguity between identity and difference in Merleau-Ponty's account of auto-affection in the 'Temporality' chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*: on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty claims that the affected and the affecting are identical (449), and on the other hand, he refers to auto-affective consciousness as a 'duality' (450). See Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, 234-235 fn. 33.

directly access the position of the other. As we have seen in the previous section, there is an indeclinable first-person perspective within experience for Merleau-Ponty.

For Merleau-Ponty, the 'touching' hand can never have a hold on the 'touched' hand in its entirety; we might be tempted to say even that the 'touching' hand does not have first-person access to the 'touched' hand. He states, "To touch and to touch oneself…do not coincide in the body: the touching is never exactly the touched."[388] If this is the case, then the scene of the two hands touching *does* indeed reveal the radical gap at the heart of self-relation that Derrida suggests. Through the example of the two hands touching, both Derrida and Merleau-Ponty purport to be following Husserl's account of intersubjectivity in its acknowledgment of the irreducible difference between oneself and other beings (as we will see in the following chapter). Yet Derrida extends irreducible difference to the relation to oneself, asking, following Husserl's account of intersubjectivity, "shouldn't a certain…'intersubjectivity,' already have introduced an other…into the touching-touched for the touching-touched to give rise to an experience of the body proper allowing one to say, 'it is I,' 'this is my body'?"[389] We might respond here that Merleau-Ponty too suggests this. It is not only Derrida, but also Merleau-Ponty, who takes seriously the gulf between self and other figured by Husserl and radicalizes it by indicating this gulf already within the self. The phenomenon of my two hands touching demonstrates that I am non-self-coincident, and suggests that others are constituted by their own internal noncoincidence as well.

At this point, it is no longer a question of whether one turns the other into the same by modeling the other on oneself. Because identity and difference are transformed in this understanding of self-relation as always already affected by alterity, the self can no longer be

388 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 254.
389 Derrida, *On Touching*, 176-177.

identified with the same over and against the other. We relate to ourselves in and through the gap that Husserl reserves for the relation between oneself and other beings. The first-person perspective is always already split. While Merleau-Ponty and Derrida both preserve the first-person perspective as the site of singularity and experience, they open a gulf within this perspective that introduces alterity within the heart of the self and indicates that self-relation is already contaminated by alterity.

Derrida's response would be to recall that Merleau-Ponty defends the identity between the toucher and the touched *in principle* but not in fact, and to argue that this manifests the preference for coincidence of which Derrida has accused him.[390] However, a deeper consideration of the transformation that self-identity undergoes in Merleau-Ponty forestalls this notion. In the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes the following: "What do I bring to the problem of the same and the other? This: that the same be the other than the other, and identity difference of difference."[391] He specifies that the idea that the same is 'other than the other' is not properly figured through something like a Hegelian dialectic, but is instead "realized on the spot, by encroachment, thickness, *spatiality*."[392] This remark indicates that such a transformation of identity is revealed through lived experience. For Merleau-Ponty, lived, embodied experience from a first-person perspective itself itself shows that identity is 'difference of difference.' While he does not expand upon this remark in the working notes, it is telling that Merleau-Ponty notes the idea that identity is 'difference of difference' within the context of a discussion of reversibility.

The implications of identity as 'difference of difference' further emerge when we consider Merleau-Ponty's claims that the constitutive failure of reversibility *is also true* of the

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390 See Derrida, *On Touching*, 213.
391 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 264.
392 Ibid., 264.

relation to oneself. First-person access to experience is not dependent on a unified, transparent, self-possessed subject for Merleau-Ponty. While the importance of first-person experience remains in that it it is the necessary condition for the possibility of recognizing that my experience cannot be equated with that of the other (something which Derrida grants), Merleau-Ponty's account of reversibility leads him to the radical—and quite Derridean—conclusion that there is a bifurcation or otherness even within one's own experience of oneself. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in *The Visible and the Invisible*, "reversibility [is] always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching things, but I never reach coincidence; coincidence is eclipsed at the moment of occurring [*au moment de se produire*]."[393] Reversibility entails that at any given moment, one of the two hands is touched, and the other is touching. I can never *experience* them as both touched and touching at the same time—and therefore, reversibility has an irreversible dimension to it.[394] Even the touching hand does not succeed in fully accessing the other hand from its own perspective: "when I touch I do not really touch *it*—I only feel its outer envelope with my left hand."[395] It is evident from this description that even with respect to self-relation—in the case of my two hands touching—there is an irreducible non-coincidence, or even irreversibility. First-person attention is fragmented even within the self, such that one hand at a time takes on the role of 'touching,' while the other is 'touched.'

It is not as though what is other to me is not as other as it seemed; rather, it is that *I myself am other*, different, heterogeneous, and multiple. Toward the end of Tangent III in *On Touching*, Derrida writes that he is tempted to make a move that "would strictly be neither

[393] Ibid.,147. Trans. modified.
[394] Ibid., 147-8.
[395] Ibid., 148. Trans. modified.

Husserlian nor Merleau-Pontyian," but that would rather mark an alternate path.[396] Where Merleau-Ponty concluded from the experience of one hand touching the other that there is a confusion between same and other, Derrida would conclude that precisely where one hand touches the other, there is an "irreducible gap….Even between me and me, if I may put it this way, between my body and my body, there is no such "original" contemporaneity" or "confusion."[397] There is an irreducible gap between one hand and the other that implies a lack of immediacy even here. Based on what I have argued, however, I do not think that Derrida's move here marks an 'alternate path' to that of Merleau-Ponty. Rather, this path is the one that Merleau-Ponty takes already.

3. Conclusion

Derrida's 'quasi-transcendental' terms *différance* and the trace singularly illuminate the contamination between selfhood and otherness, as I have argued in Chapter 2. Merleau-Ponty's terminology of 'ambiguity' and the body as 'between pure subject and object' does not, I think, as accurately describe the relation between self and other. Nonetheless, I find Merleau-Ponty to be a thinker of the contamination of the self by otherness. His role in this chapter has been particularly important for showing that, even within phenomenology, one can indicate a certain splitting of what is known as the 'first-person perspective.' In contemporary continental traditions, there is often an impasse between phenomenology and poststructuralist traditions that hinges on the question of first-person experience. Phenomenology claims that first-person experience is the necessary starting-point for philosophy, while poststructuralist thinkers often consider this to be misguided, naïve, and

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396 Derrida, *On Touching*, 193.
397 Ibid., 193.

mired in the modern metaphysical tradition one hopes to, if not escape, then at least view as 'problematic.' In arguing for an affinity between Derrida and Merleau-Ponty on the matter of the first-person perspective, I hope to indicate a way out of this impasse. While the tack of the foregoing section has been to show that Merleau-Ponty is closer to Derrida than Derrida believes, a deeper motive of this dissertation overall is to show that Derrida is closer to Merleau-Ponty than he believes. What I mean by that is that Derrida retains more of the first-person experience than is generally granted. I have shown in the previous chapter that Derrida does not reject or eliminate the self. This argument can be extended to what I have called in this chapter the 'first-person perspective': showing a doubling or duality within it follows directly from the arguments about *différance* and the trace, but does not do away with or render incoherent first-person experience, *pace* Zahavi.

In the following chapter, we will turn to the question of the relation between the self and other beings. I have mentioned very briefly in this chapter that self-relation can already be considered a kind of 'intersubjectivity.' The following chapter will demonstrate that this admission does not dissolve a distinction between oneself and other beings. The next chapter will not involve Merleau-Ponty, whose compelling account of intersubjectivity is worth revisiting on the basis of what we have said in this chapter but which would require a fuller development than can be undertaken here. By way of transition to the following chapter, however, I would like to call attention to this statement from the *Phenomenology of Perception*: "Others can be evident because I am not transparent for myself."[398] This claim provides an excellent pivot back toward the question of other beings that we will undertake in the following two chapters of this dissertation. The problem with the Levinasian model of

[398] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 368. In French, the phrase is "L'évidence d'autrui est possible parce que je ne suis pas transparent pour moi-même": it is worth noting that 'évidence' in French has stronger connotations than in English, signifying self-evidence or obviousness.

response ethics pointed out in Chapter 1 its inability to account for how a subject could encounter another if it did not already have otherness 'within' it. My solution to this problem has been to argue that there is otherness already 'within' the self. Now, we will show how this provides the condition for the possibility of relating to other beings *as other* (while also being the condition for the impossibility of relating to other beings as *purely* other). We are constantly caught up in relating both to ourselves and to other beings *as other*. The contamination of the self by the other to which self-relation attests also suggests a logic of contamination in our relation to other beings. Relating to other beings *as other* is to relate to them without presuming shared feelings, thoughts, motivations, and intentions. It is to relate to others without presuming that they are transparent to us. As Merleau-Ponty points out, this lack of transparency in facing other beings is not an obstacle to relating to them; in fact, this lack of transparency is always already the basis for our relation to ourselves—that is to say, to others.

4. Deconstructing Intersubjectivity

In the foregoing chapters, I argued that the self is contaminated by otherness. We cannot neatly distinguish between the self and the other: the otherness already within the self is not an illusion, as Levinas regards it, but is instead a genuine constituent of self-identity. At this point, a major problem arises: does not the existence of otherness within the self eliminate the boundary between oneself and other beings? If beings really are constituted by otherness with respect to themselves, and this otherness is not an illusion but is in fact not different in kind from the otherness of other beings, it becomes unclear what is left of the self/other distinction. If there is no self/other distinction left standing, then a whole host of issues arise, including but not limited to the following: 1) First-person experience either gets eliminated or extended to an undifferentiated panpsychism; 2) Intersubjectivity no longer makes sense, because there is no separation between self and other that would make a relation between subjects meaningful; 3) The ethical injunction to respect the other *as* other dissolves; 4) A traditional metaphysical conception of absolute identity and difference is preserved, with difference merely extended to what would seem to be identical. These issues, then, traverse the lines of phenomenology, metaphysics, ontology, and ethics. Ensuring that my view does not trap us within them is crucial in order for it to contribute to understandings of selfhood and otherness.

In this chapter, I would like to argue that my view of internal otherness does *not* lead to these four problems, because there is not 'one' otherness or difference. Even if the otherness that characterizes the self is genuine, as we argued in Chapter 1, it need not be *the same otherness* as the otherness of other beings. As we have seen with our discussion of *différance* and the trace in Chapter 2, imagining one universal kind of otherness is antithetical

to the very notion of otherness, inasmuch as otherness taken to be '*the same otherness*' is self-contradictory. Thus, the task of this chapter will be to demonstrate two things that at first blush may seem impossible to reconcile: on the one hand, the fact that selves are constituted by 'internal' otherness, and on the other hand, the fact that there is a difference between the otherness within the self and the otherness of other beings. The logic behind this latter claim is that otherness or difference is not singular, and it is therefore possible to distinguish between different iterations of difference. This allows us to claim that there is a difference between the otherness of self-relation and the otherness of other beings without saying that the locus of such a difference is the distinction between interiority and exteriority. Ultimately, we will see that the distinction between self and other is determinate but undecidable, in that it is heterogeneous to knowledge.

1. Same Difference?

The defense of a difference between oneself and other beings in the face of the claim that we are already other to ourselves provides a full expression of our solution to the problem set out in the Introduction: namely, how to bring together a response ethics perspective that upholds a respect for other beings *as other* and an account of the otherness of the self. It also helps to reinvigorate further the question of the relation between deconstruction and phenomenology touched upon in the previous chapter and which hinges particularly on the question of alterity/absence and sameness/presence. In contemporary continental philosophy, there exists an incommensurability between philosophers who attend to originary interdependence between oneself and others and philosophers who argue for the importance of alterity. The position of originary interdependence is often articulated by thinkers in feminist and posthumanist traditions. The position of emphasizing alterity is

often advocated by response ethicists working from a broadly Levinasian tradition, as well as some post-Hegelian thinkers drawing on Marxist and Frankfurt School traditions. I will argue that one need not choose between these two positions. Through my discussion of deconstructive intersubjectivity, I would like to suggest that originary interdependence with other beings and an irreducible dimension of alterity are *both* indicative of the way that we experience others and ourselves. The fact that the self is made up of traces of others comes into focus here and provides a way out of debates on one side or the other.

In Chapter 1, we took up the logic underlying Derrida's claims that there must already be otherness within the 'same.' Indeed, one could say that all of deconstructive thinking pertains to this revelation of alterity within sameness. In Chapters 2 and 3, we have read through a number of Derrida's favored terms in order to show that a key insight Derrida offers, and which he develops in a variety of ways, is that there is difference already in what purports to be purely self-identical. This analysis culminated in a defense of what I call the 'contamination thesis' of the first-person perspective in the previous chapter. At this point, we must return to the question of intersubjective experience and consider how we relate to other beings. We have argued that self-relation is at the same time a relation to an other (or more properly, to *others*). Where does this leave us with respect to our relations with other beings? Is there a difference on my view between intersubjectivity and intrasubjectivity? If so, on what would this difference be based? I will argue that, yes, there is a difference between oneself and other beings. This means defending the coexistence of the claim that there is otherness within the self with another claim that on the surface appears to be in tension, with this deconstructive insight, but which is in fact part and parcel of it. This second claim, which in some ways returns us to Levinas, is that there is a fundamental separation or gulf between oneself and others, such that one can never be in the position of

another. Derrida's constant reference point for this idea is Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity: specifically, Husserl's idea that others are only ever mediately accessed through analogy or appresentation, an idea that is often termed 'analogical appresentation.'

Following from the deconstruction of the first-person perspective in the previous chapter, the first section of this chapter will show that a deconstructive account of the self nonetheless upholds a privileged access to oneself that one does not have with other beings. While there is irreducible alterity both within self-relation and in the self's relation to other beings, there is nonetheless a different mode of access between these two forms of relation. This follows from the deconstruction of the first-person perspective in the previous chapter: deconstruction is not elimination, and in showing that the first-person perspective is haunted by otherness, we have also shown that this is what makes that perspective possible. We have concluded that the first-person perspective is necessarily *impure*, but this does not make it nonexistent. We have concluded that self-identity is the product of difference, but this does not make it meaningless. The first section of this chapter, then, will comprise an exploration of intersubjectivity, focusing particularly on the ways that Derrida takes up Husserl's theory of analogical appresentation as a means for squaring the existence of internal otherness with the first-person access one has to oneself but not to others. Then, we will develop an account of the relation to other beings on a 'more is less' logic, arguing that the closer one is to an other, the more the gulf between oneself and the other reveals itself. Finally, we will consider that difference between 'internal' otherness and the otherness of other beings is undecidable, in the way that Derrida uses that term: the distinction cannot be comprehended from the cognitive or conceptual perspective of knowledge.

It is clear from the previous chapters that the difference between self-relation and relation to other beings cannot be figured in terms of analogy or degree. That is, the other is

not other to me *like* I am to myself, nor is the other *more other* to me than I am to myself. These two ways of thinking about the problem are insufficient because the former would deny genuine internal otherness, while the latter would promote a strange continuum or question of degree that is based upon the idea that there is difference is unified, and the 'same' difference is merely more or less present in individual entities (as we have pointed out in Chapter 2). Preserving the first-person perspective is not about saying that the other is more other to me than I am myself. Instead, it demonstrates the insufficiency of the 'more/less' terminology with respect to self and other, for such terminology remains captive to the idea that there is only *one kind* of otherness, an idea we explored in Chapter 2.

The fact that an analogous relation between internal otherness and the otherness of the other beings is not, on my view, one of analogy, renders the terminology used in this chapter somewhat confusing. To wit, Derrida draws his remarks about the relation to other people to a large degree from Husserl, who uses the phrase *analogical appresentation* to describe it. A deconstructive account of analogical appresentation is *not* adequately accounted for with the word 'analogical' if we take the word to indicate that I relate to others *on an analogy* to the way that I relate to myself. The logic of deconstruction, so constantly attentive to the trace of the other in the same and the contamination of the one by the other, will help us to avoid this pitfall in thinking about self-other relation to which the Husserlian terminology might lend itself.

2. The Intersubjectivity of Analogical Appresentation

2a. Husserl on analogical appresentation

Because of the strong influence of Husserl on Derrida on the topic of intersubjectivity, we will first give a brief overview of Husserl's theory of analogical

appresentation. This will provide the basis for our discussion of the relation of the self to other beings. Here, we will focus specifically on Husserl's theory of analogical appresentation as developed in the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations*, as this is the formulation that particularly interests Derrida vis-à-vis the self-other relation. The well-known theory of intersubjectivity in the *Cartesian Meditations* emerges out of the question: Does phenomenology reduce one to transcendental solipsism, in that it reduces one to one's own conscious processes?[399] Thus, the issue of the relation to others is clearly grounded from the start in the first-person perspective. It is only if one begins from one's own perspective that the existence of others is in question, even if we take the first-person perspective as auto-deconstructive.

Appresentation, or a kind of presentation that indicates more than what is immediately present—a presence that indicates an absence—occurs both with respect to our perceptions of objects and to our perceptions of other people.[400] The term 'appresentation' (*Appräsentation*), which Husserl introduces in the 1920s but never rigorously defines, figures largely in his account of intersubjectivity. Following a distinction that Husserl makes between the perception of other people and the perception of objects, the kind of appresentation at work when we perceive other people is of a different kind than the appresentation of objects. That is, there are two categories of entities that are not the self: objects, and 'psychical objects,' or other *beings*. In perceiving an entity of either of these categories, I can only ever perceive *part* of it at a given time. When I look at a box, I perceive only its front side; so too when I perceive another person. But I can go around to the other

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[399] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*: *An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 89.

[400] Husserl writes: "appresentation occurs even in external experience, since the strictly seen front of a physical thing always and necessarily appresents a rear aspect and prescribes for it a more or less determinate content." Ibid., 109.

side of the box to see it from the back. I can turn it over to see all of its different sides. Even though it will never be the case that all sides will be present to me *at once*, all of its sides are in principle accessible to me. This is not the case with other beings. Even though others are embodied, and thus do present different sides in a spatial sphere that is open to my perception, their bodily multidimensionality does not exhaust their identity.

Other beings, instead, are for Husserl 'psychophysical objects.' This term need not indicate a dualism: it is not the case that others are bodies (physical objects) plus minds (psyches). It need not even be the case that this claim takes us out of the realm of perception—that is, it is not as if we perceive other people as mere bodies and then *posit* that this is not all there is to them, concluding that they must also have 'minds.' Such positing would be the method of Descartes, for instance, who looks at the people below him and sees bodies, but is unsure of whether these bodies *also* have minds or are mere automata.[401] Cartesian dualism is unnecessary from the phenomenological standpoint because one does not *only*, or even *first*, perceive a body and *then* conclude that this body also has a consciousness; rather, the body of another person *already presents itself* as conscious. Thus, Husserl says that we do not perceive other people in the same way that we perceive objects; rather, we immediately perceive other people as 'psychophysical objects.'[402] It is intrinsic to perceiving a being as a psychophysical object that one be aware that the object is not reducible to a mere body.

A psychophysical object is an *alter ego*: that is, another person who lives from his or her own conscious, first-person sphere. This indicates that appresentation in the case of

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[401] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy ,* Meditation 2. See René Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans.John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 1998.
[402] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 91.

other people is not only incomplete *in fact*, as it was with the box, but also incomplete *in principle*: while I have the capability of going around to the other side of the box, I do not have the capability of going around to the other side of the person, because the other side of the person is not the other side of his or her body; rather, it is the other side of that person as a psychophysical object, that is to say, as *conscious*. This consciousness is what is in principle inaccessible to me, because precisely to be an ego is to embody a consciousness that has an irreducible self-awareness or first-person perspective. Thus, the appresentation of objects "involves the possibility of verification by a corresponding fulfilling presentation (the back becomes the front); whereas, in the case of that appresentation which would lead over into the other original sphere, such verification must be excluded a priori."[403] The other as ego—as 'original sphere'—cannot be immediately present for me, because this would destroy the very idea of the ego.

If it were possible for the other as ego to be immediately present to me, there would no longer be any distinction between oneself and the other. If the other were fully accessible to me, then the other would just be a part of my perceived world (in Levinas's terminology, 'the sphere of the Same'—and let us not forget that the link between Levinas and Husserl is close, with the former even having published a translation of the *Cartesian Meditations*): the other would therefore be undifferentiated from myself. Husserl notes that the in-person presence of the other precisely suggests a lack of access to that person in his or her entirety.

> [W]e generally say, in the case of experiencing a man: the other is himself there before us "in person." On the other hand, this being there in person does not keep us from admitting forthwith that, properly speaking, neither

[403] Ibid., 109.

> the other Ego himself, nor his subjective processes or his appearances themselves, nor anything else belonging to his own essence, becomes given in our experience originally. If it were, if what belongs to the other's own essence were directly accessible, it would be merely a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same.[404]

The alter ego is never originarily given to one's own experience. If it were, the two of us would dissolve into one another. What is inaccessible to me is the fact that the other has a particular perspective and position in the world irreducible to that of any other: in Husserl's terms, that the other person has subjective processes, appearances, and its own essence. I can never presume to 'put myself in the other's shoes,' because there is an irreducible gulf separating our first-person experiences.

In what sense is this fundamental inaccessibility to the experience of the other *analogous* to myself? We must here resist the risk of reinscribing Cartesian dualism by presuming that 'analogy' indicates something like the following: 'Because I am a psychophysical object in the world, having a body but also consciousness. I perceive another psychophysical object over there, so it too must also have consciousness.' This approach is wholly misguided because it amounts to a version of substance dualism that posits consciousness over and above a body, yet Husserl's notion of a psychophysical object is precisely meant to guard against this.[405] It is not that I cannot access the alter ego because she has an extra, nonphysical *part* of herself—namely, a consciousness—that is inaccessible

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[404] Ibid., 109.

[405] Husserl's own position with respect to dualism is not altogether clear or consistent throughout his career, having led to much scholarly debate, but it is outside of the purview of this chapter to explore that more fully. For now, we will point to non-dualistic gestures in Husserl because this will help set up the project I am putting forth, the non-dualistic implications of which were clear in the previous chapter's treatment of Merleau-Ponty.

to my perception in the physical world. Rather, the consciousness of the other is indeed inaccessible to me, but this cannot be figured as a *part*, especially one that would imply substance dualism; it is instead a *perspective*.

Husserl's use of the term 'sphere of ownness' (*Eigenheitssphäre*) to designate the perspective of the ego is at once illuminating and misleading, as it demonstrates the fact that first-person experience is a 'world' unto itself, yet remains subject to the spatial metaphoricity that suggests that consciousness is a substance. One's own transcendental consciousness is fundamentally characterized by an *ownness* (*Eigenheit*). If I were to bring the other into this sphere, I would be reducing the other to myself. Furthermore, if I were to do so, I would *only* be bringing the other as a perceptible object into myself, because the other as consciousness is not perceptible or apparent for me. Rather, it is the very nature of the appearance of a psychophysical object to present itself as having its own sphere of ownness and first-person perspective on the world: and the fact of this appearance itself suggests what is non-apparent (that is, this sphere of ownness). Because I am familiar with my own sphere of ownness—familiarity is indeed its fundamental mark—I can *analogously* grasp that the other has her own sphere of ownness as well. Thus, Husserl writes: "The second ego, however, is not simply there and strictly presented; rather is he constituted as 'alter ego'—the ego indicated as one moment by this expression being I myself in my ownness. The 'Other,' according to his own constituted sense, points to me myself; the other is a 'mirroring' of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense."[406] Thus, we see that the other is an analogue to oneself insofar as she is an alter ego. Yet this is not an analogy 'in the usual sense,' because

[406] Ibid., 94.

the ego is not an object in the world. Instead, because the ego points precisely to what *cannot* be grasped immediately, because it is fundamentally inaccessible to anyone else, I cannot presume that the contents of my ego are the contents of the ego of the other, and so forth; the notion of analogy between ego and alter ego precisely stops one short of making any further claims to likeness. The only extent to which analogical appresentation considers the other *like myself* is the extent to which the other occupies an irreplaceable position. While we will later interrogate this 'irreplaceable position'—which Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Derrida consider to be a 'zero-point' or a 'here'—for now we will turn to Derrida's use of Husserlian analogical appresentation and then consider other consequences of deconstruction for intersubjectivity.

2b. Derrida's defense of Husserlian analogical appresentation

In a move that is likely to surprise those familiar with the Levinasian notion of alterity as well as Derrida's frequently critical remarks about Husserl, Derrida repeatedly defends Husserl's theory of the alter ego and claims that it more adequately figures the other than Levinas's infinite, transcendent account of alterity.[407] Because analogical appresentation forecloses any presumption of similarity or access to others, Derrida sees in it a remarkable regard for otherness.[408] In fact, he brings it up in a positive light in a surprising number of places throughout his writings. Husserl vigilantly guards against any claim of direct access to the other, whether through unmediated knowledge of or sympathy with the other. Because the notion of analogical appresentation developed in the fifth of Husserl's *Cartesian*

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[407] For Levinas's rejection of Husserl's theory, see, for instance, *Totality and Infinity*, 109.
[408] See, for instance, Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*; "Violence and Metaphysics" (in *Writing and Difference*); "Hospitality, Responsibility, Justice"; *Politics of Friendship*; *Adieu*; "Eating Well"; the interview "Fidélité à plus d'un," *Cahiers Intersignes* 13 (1999).

Meditations foregrounds the irreducible lack of direct access one has to the experience of the other, Derrida takes it to be a genuine thinking of otherness that outdoes supposedly more 'radical' versions (such as that of Levinas).[409]

Husserl vigilantly guards against any claim of direct access to the other, whether through unmediated knowledge of or sympathy with the other. Derrida asserts that it is only by "misconstruing his most permanent and openly stated intentions" that one can claim that Husserl's theory of the alter ego implies an other who is *like myself*, whom I can encounter only in what Levinas might call the 'sphere of the Same.' For Husserl as well as for Levinas, the other is never given *originally* to the ego, but rather appears *as other*, as something that exceeds my grasp or understanding. When I encounter another, I do not have full access to her. Only one side of the other's body is present to me; the other speaks, and I cannot anticipate what she will say; the other moves of her own accord; my encounter with the other precisely discloses that the other is beyond me. Derrida notes that "Levinas and Husserl are quite close" on this point.[410] But for Husserl, the appearance of the other is an "intentional modification of the ego" even as this modification precisely discloses that the other is infinitely other.[411] This conception gives Husserl the right to speak about the encounter with the other. Because Levinas's discourse, on the other hand, uses the language of the same to describe the other even as he rejects this schema, Levinas "deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language."[412] Husserl's approach to alterity thus is more coherent than that of Levinas because it acknowledges the irreducible role of the same in the sense of the ego.

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409 See, for instance, Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, 149.
410 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 125.
411 Ibid., 125.
412 Ibid., 125.

When there is a risk of presuming an "immediate access to the other," for instance, which is the gesture of violence that would bring the other into oneself and do away with the distance between the two, Derrida states that "Husserl's cautious approach will always remain *before us* as a model of vigilance. It is necessary to watch over the other's alterity: it will always remain inaccessible to an originally presentive intuition, an immediate and direct presentation of the *here*."[413] The other presents himself to me as another *here*, and this can never be overtaken by me. Even if I switch positions with the other, I can never be in the position of the other. The 'here' of the other is always, necessarily, a 'there' to me, and vice versa. Despite the fact that Derrida sees in Husserl many of the quintessential gestures of metaphysics, he also views in Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity something that escapes metaphysical overdetermination and compromises the theory of transcendental subjectivity.[414] Husserl's account of the alter ego interrupts the saturated sphere of phenomenology and opens it to an alterity beyond it.

Some of the most striking remarks that Derrida makes about analogical appresentation in Husserl are found in the interview "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility." Here, Derrida states: "It is still a very profound lesson that Husserl taught us, and even Levinas. In the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, Husserl insists that there is no pure intuition of the other *as such*; that I have no originary access to the alter-ego *as such*. I should go, as you know, through analogy or appresentation. So the fact that there is no pure phenomenon, or phenomenality, of the other or alter-ego as such is something which I think

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[413] Derrida, *On Touching*, 191.

[414] See, for instance, Derrida, "Eating Well" (101-2): "even in this great philosophy of the transcendental subject, the interminable genetic (so called passive) analyses of the ego, of time and of the alter ego lead back to a pre-egological and pre-subjectivist zone," and which therefore is "no longer dictated by the egological form of subjectivity or intersubjectivity." Intriguingly, he elsewhere calls Husserl's account of the *alter ego* "the moment of undecidability in Husserl." See Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility," 81.

is irrefutable."[415] For Derrida, this feature of Husserl's account is the principle of phenomenology that betrays phenomenology (in that it admits into the phenomenological picture a non-phenomenological feature, or something that exceeds phenomenality), but Derrida finds that this principle "is still valid" apart from the context of phenomenology.[416] Derrida finds this theory of intersubjectivity so compelling that he goes so far as to say in this interview, "from the point of view of Husserl's fifth *Cartesian Meditation* I remain a strict phenomenologist."[417] Derrida remains a 'strict phenomenologist' insofar as he recognizes that the condition for the possibility of the appearance of an other is that one have a fundamental lack of access to the position of that other. Derrida is a strict phenomenologist in his faithfulness to the aspect of phenomenology that interrupts phenomenology itself. The theory of the alter ego in Husserl is one that Derrida stands by insofar as it thematizes the confrontation with other beings precisely as gesturing toward the alterity of those other beings as that which cannot be confronted.

Finally, as we have noted, it is essential to the theory of analogical appresentation that first-person experience be retained in some sense. This should be familiar from our analyses in Chapters 2 and 3: deconstruction does not *eliminate* first-person experience, sameness, or selfhood, but encourages us to think it differently. In speaking of analogical appresentation in Husserl, Derrida figures this first-person experience as a 'zero-point,' a term from phenomenology denoting one's own perspective (or, in Merleau-Ponty's case, one's own body) as the 'absolute here' or ground-zero of experience. Derrida states, "in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty the ego is first the origin of the world; that is, there is a zero-point of space and time here. That is what I mean when I say 'I,' and in this place 'you'

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415 Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility," 71.
416 Ibid., 71.
417 Ibid., 72.

cannot be, it's irreplaceable. I can't be in your zero-point."[418] The 'zero-point' is another way to think about the 'sphere of ownness' that is requisite for egoic consciousness in Husserl. Each ego, as ego, is the origin of the world, or its own zero-point: its own 'here.'[419] The fact that Derrida holds on to this insight and even emphasizes further disconfirms the commonly-held view that Derrida's deconstruction does away with selfhood or subjectivity. In fact, a certain first-person perspective, albeit one haunted by the second- and third-person perspectives, is irreducible for deconstruction. The zero-point may be split open at its origin—and certainly cannot be thought in terms of pure self-presence, transparency, or substance—but it is necessary for any confrontation with the other nonetheless.

This zero-point whose origin is split is also, put in other terms, the 'here-and-now' or 'origin of the world' frequently referred to in phenomenology as a description of the first-person perspective. As early as *Of Grammatology*, Derrida uses the phenomenological terminology of the 'here-and-now' and 'origin of the world' in his description of the trace. In describing how the trace must be thought alongside the "retention of difference," Derrida notes that this retention of difference is not a "metaphysical formula," but rather interrupts the pretensions of metaphysics.[420] Amidst this argument, he writes: "The absence of an *other* here-and-now, of an other transcendental present, of an *other* origin of the world appearing as such, presenting itself as irreducible absence in the presence of the trace, is not a

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[418] Ibid., 71. While we do not have the space here to pursue this idea, it would be worthwhile to connect this idea that the other is its own 'origin of the world' to Derrida's claim, found in his works on mourning, that the death of the other is each time 'the end of the world.' See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. and trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[419] Cf. Derrida's comment in the interview "Eating Well" (103), which we previously quoted in Chapter 2, where Derrida seems to disavow the term 'origin of the world': here, he considers the possibility of a "discourse around a subject that would not be pre-deconstructive," and suggests that this subject "would no longer include a figure of mastery of self, of adequation to self, center and origin of the world."

[420] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 46-47.

metaphysical formula substituted for a scientific concept of writing."[421] It is notable that Derrida discusses the trace in terms of an absence of an *other* here-and-now or origin of the world. The trace, then, does not only offer a way for us to think deconstructively about the split origin of the self and the first-person perspective, but is directly linked with it. Specifically, the trace suggests the impossibility of ever being in the perspective or 'here-and-now' of the other.

In the interview "Fidelity to More than One," Derrida revisits the question of appresentation in Husserl as a site of respect for the otherness of other beings, offering a clearer explanation of the idea hinted at decades earlier in the quotation from *Of Grammatology* quoted above.[422] Here, Derrida suggests that the impossibility of being in the 'zero-point,' 'here-and-now,' of the other, which constitute that other as 'origin of the world' with its own first-person perspective, are the condition for the possibility of experiencing the other. He states:

> The relation to alterity in general, this experience of an invisibility in the visible where non-phenomenality is necessary, is something like a self-interruption by the phenomenology of Husserl in his *Cartesian Meditations*, or by that of Levinas throughout his entire work. The relation to the *alter ego* can never be an immediate intuition or an originary perception. One has no access to the here and now of the other, from the other side, to the zero-point of this other origin of the world—and this is the condition of the experience of the other as other. This primary dissolution at the heart of the social bond, as the condition of the social bond, has first of all to do with the alterity of the other: the other presents itself *as other* only by never

[421] Ibid., 47. Trans. modified.
[422] Derrida, "Fidélité à plus d'un." I have benefited from a draft of David Wills's forthcoming translation of this interview here.

> presenting itself as such, other as other. In other words, the way in which the other presents itself consists in not presenting itself. Isn't this the law of the relation to the other, be it X, animal, God, or man?[423]

Here, Derrida reveals the necessity for any phenomenon of the other to suggest what goes *beyond* this phenomenon of the other, in that one can never 'access' the 'zero-point' or 'here and now' of the other. He credits Husserl for having had this insight. Derrida here also makes a point that we have noted earlier: namely, that this admission of something beyond the phenomenon within the heart of phenomenology threatens the purity or identity of phenomenology from the inside.[424] In a movement that will be familiar from the foregoing chapters, Derrida suggests that the 'primary dissolution at the heart of the social bond' is also its condition of possibility. The inaccessibility of the zero-point of the other is both what makes the experience of the other impossible (as pure experience of the other, complete, totalizing, etc.) and, by the same token, what makes the experience of the other *as* other possible. Analogical appresentation is both the threat and the chance of the relation to beings.

Derrida's 'defense' of Husserlian analogical appresentation and its foregrounding of the first-person experience goes back to "Violence and Metaphysics." Here, within the context of the discussion of infinity in Hegel to which we drew attention in the first chapter, Derrida takes the side of Husserl against Levinas, who finds Husserlian analogical appresentation to be misguided because it supposedly models the other on the self. Derrida argues that Levinas's rejection of the Husserlian notion that the other is an alter ego undermines his project, and that it is the very claim that the other is infinite, beyond all

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423 Ibid.
424 For more on this, see especially the second essay of Derrida, *Rogues*.

figuration as an alter ego (or, we might say, another self) that in fact proves untenable. Without a Husserlian idea of the alter ego, Levinas is left paralyzed with regard to explaining how one could encounter the other as other. Because of this failure, Levinas is less able to take into account the otherness of the other than Husserl.[425] As a challenge to Levinas, who would accuse Husserl of not being able to think the other outside of the schema of the same, Derrida asks, "is there a more rigorously and, especially, a more literally Husserlian theme than the theme of inadequation? Of the infinite overflowing of horizons?"[426] In the sense that analogical appresentation figures the manner by which the other *in principle* exceeds my horizons and constitutes an 'other side' that I can never reach, Husserl's thought coherently and radically gestures toward the otherness of the other. In no uncertain terms, Derrida suggests that Husserl's conception of intentionality has profoundly ethical ramifications when it comes to its way of thinking otherness: "Is not intentionality respect itself? The eternal irreducibility of the other to the same, but of the other *appearing as* other for the same? For without the phenomenon of other as other no respect would be possible. The phenomenon of respect supposes the respect of phenomenality. And ethics, phenomenology."[427] Husserlian phenomenology, in accounting for the encounter with the other in terms of appresentation, is linked with the ethical injunction to respect the other as other. Far from reducing the other to oneself, which Levinas accuses Husserl of doing, Husserlian phenomenology on Derrida's view precisely signals the impossibility of reducing the other to the same, even as it claims (more coherently than Levinas) that the other *appears*

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[425] Put back into the Hegelian terms of the 'false-infinity,' Derrida states that "the only effective position to take in order not to be enveloped by Hegel" would seem to be that of taking false infinity to be irreducible. Perhaps this is what Husserl does, at bottom, by demonstrating the irreducibility of intentional incompleteness, and therefore of alterity" Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 119-120.

[426] Ibid., 120.

[427] Ibid., 121.

within the domain of the Same, but *as other*. (In the following chapter, we will see how this plays out in Beauvoir.)

Derrida's emphasis on the reliance of ethics on phenomenology may seem at first blush like a watering down or a betrayal of the Levinasian insight into the irreducible otherness of the other. Yet, as we have seen, Derrida claims that Levinas in fact does not adequately account for otherness. In absolutizing the other so drastically, Levinas renders it unintelligible. While we have explored this to some degree in the previous chapter, it is worth pointing out here on the basis of the quotations cited above. As Geoffrey Bennington puts it, "Derrida's construal of alterity as *always less than absolute* in fact constitutes a thought of the other as *more other than the absolute other*."[428] Absolute otherness, as Hegel points out in the *Logic*, collapses through contradiction back into identity. As we have suggested earlier in different terms, an otherness enclosed unto itself would actually be otherness as sameness, and therefore would be incoherent. *Différance*, then, is not absolute otherness or difference.

In light of *différance*, the alterity of other beings cannot be considered as entirely, wholly, or *purely* outside the same or self. Alterity is in principle absent and beyond the horizons, let alone the sphere, of the same, but it is not purely self-identical outside of a relation to sameness. The logic of contamination is not one-sided; if the same is contaminated by the other, so too is the other contaminated by the same. This suggests that the alterity of the other is 'less than absolute.' Yet at the same time, the notion that the alterity of the other is not purely self-identical or self-enclosed has as its consequence the fact that the other is 'more other than the absolute other.'[429] Deconstruction implies an

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[428] Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, 44.

[429] In *Interrupting Derrida*, Bennington suggests that *différance* is a name for the non-absolutizability of difference. "Derrida spends a good deal of effort establishing that this differential condition of identity need not give rise to a dialectic in the Hegelian sense: Hegel's famous demonstration that difference collapses dialectically into identity depends on an *absolutisation* of difference which Derrida

"apparent 'less is more' logic" of alterity.[430] That is, deconstruction simultaneously avows that otherness is not absolute (because an absolute 'other' would have no relation to the same, which would make of it a pure self-identity, which is precisely the metaphysical feature of sameness) and yet that it is not anything less than absolute (because an other that were not 'completely other' would be reappropriated back into the domain of sameness). Otherwise put, the condition for the possibility of alterity is also the condition for its impossibility *as pure* alterity.

In his unpublished seminars from the early 1990s on the secret and bearing witness, Derrida remains insistent that the structure of analogical appresentation is the condition for the possibility of the experience of the other as other. Within the context of the 1992-1993 seminar "Répondre du secret: Témoigner," this emerges particularly in the idea that we must *believe* others when they bear witness, and have faith in what they say, because we cannot submit their beliefs to proof. We can never *know* if another is speaking ingenuously or disingenuously because we can never have access to the other from the position of him or herself.[431] For Derrida, any witnessing requires a singular existence and a level of interiority, or of "what happens or is experienced within someone, within some singular existence (*ego* or *Dasein*) there where the other can in no way have a direct, intuitive, and originary access."[432] The lack of this access on the part of the other—which is a lack of access to me as "origin" of the world—is particularly illustrated by Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation, which Derrida says here would be "one of the best paths to follow" in order to describe

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is at pains to show is unthinkable (difference is intrinsically non-absolutisable, intrinsically finite) and on a prejudgment that difference is answerable to opposition (Hegel is, for example, *already* thinking difference as opposition when arguing that what is different from difference is identity)." Ibid., 12.

[430] Ibid., 44.

[431] This asymmetry with respect to our lack of knowledge of others will later emerge, in Chapter 5, as an ethic of asymmetrical reciprocity.

[432] Derrida, *Répondre du secret* (Séance 3, 2 décembre 1992, 9).

"this zone that remains at bottom that of the secret and of absolute singularity, of that which is absolutely my own and of which I cannot even expropriate myself."[433]

Shortly afterward in the same session, Derrida turns to consider the other 'side' of the phenomenon of the other given in analogical appresentation: not this time the other's lack of access to myself, but to the self's lack of access to the other. I will quote extensively here because these seminars are unpublished, and therefore it is worth citing Derrida's words directly to avoid any misunderstanding. He states that Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation "recalls that which is at once an axiom and an absolutely obvious fact [*évidence absolue*], to know that the *ego* who has a phenomenological access—intuitive, immediate, originary, and in person—to the present phenomenality of its own lived experiences and of all that is its own, can only ever have an indirect, appresentative, or analogical access to the lived experience of others, of the alter ego."[434] One's own consciousness is only ever one's own: "no one can enter into the consciousness of the other. I am alone with myself, at a given moment, and the condition of bearing witness is that someone who is alone with him- or herself [*seul avec soi*] can say to someone else: this is what I feel [*sens*], this is what I live, this is what I understand [*entends*]. It is impossible to break in to the cogito of others. Husserl has rigorously described the impossibility of an originary intuition of the consciousness or ego of others. I can only access the ego of others indirectly by analogy or appresentation."[435] There is a domain of secrecy 'within' the self that gives one privileged access to one's own feelings and thoughts: no one can 'break in' to that domain within another person. Without this

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433 Ibid. (Séance 3, 2 décembre 1992), 9.

434 Ibid. (Séance 3, 2 décembre 1992), 9. Derrida links this up explicitly with a discussion of bearing witness to *love* through the declaration "I love you," and also with the notion of the secret as the site of an irreducible first-person access that is at the same time bound inextricably to alterity. "Irreducible alterity, which is also irreducible singularity and therefore the irreducible secret, is the condition of love and the declaration of love as bearing witness and not as proof."

435 Ibid. (Séance 7, 2 février 1993),

secrecy within oneself, there would be no need for communicating, 'bridging the gap,' with others. Within the context of this seminar, Derrida again brings up analogical appresentation as an irreducible feature of relation to the other that is made possible by one's own first-person access to oneself.[436]

Of course, we know that based on the previous chapters, it would be wildly un-deconstructive merely to posit the irreducibility of the first-person perspective and leave it at that. What would become of the internal difference for which we have laid the groundwork? After all, even as Derrida admittedly subscribes to the phenomenological account of analogical appresentation (as we saw in the bold statement that he "remains a strict phenomenologist" with respect to the Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*), he is not a thoroughgoing Husserlian. It is worth recalling that *Voice and Phenomenon* precisely constitutes a troubling of the unmediated self-relation that Husserl posits through his distinction between 'expression' and 'indication' and the analysis of internal time-consciousness. We might also make reference to the more extended analyses provided in earlier chapters of the deconstruction of selfhood and the first-person perspective. Here, I would like to briefly draw attention to such a moment within the same unpublished seminar, where Derrida speaks of a duality already within the first-person perspective of interiority in light of the experience of bearing

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[436] Another formulation of the ineliminable first-person dimension in Derrida, which suggests not only the irreducible separation between oneself and others but *also* the irreducible separation within oneself, take this claim from the interview "Fidelity to More than One": I 'know by experience' that my here-and-now is completely untranslatable and that the world in which I speak is absolutely heterogeneous. It has nothing in common with the world of anyone else here. What I feel in myself, what I experience within myself, the way in which words come to mind, all of this is absolutely incommensurable. With the multiplicity of those who take it in, more or less, each in his or her own way, from a here infinitely different from my own, there is no common space: this distance between someone else's here and my own is infinite; each other and each other moment of myself, right here and right now, is further from me than the moon, etc. There is between two 'heres' a properly infinite irreducibility and heterogeneity. We experience this when we die, but also at every moment. Derrida, "Fidélité à plus d'un."

witness (*témoignage*): in order for the structure of bearing witness to something that one believes to properly hold, "it is necessary that one be two [*il faut qu'on soit deux*]."[437] "When I say," Derrida writes, "I cannot believe otherwise, and that this happens uniquely in me, it means that in one there are two."[438] When taken deconstructively, bearing witness to one's belief reveals that what appeared to be one is in fact more than one. There is difference or duality already within interiority. As I have previously argued, this is not at the expense of the acknowledgment of first-person experience; in fact, it is only when we consider the first-person perspective—albeit an auto-deconstructive perspective—to be an irreducible feature of belief and, more generally, communication with others, that otherness even makes sense, whether 'within' or 'outside' the self.

While Derrida follows Husserl quite far when it comes to analogical appresentation, then, Derrida certainly does not subscribe to a phenomenological conception of the ego. For Derrida, the non-presence of the other is a rupture within phenomenology; in addition to this, but also related to it, Derrida interrupts the presence to self that phenomenology foregrounds. While we have seen that Derrida agrees with Husserl that an egoic 'zero-point' is necessary in order for the separation between self and other to be comprehensible, Derrida concludes that a full attention to the relation between self and other reveals that analogical appresentation *also* holds with respect to self-relation. Corresponding to the basic gesture of deconstruction, Derrida suggests a radicalization of the self/other relation that unsettles a traditional binary and affirms a different way of thinking about its terms as mutually contaminating.

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437 Derrida, *Répondre du secret* (Séance 7, 2 février 1993), 12.
438 Ibid. (Séance 7, 2 février 1993), 12.

It is noteworthy that in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida connects analogical appresentation with deconstruction's strongest formulation of the idea that one can never have access to the other as such: *"tout autre est tout autre."* This phrase, which David Wills translates as "*every other (one) is every (bit) other,*" signifies that the question of otherness cannot be one of degree or measure. One cannot say that another is 'more' or 'less' other, because otherness as such denotes what is in principle inaccessible, and therefore cannot be considered in calculable terms of measure.[439] Derrida reads this phrase through Kierkegaard's famous analysis in *Fear and Trembling* of the Biblical story of Abraham's obedience to God, who asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Derrida recalls Husserl's theory of analogical appresentation in a crucial formulation of this phrase in *The Gift of Death*. In arguing that the singularity of Abraham's relation to God as described by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* in principle holds for every relation to the other, Derrida writes: "each of us, everyone else, each other is infinitely other in its absolute singularity, inaccessible, solitary, transcendent, nonmanifest, originarily nonpresent to my *ego* (as Husserl would say of the *alter ego* that can never be originarily present to my consciousness and that I can apprehend only through what he calls *appresentation* and analogy)."[440] The singularity of the other is what renders the other inaccessible and nonpresent to oneself. The fact that the nonpresence of the other is present

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[439] While we do not have the space to pursue this fully here, it is worth pointing out the paradoxical conclusion that, if *tout autre est tout autre*, then by the same token it is a thinking of otherness as quasi-otherness (as the previous paragraph suggests). *Tout autre est tout autre* is in fact a thinking of otherness as quasi-otherness or quasi-difference insofar as we have seen that Derrida rejects otherness or difference writ large, as absolute. The completely, absolutely other would be utterly inaccessible to oneself, and therefore would be outside of any possible experience, encounter, or phenomenalization. Ultimately, this absolute otherness would collapse back into sameness, as we have developed in Chapter 1. A rigorous thinking of *différance* reveals that these two seemingly contradictory claims are two sides of the same coin. Otherness is 'whole' insofar as it cannot be subsumed by sameness, and 'half' insofar as it is always already contaminated by sameness. The same logic is behind Derrida's conception of mourning as half-mourning, or *demi-deuil*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

[440] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 78.

to oneself—the other is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon that attests to an excess of phenomenality—indicates that the other will never be presented 'originarily.' And this lack of originary access to the other is expressive of otherness as such. Thus, Derrida invokes Husserl as a thinker of the *tout autre est tout autre* insofar as the *alter ego* encountered in analogical appresentation is 'infinitely' other in its irreducible singularity, beyond presence and grasp of the same. The infinite other is made possible by appresentation, or representation within the calculative economy of the same.

If *tout autre est tout autre*, then speaking of otherness in terms of degrees is not merely insufficient but rather fundamentally misguided. While *différance* suggests that otherness is not absolute or unified—differences are plural, proliferating, and in principle incalculable—it does not suggest that there are various degrees of 'more other' and 'less other,' as in a kind of grayscale of otherness and sameness. While Derrida certainly speaks of the 'more' and 'less' other, as we will see later in this chapter and have already seen above in Bennington's formulation of alterity in Derrida, he does so in a way that precisely unsettles a logic of degree, for the notion of 'degree' remains captive to a conception of difference as *one kind of* difference, or the 'same' difference. What appears to be 'more other' is 'less other' and vice versa; *différance* is not on a spectrum between absolute difference and absolute sameness. This argument, which follows from the remarks we made about *différance* in Chapter 2, dispels a temptation we might have to consider otherness 'within' the self as a semi-otherness as opposed to a 'full otherness' of other beings. We cannot say that we are *slightly* other to ourselves and *wholly* other to other beings. Rather, *tout autre est tout autre*. The 'less is more' logic of Derrida's writings on alterity—which I will later in this chapter develop in terms of a 'more is less' logic—uses these terms of degree precisely in order to show how they are not oppositional, binaristic, or hierarchical, but rather mutually deconstructing.

3b. Symmetrical asymmetry of the self and the alter ego

Given the manner by which deconstruction consistently troubles the boundaries between the internal and the external, deconstruction will show that analogical appresentation cannot only be reserved for one's relation to other beings, but is always already the case for self-relation. That is, the 'here,' 'zero-point,' or secrecy of interiority is always already split in its origin: our analyses of the first-person perspective in the previous chapter need merely be recalled here. Yet it is worth pointing out that, if one's own first-person perspective is split and contaminated by otherness, this is also the case for the first-person perspective of the other. We can make this claim without overlooking the gulf between self and other and presuming direct access to that other. This is one of the insights offered by analogical appresentation.

Returning to some remarks made in the Introduction, we must remember that merely to show the split origin of the self—otherness within—is to risk hypostasizing the other into the new site of perfectly self-present subjectivity. If what analogical appresentation shows me is that I cannot ever be on the 'other side' of my experience and in the place of the other—it shows me that this cannot be shown—then it also indicates that the 'other side' is not purely selfsame unto itself. While I can never be in the shoes of another, the structure of our relation to each other is such that I do better—ethically—to treat the other as self-differentiating rather than as a selfsame, identical, sovereign subject. This claim will be pursued in the following section of this chapter as well as the next chapter. I take it to be a corrective insight to the position currently holds sway in response ethics: namely, the position that the other calls upon me from a position of sovereignty (and, by extension, pure subjectivity, knowledge, and self-possession). This idea that the other is not

selfsame unto him or her or itself is one, I think, that should follow neatly from a deconstruction of the self-present subject, but which has not generally been defended by response ethicists—because of the worry about issues like symmetry and reversibility, which we will touch upon here and delve into further in Chapter 5.

A crucial issue for the remaining sections of this chapter, as well as for the following chapter, is the relation between symmetry and asymmetry. As we will see in the following chapter, Levinas unequivocally considers ethics to be a relation of asymmetry. Any symmetrical relation would violate the alterity of the other and risk turning the other into the same. Such a line of argumentation is why response ethicists tend to reject any analogy between the other and oneself—and why, for our purposes here, they might consider the subject or self as divided and opaque to itself, but not extend this logic to other beings. However, in addition to the issues we have pointed out in the Introduction, this position overlooks the inextricability of asymmetry with a certain symmetry. Naïvely choosing between symmetry and asymmetry leads to more problems than it resolves, and it is worthwhile to hold onto a qualified insight into the symmetry of relations with other beings even as one attends to their asymmetry.

Analogical appresentation, after all, has a certain symmetry to it. We might call this a *symmetrical asymmetry*. Even as the 'analogy' between oneself and the other that characterizes analogical appresentation is not one of assuming that the other is *like myself*, there is nonetheless an analogy in the sense that both oneself and other beings are presumed similar *insofar as they cannot be in each other's positions,* but are relegated to their own 'zero-points.' The basis for the asymmetry of the relation to the other—an asymmetry that is irreducible because it considers the other as *beyond* me—is this symmetry. The *alter ego*, for Husserl, indicates simply the fact that the other has a particular perspective and position in the world

irreducible to that of any other. The only extent to which analogical appresentation considers the other *like myself* is the extent to which the other occupies an irreplaceable position. There is no presumption of shared experience, shared understanding, or access to the perspective of the other. There is a structural symmetry to the relation between self and other because each is an ego (albeit deconstructed)—but this is where my similarity to the other ends.

Derrida constructs a version of this symmetry argument as early as "Violence and Metaphysics," where he complicates Levinas's emphasis on asymmetry in the ethical relation. We have already shown that he argues in this text that Levinas's account of the other fails where Husserl's account, by considering the other an *alter ego,* better succeeds. Related to this is the idea that Levinas's insistence that the relation between self and other is completely asymmetrical also fails because it absolutizes the one-directional nature of this relation (to which we will return at greater length in the following chapter). Here, Derrida claims that the idea that the other is an *alter ego* is required in order for there to be a relation to the other as 'Other' in Levinas's sense. As Derrida puts it: "If the other were not recognized as a transcendental alter *ego*, it would be entirely in the world and not, as ego, the origin of the world. To refuse to see in it an ego in this sense is, within the ethical order, the very gesture of all violence. If the other was not recognized as ego, its entire alterity would collapse."[441] It is precisely because the other is an ego that I am able to treat her as other. To fail to recognize the other as an alter ego would be to overlook the 'other side,' 'zero-point,' or 'first-person perspective' that characterizes the other: that is, it would be to fail to see that there is *more* to the other than I myself can ever access through the structure of analogical appresentation that organizes my relation to the other.

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[441] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 125. See also 127: "The other, then, would not be what he is (my fellow man [*prochain*] as foreigner) if he were not alter ego."

The ego-alter ego relation, then, has an aspect of symmetry to it. Derrida is not merely showing a preference for symmetry over asymmetry, however; rather, he is revealing a certain contamination between the two that makes both symmetry and asymmetry possible (and impossible *as pure*). Derrida describes this structure as "the transcendental symmetry of two empirical asymmetries": the ego-alter ego relation is symmetrical in a structural sense, but empirically, the relation is necessarily asymmetrical insofar as one can never put oneself in the other's position.[442] There is a symmetry in the relation between two egos inasmuch as each is an ego. For Derrida, this symmetry is the condition for the possibility of asymmetry. Yet, given that the 'ego' precisely indicates the first-person perspective that no one can never access from inside, the difference between egos is unbridgeable. As Derrida puts it decades after "Violence and Metaphysics," "the other is an ego [*un moi*]," and nothing is "more similar [*semblable*] and more irreducibly different than an ego and another ego."[443] The ego and alter ego are as similar as can be, and yet as different as can be. Their relation is at once symmetrical and asymmetrical. Derrida states, "Dissymmetry itself would be impossible without this symmetry, which is not of the world, and which, being nothing actual [*n'étant rien de réel*], imposes no limit to alterity and dissymmetry—makes them possible, on the contrary."[444] Asymmetry, then, is contaminated by symmetry.[445] It would be impossible without it. The condition of possibility for the incalculable asymmetrical relationship is this calculable symmetry. We cannot avoid a certain calculability or economy here. In this sense, the fact that the self is confronted by the other also implies that the other is beset by the self:

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442 Ibid., 126.
443 Derrida, *Répondre—du secret* (Séance 10, 11 mars, 1992), 12.
444 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 126.
445 It is worth noting that, in addition to being a 'classical' move of deconstruction, this line of argument has particular resonances with Derrida's later discussion of justice and law, especially in "Force of Law," and in the consideration of how the 'third' haunts the face-to-face relation of Levinas's ethics, particularly developed in *Adieu*.

there would be no meaning in the movement toward the other if I did not also "know myself to be the other for the other."[446] This purely formal symmetry necessarily underlies the dissymmetry crucial for any ethical relation to the other.[447]

One might wonder here whether Derrida's defense of a certain symmetry in the asymmetrical self-other relation might bear similarity to Merleau-Ponty's theory of reversibility, which we considered in the previous chapter. There, Derrida presumed that Merleau-Ponty's claims about the reversibility of self and other suggested by Merleau-Ponty's schema suggested a reduction of the other to the same. However, we have seen that, in fact, Merleau-Ponty was defending a certain reversibility as the condition for the possibility of irreversibility. Could one not say that the very same is true here of Derrida with respect to the term 'symmetry'? We see in both of these terms—reversibility and symmetry—a rejection of an absolute value of irreversibility and asymmetry, but this rejection does not in the case of either philosopher amount to a naïve praise of their opposites. Rather, it follows from a conceptualization of difference and otherness as non-absolutizable that we have neither pure irreversibility and asymmetry, nor pure reversibility and symmetry, but rather a contamination between these seemingly 'opposed' terms. A similar structure will hold for the term 'reciprocity,' which we will take up in the following chapter.

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[446] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 126. This 'other for the other,' or more precisely, as Derrida also puts it in this section, 'the other of the other,' is a phrase most associated with Irigaray, who uses it in the well-known critique of Levinas that we will explore in the following chapter.
[447] For a helpful discussion of symmetry and dissymmetry in this context, as well as a linking of it to the phrase '*tout autre est tout autre*' discussed earlier in this chapter, see Kas Saghafi, *Apparitions—of Derrida's Other* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 15-16.

3. The More You Know, the Less You Know

We have seen earlier in this chapter that Bennington characterizes Derrida's thinking of alterity in terms of a "'less is more' logic."[448] Here, I would like to consider that logic in terms of our *knowledge* of others. Knowledge might have appeared to be an enemy in this dissertation so far. My account of self-relation is *not* rooted in self-knowledge, and takes issue with the history of self-relation as self-knowledge that has characterized the philosophical tradition. An undercurrent running through this project that will come to fruition in the final chapter is that our relations to others are not primarily about knowledge, either. Ethical relations to other beings are not based on our knowledge of them: this is, perhaps, the essential insight of response ethics in Levinas and beyond. Such a rejection of knowledge as the ground for our relations to ourselves and others, however, is not a rejection of knowledge outright. It is not that knowledge is a 'bad' thing, nor even that knowledge does not play a role in our relations to ourselves and other beings. In Chapter 2, we had occasion to question the role of knowledge in decision making, where we followed Derrida in claiming that the decision marks a rupture with knowledge and is heterogeneous to it. We also saw that the rupture with knowledge did not amount to a rejection of knowledge *tout court*; indeed, we saw that knowledge is essential in making decisions, even as it is not what makes them. Knowledge prepares the decision but does not effect it.

3a. More (identification) is less (identification)

I would like to argue here that a qualified preservation of the role of knowledge helps to elucidate our relations to other beings. Specifically, I would like to propose a 'more is less'

448 Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, 44.

logic: more particularly, a 'the more you know, the less you know' logic. That is, I claim that the more we get to know others, the more they reveal themselves to be unknowable by us. The closer we are to others, the more we realize how far they are from us. This argument not only has ramifications for our relations to others, but also for our relations to ourselves: if we are closer to ourselves than to any other beings, then we are also farther from ourselves than from any other beings.

Such a 'more is less' logic is illuminated in Derrida's reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. Here, he writes about Rousseau's theory of pity (*pitié*): for Rousseau, pity is a kind of identification with the other, but which operates through imagination and reflection rather than by direct feeling. That is to say, one feels pity for the other not by feeling her pain, but through imagining her pain and judging that she is in pain.[449] According to Derrida's Rousseau, "We neither can nor should feel the pain of others immediately and absolutely, for such an interiorization or identification would be dangerous and destructive. That is why the imagination, the reflection, and the judgment that arouse pity also limit its power and hold the suffering of the other at a certain distance."[450] Being able to imagine the other's pain is also to hold that pain at a distance; we could even link it back to our Husserl discussion by saying that it is an appresentation, rather than a presentation, of this pain. In pity, I feel for another person *as other*. There is an essential difference between feeling for the other and feeling the other's pain itself.

Given that we have taken a response ethics approach in this dissertation, the idea that it is dangerous to identify with the other's pain is relatively familiar territory. To collapse a distinction between self and the other is to do violence to the alterity of the other by

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[449] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 189.
[450] Ibid., 190.

overlooking the difference between oneself and that other. But Derrida's reading of Rousseau takes this argument further. It is not enough to say that the difference between self and other is irreducible and that to collapse it is 'dangerous and destructive.' This argument gets us a certain distance, but no further (and I would say this of the majority of arguments in the response ethics tradition). Beyond this, I want to claim that the closer one is to another, the more the difference between oneself and this other is revealed. Derrida articulates precisely this thought in writing of Rousseau: "The paradox of the relation to the other is clearly articulated there: the more one identifies with the other, the better one feels his suffering as *his*: our own suffering is the other's [*la nôtre est celle de l'autre*]. The other's, as that which it is, must remain the other's. There is no authentic identification except in a certain non-identification, etc."[451] The more one identifies, the less one identifies. We feel the suffering of the other 'in ourselves,' but we know this suffering to be not our own, but the other's. We know that we cannot know the suffering of the other in itself, or as it is for the other.

In everyday life, we often find that the more we get to know someone, the more we realize how much more there is to know—and how impossible it would be to ever know that other person completely. What could such complete knowledge of the other even mean? It could not merely mean a knowledge of the other's history, tendencies, patterns, likes and dislikes—for all of these can be contemplated from a third-person point of view, whereas what is in principle inaccessible is the other's first-person perspective. The failure of knowledge is particularly salient in romantic love. On the one hand, knowledge plays an obvious role in romantic relationships. Romantic love grows and deepens through gaining

[451] Ibid., 190. Trans. modified.

knowledge about the other person. Shared conversations, experiences, time spent with the other person, and learning about the other's life narrative are key in the development of a romantic relationship. This sometimes leads to the illusion that one can have complete knowledge of the other person, unifying with the other in a dream of cognitive fusion. Yet, romantic love reveals that this knowledge is necessarily incomplete, an idea that we will explore this further in the following chapter.

The refusal to acknowledge that is impossible to know another person completely may result, for instance, in jealousy. One confronts jealousy in romantic relationships when one expects to know the other person in his or her entirety, because jealousy concerns a part of the other over which one cannot have a grasp. Jealousy implies a desire for mastery over the other not necessarily through controlling his or her movements and actions, but through having a hold over the other person's thoughts, emotions, and desires. In romance, jealousy most often surfaces when one feels that one's lover is attracted to another person besides oneself. All of a sudden, one is faced with the fact that the lover has a mental life that one can never experience from the inside. Whether or not the lover is really attracted to another person, and setting aside the issue of whether he or she acts on such an attraction, the very possibility of the lover's attraction to someone else is threatening because it reveals that the other is not transparent to oneself. As Merleau-Ponty puts it when describing a scene of jealousy in Proust's novel *Swann's Way*, to be jealous "is to feel excluded from this life [of someone else], and to desire to enter and to occupy it completely."[452] Jealous love is possessive love, and is grounded in the model of self-knowledge that characterizes the traditional metaphysical view of the self insofar as this kind of knowledge, which strives for

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[452] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 449.

possession, takes self and other to be substantial entities that are in principle completely knowable.

Knowledge is a component of romantic love, but is not its basis or motivating force. This is true of any relation to other beings, on my view. Like the decision, responsiveness to other beings is heterogeneous to knowledge. Romantic love is the strongest example of 'the more you know, the less you know' logic, because this is a relation that takes one as close as possible to another person only to reveal the immeasurable distance between oneself and another. The more we come to know the other, the more we identify with the other and are able to anticipate the other's desires, needs, feelings, and thoughts—and yet at the same time, the more we are able to acknowledge the fact that we can never live 'under the other's skin,' can never identify completely, are always capable of surprise in the face of the other. The joy of getting to know another person intimately in a romantic relationship must also be balanced by the acknowledgment that we can never know that person completely. The more we get to know another being, the more we see that that person has unimaginably more to him-, her-, or itself than we could possibly know.

While we will not have time to explore this in depth here, I'd like to circle back to the phenomenology of analogical appresentation with which we began. The account of pity that leads to a 'more identification, less identification' way of thinking about intersubjectivity has resonances in the phenomenological theory of empathy, or *Einfühlung*. This term, central to phenomenological theories of intersubjectivity, is developed by Husserl, theorized by Edith Stein, and drawn upon by later phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty. At first blush, it might seem that a theory of empathy would be antithetical to what we are developing here. In ordinary English, at least, there is a distinction between *sympathy*, or

feeling *for* another, and *empathy*, or feeling *with* another.[453] Following the account we have set forth so far, we will have been talking about sympathy rather than empathy: empathy presumes a complete identification with the other that is foreclosed by a theory grounded in the insurmountable difference between self and others. However, following the theory of analogical appresentation that we too have taken as our starting point, Husserl and other phenomenologists offer accounts of empathy that do *not* overlook the distinction between oneself and others. Stein, for instance, defines empathy as "the experience of foreign consciousness in general."[454] Empathy, then, is how we experience any being other than ourselves. It is a contact with another being that is based upon a difference between oneself and this other being. On Stein's account of empathy, we do not feel the other's pain *as our own*; rather, we do feel it, but *as the other's*. Derrida's remarks about feeling the other's pain apropos of Rousseau closely echo the phenomenological theory of empathy.

The 'more is less' logic of knowledge of the other is also a 'more is less' logic of identification: 'the more you identify, the less you identify.' This can be seen in the notion of empathy or feeling the suffering of the other, and is also developed in Derrida's discussion of Robinson Crusoe in the second year of *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminars. His discussion here also demonstrates the overturning of the hierarchy of forms of otherness to which we have referred earlier in this chapter. In the seminar, Derrida considers the many threats that menace Robinson on his island. Derrida puts these threats into three categories: the external, foreign threat of the elements (such as earthquakes and storms); the 'wild beast,' who is a

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[453] Intriguingly, the word 'empathy' was introduced into English precisely as a neologism for translating *Einfühlung*. Psychologist Edward Titchener coined it in 1909.

[454] Edith Stein, *The Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989), 11.

living being but a non-human animal; and the cannibal, who is a human being like Robinson. All three of these types of threat are 'others.'

Derrida argues that there is a hierarchy to this otherness: the natural disaster is the 'most other' because earthquakes and storms are least like me, the wild beast is an intermediate other because it is alive but non-human, and the cannibal is the 'least other' because he or she is another member of my species. Yet, Derrida goes on to say, the 'least other' of these threats—the cannibal—is in fact the most other. The proximity of oneself to the cannibal by virtue of being a member of the same species lends to this category of threat an uncanniness that increases the sense of alterity. Robinson is by far most preoccupied in the novel with fantastical fears about cannibalism. Derrida states, "because of this proximity that almost makes them my fellows [*semblables*] they are other to a greater extent. Their alterity is the more marked for being less marked."[455] What we tend to think about as the *most other* to us is in fact the least other, because we do not have the initial proximity to it which allows us to measure how great the distance between the two of us remains no matter how close we get. Derrida is led to conclude: "Now, the more the other is other, the less it is other. Conversely, the less it is other, the more it is other. More other, less other; less, other, more other."[456] This argument about the hierarchy of threats Robinson faces forwards the very same logic Derrida develops in his reading of Rousseau over thirty years earlier in *Of Grammatology*. The closer you are, the farther you are. The more you know about another being, the more you realize how little you know the other being 'completely.' In overturning

[455] Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign II*, 139. One might also relate this idea to what, in artificial intelligence studies and aesthetics, is called the 'uncanny valley': the closer a robot or artificially-generated figure gets to looking like a human or other living being, the more it causes unease or revulsion to the viewer. The term 'uncanny valley' was coined by robotics researcher Masahiro Mori in 1970.
[456] Ibid., 138.

the hierarchy between 'most other' and 'least other,' Derrida is also deconstructing the very terms of such a hierarchy: what is most other is *also* the least other, in a contaminated relation of *différance*.

This logic is also borne out in "Violence and Metaphysics," where Derrida takes issue with Levinas's absolutization of alterity. Recall that earlier in this chapter we considered what Derrida calls in this essay the 'transcendental symmetry of two empirical asymmetries' as a way of describing the ego-alter ego relation. Within the context of this analysis, Derrida also formulates the very 'more is less' logic we have been developing here. He writes: "Now, the transcendental syntax of the expression *alter ego* tolerates no relationship of substantive to adjective, of absolute to epithet, in one sense or the other. This is its strangeness. A necessity due to the finitude of meaning: the other is only absolutely other in being an ego [*un ego*], that is, in a certain way, the same as me. Inversely, the other as *res* is at once less other (not absolutely other) and less 'the same' than I. At once more other and less other, which means, again, that the absolute of alterity is the same."[457] Here, we see again the idea that the other is other inasmuch as he or she is an *alter ego*, or inasmuch as he or she is the same as me. This connects directly with the 'more is less' logic: for Derrida, the ego-alter ego structure has a 'more is less' structure. The more similar one is to the other—and nothing is more similar than two egos, as we have seen in the previous section—the more different one is from the other. This avowal is what allows our conception of intersubjectivity to affirm the irreducibility of otherness without absolutizing it in the manner of Levinas (or without, as Derrida puts it in the quote above, falling into the 'absolute of alterity' which 'is the same'). It reveals that the more 'the same' one thing is to another, the more 'different' it is as well—

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[457] Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* 127. Trans. modified.

an apparently paradoxical admission that in fact destabilizes a hierarchization of otherness that gestures back to the proliferation of differences in *différance* and all of the consequences of that which we have considered in this dissertation so far.

Another related issue that is worth pointing out, although it would have to be developed elsewhere, is the consequences of this 'the more you know, the less you know' logic for social and political philosophy. Often today, social and political theorists are caught between the value of inclusion on the one hand and the value of respecting otherness on the other hand. That is, some uphold claims to equality and social transformation through inclusion, while others claim that what is necessary is instead a preservation of, and respect for, forms of otherness that are not forced to conform to currently accepted ways of being prevalent within society. The kind of relation to other beings that we are discussing here shows that we are not caught between two opposing values. Rather, otherness may perhaps be best respect when we 'get to know' others from different backgrounds and groups, precisely because this 'getting to know' allows us to recognize that we can never be in the position of the other. It gives us all the more respect for the singularity of others. This can be seen in the issue of stereotyping, for instance: stereotyping occurs when one presumes that one 'knows' what another is all about. The more one gets to know a person, however, the more difficult it becomes to stereotype that person, because the more one sees that this person is not reducible to the qualities with which one originally associated her. The deconstructive account of intersubjectivity we have been developing has ramifications for the ways that we think about overcoming nefarious stereotypes and relating to others in social and political groups. After all, as Derrida writes in "Eating Well," "This obligation to

protect the other's otherness is not merely a theoretical imperative."[458] Rather, it has consequences for ethics and politics. While the social and political dimensions are outside of our purview here, I at least want to make a sort of promissory note here for the direction in which one could head.

This section has considered the way that a logic of 'the more you know, the less you know' or 'more identification, less identification' follows from thinking about our relations to other beings as not primarily grounded in knowledge. It helps us to explain how, the more intimate a relation to another being is, the more the otherness involved in that relation is proven to be irreducible. Yet if this logic holds with respect to others, we can see how it extends all the more to oneself. Because I am myself, I know more about myself than I do about any other being. So too do I identify more with myself than with any other being. I have a privileged access to myself. And yet, my self-knowledge also indicates to me that it is only ever partial, because my relation to myself is not encompassed by this knowledge; it is stretched out in the past and toward the future, within my body and unconscious processes, in a manner that is outside of my control. My self-identification is ever incomplete and marked by *différance*.

We have quoted Derrida on Rousseau above, considering how, in identifying with the other, we nonetheless feel the other's pain as the other's own. It is not mistaken for our own pain. This would be the inverse of the immunity to error through misidentification briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph: whereas there, it was a question of not being mistaken about what is our own pain (when I say 'I am in pain,' I cannot be wrong about *who* is in pain), here it is a question of not being mistaken about *what is not* our own pain. Yet I

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[458] Derrida, "Eating Well," 111.

would like to tarry on a phrase pulled out of the quotation from Derrida we considered a few pages above. He writes, "our own suffering is the other's [*la nôtre est celle de l'autre*]."[459] In the context of the passage, there is no reason to believe that Derrida means by this anything other than 'in feeling suffering for the other, I feel that this suffering is the other's and not mine.' However, I think that we can in good faith go beyond Derrida here and extend this phrase to experience in general—even that experience which we think of as 'our own.' A slightly misleading (in that it overlooks the context of Derrida's claim), but not unfounded, way of translating *la nôtre est celle de l'autre* would be 'our own is the other's'. What is ours is the other's. We have seen in Chapter 2 how something like this is true of the decision. The decision, which we think of as something that no one can make for another, is in fact made by the other (in the self). What if we were to extend this logic to our own feeling, our own pain, and say that 'our own suffering is the other's'? This might go a long way toward explaining the way that feelings are simultaneously private and experienced in the first-person perspective, yet 'arrive' or 'come upon' the self without willful force or control. Feelings, then, come from the other. And thoughts? Beliefs? Values? Imaginings? …Experience in general?

4. The Undecidability Between Oneself and Others

There is otherness within the self, and yet there is a difference between this otherness and the otherness of other beings. The coexistence of these two claims follows the logic of *différance* we have been tracking since Chapter 2, and which has been fleshed out in this chapter so far. In this final section, I will develop a claim about our epistemic access to this

[459] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 190. Trans. modified.

difference: specifically, I will argue that the difference between self and other is *undecidable*. This account will again draw from our earlier discussion of the decision (see Chapter 2) and hinge on the notion that the difference between self and other is heterogeneous to knowledge.

When it comes to self-relation, we cannot *know* what indicates the alterity of other beings and what pertains to our own alterity to ourselves: this distinction is heterogeneous to knowledge. In essence, the logic behind this argument is that *otherness is heterogeneous to knowledge*. Insofar as the decision is the decision of the 'other in me,' involving the kind of otherness necessary for an event, it is heterogeneous to knowledge. Insofar as my relation to the other is not fundamentally grounded in knowledge of the other—a claim developed in the previous section—so too is my relation to the other not a question of knowledge. If knowledge subsumes otherness into sameness, and is therefore necessarily incomplete or foreclosed in the relation to other beings *as* other, then so too must the knowledge of the distinction between self and other be unknowable.

Where do I end and the other begin? In "Passions: An Oblique Offering," Derrida asks whether one can ever know whether an offering is one's own, or the other's. He writes, "Will we ever know whether this 'offering' is mine or his? Who takes responsibility for it? This question is as serious and intractable [*intraitable*] as the responsibility for the name one is given or bears, for the name that one receives or the name that one gives oneself. The infinite paradoxes of what is so calmly called narcissism are outlined here."[460] The question between what is proper to the self and what is proper to the other is 'serious and intractable.' I will argue in this section that delineating between the two is *undecidable*.

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[460] Derrida, *On the Name*, 12.

To recapitulate, undecidability is the experience of having to decide between possibilities even as this decision is not programmed or guaranteed by knowledge.[461] It signifies the heterogeneity of the decision to knowledge, and the way that any decision, even after it is 'made,' is haunted by the possibility that it could have been made otherwise. Undecidability is not indeterminacy. Rather, undecidability marks the impasse between determinate options between which one may decide, as well as the impasse between the cognitive, knowledge-based weighing of those options and the instant of the decision itself, which ruptures with what went before and is not of the order of knowledge. In the same manner, we are not saying that the distinction between self and other is indeterminate: as we have repeatedly pointed out, it is not a question of 'blurred lines,' 'gray area,' or indistinction between self and other. However, the distinction is not one that can be *known*. It is determinate, but not determined by conscious, self-possessed, or certain knowledge. We may know *that* there is a distinction, but we may not cognitively possess its contents, locus, or boundary-line.

Derrida's account of mourning, which we briefly flagged in Chapter 2 as important for his deconstruction of selfhood and otherness, illuminates the undecidability between oneself and other beings. When another person dies, Derrida shows, he or she is irreparably gone: there is an otherness that is lost with the death of the other. There is an indisputable distinction between the other who is 'living, 'outside' me, and the other who lives on as dead 'within' me after his or her death. After the friend has died, Derrida writes in *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, "from now on everything will be situated, preserved, or maintained in us, only 'in us,' and no longer on the other side, where there is nothing more."[462] Derrida states that "it would be unfaithful to delude oneself into believing that the other living *in us* is living *in*

[461] Derrida, "Force of Law," 963.
[462] Derrida, *Mémoires,* 35.

himself: because he lives *in us*."[463] In mourning, one interiorizes the other where the other is unquestionably gone, and the absence of the other cannot be papered over by the delusion that he or she still lives on within oneself.

Yet at the same time, one cannot merely say that the other who lives on within oneself after death has lost her alterity. The other within is not merely a part of the self, but *remains other*. This is Derrida's well-known deconstruction of Freud's mourning/melancholia binary: where Freud considers mourning to be a 'healthy' reaction to the death of the other because it 'gets over' the absence of the other through interiorizing the other as a part of oneself, melancholia is a 'pathological' reaction that fails to overcome the death of the other by lodging the other *as other* within the self. Derrida's analysis of this distinction seeks to show that successful mourning is unsuccessful mourning insofar as one does not do justice to the memory of the other by 'getting over it' or interiorizing the other completely. To imagine that the friend could be mourned completely, 'gotten over' by being interiorized or digested fully, would be a gesture of infidelity toward the friend. Rather, a 'successful mourning' for Derrida is an unsuccessful one inasmuch as it preserves the other *as other*.[464] For this reason, Derrida favors the term 'half-mourning' or *demi-deuil* to figure the in principle incomplete nature of mourning.[465] While the otherness of the interiorized other is not the otherness of that other *him or herself*, this otherness is not a mere illusion, either (it is not a 'false alterity', going back to the terminology I used in Chapter 1). Derrida writes: "This being 'in us,' the being 'in us' of the other, in bereaved memory, can be neither the so-called resurrection of the other *himself* (the other is dead and nothing can save him from this death,

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[463] Ibid., 21.
[464] See, for instance, *The Post Card; Mémoires.*
[465] Derrida uses this term in *Points, The Post Card, Parages*, and "Circumfession" (in *Jacques Derrida,* by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993]). See Bennington, *Not Half No End,* especially the Introduction.

nor can anyone save him from it) nor the simple inclusion of a narcissistic fantasy in a subjectivity that is closed upon itself or even identical to itself."[466] The dead friend *lives* on as dead within oneself, putting into play a contamination of life and death and of self and other.[467]

Derrida relates mourning to the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, drawing on de Man's work on the topic. When one can no longer speak to the friend, one speaks for the other where the other is no longer there to speak for herself, in what Derrida calls a "hallucinatory prosopopoiea."[468] Prosopopoeia necessarily replaces the voice of the friend when the friend in his or her real, living singularity is gone. Nonetheless, even this prosopopoeia is not a pure identical echo of the self within oneself: the argument that there is alterity already within oneself has shown that alterity is constitutive of self-relation from the start. Even within the heart of prosopopoeia, the voice within the self is the voice of the other. This claim is perfectly compatible with the idea that the voice of the other within the self is not the voice of the other being 'him or herself': there is a difference between the two voices. Otherness is not singular.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida considers the question of knowledge of the other in terms of the specter or spirit. How can one know if the specter (or in this case, the other) 'exists'? Derrida's answer is, "One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge."[469] We have considered how this is the case when one mourns: one cannot know

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[466] Derrida, *Mémoires*, 21-22.
[467] Ibid., 35. "faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead."
[468] Ibid., 28.
[469] Derrida, *Specters*, 5.

whether one is mourning the other as such, or mourning the other 'within.' After the other has died, he or she 'no longer belongs to knowledge.' And yet, this is not only the case *after* the other has died; rather, it is always already the relation to the other. The other escapes the entrapment of knowledge by virtue of his or her very otherness. So too does one's own self-relation as self-other relation escape this knowledge: as we have seen in Chapter 3, the first-person perspective is not primarily cognitive, but has an ineliminable pre-reflective character. The self is a trace made up of traces, and yet this does not diminish the *sense* of oneself as unified in a living present; rather, it questions the values according to which this self considers itself self-constituting. In *Specters of Marx*, a similar idea emerges in terms of the 'ghosts within' who inhabit each of us. Derrida writes, for instance, of the specters of Marx which "are perhaps first of all the ghosts that inhabited him, the *revenants* with which Marx himself will have been occupied, and which he will have wanted in advance to make his thing; which does not mean that he knew their secrets."[470] Marx, like each of us, had his own ghosts or others within, and these others are not countable, nameable, or present. They are not owned or mastered by a subject: the others within whom we inherit are heterogeneous to knowledge.[471] We cannot even say whether they are 'inside' or 'outside' of oneself.[472]

To the question, 'is it me, or the other?' we must respond 'I don't know.' For Derrida, the 'I don't know' is closely linked with the spectral and the trace, which we have also considered as a way to figure the self-other relation. The self is a ghost inhabited by

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[470] Ibid., 122.
[471] See, for instance, Derrida's remarks about inheritance, *Specters*, 18. It would also be worthwhile to link back the question of the specter with the issue of symmetry and asymmetry considered earlier in the chapter. Much of *Specters of Marx* concerns what Derrida calls the 'visor effect,' following the scene from Shakespeare in which Hamlet's father returns to him as a specter concealed in a suit of armor: on Derrida's reading, the 'visor effect' indicates that "we do not see who looks at us," and this is a law of "spectral asymmetry." Ibid., 6.
[472] Ibid., 132: "In him outside of him: this is the place outside of place of ghosts wherever they feign to take up their abode."

ghosts, which are ghosts of the other; the self is made up of traces, which are themselves made up of traces. In *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, Derrida states, "'I don't know' is thus the very modality of the experience of the spectral, and moreover of the surviving trace in general."[473] This emerges in the context of Derrida's claims about *Robinson Crusoe*, where Derrida considers Robinson's uncertainty about whether his ghost sighting is real or fantasy. This uncertainty, Derrida states, is constitutive of the spectral. Clear and certain knowledge "would immediately dissolve spectrality."[474] Inasmuch as all experience is spectral for Derrida (any phenomenon being affected by the phantomatic or phantasmatic) or tracelike, we may say that this 'I don't know' can be generalized. We never know whether an experience is that of the self or the other. The question of 'who' experiences, the self or the other, is as heterogeneous to knowledge as the question of 'who' or 'what' decides.

The undecidability between self and other is traced in Derrida's discussion of a scene in Robinson Crusoe considered in the first year of *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminar. In this scene, Robinson comes across a footprint and is unsure whether the footprint is his own or that of another human (and, as of this point in the novel, Robinson is unaware of any other humans on the island). Robinson stands staring at the footprint, "as though he had seen a ghost," and Robinson is terrified in the face of it.[475] What he finds terrifying, Derrida states, "is the possible trace of the spectral presence of another, another man on the island."[476] Who is this other, Robinson wonders? After some initial considerations, Robinson entertains the idea that the footprint is his own. In Derrida's recasting of the scene, Robinson wonders

[473] Derrida, *Beast the Sovereign II*, 137.
[474] Ibid., 137.
[475] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I,* trans.Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 46.
[476] Ibid., 47.

whether he is a ghost of himself, and concludes, "I really don't know [*J'en sais trop rien*]."[477] Robinson's answer to the question of whether the footprint is his own or that of the other is simply that he does not know—an unsurprising answer, when we consider the claim above that the 'I don't know' is the modality of the spectral. Derrida states: "The other man, the step of the other man—is it not me again, me alone who, returning like a revenant on the circular path of the island, become an apparition for myself, a specular phantom, a specular specter (the other man as myself, myself as another, I who am an other), but a specular phantom who cannot, who does not know if he is himself, *ipse*, who really doesn't know [*qui n'en sait trop rien*]—nor whether he can still look at himself in the mirror?"[478] The step of the other cannot merely be opposed to one's own step. Whether Robinson encounters the footprint of another person (and, it is notable, another *man* here—the chapter of *Robinson Crusoe* in which this scene is found is entitled "the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore") or his own footprint, this footprint is still that of an other. In fact, the possibility that it is his own is the *most* uncanny possibility, based on the logic of the 'more other, less other' laid out above. What is closest is also furthest from us. The other's footprint is irreducibly other, even if it is Robinson's 'own.'

Yet at the same time, one might counter, *it makes a difference* whether the footprint is my own or the other's. As much as we might say that the uncanniness remains and is even intensified if the footprint is Robinson's own rather than another being's, from which we would conclude that Robinson is never at home in his own home—would we not also argue that there is a *difference* between finding out that the footprint was simply my own and discovering that the footprint was indeed the footprint of another being? If Robinson

[477] Ibid., 48.
[478] Ibid., 48-9.

discovers that the footprint was his own, he may not necessarily conclude that he has completed a full and comforting circle of self-identification, but he will need look no further. He will go back to his daily business and wonder no more about the identity of the footprint's owner. If he ascertains that the footprint was *not* his own, however, the mystery has only just begun. He cannot rest easy; rather, he must go out and search for the owner of the footprint, or, at the very least, continue to wonder about the one to whom it might belong and protect himself against its possible threat. In Robinson's case, concluding that the footprint is the footprint of another man leads to his fortifying his Castle and keeping watch over the surrounding area to guard against any possible invasion. This course of action would be altogether unnecessary if the footprint were indeed his own (and, while the reader of *Robinson Crusoe* never receives a clear answer as to the identity of the one who left the footprint, the later presence of cannibals and their human victims in the story suggests that Robinson was not wrong to conclude that the footprint was not his own). There is a difference here, one might then conclude, depending on whether the footprint is my own or the other's. This follows from the thesis that frames this chapter: that the otherness of other beings is not *the same* as the otherness of oneself.

Yet Derrida's remarks about Robinson render this interest in determining the difference misguided. Recall that Robinson's answer to the question 'Whose footprint is this?' is, for Derrida, the answer "I really don't know." While Derrida does not expand upon this answer specifically with reference to this dilemma in this session of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, this answer is illuminated by Derrida's remarks elsewhere about undecidability. Inasmuch as what is undecidable is heterogeneous to knowledge, it has the structure of the 'I don't know.' The only answer to a question about that which is heterogeneous to knowledge

would, consequently, be the answer 'I don't know,' and this is true of the question as to whether the footprint is one's own or the other's.

5. Conclusion

After establishing the necessity of otherness within the self in Chapter 1 and exploring this otherness in detail in Chapters 2 and 3, this chapter has constituted a turn back toward the otherness of other beings. I have defended my account of selfhood against the potential criticism that it dissolves the difference between oneself and other beings. I have argued that the deconstruction of the self-other relation does not eliminate the distinction between oneself and other beings; on the contrary, it allows us to consider this distinction ineliminable, and offers a way to conceptualize it outside of an absolutizing theory of otherness characteristic of a metaphysics of presence. On the basis of this, we have followed the Husserlian theory of analogical appresentation as a way to figure the deconstructive self-other relation of intersubjectivity. I have then argued for a 'more is less' logic of knowledge of other beings and knowledge of the difference between oneself and other beings, and have claimed that the difference between oneself and others is undecidable.

The following chapter will further explore the relation between oneself and other beings, pursuing the ethical implications that follow from the account of intersubjectivity we have developed in this chapter. Perhaps surprisingly, we will be drawing not on Derrida for this account, but from Beauvoir. Of course, Derrida has hundreds of pages of writing on the relation between deconstruction and ethics from which we could reasonably draw for our account. I do not emphasize his writings in the following chapter not because I do not think that they have much to offer, but rather because I find Beauvoir to be a helpful interlocutor

on the questions we will consider for two primary reasons. First, Beauvoir provides a robust but often overlooked alternative to the Levinasian ethics of absolute otherness: she explicitly critiques the gendered assumptions of the Levinasian theory of alterity and offers an alternative that preserves the importance of alterity while not absolutizing it. Second, Beauvoir offers an ethic of what I will call 'asymmetrical reciprocity' that links up with our discussion of reversibility in Chapter 3 and symmetry in this chapter. We will see that Beauvoir develops a theory of reciprocity as the condition for the irreciprocity of ethical relations, and that this aligns exceptionally well with the deconstruction of the self/other relation pursued thus far. We began this dissertation with a critique of Levinas on the relation between the other and the same; we will end it with a critique of Levinas on the ethical relevance of the value of reciprocity. This will also turn us back more explicitly in the direction of ethics, and will show that Beauvoir is a rich resource for response ethics and deconstruction.

5. An Ethic of Nonreciprocal Reciprocity

Thus far, we have focused on showing that the self is contaminated by alterity. Following Derrida, we have developed the notion that the self as constituted in and through its otherness to itself. We have argued that, while the otherness of the other cannot be collapsed within the otherness of the self in a kind of transcendental narcissism, the question of alterity within and without is undecidable. Now, we will attend to the consequences that the foregoing discussions have for ethics. Given that we as ethical subjects are always already other to ourselves, how can we relate to other beings without denying their alterity in the process? That is, if the difference between oneself and other beings is undecidable, how can we relate to other beings *as other*? While our descriptions of self-relation as a relation to alterity already offer some helpful hints, this chapter will focus on the ethical directions suggested by Beauvoir's account of reciprocity. Specifically, Beauvoir's emphasis on an ethic of reciprocity parallels the contamination of reversibility and irreversibility discussed in Chapter 3 and the contamination of symmetry and asymmetry discussed in Chapter 4. I will argue that Beauvoir offers what I will call an ethic of 'nonreciprocal reciprocity.' She does not overlook or subsume alterity, but rather theorizes its irreducibility and offers a way of conceptualizing the ethical relation between oneself and other beings that is not grounded in knowledge of them. She shows that reciprocity is the condition for the possibility of irreciprocity—which, following the deconstructive logic pursued in this dissertation, also signifies that reciprocity is the condition for the impossibility of irreciprocity *as pure*, and vice versa.

My use of Beauvoir here might seem surprising at first glance. Philosophical discussions of alterity do not usually invoke her work; indeed, scholars interested in the topic

have tended to dismiss her work, identifying it with an existentialist emphasis on subjectivity, equality feminism, and the Hegelian overcoming of difference that leaves no room for the other. Yet, one of my aims is to argue that Beauvoir's writings consistently evince a concern for alterity and difference that has been widely overlooked. Like the Levinasian tradition of response ethics, Beauvoir affirms an ethical injunction to preserve alterity and difference, and to reject an ethic premised on symmetry or similarity between oneself and other beings.[479] Unlike the Levinasian tradition, however, Beauvoir offers satisfying solutions to the question of how beings relate to each other in and through their otherness. My hope is that this turn to Beauvoir will not amount to a step back from the seemingly more 'radical' deconstructive insights and place us on a firmer, metaphysically assured 'existential' ground; indeed, a goal of this chapter is to show that Beauvoir should not be dismissed by thinkers in the 'poststructuralist' tradition because of her existentialist commitments, but that she, like Merleau-Ponty, has much to offer response ethics and deconstruction.

We have seen in Chapter 1 the shortcomings of the Levinasian schema for explaining how an individual might relate to other beings. I will show that Beauvoir develops an ethical theory that is in line with response ethics but that succeeds better than Levinasian ethics in in accounting for ethical responsiveness. Here, we will attend to a different, albeit related, set of shortcomings with Levinas's view than those treated in Chapter 1, and show how Beauvoir provides more sufficient solutions to the issues that Levinas considers. While at the beginning, pointing out the problems in Levinas's conception of the same and other

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[479] For explorations of the importance of alterity in Beauvoir's ethics, see for instance Ellie Anderson, "The Other (Woman): Limits of Knowledge in Beauvoir's Ethics of Reciprocity," in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol, 28, No. 3 (2014), pp. 380-388; Jennifer McWeeny, "Origins of Otherness: Non-Conceptual Ethical Encounters in Beauvoir and Levinas," in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, Vol. 26 (2009-2010), pp. 5-17; Ursula Tidd, "The Self-Other Relation in Beauvoir's Ethics and Autobiography," in Margaret A. Simons, ed. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press and Hypatia, Inc., 2006, pp. 228-240.

suggested residual traces of a modern selfsame subject without the internal otherness required in order to explain the relation to other beings, here taking issue with the one-sidedness, or unidirectionality, of Levinas's ethics will expose latent issues in this approach to response ethics and demonstrate how Beauvoir offers an intersubjective ethic that preserves alterity, yet does not posit it as absolute or one-sided. In this sense, critiques of Levinas bookend my project, revealing issues with Levinasian-inspired modes of response ethics that dominate today and offering an alternative that follows from the investigation into the self-other relation that has comprised the foregoing chapters of this dissertation.

Beauvoir, like Levinas, distinguishes her perspective from ethical theories that presume symmetry, sameness, or similarity between self and other. In fact, I will argue here that it is Beauvoir who offers a richer account of alterity and the ethical relations to others possible on its basis. Because the commitments of this dissertation follow those of response ethics inasmuch as they avow that the relation to others exceeds knowledge, similarity, or simple symmetry, we will first consider why the response ethics tradition has rejected reciprocity by associating it with these terms. We will undertake an analysis of Levinas's use of the term 'reciprocity' and show why he consistently opposes it to his own unidirectional, asymmetrical ethic of alterity throughout his career. Then, we will show how these features of Levinasian ethics crystallize in Levinas's account of eros and the feminine. I will show that this undermines his ethical viewpoint and reveals the insufficiency of a response ethics that takes alterity to be absolute. After this analysis of Levinas, the second portion of the chapter will turn to Beauvoir: I will show that Beauvoir's account of reciprocity successfully avoids the mutual-exchange model with with Levinas associates it, and argue that reciprocity in Beauvoir's work actually provides another way to think about the self-other relation we developed in the previous chapter. Like Levinas, Beauvoir takes the erotic relation as her

primary example of the relation to the other; but, unlike Levinas, she develops an account of romantic love that at once attends to asymmetry and to a certain symmetry in this relation that gestures toward an ethic of what I will call 'nonreciprocal' reciprocity. I will argue that this ethic offers a compelling, coherent account of the relationship between oneself and other beings that resolves the issues with Levinas's account of that relation and that follows from the self-other structure laid out in this dissertation so far, especially following from what we have said in the previous chapter about intersubjectivity.

Before launching into the argument of this chapter, I'd like to make a couple of brief remarks about the nexus of issues at work here: first, I will note my position on the question of Levinas and feminism, and then will explain my turn to the term 'reciprocity,' which is quite unpopular in contemporary response ethics and continental philosophy more generally. As for the first issue, eminist thinkers have long drawn attention to Levinas's view of the feminine as the other and provided many critical accounts of it. Indeed, it is Beauvoir herself who mounted the first influential critique of this view, in her Introduction to *The Second Sex*. In Levinas's analysis of eros, the position of 'the same' is explicitly masculine, while the position of 'the other' is feminine (and, insofar as the other is infinite and transcendent, the feminine thus does not really have a 'position' at all). In line with Beauvoir, and in contrast with the strain of Levinas scholarship that has sought in recent decades to reclaim his work for feminist thought, I not only do not think that Levinas can offer much to feminist thought, but also do not consider much of his ethical perspective of absolute otherness to be left standing once a feminist critique is applied to it.[480] The reason for this is that, as we will

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[480] For feminist interpretations of Levinas, see for instance: Tina Chanter, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Tina Chanter, "Feminism and the Other," *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, (London: Routledge, 1988); Robert John Sheffler Manning, "Thinking

see, Levinas takes the relation between masculine 'Same' and feminine 'Other' to be *exemplary* of the ethical relation. I argue that Beauvoir's ethic of nonreciprocal reciprocity does better justice to the other than the dominant Levinasian strain of response ethics, and that it elucidates the ethical ramifications of the account of self-other relation we have developed in this dissertation so far.

In the previous chapter, we developed an argument concerning 'symmetry as the condition for the possibility of asymmetry', which followed from the Husserlian theory of analogical appresentation and Derrida's remarks about the relation between selfhood and otherness. Here, I will make a parallel argument concerning 'reciprocity as the condition for the possibility of irreciprocity,' in which the latter indicates an ethical offering without hope or expectation of exchange, mutuality, or equality. Like symmetry, reciprocity tends to get a 'bad rap' in response ethics because it is aligned with a model of 'tit for tat' exchange and/or a leveling out of the differences between subjects. However, an account of reciprocity with deconstructive commitments will show that this is not the case. What we say about reciprocity in this chapter will also relate to the figure of the 'third' that we discussed in Chapter 3. Recall that the third, for Levinas, is the figure who interrupts the face-to-face relation between two and introduces the domain of justice, whereas Derrida argues that the third haunts the face-to-face relation from the start. Similarly to the manner in which we showed that Merleau-Ponty accounts for this 'haunting' in his phenomenology of the first-person perspective in Chapter 3, I think one can show that such a haunting is at work in Beauvoir's account of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. While our emphasis on the dual relation of romantic love in this chapter will generally elide this aspect of the intersubjective

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the Other Without Violence? An Analysis of the Relation Between the Philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas and Feminism," in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 5:2 (1991).

relation, I do not think that this is at the expense of a spectral 'third' in this relation, and will mark places where I see something like the 'third' at work, which could be followed up in future iterations of this project.

Derrida himself gestures toward a reappraisal of reciprocity in *Adieu to Emanuel Levinas*, where he links it with substitution and replaceability, as well as to ipseity and auto-affection. He writes: "The most general possibility of substitution, a simultaneous condition, a paradoxical reciprocity (the condition of irreciprocity) of the unique and of its replacement, a place that is at once untenable and assigned, the placement of the singular as replaceable, the irrecusable place of the neighbor and of the third—is not all this the first affection of the subject in its ipseity?"[481] In order to relate ethically in their uniqueness and alterity, subjects need to be at the same time replaceable or substitutable. This reciprocity as the condition of irreciprocity is not a structure supervenient upon more 'basic' structures of self-relation and intersubjectivity, despite the fact that the placement of this chapter on ethics at the end of the dissertation might suggest such an interpretation. Rather, as Derrida states in this quotation, this is itself the *first affection* of the subject: the ethical relation to the other is always already there from the start.

1. Levinasian Alterity and the Rejection of Reciprocity

As we have seen, Levinas insists throughout his work that the other is "absolutely other," outside any totality.[482] Levinas contends that the other has not been treated *as other* in

[481] Derrida, *Adieu*, 110. Cf. Derrida, "Hospitality, Responsibility, and Justice," 69, where Derrida claims that hospitality implies a break with reciprocity. I would claim here that reciprocity in this latter context would refer to a 'pre-deconstructive' account of reciprocity as tit-for-tat exchange. Connecting what I develop here *vis à vis* reciprocity with Derrida's claims about hospitality will be one future direction in which I hope to take this project.

[482] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

philosophy but rather has been reduced, through a variety of philosophical moves and systems, to the 'Same'. The philosophical move *par excellence* has been one of totalization, or subsumption into the domain of the Same. Levinas claims that, contrary to the privileging of sameness and totality throughout the history of philosophy, it is only by maintaining the alterity of the other that an ethics worthy of the name would be possible. For Levinas, the other is infinite and transcendent, exceeding the bounds of the totality of the same. Same and other are not terms of a formal opposition, since such an opposition would already presuppose a totality within which the two terms are countable. Moreover, the other is not other when one conceptualizes or represents it, imagines it spatially, considers it in terms of the other's qualitative differences from oneself, or counts it in terms of a quantitative difference from oneself. Rather, the relation to the other exceeds all of these modes of understanding, which invariably attempt to neutralize alterity. One does not relate to the other in terms of knowledge, which implies possession, grasping, and mastery—all of which are opposed to ethics as he conceives it. Instead of this reduction of the other to the same (which Levinas associates with ontology), Levinas proposes metaphysical desire as that which orients us to the transcendent 'other' and founds ethics.

This ethical orientation to the other as other is disclosed in the face, which for Levinas is "the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*."[483] The 'face' encompasses more than the physical phenomenon of the face of another person: the face manifests the alterity of the other by indicating an alterity that ever eludes my powers of representation or ideation. It signifies the very elusiveness of the other—the face faces me with the alterity of the other. While in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas writes about the

483 Ibid., 50.

face in terms of the presence of the other, he emphasizes in *Otherwise than Being* that the face is in fact a "a trace, trace of itself," which always exceeds not only representation but also presence and phenomenality.[484] Even as we have seen in Chapter 1 that Levinas fails to theorize adequately the way that one can relate to other beings, this conception of the face here is relatively close to what we have discussed in terms of the self as a trace in the previous chapters. Here, we can see that the face of the other is also a trace.

The alterity that presents itself as a trace in the face of the other reveals, for Levinas, a very different manner of encounter than the violent struggle for recognition characteristic of the dialectical tradition stemming from Hegel and dominant in the intellectual climate of France at the time. Implicitly critiquing this viewpoint and its major proponent, Jean-Paul Sartre, Levinas conceives of the relation to the other as originarily peaceful rather than as a violent struggle inaugurating the dialectic of master and slave. Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity* that the relation with the face of the other "is maintained without violence, in peace with this absolute alterity."[485] While Levinas avows that the desire to struggle and kill can certainly be prompted by the face of the other, he claims that this desire presupposes a more originary peaceful relation. For Levinas, "War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other; it does not represent the first event of the encounter."[486] For Levinas, the relation to the other is not originally a relation of power, and therefore not one of struggle. The face of the other resists my power and therefore reveals itself as beyond my grasp, but this is not threatening because the face serves not as a contestation of my power but rather as an invitation "to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised."[487] The

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484 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 94.
485 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 197.
486 Ibid., 199.
487 Ibid., 198.

face, for Levinas, opens up a domain of relationality that is not primarily one of power or struggle but rather is a domain of peace, invitation, and welcome.

1a. Levinas's rejection of reciprocity

Levinas denies that the relationship between same and other is symmetrical. Such symmetry, he suggests, would only be thinkable were one to adopt an objective, third-person perspective, a sort of view from nowhere. This is, however, impossible, since one always starts from a subjective position, and therefore we can only think the same-other relation from the first-person perspective—namely, that of the same (as we have noted in Chapter 3, Levinas denies that the face-to-face relation between two parties always alreadyimplies a third). Because the other eludes my powers of representation and ideation, I am unable to consider the other as another 'self' who would equally see me as other in the way that I see him or her. As Levinas puts it in the essay "Diachrony and Represention," "The 'relationship' from the ego to the other is thus asymmetrical, without noematic correlation of any thematizable presence."[488] On Levinas's view, considering the other to be equal to myself in symmetry would violate the alterity of the other because it would demand bringing the other into the domain of representation and thematization that constitutes the 'same'.

In opposing a symmetrical relation between same and other, Levinas also opposes the ethical notion of reversibility. The same-other relationship on Levinas's view must privilege the other over the same, even as it is only from the position of the same or the I that one can privilege the other. Such asymmetry, according to Levinas, precludes reversibility. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas states that between self and other, "relations are

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488 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 108.

never reversible."[489] Rather, responsibility "goes one way, from me to the other."[490] Thus, Levinas rejects a dialectical view of alterity in favor of one that I call 'unidirectional'—that is, from the same to the other. Reversibility would presume that same and other "would complete one another in a system visible from the outside"—that is, a totality or closed circle perceptible by a view from nowhere.[491] Such a presumption of totality is precisely what Levinas contests. For him, the relation to the other introduces a transcendence that interrupts and shatters any totality, in that any totality is a totality of the same. Levinas states: "The radical separation between the same and the other means precisely that it is impossible to place oneself outside of the correlation between the same and the other so as to record the correspondence or the non-correspondence of this going with this return. Otherwise the same and the other would be reunited under one gaze, and the absolute distance that separates them filled in."[492] Reversibility does not do justice to the relation to the other because it requires my imagining that, as I move toward the other, so too does the other move toward me. Reversibility imagines symmetry between both parties and thus generalizes the response to the other, when in fact alterity precisely disallows this generalization. Reversibility takes the movement of the same toward the other, imaginatively posits a movement of the other toward the same, and then encloses the positions and movements of both in a totality that belies the nature of the response to the other qua other. This is antithetical to the unidirectional standpoint of Levinas's ethics.

This critique of reversibility forms the basis for Levinas's repudiation of reciprocity, because Levinas considers reciprocity to be a particular case of reversibility. Levinas

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[489] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 101.
[490] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 138.
[491] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35. One might wonder whether this rejection of reversibility is behind Derrida's disavowal of reversibility as a possible site of relation to the other in Merleau-Ponty.
[492] Ibid., 36.

associates reciprocity with an ethics of reversibility and symmetry throughout his writings. On his view, reciprocity implies a tit-for-tat exchange in which one would be able to imagine the other person in one's own shoes and vice versa, and act on the basis of knowing that the other could or would act reciprocally. Thus, in *Existence and Existents*, he asserts that in reciprocity, "the asymmetry of the intersubjective relationship is forgotten."[493] Levinas claims that "the interpersonal situation is not the of itself indifferent and reciprocal relationship of two interchangeable terms."[494] Rather, the I is never indifferent to the face of the other, and this relation can only go in one direction—from same to other—rather than being considered interchangeable or reversible. Reciprocity, on Levinas's view, requires the presumption of interchangeability and reversibility between subjects.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas again aligns reciprocity with indifference and a denial of the first-person perspective of subjectivity. He states, "In the non-indifference to a neighbor, where proximity is never close enough, the difference between me and the other, and the undeclinability of the subject are not effaced, as they are in the situation in which the relationship of the one with the other is understood to be reciprocal."[495] Levinas presumes that reciprocity is symmetrical, reversible, and destructive both of the transcendence that characterizes the other and of the first-person perspective that characterizes the self. Because Levinas contends that the relation to the other is asymmetrical and infinite while the other is transcendent, he denies reciprocity as a potential figuration of the relation to the other. He states in *Time and the Other*, "But already, in the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life, alterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship."[496] We

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[493] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 95.
[494] Ibid., 95.
[495] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 138.
[496] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 83.

cannot encounter the other in reciprocity for Levinas because reciprocity fails to recognize that the other always eludes us.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas counterposes reciprocity to 'obsession', which he suggests as an alternative to an ethic of reciprocity. Obsession refers to the passivity of the subject called upon by the other, or to the responsibility that exceeds the model of consciousness and intentionality and signals the non-reciprocity of human relations. He writes, "Obsession, in which difference shudders as non-indifference, does not simply figure as a relation among all the reciprocal or at least reversible relations that form the system of the intelligibility of being, and in which the ego, even in its uniqueness, is a universal subsuming a multiplicity of egos."[497] Obsession is opposed to the perceived indifference and abstraction of reversibility and reciprocity. Obsession can only be thought from the perspective of the one who has a vested interest in the alterity of the other. It is, for Levinas, "non-reciprocity itself."[498]

Obsession is not consciousness; rather, it overwhelms consciousness and reveals the passivity required in the relation to the other. Obsession "puts into question the naïve spontaneity of the ego" and forecloses the possibility of a return to the self or domain of the same.[499] For Levinas, reciprocity would be unable to mark this foreclosure, because it would lay claim to an objective third-person perspective that would require the overcoming of alterity and the placement of it in an economy of totality in which the one and the other are countable and equal. The ipseity of the same, or what we have called the 'first-person perspective,' is ineliminable for obsession, as opposed to the third-person perspective of reciprocity on Levinas's view. He claims, obsession "is a one-way irreversible being

[497] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 83.
[498] Ibid., 84.
[499] Ibid., 91.

affected…It is tied into an ego that states itself in the first person, escaping the concept of an ego in an ipseity—not in an ipseity in general, but in *me*."[500] This one-way obsession is "over and beyond all the reciprocal relations" that are set up in society.[501] Obsession names Levinas's alternative to reciprocity and offers a figure of the asymmetrical, passive response to the other who lays claim to my subjectivity and draws me out of the domain of the same.

1b. Eros in Levinas

In *Time and the Other*, Levinas asks whether there is a situation that serves to reveal the alterity of the other qua other. That is: does any particular situation provide a paragon for the ethical relation to the other? He claims, here and consistently throughout his work, that this situation is the erotic relationship. Eros thus plays a central role in Levinas's work. In the 1947 text *Existence and Existents*, Levinas states that intersubjectivity "is brought about by Eros, where in the proximity of another the distance is wholly maintained."[502] The erotic relation, for Levinas, is therefore not one case of relation to the other, but is *its very basis*. Eros *exemplifies* the relation to the other that preserves alterity. The reason for this is that that the alterity of lovers to one another is precisely the condition for an erotic relation; eros is thus the most salient example of the preservation of the other's alterity in the midst of a relation to the other.

Eros evades reducing the other to the same, on the one hand, by precluding any attempt at fusion with the other, and, on the other hand, by constituting a form of relation that is not one of power or possession. Both fusion and possession are attempts to neutralize alterity, whereas eros inaugurates a *proximity* to the other that maintains otherness.

[500] Ibid., 84.
[501] Ibid., 84.
[502] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 95.

Levinas claims in *Time and the Other* that, while eros has often been perceived as a desire for union (we may think of the half-people striving to find their lost other halves in Aristophanes' myth in *The Symposium*), Levinas has "precisely wanted to contest the idea that the relationship with the other is fusion."[503] For him, the erotic relation is made possible by lovers' proximity to one another rather than their fusion. In one's inability to fuse with the other person, or to reduce him or her to an object that one would be able to possess, the limits of one's knowledge of and access to the other are revealed. This revelation of the other is at the same time a revelation of the absence of the other, insofar as it is the nature of alterity to foreclose full presence to oneself. As Levinas describes it, "this absence of the other is precisely his presence qua other."[504] Fusion with the other would be an abolishment of otherness. Levinas writes, "proximity is not a degradation of, or a stage on the way to, fusion."[505] Rather, proximity is an altogether different way of figuring the relation to the other: rather than being somewhere between separation and fusion, proximity reveals the separation that is always required in even the closest relationships of intimacy in which the other remains other.[506]

While eros is not an attempt to fuse with the other, is it not an attempt to possess the other, either. Like fusion, possession would amount to a destruction of alterity; in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas states, "Nothing is further from *Eros* than possession."[507] Proximity, on the other hand, implies a closeness that can never grasp the other. Possession here does not

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503 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 90.
504 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 95.
505 Ibid., 95.
506 It could be argued that we are back in the territory of Husserlian analogical appresentation here, inasmuch as proximity presents the other as not completely presentable, as absent. However, obsession and eros in Levinas are antithetical to the dimension of symmetry or reversibility at which analogical appresentation hints.
507 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 265.

only mean the literal possession of violence or rape, but also any representation of the other on the plane of knowledge. As we have seen, knowledge of the other is not for Levinas the mode of relating to the other qua other. Rather, knowledge is a way of bringing the other into one's own horizon of representation—the horizon of the same. He writes, "It is only by showing in what way eros differs from possession and power that I can acknowledge a communication in eros. It is neither a struggle, a fusion, nor a knowledge. One must recognize its exceptional place among relationships. It is a relationship with alterity, with mystery."[508] Communication is possible in eros because of the lovers' separation from each other. Proximity as such would be impossible if the lovers were to fuse, or if one were to possess the other. Both are ways of destroying alterity. Proximity plays a key role in Levinas's later text *Otherwise than Being*, where Levinas states that proximity "is contact with the other. To be in contact is neither to invest the other and annul his alterity, nor to suppress myself in the other. In contact itself the touching and the touched separate, as though the touched moved off, was always already other, did not have anything in common with me."[509] Proximity is an immediacy in which the other and the self come into contact while not being reduced the one to the other. The other is always privileged over the same in this contact, because I am always responsible to the other before the other in this contact.

Levinas discusses eros in terms of voluptuosity, which for him highlights the separation that is requisite for proximity in the erotic encounter. Voluptuosity is Levinas's term for the "coinciding of the lover and the beloved" that retains their duality.[510] While the two coincide or come into contact, they do not fuse: rather, as Levinas puts it in *Totality and*

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[508] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 88. Note that, here again, Levinas claims that eros is an 'exceptional' instance of contact with the other.
[509] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 86.
[510] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 270.

Infinity (echoing his own words in *Time and the Other*), "the pathos of voluptuosity is made of duality."[511] The genuine encounter that occurs in voluptuosity brings one into proximity with the other in a manner that produces pleasure and delight, precisely because one takes pleasure in the other who cannot be neutralized into the realm of the same. The pleasure of eros is in the proximity to the other. In this proximity, the subject is transfigured, and experiences a doubling of self: Levinas writes, "The subject in voluptuosity finds himself again as the self (which does not mean the object or the theme) of an other, and not only as the self of himself."[512] In voluptuosity, the subject doubles as she feels her self also the self of the other, while this doubling is at the same time an emptying, in that to be the self of the other is to experience a certain loss of self. Voluptuosity complicates the status of self and other, even as this complication does not resemble a fusion. To fuse would be to collapse the distinction between self and other, whereas the movement of voluptuosity is to retain this distinction but to allow oneself also to feel other and to feel the otherness of the loved other as a source of *jouissance*.

At first, this account of eros might seem to be a bit tangential to our purposes. We have understood since Chapter 1 that the relation to the other for Levinas is not a matter of fusion or knowledge, and we have followed up that discussion in the previous section of this chapter by linking it up to the question of reciprocity. Why discuss eros at length here? The reason for this is that, because eros is *the exemplar* of the ethical relation to the other on Levinas's view, the consequences of the erotic relation are consequences for Levinas's ethics of alterity *tout court*. Now, I will attend to the dimensions of this relation to the other that

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[511] Ibid., 276. See also *Time and the Other*, 86.
[512] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 270.

undermine the feminine position—which, we will see, undermine the position of the other in its entirety, thus rendering Levinasian ethics unable to account for the alterity of the other.

Levinas counterposes the feminine to the masculine by equating the latter with subjectivity and the former with alterity. For Levinas, it is taken for granted that the position of subjectivity, ipseity, sameness, is a masculine one. This leads him to imply that the masculine is the 'existent' as opposed to the feminine 'other.' As early as *Existence and Existents*, Levinas explicitly associates femininity with alterity. He writes in this text that "the other par excellence is the feminine," and defends this claim at greater length in *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity*.[513] If eros, for Levinas, is the situation that reveals the alterity of the other qua other, it is here the other *as feminine other* that is being revealed to the masculine point of view. The feminine is "essentially Other," and is thus opposed to the masculine Same.[514] In *Time and the Other*, Levinas writes: "The existent is accomplished in the 'subjective' and in 'consciousness'; alterity is accomplished in the feminine. The term is on the same level as, but in meaning opposed to consciousness."[515] Because we have seen that Levinas disavows not only reversibility but also reciprocity in his ethics of alterity, the movement from the same to the other can ever only be unidirectional—and here, we see that that unidirectionality goes from the masculine toward the feminine. It is the masculine same—subjectivity, consciousness—that has all the power of movement toward the feminine other, who is defined as the opposite of consciousness and subjectivity—that is, as alterity.

While this gendered asymmetry figures prominently in all of the analyses of eros that Levinas undertakes in his work, the chapters on eros and fecundity in Section IV of *Totality*

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513 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 85.
514 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 86.
515 Ibid., 88.

and Infinity particularly reveal certain problems with the gendered dimension of his account. Levinas equates femininity with virginity, a virginity that is inviolate because even in the most consummate erotic encounters, the alterity of the other always remains other, eluding one's grasp and escaping the consummation of fusion. When Levinas writes of "the virginity, forever inviolate, of the feminine," he is revealing that the unidirectionality of the ethical encounter—from same to other—is ever in the direction of masculine to feminine. Levinas does not so much as hint that the female lover might consider her male lover—let alone that the male lover might consider his male lover—an ever inviolate virgin. Rather, the feminine is in the position of inviolate virgin because she is the other who remains other, and she is thus precluded from the very position of 'same' that would even give her the subjective stance from which to respect the alterity of her other.

The gendered asymmetry on which Levinas insists throughout his career has severe implications for his ethics. This identification of woman with the Other conflicts with his very ethical project of treating the other as other instead of as a mere moment in the return to self of the Same. We have seen that, for Levinas, the erotic relation to the feminine other is privileged as the relation to the other par excellence. Because Levinas treats eros is the exemplar of his ethics rather than as a special case, the denigration of the other that occurs in the treatment of the feminine in eros can be extended to his view of alterity in general. That is, what undermines the erotic case can equally be said to undermine the relation to the other in his ethics of the face. Levinas's ethics of the face does not grant the other a position of subjectivity or freedom; therefore, the respect for the other that he considers requisite for ethics has no way to account for the alterity of the other, let alone the voice of appeal that manifests in the face of the other. The other appears in the domain of the same only as a

mystery that eludes one's own grasp, and the emphasis on the first-person perspective of the same becomes a rejection of the first-person perspective of the other *tout court*.

Levinas's ethics takes respect for the other to the point of reversal, where acknowledgment that the other is nonrepresentable within my domain of the same becomes a relegation of the other to a blank canvas of silence on which the subject of the 'same' can place whatever qualities, ideas, or images without needing to ask the other what she considers herself to be. In considering the feminine other to be privileged over the masculine same, Levinas in fact unconsciously reinforces the masculine privilege that marks his very notion that the domain of the same is that of the masculine. While the rejection of the 'view from nowhere' in ethical relationships is compelling, the refusal to see the potential for reciprocity between Same and Other becomes in Levinas an exoticization and fetishization of the other: specifically, the feminine other.

This exoticization of the feminine other in Levinas has been widely noted by feminists. The most well-known critique of it is Luce Irigaray's "The Fecundity of the Caress: A Reading of Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 'Phenomenology of Eros." Here, Irigaray shows how Levinas undermines his own ethical project by treating woman as the other, and she suggests that the denial of the subject-position to the female lover results in the failure to respect the other as other. In Levinas's account, the female lover is left no place of her own—no domain of the same from which she might venture toward the other. Rather, the female lover provides the 'dwelling' for the male lover, and as he ventures toward her and enters this space through eros, she waits receptively without making her own movement toward him. She cannot move toward him if she does not even have an initial position of her own. The asymmetry of the erotic relation is based upon the female lover not having a place of her own from which to reach out toward the male lover as he reaches out to her.

Moreover, there is no 'female lover' for Levinas. She is the beloved, while 'the lover' is always in the masculine. Irigaray writes, "to define the loving couple as a male lover and a *beloved woman* already assigns them to a polarity that deprives the female lover of her love."[516] The feminist critique of Levinas is, on my view, a decisive death knell for the Levinasian approach to alterity. Even as I follow Levinas in the insight that ethics is a matter of relating to others *as other*, the way that Levinas conceptualizes this otherness cannot be adopted in whole cloth.

This feminist critique is a critical dimension of the claim, developed following Derrida in Chapter 1, that Levinas absolutizes the self-other relation in a manner that renders unintelligible any possible relation to the other. Here, we see the irreducible gendered dimension to this absolutization. What Levinas says about eros and the feminine is a direct consequence of his *absolute* conception of otherness. In Chapter 1, we argued that the absolutization of the other provides problems for Levinas's view, and in the following chapters we considered how the non-absolutizability of otherness is developed in Derrida. Here, we can see from a different angle how dissatisfying the absolutizing tendency in Levinas is. It results in an absolutization of the feminine as other that leaves no room for

[516] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 205. In addition, Irigaray argues that Levinas reduces her to a moment in man's return to himself—something that Levinas's very account of the Other would seem to have foreclosed. In considering Levinas's remarks on fecundity, Irigaray shows how, ultimately for Levinas, the feminine is what produces the figure of the 'son,' which is an alter ego of the father—a kind of 'othered' self. Even leaving aside the question of the complete absence of the daughter, and the fact that the section on fecundity in Levinas is almost entirely about *paternity* rather than maternity, the feminine here figures solely as a conduit for the relation of the father and son—that is, the masculine return of the Same. As Irigaray puts it (204): "But does one who encounters only self in the beloved woman caress himself under the guise of a greater passivity?" In his view of the feminine as other and as that which produces the other self of the son, Levinas's account of eros falls into the very masturbatory short-circuit of desire to which he on the surface opposes his view.

considering the other as anything but a placeholder for what escapes oneself, and therefore becomes an empty injunction that leaves no room for relation to the other.

2. Beauvoir's Affirmation of Alterity in Reciprocity

Unlike Levinas, Beauvoir embraces the notion of reciprocity even as she too rejects an ethic premised upon symmetry or interchangeability of subjects. Whereas Levinas offers a theory of alterity that, as we have noted in previous chapters, renders the other *absolute*, Beauvoir denies this, and thereby obviates the issues that plague the Levinasian schema, by conceiving of the relation to alterity as both asymmetrical and reciprocal. I will argue that what she develops can be considered a kind of asymmetrical reciprocity or irreciprocal reciprocity in that it gestures toward an economy of reciprocity that does not expect or require tit-for-tat exchange. This notion is premised upon Beauvoir's conception of otherness, a theme which runs throughout Beauvoir's philosophical writings and novels. I have argued elsewhere that a number of her novels and stories reveal the disastrous results of founding romantic relationships on presumptions of knowledge, identification, or similarity to one's lover.[517] In addition, her ethical writings—particularly the early essay *Pyrrhus and Cineas*—contain many fruitful inquiries into the nature of alterity.

For Beauvoir, alterity is irreducible. This has often been overlooked in scholarship because of the way that otherness figures in Beauvoir's feminist writing, where she attends to a destructive patriarchal tendency to subject women to an 'othering' that reduces their subjectivity and agency. It is often assumed that the solution to this is to proclaim women as transparent, modern agential subjects. This is not, however, the case. While Beauvoir,

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[517] See Anderson, "The Other (Woman)."

especially in *The Second Sex,* does attest to a destructive and evitable form of 'othering' in the social and political spheres, her work also manifests a more indeclinable alterity within the self-other relation and even within self-relation, such that the idea that she promotes a theory of subjectivity premised on agency and transparency is utterly misguided.

This theory of the self-other relation in Beauvoir culminates in an ethic of reciprocity that illuminates what we have said in Chapter 4 about symmetry and asymmetry. Although Beauvoir to my knowledge does not use the term, I claim that her ethical account corresponds to an intersubjective relation of analogical appresentation. Beauvoir consistently shows that there is an ego-alter ego structure in the relation between oneself and others that precisely shows one's own inability to occupy the position of the other.[518] This emerges particularly in her writings on romantic love, a topic touched upon in the previous chapter to which we will return at greater length here. For Beauvoir, romantic love faces one with the ineliminable alterity of the other and cannot coherently be based upon a relation to the other figured by knowledge of that other. Romantic love reveals what we have called in the previous chapter the 'more is less' logic of knowledge of and identification with the other: in the most intimate relationship, the gulf between self and other is particularly salient. This is true *a fortiori* of self-relation of self-relation on her view. The ethical relation to the other is, for Beauvoir, a relation of reciprocity; yet, as we will see, this reciprocity does not amount to a mutual, symmetrical exchange. As a result, its logic follows from analogical appresentation inasmuch as that theory reveals the asymmetrical symmetry of the ego-alter ego relation. It can also be said to correspond with Merleau-Ponty's theory of reversibility, treated in

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518 This linking of Beauvoir's theory of intersubjectivity back to Husserl is in line with Sara Heinämaa's claim that Beauvoir is a phenomenological thinker indebted to Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of the lived body. See Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

Chapter 3: one is only ever on 'one's own side' in the relation to the other, and yet this relation to the other indicates that the other is also on his or her 'own side.'

2a. Beauvoir's Account of Reciprocity

In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir states, "the category of the *Other* is as primary as consciousness itself."[519] For Beauvoir, the structure of subjectivity is such that all others are irreducibly other to oneself. As is well understood, Beauvoir's conception of alterity is largely influenced by Hegel: Beauvoir accepts the Hegelian scene of recognition in which two consciousnesses are faced with each other, and their initial reaction is one of hostile struggle and a desire to dominate or kill. This Hegelian orientation would be enough at first glance for Levinas to discount Beauvoir's account of alterity as resulting in the subsumption of the other into the same, since this is the move that Levinas critiques in dialectical accounts of the same and the other. Yet, while Beauvoir draws much from Hegel regarding the initial character of the encounter with another as one of struggle, she does not consider the encounter with the other to be a mere moment after which the self would return to itself, and thus does not follow Hegel very far.

Rather, throughout her writings, Beauvoir holds that the other is irreducible to the same, and that ethical relations between individuals or groups require an acknowledgment of this irreducible alterity. Like Levinas, she considers ethics to be "not an ensemble of constituted values and principles"; from Beauvoir's existentialist perspective, ethics is the "constituting movement through which values and principles are posited."[520] Ethics is not

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[519] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xxii. Trans. modified. "*Other*" here is "*L'Autre*."
[520] Simone de Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 188.

action based on previously established laws or principles, but rather is "action itself, insofar as this action attempts to justify itself."[521] Ethics is thus a constant attempt to justify one's actions and to assess their consequences, as well as relating to others in particular situations that arise without a pre-established rubric for moral conduct. Thus, the influence of Hegel on Beauvoir and her vision of the initial encounter as a violent one should not obscure the striking closeness and compatibility of her account of alterity with that of response ethics. As Silvia L. López puts it, "The paradigm of intersubjectivity inherited from Hegel is eventually transformed in de Beauvoir's writing into an erotic model of recognition whereby the conditions of possibility of the moral relationship are based on our willingness to assume the risks of vulnerability and the bonds of ambiguous subjectivity."[522] Beauvoir adopts the dialectical emphasis on recognition and its initial struggle in order to resolve it in a different manner from Hegel, in a manner that maintains the alterity of the other through, as we will see, an ethic of reciprocity.

If Beauvoir's view of intersubjectivity begins in a Hegelian master-slave moment, it ends up in a surprisingly Husserlian place. Beauvoir shows that, in order for a relation to other beings to be possible, one must acknowledge that the other exceeds one's own understanding or grasp: that is, one must preserve the the alterity of the other. We will see that this idea goes along with a sense that what is beyond one's grasp is the 'freedom' of the other—which, while terminologically different from Husserl given Beauvoir's existentialist commitments, nonetheless parallels Husserl's idea that the 'zero-point' of the other is what is beyond one's grasp. While this injunction to maintain alterity, for Beauvoir, is normative, it does not amount to a fixed principle or axiom; rather, it is a phenomenologically informed

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[521] Ibid., 189.
[522] Silvia L. López, "Your Simone: Eros, Ethics and the Other Scene of Writing in Simone de Beauvoir," *MLN*, 119:4 (September 2004), 648.

and ontologically based feature of human relations. Beauvoir's work shows that the relation to the other is not one of knowledge or representation, which would amount to possession and therefore destroy the alterity of the other. A number of her novels and short stories, such as *She Came to Stay* and *The Age of Discretion*, reveal the disastrous results of founding relations to others on presumptions of knowledge of, identification with, or similarity to them. As we will see, her ethical writings—particularly the early essay *Pyrrhus and Cineas*—contain many fruitful inquiries into the nature of alterity. Yet it is Beauvoir's distinction between two forms of alterity in *The Second Sex* that provide a crucial starting point for her account of alterity and the ethics of reciprocity that results.

The analysis of alterity in *The Second Sex* has a more social cast than Beauvoir's novels and essays on ethics, and than the Levinasian view of alterity.[523] Beauvoir's claim that women have been posed as 'other' in contrast to men is explicitly occasioned by Levinas's arguments in *Time and the Other* about the other as the 'feminine.' The footnote to Beauvoir's famous sentence "He is the subject, he is the absolute; she is the Other" in the Introduction to *The Second Sex* details how Levinas provides the "most explicit" version of this view of woman.[524] Her claims about the tradition that relegates woman to the status of other in a manner that denies her own freedom, transcendence, and subjectivity and serves to oppress her take Levinas as the paradigmatic champion of this patriarchal philosophy. She goes on to quote *Time and the Other* at length, where Levinas wonders whether anything can reveal the situation of alterity in a concrete form and concludes that it is the feminine, as the feminine reveals alterity in its essence. Beauvoir then writes: "I suppose that Levinas does not forget that

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[523] This social cast is something Beauvoir herself considered to be an improvement from the ethical positions of her earlier work, which she considered too abstract and ahistorical. See *The Force of Circumstance, Volume I,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Paragon House, 1992).
[524] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, xxii. Trans. modified.

woman is also a consciousness for-itself. But it is striking that he deliberately adopts a point of man's point of view, without pointing out the reciprocity of subject and object. When he writes that the woman is mystery, he implies that she is mystery for man. Thus his description, which claims to be objective, is in fact an affirmation of masculine privilege."[525] This positioning of man as the same and woman as the other without reciprocity is, according to Beauvoir, an entrenchment of male privilege and an unjust denial of the subject-position to woman. As a result, "Woman thus appears as the inessential who never returns to the essential, as the absolute Other, without reciprocity."[526] The Levinasian view precisely describes the process of 'othering' that Beauvoir denounces in *The Second Sex* in contrast to the view of alterity that opens the possibility of reciprocity.[527] Levinas leaves no place for woman's own subjectivity—and, by extension, for a relation of reciprocity to man.

For Beauvoir, there is a difference between systematically setting up one group as 'other,' and thereby denying it self-consciousness and freedom, and acknowledging the ontological structure of alterity that underlies all human relations. The former move constitutes destructive and unjust practices of 'othering,' such as relegating woman to the status of inessential other by denying her agential subjectivity (as Levinas does). The latter is an irreducible feature of subjectivity and human relations, the necessary basis for any encounter between people. Beauvoir thus distinguishes "two forms of mutually exclusive alterity."[528] The failure to acknowledge the other as other leads to possession and the destruction of alterity, as is the case when one brings the other into one's own realm of representation and presumes full knowledge of the other. The second form of alterity,

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525 Ibid., xxii. Trans. modified.
526 Ibid., 141. Trans. modified.
527 The same tenets of Beauvoir's brief critique of Levinas can also be seen in her remarks about the fiction of Montherlant and Lawrence in *The Second Sex*. See, for instance, Ibid., 263.
528 Ibid.

however, is an acknowledgment that the other exceeds this representation by the self, and is the basis on which a relation of reciprocity can be built.[529]

The existentialist notion of freedom is crucial to Beauvoir's conception of alterity, and she uses the term frequently in her writings on ethics and subjectivity. Yet the affirmation of the term 'freedom' should not lead us to assume that Beauvoir is advocating a herculean, individual subject independent from others, as is often assumed. Instead, far from affirming the solitude of the subject, Beauvoir's conception of freedom rather takes as its starting point the subject's immersion in the world and inextricable connections to others. She states in *The Second Sex*, "The ego is constituted as for others, by others."[530] Subjectivity, for Beauvoir, is a negativity and a movement of transcendence, but this subjectivity is not removed from the intersubjective domain. Rather, as Beauvoir writes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "subjectivity necessarily transcends itself toward others," even as it is constituted through this otherness."[531] Subjectivity is thus a movement toward the other. One might hear here echoes of Levinas's unidirectional ethics, in which subjectivity is established as a response to the other, initiated by the face of the other but fundamentally directed from myself toward the other. Freedom is inextricable from relations to others. Freedom moves from out of one's own situatedness and toward other beings. Moreover, insofar as freedom lacks determinate content, one might say that it something like that toward which Derrida gestures in his writings on the decision: namely, freedom for Beauvoir is heterogeneous to knowledge.

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[529] Those who have considered Beauvoir's ethical philosophy to be one of 'sameness' have attended exclusively to the former kind of alterity—the destructive, avoidable process of 'othering'—and presumed that Beauvoir's solution to this is an ethics of identification. This overlooks the other kind of alterity that is in fact fundamental to Beauvoir's ethics.

[530] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 348. Trans. modified.

[531] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* trans. Bernard Frechtman (Princeton: Citadel Press, 2000), 63.

Beauvoir considers subjectivity to be characterized by an ambiguity between freedom and boundedness, which she lays out in her most well-known piece on ethics, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The human condition for Beauvoir is irreducibly ambiguous, constantly shuttling between defining itself and being defined by others and its situation, knowing itself as subject and being treated as object, and necessarily projecting its own existence (transcendent) while at the same time it is projected into existence by what exceeds it (immanent). The primary form of self-relation is not, for her, self-knowledge. Beauvoir disavows the dream of self-knowledge, calling it "impossible," and instead arguing that self-relation is a matter of 'self-revelation,' which is premised on what we have called in this dissertation 'internal otherness.'[532] One can reveal oneself *to* oneself because one is not transparent to oneself. Rather, the existentialist terminology of 'transcendence' and 'immanence', perhaps surprisingly, suggests the contamination of the self by the other. While 'immanence' suggests the inescapability of one's own immersion in one's situation, environment, social context, and relations with other beings, 'transcendence' suggests the ability of one to make a movement beyond this immersion—*not,* however, from a pure freedom or activity. Transcendence is always already contaminated by otherness insofar as it goes beyond the programmatic realm of knowledge and mastery. As a result, I think it can be argued that Beauvoir, like Derrida and Levinas, espouses some version of the 'contamination thesis' of selfhood and alterity, although it is beyond the purview of this chapter to develop such an idea fully. While Beauvoir, like Merleau-Ponty, happily uses the term 'ambiguity' to figure this contamination (a term that Derrida associates squarely with the metaphysics of presence), she nonetheless suggests that self-relation is contaminated by alterity, and rejects

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[532] Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965), 368.

the idea that self-relation is premised on self-knowledge (an idea we will discuss briefly later in this section).

Despite the fact that one initially tends to perceive the immanence of others rather than their transcendence in that the latter eludes direct perception or presentation, Beauvoir contends that we must supplement this initial perception by recognizing that the other is also a freedom if we claim to recognize the other as other.[533] We might say here, then, that the freedom of the other is *appresented*. In addition, it is precisely the freedom of the other that exceeds any potential grasp over him or her that one might have, and which shows the insurmountable gulf between self and other. Beauvoir writes, "as freedom, the other is radically separated from me."[534] One can never have access to the freedom of the other, for freedom is precisely a movement that exceeds external determination, including the determination of others. The freedom of the other does not concern the self beyond one's respecting it as other to oneself.

In *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, Beauvoir describes how one's relation to the other must be a relation to the other in her freedom, for only this will guard against treating the other as an object or a means—in Levinas's terms, on the level of possession or power—and identifying the other with oneself. On an epistemological level, the freedom of the other "absolutely does not exist for me."[535] This admission attests to the impossibility to being in the perspective, or on the side of, the other. Beauvoir means by 'freedom' that which is only one's own, and therefore that which is inaccessible to others. And yet, one must constantly appeal to the freedom of the other in order to encounter the other as other. She writes:

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[533] This may offer a slightly more dualistic view than Husserl's insistence on the other being as a 'psychophysical subject,' which we discussed in the previous chapter.
[534] Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 124-5.
[535] Ibid., 126.

"Respect for the other's freedom is not an abstract rule. It is the first condition of my successful effort. I can only appeal to the other's freedom, not constrain it."[536] To say that the other's freedom does not exist for the self means that one cannot have epistemic access to it; however, one can—and must—*appeal* to this freedom in order to respect the other. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir describes this relation to the other in her alterity thus: "It is only as something strange, forbidden, as something free, that the other is revealed as an other. And to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes. Love is then renunciation of all possession, of all confusion," in which 'confusion' indicates the confusion between self and other characteristic of an attempt at fusion or identification with the other.[537] The other's freedom is totally beyond the grasp of the self—beyond relations of possession or fusion—and one relates to the other precisely through recognizing one's inability to grasp her freedom, her alterity. This relation in difference aligns with the intersubjective structure of analogical appresentation discussed in the previous chapter, inasmuch as it offers a way to conceive of the relation to the other that forecloses access to the 'zero-point' or first-person perspective of the other.

While the terminology of 'freedom', let alone 'recognition', is foreign to what we have developed so far in this dissertation, the question of maintaining the separation of self and other even in their proximity reveals a parallel with what we have argued so far; moreover, I think the term 'freedom' here can be considered Beauvoir's version of what we have called in previous chapters the 'first-person perspective.' Freedom, after all, does not for Beauvoir have any determinate content, but is the movement of projection that is heterogeneous to knowledge but cannot be replaced by the freedom of any other being. For

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536 Ibid., 136.
537 Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 67.

Beauvoir, the encounter between oneself and the other is an encounter of freedoms that are not interchangeable or homogeneous. She states, "In enlightened, consenting recognition, one must be capable of maintaining face to face these two freedoms that seem to exclude each other: the other's, and mine. I must simultaneously grasp myself as object and as freedom and recognize my situation as founded by the other even as I affirm my being beyond the situation."[538] In coming into contact with the other, our freedom with respect to each other may be preserved even as we enter into proximity. One freedom need not cancel the other out. This passage suggests as well that the ambiguity of the human condition is bound up with the coexistence of freedoms: in my relation to the other, I must acknowledge both one's own freedom as a subject and the fact that one is, as a body and particular individual in the world, an object for the other and created *by* the other.

Levinas would reject this ethic, since to see one's relation to the other as reversible would require a view from nowhere. But Beauvoir does not consider the ethical relation to require such an impossible, impartial view. She contrasts her ethical position with what she calls "false objectivity," which for her characterizes the universalizing ethics of Kant and utilitarianism.[539] For Beauvoir, no ethical action is possible from a universal perspective, because that is simply not possible given the situated nature of our encounters with the world and others. She claims that we must "turn away from the errors of false objectivity," and that the "error of Kantian ethics is to have claimed to make an abstraction of our presence in the world."[540] For Beauvoir, it is precisely Hegel who most clearly makes a case against false objectivity, which is curious given that Levinas rejects the dialectical viewpoint

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[538] Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 123. Trans. modified.
[539] See, for instance, Ibid., 99 and 127.
[540] Ibid., 126 and 127.

as presuming an impossible objectivity by imaginatively posing the one to the other in reversible relation.[541]

However, Beauvoir, like Levinas, agrees that Hegel's perspective remains too universal: later on in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, she couples Kant and Hegel as espousing "universal ethics" that deny individuality and failure.[542] Instead, Beauvoir affirms, "I can take no other point of view than my own."[543] The situated, first-person perspective is capable of perceiving the reciprocity of the relation to the other—reciprocity need not be a result of an abstract claim to universality. Rather, it is precisely the first-person, perspectival nature of this encounter that discloses its asymmetrical, irreversible character. Beauvoir writes: "Each person is only a subject for himself. But it is true that I am just anyone only in the eyes of others, and ethics cannot demand from me that I realize this foreign point of view. That would be to cease being me; that would be to cease being. I am; I am in situation before the other and before the situations in which he finds himself. And that is exactly why I can prefer and desire."[544] It is one's own first-person experience itself that reveals second- and third-person perspectives that others bear toward oneself. Beauvoir promulgates the notion that in our ethical relations, one cannot overlook one's own ambiguous condition and first-person perspective in favor of universalizing claims that overlook their own situatedness. The other does not experience my subjectivity in the way that I do—the other experiences me as an other, as I experience her as an other. It is impossible to adopt the other's point of view, but one's own point of view is itself already contaminated by the points of view of others. The encounter with another being is an irreversible movement toward him or her,

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[541] Ibid., 99.
[542] Ibid., 138.
[543] Ibid., 140.
[544] Ibid., 128.

which also reveals the other's movement toward the self even as I cannot have mastery over the other's movement. In Husserlian terms, it is *appresented* to me.

While one can be generous toward others, one can never act in their place. This idea is the crux of Beauvoir's talk of freedom, and it is in fact this inability to act in another's place that allows for generosity and reciprocity rather than prohibiting it. Beauvoir's ethical writings reveal that acting 'for' another is unsatisfying to the individual because it is based on the illusion of identity with the other. Beauvoir explores this particularly in her chapter on 'Devotion' in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. Here, she states that devoting oneself to another completely is an attempt to act in the place of the other, and that this is impossible—because it is the very nature of being a self not to have a 'place,' because the self is a movement of surpassing itself. Due to this nature of selfhood, Beauvoir claims, "The fundamental error of devotion is that it considers the other as an object carrying an emptiness in its heart that would be possible to fill."[545] Yet it is not possible to fill such a void by attempting to devote oneself to another so completely that one acts in her place; acting for another is impossible because the projection of freedom is tantamount to a 'zero-point' or irreducible first-person character of self-relation.

How does one experience the other as a free subject without considering this relation to be one of understanding that the other is a free subject *like oneself*? That is, how does one uphold an ego-alter ego structure without relegating it to pure analogy, symmetry, or equality? In her introduction to Beauvoir's ethico-political essay "An Eye for an Eye," Kristana Arp describes how Beauvoir's central concept of ambiguity highlights the incommensurability between oneself and the other. She states that the self experiences its

[545] Ibid., 122.

own ambiguity differently than it experiences the ambiguity of others: while one's own freedom as a subject is directly evident to oneself, it is rather my embodiment as an object that is directly evident to others. As a result, "Given that everyone is rooted in his own subjectivity, the other is not simply equivalent to oneself. Instead there is a reciprocity between subjects (a reciprocity almost in a mathematical sense—the way the fraction 2/3 is reciprocal to the fraction 3/2."[546] Arp's reference to the fraction here is apt, in that it illuminates the fact that the other and the self need not be considered equivalent in order to have a relation of reciprocity. I am directly conscious of myself but not directly conscious of the other, and this introduces an inescapable asymmetry in our relations.[547] Beauvoir thus considers the movement toward the other to entail a reciprocal movement from the other toward the self, although this reciprocal movement is not one that can be represented, directly accessed, or 'known'. While according to Levinas, the preservation of alterity is possible only unidirectionally—that is, the same moving toward the other—Beauvoir considers this relationship to go two ways. Reciprocity does not paper over a distinction between self-relation and the relation to others. Rather, it shows that one's self-relation is not 'the same as' the relation to other beings, something that corresponds with our remarks about *différance*. And on the level of self-relation, the otherness indicated in both transcendence and immanence signals that there is alterity contaminating selfhood already.

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[546] Kristana Arp, Introduction to "An Eye for an Eye," in Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 241.

[547] The affirmation of self-consciousness here is not an affirmation of a transparent subject of self-knowledge. Freedom, for Beauvoir, precludes self-knowledge because freedom is what reveals that to be a self or subject is to be a movement *toward* (whether toward one's projects, toward the future, or toward others) rather than to be a substance. Thus, when I affirm my own freedom and acknowledge that, while the other is also a freedom, I do not have direct access to it, I am not claiming that my own freedom, let alone my access to it, is something the contents of which are transparent to myself—because for Beauvoir, it could not even be said to have 'contents.'

This viewpoint is in line with the remarks about the first-person perspective that we made in Chapter 3, as well as the idea in Chapter 4 that the other can only be encountered via analogical appresentation. The version of analogical appresentation implied by Beauvoir's idea that one cannot adopt the perspective of others or inhabit their subjectivity 'from the inside' has a symmetrical character that provides the basis for the asymmetry in any relation to the other.[548] Moreover, in that her work foregrounds the otherness that necessarily marks the self, I think Beauvoir could also be said to offer a conception of the way that the 'third' haunts the face-to-face relation between two parties. As we have seen earlier in this section, Beauvoir's claims about the indeclinable alterity in our relations with other beings also goes for the relation to oneself. One can never know, possess, or be at one with other beings *or oneself.* Inasmuch as Beauvoir offers an account of subjectivity that is marked by opacity, she could be considered in line with the position we have developed in this dissertation, which in Chapter 3 in particular has claimed that the first-person perspective is haunted by the second- and third-person perspectives. Here, then, we can consider the face-to-face relation in Beauvoir as a face-to-face(-to-face) relation, following Derrida's arguments about the third and the 1+n structure of self-relation and the relation to other beings.

For Beauvoir, reciprocity is implicit in any human relation, and provides that basis for ethical relationships between individuals. In the Introduction to *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir recasts the Hegelian scene of recognition in terms of a traveler to another country: when traveling abroad, a person is surprised to find herself equally regarded as a foreigner as those whom she is regarding as a foreigner. This recognition reveals to the traveler that "the other

[548] This idea, which would benefit from further development in future projects, is compatible with Sara Heinämaa's argument that Beauvoir is profoundly influenced by Husserl, developing her theory of the lived body from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. See Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference.*

consciousness, the other ego, sets up a reciprocal claim" as oneself, and thus "individuals and groups are forced to realize the reciprocity of their relations" whether they'd like to or not.[549] Once this underlying reciprocity is realized, the parties involved have a choice: between the adoption of an ethical relation of reciprocity, or one of domination and oppression.[550] Of the first alternative, Beauvoir writes: "If both sustain this claim upon the other, it creates between them—be it in hostility or in friendship, but always in tension—a relation of reciprocity."[551] Here, the tension between self and other is not be sublated or dissolved, but is rather sustained and acknowledged as the basis for an ethic of reciprocity.

The second alternative, however, is the more common one. Here, reciprocity is suppressed, as one group seeks to dominate another. *The Second Sex* details how ethical reciprocity between men and women has been extinguished by the patriarchal conditions that have suppressed the claims of women. Beauvoir famously writes, "In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral…whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity."[552] Beauvoir thus sees the problem of sexism as fundamentally a failure of reciprocity. She claims that the group 'women' has been systematically considered 'other' and marginalized and oppressed on the basis of this perceived otherness.

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[549] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, xxiii-iv.
[550] As Beauvoir does with otherness, she implies a distinction between a descriptive and a normative account of reciprocity. The validity of this distinction could be deconstructively troubled, although we do not have the space to do so here. I think we could do so—showing the way that a destructive relation of oppression 'haunts' even what seems to be a genuinely respectful relation to other beings—without undermining our affirmation of Beauvoir here.
[551] Ibid., 61.
[552] Ibid., xxi.

This possibility for reciprocity is accomplished when one respects the first-person perspective of the other while recognizing that this first-person perspective is haunted by what is other to it—what, in Beauvoir's terminology, would be called ambiguity. Beauvoir writes that a Hegelian scene of conflict between self-consciousnesses "may be surmounted by the free recognition of each individual in the other, each at the same time positing self and other as object and as subject in a reciprocal movement. But friendship and generosity, which concretely actualize this recognition of freedoms, are not easy virtues; they are assuredly man's highest accomplishment, and that is where he finds himself in his truth."[553] In order to have a relation of reciprocity with an other, I must be able to affirm my ambiguous condition as both object and subject, and go past my initial desire to perceive the other as merely an object in order to recognize that the other is also characterized by an ambiguous condition. This second acknowledgment is perhaps the more difficult one, inasmuch as it requires recognizing that the other exceeds my comprehension or grasp. The realization of this ambiguity and separateness of self and other is challenging—as we have seen, it is inevitably in a state of tension. However, it is necessary for ethical relations between others. As Beauvoir emphatically puts it: "The affirmation of the reciprocity of interhuman relations is the metaphysical basis of the idea of justice."[554] Generosity and friendship are to be striven for, and these require reciprocity. Without reciprocity, Beauvoir contends, justice is inconceivable.

An ethical relation to the other, on Beauvoir's view, is not predicated on an equal or symmetrical exchange. Beauvoir considers ethics distinct from any idea of indebtedness, and thus 'reciprocity' for her is completely unrelated to an economy of exchange. *Pyrrhus and*

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[553] Ibid., 140. Trans. modified.
[554] Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 249.

Cineas advocates generosity toward others in ethical relations but claims, "It is not a matter of paying off a debt here. There exists no currency that allows for paying the other in return. Between what he has done for me and what I will do for him, there can be no measure."[555] The question of measuring what I have done for the other compared to what the other has done for me is as foreign to Beauvoir's ethics of reciprocity as it is to Levinas's ethics of obsession and alterity. Any measure would deny that an act of generosity was freely undertaken but rather suggest that it was done out of a particular interest. Beauvoir describes the 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' model of justice as an "impossible reciprocity."[556] Reciprocity, for her, is instead the bare acknowledgment that the other is other to me in her freedom and yet that we may engage in generosity and respect, not that I and the other are engaged in payment of moral debts or symmetrical exchanges.

As a result, I call the relation between self and other on Beauvoir's view a 'nonreciprocal reciprocity'. In the same way that we considered an irreversibile reversibility in Chapter 3 and an asymmetrical symmetry in Chapter 4, Beauvoir offers an ethic of reciprocity that provides the condition for the possibility of nonreciprocal relations. As in analogical appresentation, here reciprocity is figured as an ego-alter ego structure that provides the basis for ethics, but the ethical encounter does not require, or even expect, that the parties involved will treat each other according to some equalizing morality such as the Golden Rule. The ethical relation for Beauvoir is not one of pure symmetry or exchangeability between self and other.[557] Using the phrase 'nonreciprocal reciprocity' to

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[555] Ibid., 123.
[556] Ibid., 251.
[557] I have elsewhere argued that Beauvoir promotes what Iris Marion Young terms 'asymmetrical reciprocity'. Young, who uses the asymmetrical ethics of Levinas and Irigaray as an alternative to Seyla Benhabib's 'symmetrical reciprocity, writes: "The images of symmetry and reversibility suggest that people are able to understand one another's perspectives because, while not identical, they are similarly shaped, and for that reason replaceable with one another." Iris Marion Young,

describe Beauvoir's ethical outlook evinces the importance of reciprocity for her conception of relations between people, while highlighting the fact—which is obfuscated by the usual connotations of 'reciprocity'—that reciprocity on her view acknowledges my lack of access to the freedom of the other in a manner that forecloses the possibility of symmetry, and does not expect that our relations will be in fact reciprocal.

Levinas develops the idea of obsession as an alternative to reciprocity because he identifies reciprocity as an instance of reversibility, and therefore as purely symmetrical. However, Beauvoir's ethics of reciprocity does not fall into these perceived dangers. As we have seen, Beauvoir affirms the asymmetry and non-indifference of the relation to the other, but considers reciprocity as a way to figure this relation to the other. On her view, reciprocity does not require the abstract perspective of a totality. Levinas's working notion of reciprocity is thus quite different from Beauvoir's. While Levinas conceives of reciprocity as reducing the gap between self and other and presuming the indifference of a universal moral 'ought,' reciprocity is Beauvoir's way of figuring the specific ethical claim the other places upon me through her presence. This claim can never be subsumed into representation, understanding, or any other reduction of her alterity. Where Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, "The sense of our whole effort lies in affirming not that the Other forever escapes knowing, but that there is no sense in speaking here of knowledge or ignorance," he seeks to found ethics on a relation to the other that is not about knowledge of the other's position, about an attempt to place oneself in the other's shoes.[558] Beauvoir's ethics too makes such an attempt, taking knowledge of the other out of the equation not by denying that we have knowledge of the other, but by suggesting that because we can never have full

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"Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought," in *Constellations*, 3:3 (1997).

[558] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 89. Trans. modified.

knowledge of the other (nor of oneself, since neither self or other are objects one can *know*), ethics cannot found itself on this basis. Rather, ethics must be a response to the other as she presents herself to me. Beauvoir's ethics of nonreciprocal reciprocity avoids the pitfalls of Levinas's critique of reciprocity by emphasizing the contamination of reciprocity by irreciprocity, and in this sense is closer to Levinas's ethics of 'the face' than is usually granted. The 'face to face' relation one finds in Beauvoir does not imply symmetry between the faces, even as it affirms that my relation to the other must necessarily also involve the other's relation to me.

2b. Eros in Beauvoir

Like Levinas, Beauvoir takes the erotic relation to be a particularly salient form of the relation to the other, even as she does not lift it up to the position of 'exemplar' in the way that Levinas does. Beauvoir's account of the reciprocal erotic encounter in *The Second Sex*, though brief, is one of its most stirring series of passages, and reveals that, for Beauvoir, eros preserves the otherness of the other while relating to him or her in intimacy and love. A number of scholars' recent attention to Beauvoir's analysis of eros attests to its importance for her ethical perspective.[559] Beauvoir suggests that it is through the erotic encounter that one experiences "the real presence of the Other," because the sexual act reveals that one is both desiring and desired, both subject and object, both same and other.[560] In the sexual encounter, one's erotic desire pertains to the other as both corporeal object and free self-consciousness. Thus, Beauvoir claims, "the erotic experience is one that most poignantly

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[559] See, for instance, Debra Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Lauren Guilmette, "Reading Butler Reading Beauvoir Reading Sade: On Ethics and Eros," in *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 55, SPEP Supplement 2011.
[560] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 348.

discloses to human beings the ambiguity of their condition; in it they are aware of themselves as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject."[561] Through the erotic relation to the other, one is able to experience oneself as subject while acknowledging that one is an object of pleasure for the other, as well as experiencing the other as the object of my pleasure while acknowledging that that other is more than an object, and that this excess—that is, the perspective of the other—is inaccessibly other to me. For Beauvoir, eros is the model for the possibility of recognizing the alterity of the other without boxing the other into the denigrating category 'other' that is too often used to oppress particular groups by those in power; thus, it plays an exemplary role in her work, as in that of Levinas.

Beauvoir characterizes eros as a movement toward the other that does not culminate in possession or fusion. In Levinas's terminology, one reaches proximity in eros. Beauvoir writes, "Eroticism is a movement toward the *Other*, this is its essential character."[562] The movement toward the other that is the erotic relationship is only ever a movement *toward*—for if it were to reach the other, grasp the other, this movement would end and become a mere subsumption of the other into the same. In the erotic act, "the dimension of the *other* remains; but the fact is that alterity has no longer a hostile implication; it is this consciousness of the union of bodies in their separation that gives to the sexual act its moving character."[563] The relation between self and other here, which is based on their separation and difference, is the source of their joy and passion. Thus, Beauvoir writes, the "difference" between those in an erotic relationship "becomes the source of their enchantment when they do unite."[564] Lovers love in the space of their duality. And let us not

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[561] Ibid., 402.
[562] Ibid., 446.
[563] Ibid., 401. Trans. modified.
[564] Ibid., 402, Trans. modified.

forget here the ambiguity of the human condition on Beauvoir's view: it is not as though two transparent, solipsistic subjects whole unto themselves enter into a relation with each other that is clear-cut and orderly, but rather that two ambiguous subjects—characterized by being subjects as well as objects, constituted in and through the world of their engagements and others—enter into a relation that, despite their ambiguity, nonetheless retains their difference from each other. The character of eros as a coming together that maintains separation between individuals is precisely what Beauvoir generally terms 'reciprocity'. Beauvoir writes of the erotic encounter: "Under a concrete and carnal form, there is reciprocal recognition of the ego and of the other in the keenest consciousness of the other and of the ego."[565] The erotic encounter reveals a "reciprocal generosity of body and soul."[566] This generosity risks that the other will not recognize me as a freedom, but rather perceive me only as an immanent object, but, when reciprocity is achieved, this generosity reveals a mutual recognition that is a source of joy from the perspective of each even as this recognition is precisely *not* a recognition of oneself in the other.[567]

Thus, the example of erotic experience in *The Seccond Sex* offers a picture of what Beauvoir means by reciprocity. Far from being a matter of reversing perspective that would presume access to the other's experience or placing oneself 'in the other's shoes,' reciprocity recognizes the other qua other. Beauvoir writes, "authentic love should be founded on the reciprocal recognition of two freedoms; each of the lovers would then experience themselves both as oneself and as other."[568] In this sense, the reciprocity of eros is very much in line with the proximity of eros that Levinas describes, with the crucial difference that for

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565 Ibid., 401. Trans. modified.
566 Ibid., 402. Trans. modified.
567 Though I am indebted to Bergoffen's account, this is where we part ways. See Bergoffen, *Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*.
568 Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 667. Trans. modified.

Beauvoir there is a sense of the other's movement toward me. There is a doubling of both self and other that moves in two directions. This encounter, for Beauvoir, necessarily stems from the situated, contaminated first-person perspective while acknowledging the other's perspective in relation to myself. She says that in the case of such a "relation of reciprocity," a lover is each capable of "feeling the pleasure as being his or her own but as having its source in the other."[569] This idea is strikingly close to the experience of feeling the other's pain in oneself but *as the other's* that Derrida describes in *Of Grammatology* and which we detailed in the previous chapter. Here, Beauvoir develops this very same idea with respect to the sexual encounter. In erotic passion, one can be consumed by one's own pleasure precisely through that pleasure's being caused by an other who is irreducibly separate from oneself. There is not a confusion of perspective, but a doubling and proliferating that destabilizes 'external' and 'internal' boundaries and suggests a contamination of self and other.

Recall that Beauvoir's ethics of reciprocity is an appeal to the other as other, inasmuch as one cannot constrain the other's freedom but can only appeal to it. The same goes for the erotic relation: the structure of eros collapses if erotic desire morphs into possession or fusion. Eros is possible only if one allows the other to be free from one's own constraint. This notion of appeal is quite close to Levinas. However, for Beauvoir, the importance of reciprocity resurfaces here: for her, in order for the appeal to be successful, "I must be allowed to appeal."[570] One must not only respond to the appeal that comes *from* the other, but must also be allowed to appeal *to* the other. That is, there must be the possibility for a reciprocal appeal. If it were only a matter of the other appealing to oneself, one would

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569 Ibid., 401.
570 Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 136.

be in the situation of an oppressive patriarchy that results from an absolutizing conception of self and other. In discussing the encounter with the other and the appeal that the face of the other constitutes, Levinas forecloses this other direction of the appeal and of the encounter. Levinas does not discuss the appeal that the 'same' makes to the 'other,' and in so doing valorizes the other exclusively. However, this valorization is paradoxically a denigration of the other because it ultimately forecloses the other from the subjective position of the same.

3. Conclusion

For both Levinas and Beauvoir, alterity reveals the impossibility of putting oneself in the position of the other and the necessity instead of responding to the call of the other. Yet the female other in Levinas has no voice, no call, no agency or subjectivity or position of her own. Because Levinas not only forecloses the possibility of imaginatively putting oneself in the other's position, *but also* denies the female other the possibility of having her own voice and place from which to tell the male other that she too is a self, she is left with nothing. How can one hear the appeal of the other when the other has no voice of appeal? Levinas fails his own ethics of alterity when it comes to the phenomenology of eros—and as a result, woman in Levinas *is not respected as other*. Most importantly, because woman is the exemplar of the other in Levinas, we can generalize this statement to say that *the other* in Levinas *is not respected as other*. Because the unidirectionality of Levinas's ethics results in the denial of the subject-position to the other, it denigrates the other while claiming to privilege her. Idolizing or fetishizing the other here becomes a tool for the oppressive practice of 'othering,' which denies freedom to the other. This is an inescapable result of the absolutizing tendency in

Levinas, and can be overcome by an intersubjective theory of analogical appresentation and an ethic of nonreciprocal reciprocity.

Beauvoir's ethic of nonreciprocal reciprocity manifests the Levinasian insight into the alterity of the other and the importance of respecting how this alterity is removed from one's own understanding or grasp. However, by emphasizing that it is precisely through one's own perspective that one can acknowledge how the perspective, and very being, of the other as a subject who in turn can choose to respect or deny *my alterity to her*, Beauvoir does justice to the alterity of the other in a way that Levinas's ethics ultimately cannot. We might conclude with Beauvoir's remarks on Stendhal in *The Second Sex*, which provide a description of how reciprocity can be established by an eros that does not hold idolize the other in a manner that denies her a place of her own. Beauvoir writes that, in Stendhal's novels, woman is "that other consciousness that, in reciprocal recognition, gives to the other subject the same truth it receives from it," and that "this supposes that woman is not pure alterity: she is subject herself. Stendhal never describes his heroines as a function of his heroes: he provides them with their own destinies."[571] Acknowledging that a relation to an other must come out of one's own first-person perspective need not amount to treating the other as a function of oneself. Rather, this acknowledgment requires granting that the other has a freedom, a subjectivity, or in this context, a 'destiny' of her own. This, in turn, requires rejecting that the other is, as Beauvoir puts it, 'pure alterity.' Rather, otherness is contaminated by sameness, as sameness is contaminated by otherness.

I have argued in this chapter that Beauvoir's ethic of reciprocity extends what we developed in Chapter 4 with respect to the intersubjective relation of analogical

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[571] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 260.

appresentation. The idea that the ethical relation is one of 'nonreciprocal reciprocity' builds upon the contamination of reversibility and irreversibility signaled in Chapter 3 and the contamination of symmetry and asymmetry developed in Chapter 4. By accounting for the irreducibility of otherness in ethical relations as well as in one's own self-relation, while at the same time foregrounding a certain structural symmetry or reciprocity in these relations, Beauvoir offers resources for a response ethics approach to the self-other relation. While we do not have the space to pursue the consequences of this here, I would claim that Beauvoir's rejection of full knowledge of the other or of oneself could also correspond to the idea developed toward the end of the previous chapter: namely, that the distinction between oneself and other beings is undecidable. Such an undecidability is figured in Beauvoir's writings on the erotic encounter as well as in her practice of autobiography. The inability of knowledge to figure the self-other relation for Beauvoir could also be linked back to the 'more is less' logic in the previous chapter. It would also be worthwhile to follow up her claims about subjectivity and ambiguity in order to further show that she espouses a version of the 'contamination thesis' I have discussed in Chapter 3, and which I see not only in Derrida but also in Merleau-Ponty. Here, however, I have tried to show that her view of reciprocity does not rely on a traditional metaphysical conception of reciprocity as tit-for-tat exchange, but rather bears similarity to the 'condition for the possibility as the condition for the impossibility (*as pure*)' sort of logic we have pursued in the previous chapters. Reciprocity is, for Beauvoir, a nonreciprocal reciprocity. It resolves the issues that plague Levinas's absolutizing theory of otherness and instead reveals the contamination of self by the other and of reciprocity by irreciprocity. It offers an illuminating account of the ethical relation between oneself and other beings that provides a compelling alternative to absolutizing

tendencies in Levinasian strains of response ethics that follows from the structure of the self-other relation we have laid out in this dissertation.

Conclusion

I began this dissertation with an epigraph from Butler, which states that one's own foreignness is paradoxically the source of one's connection to other beings. I argued in the Introduction that Butler herself does not offer a coherent explanation of this idea, and suggested that an account of the relation between selfhood and otherness with deconstructive commitments following the work of Derrida would make it possible to provide the coherent explanation Butler lacks. More generally, I claimed that it would resolve issues in the contemporary continental tradition of response ethics and of accounts of internal otherness in the wake of the 'death of the self.' How has this dissertation provided such an account, and has it succeeded in doing so?

Put differently, the idea that Butler suggests is that one's otherness to oneself is the condition for the possibility of treating other beings *as* other. A consequence of deconstruction that, on my view, has offered a particularly compelling way to treat this idea is that the condition for the possibility of something is the condition for its impossibility *as pure*. When it comes to the self-other relation, this argument amounts to the following: otherness to oneself, or 'internal otherness,' is the condition for the possibility of relating to other beings *as* other, inasmuch as self-relation is always already a relation to an other. Because otherness is neither absolute nor uniform on a hierarchical gray scale, but rather *différantial*, there is a difference between 'internal otherness' and the otherness of other beings even as, at the same time, both are 'genuine' forms of otherness. We are, therefore, always already in relation to otherness, so there is no problem of explaining how one relates to others (as there was in Levinas, for whom the absoluteness of alterity posed problems in account for the relation between the other and the same). At the same time, if otherness to

oneself is the condition for the possibility of relating to other beings as other, it is also the condition for the impossibility of relating to them as *purely* other. This latter idea was developed in Chapters 4 and 5 especially, where we stated that there is a kind of symmetry or reciprocity that contaminates intersubjective relations of asymmetry and irreciprocity.

Moreover, otherness is at once the condition for the possibility of the self and the condition for the impossibility of the self *as pure*: that is to say, the self is contaminated by otherness. This notion has allowed us to argue that the self is constituted in and through otherness, without leaving us with the problems that philosophies that make the self the pure product of external forces (as we saw with Butler's Foucaultian-inspired framework in the Introduction, and briefly with Althusser and Mead in Chapter 4). Those philosophies merely reversed the traditional privileging of the self with a new privileging of the other, a reversal deconstructed by the account of contamination, the trace, and *différance* that we undertook beginning in Chapter 2. The self is a series of identity-effects produced through the otherness of the trace and *différance*, but the trace and *différance* have also been shown themselves to be another way of understanding sameness. Thus, we are not advocating a unidirectional view where we can hang our hat on the idea that 'the self is caused by otherness.' Rather, deconstruction upsets such a causation, instead gesturing toward a constitutive absence and heterogeneity to knowledge that cannot be encapsulated in a metaphysical picture of self-constitution or self-other constitution.

In Chapter 1, we took on Levinas's idea that self-relation is merely a play of the same, as opposed to the alterity brought about by the relation to the absolute other. We especially considered Levinas's writings on interiority, *jouissance*, and psychism in *Totality and Infinity*, and considered Levinas's claim that these modes of self-relation manifest a 'false alterity' that does not indicate the 'true alterity' of other beings. With the help of Derrida,

who in "Violence and Metaphysics" puts pressure on Levinas's idea that the other is infinite, we showed that Levinas's infinite, absolutizing account of otherness is incoherent. We also showed that the implicit distinction Levinas draws between 'true' and 'false' alterity is untenable. We argued that there could be no coherent relation to the other if 'true alterity' did not already characterize self-relation within sameness.

The conclusion we drew from Chapter 1—that otherness must already be indicated within sameness—led us to a deconstruction of the self/other relation in Chapter 2. This long and in some ways unwieldy chapter comprised an investigation of the contamination of sameness by otherness in a wide variety of places in Derrida's work. We focused particularly on 1) the trace, 2) *différance*, 3) auto-affection, and 4) decision, showing that Derrida offers a compelling way to think about the relation between identity and difference that reveals their constitutive contamination. Difference provides the condition for the possibility of identity, even as it also bars identity from being pure (and therefore is, in a sense, the condition for the impossibility of identity). Far from dominant trends in scholarship that focus purely on Derrida's remarks about difference, and which sometimes presume that Derrida has nothing to say about the self or sameness, I showed that deconstruction in fact has much to say about these latter terms. Moreover, to focus exclusively on difference in Derrida is to reverse the metaphysical tendencies while remaining prey to their assumptions, which is in clear contrast with the aim of Derrida's work from beginning to end.

In Chapter 3, I turned to what in phenomenology is called the 'first-person perspective' in order to argue that deconstruction does not eliminate a subjective ground of experience, but instead shows that it is contaminated by what is other to it. This amounts to what I call a 'contamination thesis,' which I contrast with Zahavi's insistence that the first-person perspective is not split by otherness, but rather only accompanied by it (the

'accompaniment thesis'). I claimed that the first-person perspective is haunted by second- and third-person perspectives. Then, we turned to Merleau-Ponty in order to consider from a different angle the relationship between deconstruction and phenomenology *vis à vis* the first-person perspective. I argued that Derrida, who sees in Merleau-Ponty's account of reversibility a preference for sameness over otherness, misreads Merleau-Ponty and fails to see his own affinity to the phenomenologist. I claimed that, like Derrida, Merleau-Ponty espouses a 'contamination thesis' by which the first-person perspective is constituted through otherness to itself. I argued that reversibility, for Merleau-Ponty, entails a certain non-coincidence or irreversibility.

Chapter 4 began with the question of where our account of otherness within the self leaves us in terms of the relation to other beings. Does an account of internal otherness, by showing that self-relation is always already a self-other-relation, imply no difference between the otherness of oneself and the otherness of other beings? That is, if Chapters 1-3 have constituted an argument that otherness within the self is not 'false,' but rather 'genuine,' then is there only one kind of otherness that holds both for oneself and other beings? I answer this question in the negative, showing that it follows from the deconstruction of sameness and otherness—in which otherness is characterized by *différance* rather than a logic of degree, purity, or uniformity—that no other is the *same* other, but rather that each other is irreducibly, and differently, other. I treated Husserl's theory of analogical appresentation, which preserves the first-person perspective of both self and other and offers a way to consider the self's relation to other beings without eliminating alterity on the one hand or absolutizing it on the other. I showed that Derrida demonstrates a remarkable regard for this Husserlian theory, considering it especially illuminating in its suggestion that the relation to the other is not purely asymmetrical, but also bears a certain symmetry. I then claimed that

Derrida offers a 'more is less' logic of otherness, by which the more we know about others, the less we know about them. This culminated in my idea that the difference between oneself and other beings is undecidable.

Finally, Chapter 5 further explored the relation between the self and other beings, this time returning to the discourse of response ethics and arguing that Beauvoir's ethic of reciprocity offers a compelling alternative to the absolutization of the other of Levinasian response ethics. I first analyzed Levinas's claims about reciprocity, which provided a way to consider why reciprocity is generally unpopular among response ethicists (because of its connotations of expected mutual exchange). I then showed how Levinas's rejection of reciprocity in favor of a unidirectional and absolutely asymmetrical relation to the other is insufficient, attending particularly to his account of the erotic relation to the feminine because he takes it to be the exemplar of the relation to the other. Next, I turned to Beauvoir in order to show that she offers an ethic of reciprocity that does not fall into the trap of subsuming otherness into oneself, a trap that Levinas unremittingly associates with reciprocity. I turned to her account of the erotic relationship, where reciprocity is figured as a relation to the other in and through that otherness, and argued that this intersubjective account follows from the contamination of selfhood and otherness theorized in the previous chapters as well as illuminating it.

Of course, a number of questions or issues remain to be explored in light of what I have undertaken in this dissertation. For one, the question of what constitutes a 'relation' requires further development. I noted in the Introduction that I take relation to precede identity, rather than taking it to be supervenient on the prior identity of independent entities. A number of questions arise when we take this idea in conjunction with deconstruction, given that the arguments in this dissertation have generally deconstructive or Derridean

commitments. Firstly, does not this idea that relation precedes identity sound very Hegelian—and, if so, what differentiates deconstruction from Hegelianism? I think that, while this dissertation has suggested some points of difference, it has not drawn them out sufficiently. The points of difference would include the following: 1) Hegelianism does not as adequately account for the constitutive absence of otherness as does the Derridean 'trace' or *différance*, preferring instead to presentify otherness; 2) there is no moment of sublation for Derrida; 3) the non-absolutizability of difference prevents difference from collapsing back into sameness, as it does in Hegel. These would require further development, however. Secondly, one might argue that a deconstructive relation would necessarily be a 'relation without relation' (as I have noted in a footnote within the body of the dissertation). This further signifies that a relation is not a relation between two self-present, self-subsisting entities. I think that such an idea corresponds with what I have laid out, but a future iteration of this project would need to draw out further the idea that self-relation (as self-other-relation) would be a 'self-relation without relation'.

In addition, I would like to investigate further my claim that self-relation is not cognitive, which offers a picture of self-relation that is in contrast with views that foreground self-knowledge. I find compelling the connection between my argument that self-relation is not grounded in self-knowledge and the insight from response ethics that the relation to other beings is not grounded in knowledge of them. While I have noted the connection between these two ideas in this dissertation, I think further development of it would improve the theories that I develop here and constitute a genuine contribution to the intersection between internal otherness and response ethics that I laid out as two 'currents' of contemporary continental philosophy in the Introduction.

Finally, the ethical account of reciprocity laid out in Chapter 5 would be improved by tightened connections to deconstruction: in particular, I think that one could connect what I have said about 'nonreciprocal reciprocity' to Derrida's writings on hospitality and the gift. Specifically, Derrida's idea that conditional and unconditional hospitality are different and yet not absolutely opposed relates to the account of reciprocity offered by Beauvoir.[572] So too does Derrida's idea that a gift must be freely offered without expectation of return, even as there is a kind of economy of the gift that underwrites this unconditional, free giving of it.[573] Moreover, I have signaled in Chapter 5 that Beauvoir, like Derrida and Merleau-Ponty, offers an account of self-relation that shows the contamination of selfhood by otherness. This idea, which I see at work in Beauvoir's writings, has not adequately been theorized in this chapter. A further analysis of how Beauvoir attests to such a contamination of selfhood will have to be proposed in the future.

In conclusion, I have attempted to achieve a number of aims in this dissertation. First, I have tried to improve upon existing theories of response ethics by developing an account of selfhood and otherness that I think has not been adequately provided. For this account, I have drawn primarily on Derrida; another aim of this dissertation has been to show that Derrida is a rich, albeit often overlooked, source for thinking about selfhood because of the implications of the deconstruction of sameness and otherness. These two primary aims have been undergirded by a number of secondary aims, including: a) contesting the Levinasian view of otherness as absolute and infinite; b) arguing that the relation to otherness, whether in self-relation or the relation to other beings, is not cognitive, and is

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572 See Derrida, *Adieu*, and Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Anne Dufourmantelle (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000).
573 See Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* and Jacques Derrida, *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

therefore heterogeneous to knowledge; c) showing that Derrida underestimates Merleau-Ponty, and that Merleau-Ponty offers a robust account of the contamination of selfhood by otherness; d) arguing that Beauvoir is a thinker of alterity who offers a compelling alternative to the Levinasian tendency of contemporary response ethics. The aims of this dissertation thus operate at a variety of levels, from specific scholarly debates within continental European philosophy to broad philosophical questions about the nature of identity and difference. My hope is that, in showing that the self is always already other to itself, I have provided a helpful way to consider the ways that we relate both to ourselves and to other beings, and that this will provide opportunities for investigating these relations in greater depth in the future.

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