

# Derrida Interviewing Derrida: Autoimmunity and the Laws of the Interview

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## 1: Later Derrida

**N**EARLY A DECADE AFTER DERRIDA'S DEATH, THE SENSE OF REMAINING IN HIS WAKE—and at his wake—pervades engagements with his texts. Questions of legacy and following still abound, as inheritance becomes torn between re-examinations of Derrida's concerns and readings of twenty-first century events through deconstruction. Following Derrida's death, Michael Naas claimed that we are at the opening of a new possibility wherein Derrida's work can be read 'on its own terms, ... without the spectre ... of Derrida's presence. ... [It] is perhaps now possible as it never really was before to read his work without the phantasm of an author or a father coming to master our reading' (9). For Tom Cohen, however, the father and his proper name remain claustrophobically present, as Derrida's revenant continues to haunt his work, and to bring deconstruction dangerously close to 'Derrideanism' (*Theory* 98). Cohen argues that far from employing the opened space to bring deconstruction to bear on the twenty-first century, Derrida's 'family' calcify Derrida's texts by enshrining the father's concerns:

Derrida's death spawned an ensemble of able and often admirable critical scion given over to talking about 'ethics', about 'religion', to exegetical commentary, to recuperation and stitching back, to almost outbiddings of mourning and friendship shaded into a quiet stupor of orthodox and

policing networks, to writing for one another, to its auto-immune phase.  
(*Theory* 156 n.14)

This jealous guarding of Derrida's legacy is, for Cohen, no more than a legitimate continuation of Derrida's 'obsess[ion] over the survival of his corpus' (*Theory* 97). This fixation, Cohen argued in an earlier essay, caused Derrida to fabricate 'a "late Derrida"' who could 'enter into the main arteries of humanistic traditions ... in order ... to counter the entrapping clichés of him as anti humanist "post-structuralist" (he saw what happened to de Man)' ('Geomorphic Fold' 78). In a 1993 interview with Bernard Stiegler, Derrida said: 'I'm not under any illusion about the possibility of my controlling or appropriating what I do, what I say or what I am'. 'But', he continued,

I do want—this is the point of every struggle, of every drive in this domain—I would at least like the things I say and do not to be immediately and clearly used towards ends I feel I must oppose. I don't want to appropriate my product, but for the same reason, I don't want others doing this towards ends I feel I must fight. (*Ecographies* 37)

Derrida began to think about posthumous readings: in *The Ear of the Other* he speculates, specifically regarding Nietzsche, on 'the line of credit extended to a signature, about delaying the date of expiration, about the posthumous difference between him [Nietzsche] and his work' (23). Having argued that Nietzsche is not innocent of the National Socialist appropriation of his work—'There is nothing absolutely contingent about the fact that the only political regimen to have *effectively* brandished his name as a major and official banner was Nazi' (31)—Derrida was not unaware of the ways in which his own signature and proper name could be posthumously employed. And so he moved towards a protection of his legacy, not only from detractors, but also from his inheritors. Cohen coins the term '*Derridawars*' ('Tactless' 3) to refer to the struggles between Derrida and his academic heirs, arguing that in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* we do not witness a gesture of connection or homage but see Derrida 'tracking ... a renegade off-spring, one who imagines himself to have surpassed deconstruction' ('Tactless' 6). Cohen notes struggles within Derrida's texts as he reacted to 'betrayal' by his academic family, who, in 'wanting to be heir and official extension, wanting to build a more or less officious "deconstructive" network' ('Tactless' 10) move too soon, too quickly, and 'must be yanked back, reinscribed, *exscribed*, cut off and restituted, in a manner bearing on what might come "after" J.D.'s writing' ('Tactless' 8). While Martin McQuillan, addressing *On Touching* in an earlier issue of *Derrida Today*, never expressly relates Derrida's criticism of Nancy to a preservation of his legacy, his outline of Derrida's analysis supports Cohen's argument. He writes that 'Derrida turns on Nancy some of the guns that are usually trained on himself by others (the self-

deconstructing text, the transcendental reduction, the excessive word play that destroys the category) and lets Nancy have both barrels' (210). In other words,

'There is deconstruction and there is deconstruction!' ... There is what Derrida does and there is a use of the term 'deconstruction' in an institutional context as an act of affiliation to a certain reading project but the work pursued under this name may or may not be any more 'deconstructive', i.e. Derridean, than work going on outside it. (206)

McQuillan's argument implies a certain insistence by Derrida that deconstruction retain his name, his trace, and his *intentions*. Within Derrida's texts is the struggle between a desire to prevent deconstruction from stagnating as inheritors repeat and ventriloquize the voice of the master, and the wish that deconstruction remain recognisable as *Derrida's* legacy, and used as Derrida would have wished.

This conflict within Derrida and deconstruction can be linked—*perhaps*—to a certain change within Derrida's writing in later texts, although there are immediate and inevitable difficulties to any commentary on changes in Derrida's style. In an interview given by Derrida in 1975 his hapless interviewer attempts to divide Derrida's texts into three category types:

theoretical or critical texts of a relatively classical form ...; interventions on certain political or institutional questions ...; and more wide-ranging texts which are unclassifiable according to normal standards ... in which you implicate yourself, along with your 'body', your 'desire', your 'phantasms', in a ways that perhaps no philosopher has ever done until now. (*Points* 5)

Derrida responds by outlining how, in the texts that have been classified as 'theoretical', the demonstration is 'constantly overrun, carried beyond itself by a scene of language, of counter-signature run adrift, of smuggled-in fiction (generally either unreadable or neglected) which affiliated it with texts that you have classified differently, with *Glas* for example' (*Points* 17). The thetic is always contaminated by the non-thetic, and the ludic always contains the (falsely separated) serious. Furthermore, as Derrida denied that there was ever 'a *political* or *ethical* turn in "deconstruction"' (*Rogues* 39), it is extremely difficult to establish any definite progression or alteration regarding his work's themes or periods. Geoffrey Bennington states that Derrida's *oeuvre*, remarkable, he writes, for its consistency and diversity,

cannot be divided into styles or periods: even the quite widespread idea that there are first of all very philosophical texts and then, after *Glas* (1974), a

more 'literary' and less 'serious' tendency, is doubtful as to its empirical accuracy and irrelevant to our understanding. (13-14)<sup>1</sup>

While acknowledging this contamination, a shift in Derrida's texts is nonetheless generally recognised; in *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac 'insist on a visible mutation in Derrida's writings since the late 1980s' (6). J. Hillis Miller states that 'Derrida wrote so much about politics in his last decades that it might even be possible to assert (not quite truthfully) that he became almost exclusively a political philosopher, a political theorist, or even a political scientist' (229). The term 'Late Derrida' has featured in the titles of books, conferences and special editions of journals, and while a measured reluctance to periodise is generally exhibited, a general sense of transition and change within Derrida's texts is acknowledged, both in content and in style. Phrases change; while the phrase *il faut* (one must) figures so extensively in his later texts that Elizabeth Rottenberg writes of 'the never-ending, unrelenting "il faut" of deconstruction' (*Negotiations* 1), in 1976 Derrida referred to it as an 'ethico-pedagogico-professorial prescription' (*Acts of Literature* 19) that should be avoided. The 'poetico-literary performative' (*Acts of Literature* 55) is first used with approbation to describe an event in writing which gives space for the invention of the new, but gradually becomes associated with conformity and intentionality: 'In the strict sense, a performative still presupposes too much conventional institution to break the mirror' ('Psyche' 46). The ways in which difference and singularity are investigated change, as an overt ethical and political engagement takes precedence, and images of technology, medicine, justice, democracy and rights come to the fore. And the style changes: as elusive a point as style is, Derrida's later mode of writing evinced, overall, a tendency minutely to examine the paths a term and concept might take, rather than performatively trace the steps along those paths.

As Derrida's career developed, the amount of time he spent reading, explaining and referencing his own texts also increased. The conferences and symposia at which he spoke were often dedicated either to Derrida's texts or to specifically 'deconstructive' readings, and so Derrida either explicated themes from previous works, or performed a deconstructive engagement. More and more Derrida tied his texts to previous texts, noting how paths taken in one provide a ghostly side road to another, so that, as Catherine David said in a 1983 interview, 'To read you, one has to have read Derrida' (*Points* 117). Readings of Nietzsche and Hegel become, as Eugenio Donato pointed out, a performance of 'Derrida rereading *Of Grammatology* today' (*Ear of the Other* 55). Texts and themes previously thought apolitical were revealed to have a political dimension—in *Rogues* Derrida states that 'The thinking of the political has always been a thinking of *différance* and the

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<sup>1</sup> This was written in 1991; it is possible that Bennington is less definite about this now.

thinking of *différance* always a thinking *of* the political, of the contours and limits of the political' (39). An excellent example of this re-reading and re-engagement is given by Samir Haddad when he compares a passage from *The Politics of Friendship* with a citation of the same passage in *Rogues*. In *The Politics of Friendship* Derrida writes that, with regards to democracy, the limit between the conditional and the unconditional 'will have inscribed a self-deconstructive force in the very motif of democracy' (105). In *Rogues* he inserts an additional note: '... will have inscribed a self-deconstructive force [*I could have in fact said 'autoimmune' force*] in the very motif of democracy' [emphasis added] (90). As Haddad writes, although he rather understates the case, 'In thus suggesting that we today read "self-deconstructive" as "autoimmune", *in changing names*, Derrida ever so gently brings the earlier analysis into line with the latter' (511). Derrida citing Derrida inaugurated a new text. Derrida reading Derrida changed Derrida.

Derrida's texts operate in ironic, aphoristic relation to each other, each a foreword and an epilogue to another, each a reengagement and a rewriting, independent and conjoined. Each text is in counterpoint with every other text, in time and out of time. Each new text changes every other text, always a preface to a further fragment. Hence 'Envois' is 'the preface to a book I have not [yet?] written' (*The Post Card* 3), and *The Politics of Friendship* 'resembles a lengthy preface. It would rather be the foreword to a book I would one day wish to write' (vii). As Derrida's neologisms and paleonyms increased in number and relations, a corresponding tendency to explicate and trace those connections is visible. The deconstructive interest in undoing and unsealing became not so much an act of engagement but of *disclosure*, of showing how the knots were tied. While Derrida could never be accused of presenting 'easy' or instantly accessible papers, the content of these pieces was often a *performance* of a deconstructive reading that operated to explicate deconstruction. Derrida, in a sense, demonstrated how Derrida would read the topic in question: Derrida performed Derrida reading.

As Derrida was increasingly called upon to read Derrida in academic contexts—and we must question if Derrida was the best reader of his own work—he was increasingly called upon to talk about Derrida in situations on the borders of the academic and the popular: the interview. It is extremely difficult to ascertain precisely the number of interviews Derrida gave—in *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue*, Elizabeth Roudinesco estimates that Derrida 'participated in approximately one hundred interviews' (199 n.10), although Peggy Kamuf speculates that the number could have reached five hundred (87). From *Points, Paper Machine, Negotiations*, the numerous volumes that contain interviews, for example *Sovereignties in Question, Who Comes After the Subject, Applying: To*

*Derrida* etc., the film and screenplay, and online resources<sup>2</sup> a sense of the increasing volume from his first in 1968 to his last, *Learning to Live Finally* in 2004, can at least be ascertained. But regardless of the precise number, the interview was a forum that Derrida rarely engaged in without both a metacommentary on the form itself, and a certain distaste: 'Ah interviews! Yes, I have always suffered from the *laws of the interview*. After several decades, I really must recognise that I have too often done what I said I didn't like doing' [emphasis added] (*Paper Machine* 136).

This article looks at Derrida's reading of the laws of the interview within his interviews, as he uses the interview to establish the interview's inadequacies, and thereby find the excess within its limits. It then proposes that a certain contamination by those laws occurred in Derrida's later works, resulting in a mode of exposure and confession that can be termed autoimmune. The autoimmune subject guards and exposes itself, protects and endangers itself, preserves and compromises all and a part. Autoimmunity is an inter-view, a critical look, a self-deconstruction, a view inside that undoes what it sees, Medusa turned on herself. Autoimmunity means that the entity turns on itself, and 'must then come to resemble [its] enemies, to corrupt itself and threaten itself in order to protect itself against their threats' (*Rogues* 40). As the later Derrida began to demarcate his legacy with increasing precision and exactitude, he began to cause deconstruction to turn on itself and step towards a certain antithetical immunity.

## **2: Derrida on the Laws of the Interview**

'On the whole,' said Lévi-Strauss, 'and all things considered, the interview is a detestable genre, to which the intellectual poverty of the age obliges one to submit more often than one would like' (85-86). 'What if', asks Derrida, 'all the questions put to me about what I write came down to fleeing what I write?' (*Points* 10-11). The word *interview* comes from the old French *entrevue*, to have a glimpse of, and *s'entrevoir*, to see each other, but the mutual insight of the *interview* is all too often no more than a ruthless overview, an oral summary of that which cannot be summarised and was designed for the page: 'it is difficult for me to *talk* about it first of all because these texts explain themselves, in a mode that does not allow for the kind of verbal overview you have invited me to give here' (*Points* 12). Derrida repeatedly expressed exasperation with a mode of unidirectional engagement whose price was 'simplification, impoverishment, distortion, displacement of argument by symptom' (*Points* 10), and whose 'codes, demands, contracts, investments, and surplus values' (*Points* 9) were those of the

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jacques-derrida/bibliography/>> and <<http://hydra.humanities.uci.edu/derrida/jdentre.html>>.

consumer who has purchased a backstage pass on the understanding of intimate insights and revelations: “An interview with Derrida? At last maybe we’re going to understand something about him!” (*Points* 115). The interview is ostensibly impossible, Derrida says, as it is ‘a law of genre that orders us always *to make as if*’ (Borradori and Derrida 135)—*as if* we are being spontaneous, *as if* the spontaneous were the truthful, *as if* truth can be so easily packaged. *As if* there is a live event, *as if* editing does not exist, *as if* presence can be unambiguously present on our pages or through our television screens. The codes of the interview demand revelation, confession, speed, accessibility, summary, and they present the illusion of presence, immediacy, reality and truth. They are phonocentric and logocentric, making manifest the latent, repressed or obscured, the media’s talking cure. But this truth and immediacy is, unsurprisingly, false, as the interview is ‘an extremely artificial device’ (*Points* 133), as “live” communication and “real time” are never pure’, and ‘permit neither intuition nor transparency, nor any perception unmarked by interpretation or technical intervention’ (*Negotiations* 88).

The interview strives to learn things by heart, that is, to assimilate the core or truth of an argument without the vagaries or defences of a supposedly deceptive medium—written language. It seeks to uncover, without prevarication, play, or extraneous detail, speaking plainly and directly, exactly what the interviewee’s intentions were, and what her meaning is. It presupposes a determinable, translatable, univocal meaning that can be uncovered and presented, simply and immediately. It presumes that the mode of expression is separate from the content, so that an idea presented in an ornate or elaborate style will remain the same when expressed simply and plainly. It thus makes it hard ‘to respect ... the indirect conditions or invisible detours of the question’ (*Negotiations* 91). Speed is the key—‘I’m going too fast, of course; surely I’m being unjust; the interview genre elicits that; I’d refine this if we had the time and the texts in hand’ (*Negotiations* 174)—as speed becomes truth, and the quick answer is the candid answer as it taps into meaning without the activity of the censor.<sup>3</sup>

The interview presumes that ‘what is there is there and what is not is not’ (*Points* 6). While the interview recognises the inseparability of the thinker and the thought, it attempts in a rudimentary, pseudo-psychoanalytic way—‘What was your father’s name?’, ‘How old were you when you left Algeria?’, ‘Do you have specific memories of that fear?’ (*Points* 120)—to explain the thoughts through

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<sup>3</sup> While the slow and careful route may, in a sense, multiply defences against the impromptu, the careful path will always contain improvisation. Defences are always betrayed. Improvisation—possible and impossible, as there are always filters and delays—is not something Derrida was opposed to. His stance was never against improvised responses, but *against the presumption that improvising is somehow more ‘true’*. Or indeed possible.

the thinker. Thus, under the laws of the interview, deconstruction *is* x. And deconstruction *is* x *because* Jacques Derrida, among other things, “was-born-in-El Biar-on-the-outskirts-of-Algiers-in-a-petit-bourgeois-family-of-assimilated-Jews” (*Points* 119-20).

Antoine Spire asks, ‘Isn’t it necessary to simplify in order to spread knowledge? And when we simplify, are we absolutely and irreducibly led into betrayal? Do you think that all interviews are betrayals, because they can’t enter into the details?’ (*Paper Machine* 148). Derrida replies that, while simplifications are sometimes necessary to transmit knowledge, in general there must be preventative rules, or precautions, so that one offers ‘the best or least bad simplification’ (*Paper Machine* 148). In any text some simplification will always occur, as one can never present, in perfect detail, every aspect of each case. And, ‘perhaps, perhaps, it is better to simplify a little while letting something get through, like contraband, rather than to be silent with the excuse that one can never be equal to the complexity of things’ (*Paper Machine* 149). In betrayal arising from simplification, one hopes that a measure of ‘truth’ slips in between the glances. The good interview, with the *least bad* simplification, points the receiver elsewhere, towards the longer, less simplified texts, and does not presume to be an end in itself. Derrida’s slow weaving through a textual web may seem like an attempt to ‘bog down the interview, to paralyze it’ (*Points* 37), but is rather an attempt to step in a different direction, and create a new event. As Derrida says, evoking Heidegger,

What matters is the trajectory, the pathway, the crossing—in a word, the experience. The experience is then the method, not a system of rules or technical norms. ... In an interview, even if one repeats the same thing, the same ‘contents’—even so, the situation, the context, the mode of address, the addressees, and the signature are all different every time, and it’s the impromptu of this ‘situation’ that is what the reader or listener is waiting for, I suppose. Otherwise, it is always better to read the books. (*Paper Machine* 137)

The ‘good’ interview must be an event, a different path, an experience. It must be recognised as a plurality of voices, a multiplicity of addresses and addressees. Not a direct presentation of a univocal truth achieved through plain speech, pithy, quotable summaries and touching biographical reminiscences.

The press interview is thus clearly, if problematically, distinguished from the polylogues that Derrida wrote himself, the dialogues held with other thinkers, the questions asked at the end of papers, and the round-table discussions. How the interview might break out from its limitations is performed in the ‘interview’ Derrida wrote for *Le Monde* in 1982, in which he pretends to be interviewed by,



we presume, the editor Christian Delacampagne. While Derrida retains the basic position of interviewee the contribution made by the questioner greatly outweighs the normal pattern—the questioner is erudite, familiar with Derrida's style and way of reading, and willing to debate and digress. But the phonocentric preference of the interview is not lost—the interviewer suggests that Derrida 'dictate [his] books over the telephone' (*Points* 174), and the delayed, edited, mediated presence of the interview is thereby remarked upon. But in the space permitted by a learned and knowledgeable partner, Derrida is able to discuss the performative, the privileging of speech over writing, of plain language over the academic, of the specialised over the general, and end with the break-down of the (telephone) line and the refusal to recognise the spoken event as the final text.

The film *Derrida*, which primarily comprises interviews, moves even closer towards the 'least bad' interview. As the co-director Amy Ziering Kofman explains, 'It was never of interest to me to make a film about 'who Jacques Derrida is' and present a narrative of his life' (Dick and Kofman 129). *Derrida* attempts to side-step the laws of the interview, to step away from univocal meaning, from 'a conventional PBS or BBC type documentary narrative that biographically recount[s] facts about Derrida's life in a standard documentary fashion' (Dick and Kofman 23). Instead, Ziering Kofman and Kirby Dick create a work that is both public and private, academic and anecdotal. A biography on Derrida, inheriting from Derrida an approach to Derrida and to biography. *Derrida* moves slowly, containing meandering shots accompanied by Ziering Kofman's otherworldly voiceovers from Derrida's texts. It questions representation, and problematises the subject and the means of the biography, knowing that, as Dick says, the work cannot present Jacques Derrida, at home, unplugged, and instead 'creates a doppelganger of the subject' (Dick and Kofman 47), a portrait of the artist who answers the question but who comes no closer to an ultimate truth. Instead it presents a fragmented, fractal subject(ile), a lower case 'i'. This 'i' is mirrored in the title of the volume of the screenplay: *Derrida* is written in large, white letters, with the exception of the 'i', which is in gold. The subject, always in lower case, is off-centre, a subjectile, and yet always a focus, a draw, a distraction. It glitters, it is and is not gold. It is an interview, and it is not.

Within the interview, Derrida says, even in its most naive formulation, it is expected that he will 'defend, justify, consolidate things I have done these last years. ... And even if I were to indicate, in an autocritical mode, such and such a limit, or negative aspect, or strategic weakness, would anyone be duped by the manoeuvre of reappropriation?' (*Points* 10). The interview, as imparting the immediacy of *phonē* and the permanence of truth, is broken down by Derrida within the interviews—his comments on their laws work to reveal their very impossibility. It also reveals that the interview presumes upon a certain defence

and reappropriation. It is precisely that delimiting and gathering back that Derrida assimilates into his later texts in an auto-immune act that turns his texts towards the immune.

### 3: Autoimmunity

In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida writes:

the living ego is auto-immune. To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego ... it must ... take the immune defences apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once *for itself and against itself*. (177)

In *Rogues* Derrida describes *autoimmunity* as the ‘strange illogical logic by which a living being can spontaneously destroy, in an autonomous fashion, the very thing within it that is supposed to protect it against the other, to immunize it against the aggressive intrusion of the other’ (123). The strange, illogical logic of the ‘autoimmune contradiction or counterindication’ (*Rogues* 83) is a step ‘both self-protecting and self-destroying, at once remedy and poison’ (Borradori and Derrida 124)—the contradictory force of weakness that operates within a structure and causes it to undo or attack (part of) itself. Autoimmunity is the ‘*double bind* of threat and chance, not alternatively or by turns promise and/or threat but threat *in* the promise itself’ (*Rogues* 82). It is a force of weakness, a suicidal drive of threat and chance, promise and perjury, of (ir)responsibility.

Derrida argues in ‘Faith and Knowledge’ that religion’s denial and use of technology demonstrates an autoimmune relation. Religion is of the *heilig*, the holy, of the ‘pure, non-contaminated, untouched, the sacred’ (‘Faith and Knowledge’ 61), that which is—or should be—immune from the contaminations of reproduction. And yet religion ‘is immediately transmitted, massively “marketed” and available on CD-ROM’ (‘Faith and Knowledge’ 62); it reproduces and disseminates itself through the (impure) technology of iterability. Religion depends upon the unsound and contaminated—this impurity is at its ‘core’—and yet it condemns and attacks this part of itself as if it were separate and other:

all self protection of the unscathed, of the safe and sound, of the sacred (*heilig*, holy) must protect itself against its own protection, its own police, its own power of rejection, in short against its own, which is to say, against its own immunity. It is this terrifying but fatal logic of the *auto-immunity of the unscathed*. (‘Faith and Knowledge’ 79-80)

Derrida’s first prolonged engagement with autoimmunity specifically engages with technology and the media, with globalisation and ‘tele-technoscience’ noted

as that which is both utilised and condemned. When technology is attacked by religion, religion is seen to effectively launch an attack on itself—an attack on a part of itself that it has designated other. And while this attack is fatal, ‘autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes—which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive’ (*Negotiations* 152). Autoimmunity is the aporia that opens another path, that has ‘an internal contradiction, an indecidability, that is, an internal-external, nondialectisable antinomy that risks paralyzing and thus calls for the event of the interruptive decision’ (*Negotiations* 35).

In *Rogues* Derrida links autoimmunity to democracy, which he understands as improper, mutable, elusive and undecidable, always insufficient to meet its own needs and demands, pervertible and perfectible.<sup>4</sup> He uses the example of the 1992 Algerian elections, in which democratic elections were halted as the government felt that the electoral process would end—democratically—in the cessation of democracy. Similarly, in response to the September 11 attacks, the American government restricted its own freedom and democratic processes, deciding, in order to save democracy and freedom, to temporally suspend (a degree of) democracy and freedom. In so doing it added friendly fire to the loss of life. In protecting itself, democracy turns on itself, and ‘must then come to resemble these enemies, to corrupt itself and threaten itself in order to protect itself against their threats’ (*Rogues* 40).

Derrida argues that freedom and sovereignty always presume an empowered self with a certain power to decide, to speak for itself and know itself.<sup>5</sup> But as soon as the sovereign self tries to place itself or explain itself, it begins the process of autoimmunity. In defining itself, sovereignty/the self/democracy opens itself up to counter-interpretations that dissolve any conceptualisation of the entity as in possession of an absolute ‘natural’ right or essence. The autoimmune process thus does not simply consist in attacking one’s own defences, a murder/suicide,

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<sup>4</sup> Democracy is hence better reinscribed, Derrida writes, as the *democracy to come*. *Democracy to come* has the structure of a promise, but a promise/perjury, an aporetic ‘force *without* force, incalculable singularity *and* calculable equality, commensurability *and* incommensurability, heteronomy *and* autonomy, indivisible sovereignty *and* divisible or shared sovereignty’ (*Rogues* 86). Democracy to come *is* autoimmune, overstepping itself, transgressing itself. It is a different thinking of the event, an event that is unique and unforeseeable. A *mondalization*, a thinking beyond national borders, of justice, and of self-criticism.

<sup>5</sup> As Derrida points out, too often the self so in command of itself is ‘master in the masculine: the father, husband, son, or brother, the proprietor, owner or seignior’ (*Rogues* 12).

but in compromising the self, the *autos*—and this ipseity. It consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising *sui-* or *self-*referentiality, the *self-* or *sui-* of suicide itself. Autoimmunity is more or less suicidal, but, more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity. (*Rogues* 45)

Suicide may kill a body, but autoimmune suicide does away with the very concept of a self, annihilating suicide as there is no longer a self present enough to itself to take its own life.

#### **4: The Autoimmune Interview**

As Derrida grew concerned about his legacy, his texts began to take on the weight of his re-reading and re-marking them. But this re-engagement is not so much a re-writing as a re-assimilation—a defence, a justification, a consolidation—and as such the structure exhibited is that of an interview—Derrida reading Derrida is *Derrida interviewing Derrida*, and asking himself questions such as ‘How would you demarcate your corpus?’... ‘Describe how you would distance yourself from the misreading of detractors and protégées.’... ‘Could you expand on how you would extend deconstruction into fields of the political and the ethical?’... In outlining a legacy through the auto-interview—albeit an interview deconstructed and transgressed—deconstruction turns on itself, reading itself through the structure of its other: so much do the laws of the interview concentrate on orality and presence, immediacy and psychobiography that deconstruction’s antithesis may well be named *interview*. Thus, in moving towards a plain defence and delimitation of deconstruction Derrida causes it to take on traits of its opposite, of its ‘enemies, to corrupt itself and threaten itself in order to protect itself against their threats’ (*Rogues* 40). Thus in interviewing himself Derrida performs the tautology/paradox of an *autoimmune self-deconstruction*; ‘a self-deconstructive (*auto-déconstructrice*) force (I could have in fact said ‘autoimmune’ force)’ (*Rogues* 90). A self-deconstructive force is an autoimmune force, as it means that part of the text—a term, a trope, a thesis—turns on the text, or the text itself breaks itself down, that is, pushes itself to an interruptive transgressive excess, by opening itself to itself-as-other.

In self-deconstructing, the text autoimmunely turns on itself, threatening itself through interruption by and conjoining with its opposite. This invasion from within is not heterogeneous to deconstruction, since deconstruction, like democracy, *has to* be autoimmune in order to be itself. But being itself opens it to the undoing of itself. Deconstruction, like religion, needs technology, iterability and the interview’s modes of presentation, authorship, and summary in order to be itself, and thus interrupts and turns from itself. If autoimmunity is ‘that strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, “itself” works to

destroy its own protection, to immunise itself *against* its “own” immunity’ (Borradori and Derrida 94), in the case of deconstruction an ironic twist occurs that turns autoimmunity on itself. The *(ir)responsibility* that is deconstruction is forced to comply with certain legal and social ‘responsibilities’—present your work accessibly, systematise and sign your text simply and on the dotted line—and thereby become responsible. However, this form of logocentric, reductive responsibility is—should be—an anathema to deconstruction, and so becoming ‘responsible’ in this sense is, for deconstruction, an autoimmune response of irresponsibility, which pushes the non-method of deconstruction closer to a method.<sup>6</sup> If deconstruction involves a turning towards radical difference, deconstruction then becomes open to closure, welcoming of method, convivial with phonocentrism, and cosy with the interview. In other words, deconstruction tends towards what it is not, that is, towards the protected, safeguarded, hostile *immune*.

The countersignature of the other—even when the other bears the same name—comes ‘to *lead it* [the text] *off* elsewhere, so running the risk of *betraying it*’ (*Acts of Literature* 69). Thus the countersignature of the other is an autoimmune act: ‘you have to give yourself over singularly to singularity, but singularity then does have to share itself out and so compromise itself, *promise to compromise itself*’ (*Acts of Literature* 69). Each text is autoimmune, an auto-interpretation or self-critique that both turns every text into a writing of the self, and in that process undoes the self. The signature signs the contamination of the self and the other, as each text is undersigned by the self, a signature that is already a signing of alterity. But under the laws of the interview, autoimmunity turns on itself, and the signing of alterity and the subjectile becomes an (attempted) signing of *immunity* by a pure, autonomous subject. The auto-interviewing of Derrida’s work requires that deconstruction present a *Thinker*, a responsible subject to whom questions can be directed, and from whom explanations and accessible summaries can be gleaned. This is not, of course, to imply that the interview is alone in provoking the demand for a responsible, authoritative signature, but that the interview is *premised* on taking the signature, so to speak, and making it account for itself. If every text is haunted by a signature, an interview is *séance*, a making-present of an absent signatory. If deconstruction was an autoimmune ‘i’, under the laws of the interview, and towards the end of Derrida’s career, deconstruction turned on itself and began to move towards the immune ‘I’. The self (re)born from interviews is a different self, but a self moving away from difference and the signature of the other, and towards the same, as inter-view is forcibly stabilised as interview. The auto-interview is thus symptomatic of a

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<sup>6</sup> This autoimmunity operates both in terms of the attack on *part of the self* outlined in ‘Faith and Knowledge’—Derrida in autoimmune relation to the section of himself that is deconstruction—and the attack on the ‘*whole*’ self in *Rogues*—Derrida/deconstruction in autoimmune relation to Derrida/deconstruction.

certain jealousy—a certain blindness—and a rather more zealous protection of the legacy, as deconstruction moves away from being ‘*what happens*’ (a formulation Derrida frequently repeated), to being ‘*what happens when Derrida reads*’. Derrida shows concerns with the survival of his texts, and the living on of a deconstruction in his name and underwritten by him. The insistence on continued existence in recognisable form meant that the later Derrida was less open to openness, less willing to follow arbitrary paths, more eager to detail and explain and present. In the drive to survive, Derrida turns deconstruction towards certain laws of the interview, and deconstruction autoimmunely becomes immune.

In a 1983 interview Anne Berger said to Derrida: ‘I don’t know if I’m addressing the man or the “writer-thinker”, I don’t know what their relation is’ (*Points* 132). Their relation, Derrida has shown us, is one of mutual, dynamic contamination, as the public and the private Derrida merge together. As Derrida stated repeatedly,

I do not believe in the conceptual value of a rigorous distinction between the private and the public. There can be the singular and the secret, but these resist the ‘private’ as much as they do the ‘public’. In what I write one should be able to perceive that the boundary between the autobiographical and the political is subject to a certain strain. (*Negotiations* 17-18)

The contamination between categories and the gathering that so fascinated Derrida generates its own autoimmune problems. An autobiographical, confessional text requires the bringing together of all the threads that explain, expose, present and re-present the self. It presumes upon the existence of a pre-existent subject which then outlines its own story. But not only does the act of gathering conjoin the threads of the other, it also assembles threads of events that never took place: ‘Still today there remains in me an obsessive desire to save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens—or *fails to happen*’ (*Acts of Literature* 34). The gathering attempts to present a stable, unified, self-present self, but by gathering truth, truth is produced, events are changed. The self that gathers is wholly different to the selves that are gathered:

There is not a constituted subject that engages itself at a given moment in writing for some reason or another. It is *given* by writing, by the other: *born* as we were bizarrely saying a moment ago, born by being given, delivered, offered, and betrayed all at once. (*Points* 347)

Thus the self preserved is a different self, and the self that interviews a different self again. There is a blind spot as one reflects, an invisible trait that cannot be captured as one looks at oneself looking. The *Augenblick*, the blinking of *difference* is ‘the law of the inter-view’ (*Memoirs of the Blind* 55), and very much a

blind view. Preserving and gathering is suicide, but within the interview takes the form of a death masquerading as life, a false survival of the preserved undead.

The later Derrida is a Derrida in interview, asking himself questions that lead to immune signatures and revenants of presence. The result was an autoimmune relation at the 'heart' of deconstruction, and thus the legacy left to us to inherit is the contaminated and competing binary of deconstruction/Derrida studies. While autoimmunity may be self-deconstruction (*Rogues* 90), the self-deconstruction of deconstruction turns the wheel back to metaphysics of presence, and immunity.

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