

EFTICHIS PIROVOLAKIS

Reading Derrida & Ricoeur

IMPROBABLE ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN
DECONSTRUCTION AND HERMENEUTICS



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Reading Derrida and Ricoeur

SUNY series: Insinuations: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Literature

Charles Shepherdson, editor

Reading Derrida and Ricoeur

Improbable Encounters between
Deconstruction and Hermeneutics

Eftichis Pirovolakis

SUNY
P R E S S

“The Word: Giving, Naming, Calling” by Jacques Derrida was originally published in French as: “La parole: Donner, nommer, appeler,” in *Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Myriam Revault d’Allones and François Azouvi, L’Herne, no. 81 (Paris: Éditions de L’Herne, 2004) 19–25, Copyright © 2004 Éditions de L’Herne. It is reproduced here with permission by Éditions de L’Herne and Marguerite Derrida. English translation © 2010 Eftichis Pirovolakis.

Published by State University of New York Press, Albany

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For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

Production by Eileen Meehan
Marketing by Anne M. Valentine

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pirovolakis, Eftichis, 1970–

Reading Derrida and Ricoeur : improbable encounters between deconstruction and hermeneutics / Eftichis Pirovolakis.

p. cm. — (SUNY series, insinuations: philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4384-2949-6 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Deconstruction. 2. Derrida, Jacques—Criticism and interpretation. 3. Ricoeur, Paul—Criticism and interpretation. 4. Phenomenology and literature. 5. Hermeneutics. 6. Literature—Philosophy. 7. Criticism—History—20th century. I. Title.

PN98.D43P57 2010

801'.95—dc22

2009014349

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Antony and Cleopatra

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Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Chapter 1</i> Ricoeur on Husserl and Freud: From a Perceptual to a Reflective Present	13
Ricoeur Reading Husserl: The Thick Present and Continuity	14
Freud's Quantitative Hypothesis and Unconscious Autonomy	25
From a Perceptual to a Reflective Present	31
<i>Chapter 2</i> Derrida and Rhythmic Discontinuity	43
Husserl's Aporia: Discontinuity and Repetition	44
The Necessary Possibility of Difference and Syncopated Temporality	52
Freud: Permeability and Impermeability, Life and Death	58
First Inscription and <i>Nachträglichkeit</i>	67
Scriptural Metaphorics	73
<i>Chapter 3</i> Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self	83
The Singularity of the Speaking Subject	84
<i>Idem</i> and <i>Iipse</i> : From Narrative Identity to the Ethical Self	91
Benevolent Selfhood	97
Oneself as Another	103
Concluding Remarks	111
<i>Chapter 4</i> Secret Singularities	119
Spacing, Iterability, Signatures	120
Secrets of Speech	130
Originary Mourning: In Memory of the Absolutely Other	138
An Unexperienced Experience: The Absolute <i>Arrivant</i>	144
Expropriation	155

Conclusion	161
Appendix: "The Word: Giving, Naming, Calling," by Jacques Derrida	167
Notes	177
Bibliography	207
Index	219

Acknowledgments

In the course of writing this book, I have been indebted to the support and friendship of many people. I would like to thank Laura Marcus and Vicky Margree for their help and vital advice; Sean Gaston for his friendship and numerous thought-provoking conversations on Derrida and Ricoeur; the anonymous readers for State University of New York Press for their encouraging and constructive comments; and the series editor Charles Shepherdson and James Peltz for helping the finished manuscript through its last stages.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Joanna Hodge and Nick Royle for examining my Sussex doctoral thesis on which this book is based, for kindly making available to me some of their unpublished papers and for their very positive contributions towards the completion of this project. I am especially grateful to Céline Surprenant for her vital supervisory role during the later stages of the research, and for her generosity in reading very closely and offering incisive criticism and invaluable advice on the original manuscript. I am also greatly indebted to Geoff Bennington for the range of knowledge he has brought to my work, for helping me clarify my arguments at certain important points during the early stages of this project and, most of all, for continuous inspiration and encouragement since 1993. Very special and singular thanks are due to Vassiliki Dimitropoulou for her patience, understanding, and overall support.

Finally, I would like to record my gratitude to the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation for its financial assistance between 2001 and 2004, and to Marguerite Derrida and Éditions de L'Herne for kindly authorizing the translation into English of Jacques Derrida's "La parole: Donner, nommer, appeler," which appears here as an appendix. Some of the arguments on Ricoeur's narrative theory in the second section of chapter 3 have been anticipated in my " 'Donner À Lire': Unreadable Narratives," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 19, no. 2 (2008): 100–122.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations will be used in the main body of the text and the notes. They will be followed by volume number, where appropriate, and page number to the English translation. Details of the edition referred to appear under the author's name and title in the bibliography.

Works by Jacques Derrida

- AF *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*
- AP *Aporias: Dying—Awaiting (One Another at) the “Limits of Truth”*
- FSW “Freud and the Scene of Writing”
- GD *The Gift of Death*
- LI “Limited Inc a b c . . .”
- MPM *Mémoires: For Paul de Man*
- PG *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy*
- PM “Perhaps or Maybe”
- SEC “Signature Event Context”
- SP *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*
- SF “To Speculate—On ‘Freud’ ”
- VM “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas”
- W “The Word: Giving, Naming, Calling”

Works by Paul Ricoeur

FM	<i>Fallible Man</i>
FP	<i>Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation</i>
H	<i>Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology</i>
IT	<i>Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning</i>
MHF	<i>Memory, History, Forgetting</i>
OA	<i>Oneself as Another</i>
QS	“The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology”
RM	<i>The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language</i>
SWE	“Structure, Word, Event”
TA	<i>From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II</i>
TN	<i>Time and Narrative</i>

Works by Sigmund Freud

SE	<i>The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud</i>
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Works by Edmund Husserl

CM	<i>Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology</i>
<i>Ideas I</i>	<i>Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology</i>
PITC	<i>The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness</i>

Introduction

An encounter simultaneously tangential, tendentious, and intangible begins to emerge but also slips away.

—Jacques Derrida, “The Word: Giving, Naming, Calling”

Any account of the contentious relation between Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida cannot fail to be marked, initially at least, by a feeling of melancholy and a certain mournfulness. Not only because the two thinkers, having recently passed away within only a few months of each other, will not have the opportunity to contribute to or revisit the various debates in which they jointly participated for approximately fifty years. But also because, even when they were alive, most of their public encounters could be described, at best, as missed opportunities of a fruitful dialogue. Hence a sense of sorrowfulness with respect to the distance separating deconstruction and hermeneutics, those two most influential streams of contemporary European thought.

The first public instance of a miscarried dialogue was a roundtable discussion following a conference on “Communication” in Montreal in 1971, organized by The Association of the Society for Philosophy in the French Language.¹ Both Ricoeur and Derrida contributed formal presentations to the conference and actively participated in the roundtable discussion, which was dominated, to say the least, by an animated confrontation between them.² A debate between the two thinkers apparently did take place at the time. Considering, however, that the word *debate* implies the willingness of each partner in a conversation to resolve any initial disagreement by being open to what the other has to say, or, according to its Latin *etymon*, the reversal of an incipient discordance,³ it is clear that this exchange constituted, rather, a spirited altercation. And even though Derrida, on three or four occasions, begins responding by declaring that he agrees with Ricoeur, he hastens to temper and complicate this scene of agreement by adding another twist to his argument. Whether the dichotomy between semiology and semantics, the event of signature, or *différance* is at

issue, Ricoeur and Derrida seem to be talking at cross-purposes throughout this discussion. At certain points, the confrontation becomes so lively that the two interlocutors cannot help interrupting each other, thereby rendering the possibility of a patient dialogue very difficult indeed.

Nor is a series of publications that appeared in the seventies on metaphor a debate, as in none of the three texts of this exchange do they fully engage with each other's arguments. The first one, Derrida's "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" (1971), is a "deconstructive" interpretation of the vicissitudes of metaphor in philosophical discourse and does not contain any reference to Ricoeur.⁴ It is the latter who instigates the polemic by providing, in the eighth study of *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (1975), a critical reading of Derrida's essay.⁵ In no way does that reading amount to a detailed response to Derrida. Ricoeur chooses to focus on two very specific aspects of "White Mythology," whose argument, moreover, he hastily assimilates to Heidegger's conviction that the metaphorical exists only within the limits of metaphysics, and to which he devotes just a few pages. Finally, "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" (1978) was supposed to be Derrida's rejoinder to Ricoeur's polemical comments.⁶ Yet, the explicit references to Ricoeur are limited to a few observations to the effect that he mistakenly attributed to Derrida assertions that "White Mythology" was specifically intended to put into question. Derrida goes on to devote the largest part of his essay to a meticulous examination of certain Heideggerian motifs. As a result, their debate on metaphor could also be portrayed as a failed attempt to engage in constructive dialogue.⁷

More recently, in his *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), Ricoeur affirmatively draws attention to Derrida's paradoxical formulation that forgiveness is impossible to the extent that one, in order genuinely to forgive, should forgive the unforgivable. Despite, however, his acknowledgment of an asymmetry between the act of forgiving and the demand to forgive the unforgivable, Ricoeur defines forgiveness, on the first page of his "Epilogue," entitled "Difficult Forgiveness," in terms of an infinite horizon or a task that may be *difficult* but not *impossible*.⁸ Derrida refers to this third instance of disagreement in his brief essay paying tribute to Ricoeur.⁹ He wonders about the difference between an impossible and a difficult forgiveness, and points out that at stake, in the final analysis, is the concept of the "self" and Ricoeur's insistence on determining selfhood on the basis of the "I can."¹⁰ *A contrario*, for Derrida, it is always the other, be that other myself, who decides, forgives, or acts, a structure that, introducing an absolutely irreducible alterity into the heart of the experience of forgiveness, renders problematic its construal as activity or possibility, even a difficult one.

Finally, the controversial issue of selfhood resurfaces in a discussion on the promise, in which both thinkers participated. On the one hand, Ricoeur's "La promesse d'avant la promesse" (2004) contains no reference to Derrida and

explicitly opposes the promise to betrayal and perjury. Invoking J. L. Austin's and John R. Searle's speech acts theory, Ricoeur associates the promise with the self-constancy of a self that ought to keep the word given to the other within a horizon regulated by the Kantian Idea of a universal civil society.¹¹ On the other hand, Derrida distances himself from Ricoeur's reliance on the notion of the "self" and establishes an inextricable link between the promise and an originary pervertibility. The latter points to a certain otherness that cannot be subordinated to the authority of the self, to an ineluctable multiplicity that will always minimally contaminate the self-constancy and ethical responsibility that Ricoeur's "selfhood" prioritizes. Derrida underscores that both speech acts theory and hermeneutics cannot help acknowledging the inherence of this structural pervertibility in every act of promising, even if they strive to minimize its effects and significance.¹²

The sense of failure emanating from these four occasions is aggravated by their reluctance to confront directly or discuss in detail each other's philosophy. With the exception of Derrida's essay on Ricoeur, it is only rarely and merely in passing that one can identify in their writings brief references to each other's work.¹³ They have both been disinclined to embark on a productive and genuine *Auseinandersetzung*, to discuss the other's positions publicly in a way that would have made it easier for their readers clearly to determine the individual standpoints of the two philosophers, and, therefore, the elusive relationship between them. It is in view of such discrepancy and such reticence about explicitly taking on each other that the debate between them can be qualified as an unavailing one.¹⁴ Now that both thinkers have passed away, this abortive dialogue takes on an absolute dimension. The situation today seems irreversible and the opportunity of a fruitful encounter, of which they did not take advantage in the past, appears to have been irremediably missed, something which gives rise to a certain poignancy.

In response to this situation, some commentators tend to affirm an incongruity between the thought of Ricoeur and Derrida, no matter how much they may disagree over the philosophical merit of each thinker. If one briefly focuses on two of the most polarizing approaches, one finds, at one end of the spectrum, J. Hillis Miller's acerbic 1987 review of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* (1983–85). Miller attributes to Ricoeur "a conspicuously reactionary role within current critical theory and practice," and bluntly claims that *all* of his basic presuppositions are mistaken, while opposing such conservatism to Derrida's infinitely more rigorous and radical formulations.¹⁵ At the other end, Stephen H. Clark criticizes Derrida for his dependency "on a series of restrictive and unstated premises derived from structuralism," his profound orthodoxy and tendency "to merge back into the pack, distinguished only by his absence of generosity towards a past history of error." At the same time, Clark praises Ricoeur for his exploratory, radical interventions and "cross-disciplinary thought," which

he designates as post-structuralist.¹⁶ However differently they may perceive the intellectual value of Ricoeur and Derrida, Miller and Clark concur in opposing the two thinkers to one another, in portraying their relation in terms of difference and divergence.

Leonard Lawlor's *Imagination and Chance* offers a much more balanced account. This book-length study does not fall prey to the simplifying temptation to oppose Ricoeur to Derrida by hastily endorsing a watertight division between them. On the contrary, Lawlor cautiously admits that things are much more complicated and synthesizes, in his introduction entitled "A Barely Visible Difference," the similarities between the two philosophers as follows: they both agree that thought cannot achieve self-knowledge by means of intuitive self-reflection, that thought has to externalize and mediate itself in repeatable signs, and that linguistic mediation disallows the possibility of a "complete mediation" whereby the origin would be recovered in all of its determinations.¹⁷ In light of such overwhelming and blurring affinities, the work of Derrida is said to be "almost indistinguishable" from Ricoeur's.¹⁸

And yet, Lawlor identifies "a barely visible difference" as far as the role of mediation is concerned. On the one hand, mediation, for Derrida, is qualified as originary non-presence, discontinuity, and difference, and incorporates an element of chance that forestalls any safe transition from thought back to thought. Derridean *différance*, argues Lawlor, accounts for the unforeseeable accident that is considered to be inherent in the sign's structure; as a result, it cannot be conceived of as circularity or linearity but, rather, as a zigzag movement. On the other hand, Ricoeur's mediation constitutes a dialectical concept articulating origin and end, *archē* and *telos*. Functioning as a safe passage from present back to present, mediation is always placed into the service of presence, identity, immediacy, and continuity. While Ricoeur accepts that mediation is intimately bound up with a distance or absence that prevents it from reaching an absolute degree, still, complete mediation is maintained as a task and distanciation is said to be regulated by the always receding horizon of complete identity.¹⁹

Accordingly, Lawlor purports to have pinned down an almost imperceptible difference, the illumination of which constitutes the thematic axis of *Imagination and Chance*. His conclusion, suggestively entitled "The Difference Illuminated," consolidates the idea of differentiation in terms of four specific motifs: the origin of mediation, the transitional point or mediation itself, the end or destiny of mediation, and, finally, the Idea in the Kantian sense.²⁰ I will return below to Lawlor's fine study, but what needs to be stressed here is his insistence on a difference that, albeit "barely visible," is nonetheless thought to belong to the order of a metaphorical visibility or phenomenality.²¹

As one of my objectives is clearly and accurately to bring into focus the difference between these two most prominent continental philosophers, this

study constitutes a continuation and expansion of Lawlor's project.²² I will juxtapose and reflect on texts in which Derrida and Ricoeur address similar issues or scrutinize the work of thinkers such as Edmund Husserl, Sigmund Freud, and Emmanuel Lévinas. The thematic organization of my project involves interpretative decisions, and, in this respect, a margin of contingency appears inevitable. Without wishing to reduce this margin, I would like to point up some of the reasons that have led to these decisions.

The confrontation staged in the first two chapters, whose thematic focus is the relation between continuity and discontinuity, takes place on the basis of a certain commonality, namely, their shared interest in phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Ricoeur's translation of and commentary on Husserl's *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913) appears as early as 1950 and is the work that establishes his reputation as a leading expert on phenomenology.²³ The appeal of Husserl's thought remains undiminished throughout Ricoeur's career and he keeps returning to it even in his later writings. It is not by chance that his own philosophy has been portrayed as a ramification of "hermeneutic phenomenology."²⁴ Similarly, the early phases of Derrida's career are marked by an intense preoccupation with phenomenology thanks, to a great extent, to Ricoeur's rigorous reflection on the *Ideas I*.²⁵ Derrida's first published work in 1962 is a translation and extended commentary entitled *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*, but, already before that, his higher studies dissertation, written in 1953–54 and published belatedly in 1990, was devoted to the problem of genesis in Husserl's philosophy.²⁶ Both Ricoeur and Derrida turn to Freud in the mid '60s in order to address, in their own idiosyncratic ways, problems left unresolved by Husserl.²⁷

My concentration specifically on the two thinkers' readings, on the one hand, of Husserl's exegesis of temporalization, and, on the other, of psychoanalysis as a radicalization of phenomenology, has been motivated by two interdependent factors. Firstly, I believe that this juxtaposition allows one to gain a vantage point from which to examine the gulf separating Ricoeur's dialectical construal of the present from Derrida's affirmation of discontinuity and interruption. Secondly, by virtue of the fact that Lawlor devotes only a few pages to Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness and makes almost no reference to Freud, my discussion brings to light some aspects of the encounter between Ricoeur and Derrida that perhaps lie beyond the scope of *Imagination and Chance*.²⁸ This exigency of investigating the link between Husserl and Freud is underlined by Derrida's coupling of phenomenology to hermeneutics, both of which he distinguishes from psychoanalysis, a gesture already anticipated in one of his questions to Gadamer in 1981 that concerned the challenge of psychoanalysis to hermeneutics.²⁹

The thematic framework of the third and fourth chapters is provided by the two philosophers' preoccupation with singularity and generality, which

will be initially studied on the basis of their sustained attention to signification and language. I mentioned, above, Lawlor's remark that both thinkers reject the idea of transparent self-reflection and admit that thought is possible only if it is mediated by signs and externalized. Several of Ricoeur's works published between the late '60s and the mid '80s are characterized by their focus on spoken or written discourse, hence the use of the phrase "linguistic" or "hermeneutic turn" to describe that phase of his career.³⁰ Similarly, Derrida is interested, right from the beginning, in the functioning of the linguistic sign. In "The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations" (1983), he recalls that the title he had submitted around 1957 for his first thesis topic was "The Ideality of the Literary Object," a study of the problematics of communication and literary meaning.³¹ Subsequently, the overwhelming majority of his published work in the '60s and '70s is concerned with the structure of signification as attested to by *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), *Dissemination* (1972), *Positions* (1972), and *Margins of Philosophy*.³²

As Lawlor has extensively studied the two philosophers' debate on metaphor, I will focus here on their analyses of deixis and the first-person perspective, which, with the help of Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of the self" and dialectics of narration and prescription, will function as points of transition leading to the ethical relation between self and other. I will investigate their disparate accounts of Husserl's interpretation of intersubjectivity, but also their response to some of Lévinas's writings on alterity and responsibility.³³ On the basis of this confrontation on singularity and generality, I will explicate Ricoeur's self-characterization as a "post-Hegelian Kantian,"³⁴ as well as Derrida's tendency to resist, without straightforwardly opposing, the dialectical structure germane to Ricoeur's thought.

To avoid, however, subscribing to too teleological a construal of the difference between the two thinkers—a construal indissociable from the terms *debate* and *dialogue*—another strand of this book will reflect, following Derrida, on the nature of this difference. A radical thinking of difference will be announced, a thinking that, while allowing for the ordinary teleological conceptuality, takes difference seriously into account and cautiously refuses to determine it in a negative and provisional way. This alternative interpretation turns out to have serious implications for the debate between Ricoeur and Derrida, as this has been portrayed thus far.

In a sense, if a debate is not to be reduced to a banal situation where two partners harmoniously communicate to each other beliefs they already share, it has to presuppose a moment of absolute distance. Without this moment of interruption or discord, there is no dialogue but simply a complacent confirmation of ideas the interlocutors know they anyway share. If such a radical difference constitutes the a priori requirement of any event of dialogue, if there is no genuine encounter without or before that moment of violent interruption,

then this moment can be relegated neither to an empirical accident nor to a negative and provisional necessity. Rather, alterity and non-dialogue have to be construed as *positive* structural possibilities without which dialogue *stricto sensu* would not stand a chance.

Although Ricoeur's and Derrida's shared thematic concerns, their common intellectual context and their philosophical discrepancies may constitute interesting empirico-historical information, they cannot function as necessary conditions able to give rise to a genuine encounter between them. Such a condition can be supplied by an ineluctable and positively determined distance alone. It is in this light that the non-dialogue or non-event apparently lamented at the beginning of this introduction, far from regretfully instantiating a contingent failure, functions as the positive condition of a promised debate. The missed opportunity of a fruitful exchange in the past will have succeeded in making possible an encounter respectful of the two thinkers' irreplaceability. What is at stake here is a non-dialogue whose "non" does not indicate a negative actuality but a radical heterogeneity that promises the event of an encounter worthy of its name.³⁵ Owing, however, to the essential character of such heterogeneity, a dialogue or a debate, in the ordinary sense of these terms, is rendered at the same time impossible. To the extent that the chance of an encounter depends on an a priori required distance, this chance will always be marked by alterity, so it will never become a dialogue, given that the latter is intended, by definition, to overcome and suppress difference.

If the chance of a genuine debate cannot indeed be disengaged from the exigency of absolute alterity and non-dialogue, is the term *debate* worthy of this structure? If the possibility of dialogue is grounded in an ordinary non-dialogue, is this not to say that the words *debate* or *dialogue*, which imply some common ground or a shared objective, cannot appropriately bear witness to this complex configuration? This is why it is tempting to describe the "relation" between Ricoeur and Derrida in terms of "improbable encounters."³⁶ This expression, to the extent that it affirms both a radical difference and the chance of a meeting of texts bearing their signature, respects the two thinkers' irreducible singularity. The improbable or uncanny encounter between them, which the second strand of this study calls for, will never be a debate in the sense of a juxtaposition simply or dialectically opposing their work in view of a synthesis or reconciliation. At best, one can speak of an apposition, a placement next to each other of discussions of texts, which perhaps, like two parallel lines, may meet at infinity.³⁷

The belief in such improbable encounters, indebted to Derrida's thought, constitutes a fundamental methodological presupposition reflected in the structuring principle of my study. On the one hand, the first and the third chapters focus on Ricoeur's work, whereas chapters 2 and 4 are devoted to Derrida. It is possible *prima facie* to delimit and identify the position the two thinkers

occupy vis-à-vis the texts they read. On the other hand, the two chapters on Derrida will reveal a reading strategy that will give rise to another thinking of difference, identity, and position. According to a familiar Derridean gesture that differentiates between the author's declared intentions and his or her descriptions,³⁸ I will briefly revisit Ricoeur's texts to see if one can discover therein any moments interrupting his expressly hermeneutic assertions. Ricoeur's discourse will be shown to include possibilities that can be hardly maintained simultaneously, and, as a consequence, the relation between the two philosophers will turn out to be more complicated than initially thought. I will argue that such a complication alone, which is not without a parallel as far as Derrida's relation to reflective philosophy and hermeneutics is concerned, allows for an uncompromising singularity without seeking to negate, exclude, or subordinate difference to a desired commonality. Moreover, this reading does justice to the complexity and richness of Ricoeur's and Derrida's texts by resisting the temptation of associating them, once and for all, with either deconstruction or hermeneutics.

Before delineating in greater detail the thematics of this study, it has to be underlined that there is significant overlapping between all four chapters in more than one way. The themes specific to any one chapter are imbricated across the whole book. As a result, the link between singularity and generality is broached much earlier than the third chapter, and the movement of temporalization constitutes a motif overflowing the limits of the first two chapters. In addition, there are thematic concerns of equal salience diffused throughout the book, such as the finitude-infinity binary, the exigency of distance and interruption, the relation between repetition and difference, or that between possibility and impossibility.

The first chapter focuses on the coupling of consciousness and presence in Ricoeur's construal of Husserl and Freud. The third volume of *Time and Narrative* considers Husserl's theory of temporalization to provide a coherent approach to the *human* experience of time to be opposed to the *cosmological* time of nature. Ricoeur examines the phenomenological "thick present," and underscores that Husserl's major contribution was the intercalation of the concept of "retention" into the realm of perception. What is crucial, however, is the relation between primary intuition and retention, and the extent to which Ricoeur endorses the phenomenological emphasis on continuity. According to Husserl's manifest declarations, this continuity is interrupted as soon as one crosses the borderline separating perception from memory, whose corollary is the coupling of intuition and immediate presence. Dissatisfied with such a coupling, Ricoeur draws upon Kant's conception of temporality and Freudian psychoanalysis in order to question the self-sufficiency and immediacy of the Husserlian ego.

By virtue of his early quantitative hypothesis and the later topographical and economic models, Freud introduces distance into the very heart of perception, thereby casting into doubt the transparency of conscious presence. In the first instance, Ricoeur embraces Freud's critique of immediate consciousness and commends the anti-phenomenological reduction by means of which psychoanalysis suspends the properties of the transcendental subject. At the same time, he does not wish to give up all hope with respect to the possibility that the subject may attain, with the help of the analyst and the analytical technique, a certain self-reflexivity. Consequently, although Ricoeur admits to the necessary alterity of Freudian categories such as the primary process, the pleasure principle, the unconscious, the death drive, etc., still, these are determined as negative phases dialectically linked to a positive and meaningful reappropriation.

Ricoeur's nuanced discourse both allows for the idea that unconscious activity *as such* remains inaccessible and highlights that the dialectical character of most psychoanalytical divisions makes possible the appropriation of an initial non-presence. He articulates the *actual impossibility* of attaining an absolute mediation with the *conceptual possibility* of such a mediation posited as a *telos* or a task never to be actually achieved. The infinite idea of a reflective consciousness gives rise to a mediated self purged from the hubristic belief in self-constitution. In spite of incorporating some Freudian insights in order to expose the illusion of a transparent consciousness, Ricoeur's philosophy remains indebted to a continuist and dialectical conception of presence.

Chapter 2 begins by exploring Derrida's response to Husserl's lectures on time-consciousness in *Speech and Phenomena* with a view to revealing the extent to which Ricoeur underplays the implications of the introduction of retention qua alterity into the perceptual present. According to a reading gesture outlined above, Derrida distinguishes Husserl's declared intentions from his actual descriptions. As a result of this tension, a certain distance between original intuition and retention turns out to be absolutely irreducible, which entails that one is not justified in stressing the primacy of continuity. If difference is neither an empirical eventuality that may befall the temporal present here and there, nor a negative necessity anticipating a plenitude of presence, in what terms is one supposed to think of its irreducibility? The philosophical configuration of "necessary possibility" and the quasi-concept of *différance* will reveal a paradoxical commingling of presence and absence, continuity and discontinuity. Although this aporetic structure and its syncopated temporality are far removed from Husserl's manifest declarations, his analyses contain traces that invite one to conceive of non-presence in a nonnegative, non-teleological fashion.

Next, following Derrida's early work on Freud, I will evaluate Ricoeur's conviction about the dialectical nature of psychoanalysis. If such a dialectics rests on the oppositional determination of perception and memory, life and

death, pleasure and reality, etc., are these oppositions safely sustained by Freud's accounts of the psychical apparatus? Or does Freudian discourse bear witness, on the contrary, to a permeable-impermeable borderline that gives rise to all those values while excluding a watertight dichotomy between them? Derrida affirms a peculiar diastem that is the only chance of a present intuition, the memory trace, and psychical life in general. Paradoxically, this diastem has to be thought of in terms of a *différance* that complicates opposition and, by extension, dialectics. Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* goes some way toward capturing the discontinuous temporality involved in such a structure. To what extent does psychoanalysis differ from phenomenology in light of the fact that Husserl too allows, by virtue of retention, for a certain difference as constitutive of the living present?

Another set of issues I will address here is the significance of Freud's portrayal of psychical processes in terms of increasingly intricate scriptural metaphors. What does this metaphoricity imply not only for perception and memory but also for the act of writing itself? Does psychical writing function according to a topography, or does it disturb any ordinary understanding of spatiality? Can the psychical text be understood on the basis of conventional temporal categories, or does it originate in an aporetic temporalization resistant to permanence and identity? I will explore the disjuncture between Freud's commitment to interpretation and certain descriptive moments that call upon one to think the *impossibility* of acceding to an original psychical inscription or mnemonic trace. Finally, I will revisit Ricoeur's discourse in order to identify therein instances that, by allowing for a more interruptive thinking of non-presence, undercut his dialectics of archaeology and teleology. This latter gesture complicates any attempt definitely and securely to differentiate Ricoeur's thought from Derrida's.

The last two chapters will focus on singularity and the relation between self and other. Chapter 3 will present Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self, which admittedly has taken on board the criticism leveled by psychoanalysis and structuralist linguistics at various "philosophies of the subject," thereby resisting any straightforwardly Cartesian, Kantian, or Husserlian conception of subjectivity.³⁹ In both early and more recent writings, Ricoeur is keen to establish a link between the subject or the self and singularity. As far as language is concerned, the use of the personal pronoun is claimed to designate transparently and singularly the speaker of discourse. By underlining the self-referential and singularizing function of the speech act, he seeks to achieve a mediation between Husserl's belief in the subject as the self-constituting principle of language and the structuralist rejoinder that language is an autonomous entity that cannot be reduced to a medium at the disposal of a sovereign self.

Besides, I will examine the two types of identity, *idem* and *ipse*, introduced in *Time and Narrative* but more fully developed in *Oneself as Another*. Their

dialecticization will lead to “narrative identity,” a motif that takes into consideration both the possibility of change and the self-constancy that ethics requires. Insofar as such self-constancy cannot be guaranteed on the level of literature, it has to be linked to the prescriptive realm of ethics where a truly responsible agent ought to take the initiative and publicly declare “Here I stand!” The hermeneutic functions of “refiguration” and “appropriation” serve as the points of transition from the literary to the ethical. This passage from plurality to a singular responsibility is ensured by the regulative Idea of the “good life,” on whose basis the notion of the “ethical self” is developed. The ethical self is yoked together with action, decision, and benevolence, categories mediated by a certain passivity and finitude originating in the call of the suffering other. Ricoeur defines the ethical relation in terms of friendship and reciprocity, whose corollary is the dialectical pairing of selfhood and alterity, activity and passivity. His reflection is dominated by this dialectic, through which he negotiates a median position between Husserl’s assimilative interpretation of the alter ego and Lévinas’s hyperbolic discourse on absolute exteriority.

Does Ricoeur succeed in reinscribing the philosophies of the cogito after assimilating the challenges of psychoanalysis and structuralism? What are the implications of the concepts of benevolence, mutuality, and friendship with respect to the other’s alterity? Is the idea of a singular self compatible with the generality that inheres in a prescriptive ethical domain regulated by the Idea of the “good life”? Does the public declaration “Here I stand!” sufficiently guarantee one’s ethical behavior and singularly assumed responsibility?

Chapter 4 complicates the link between selfhood and singularity. I will initially concentrate on Derrida’s discussion of the personal pronoun, which casts doubt upon the supposedly singularizing role of language. Insofar as the phenomenon of deixis in general can be shown to be subject to the law of iterability, the latter introduces a minimal exemplarity or generalizability into the heart of a singular referent. Although this gesture might be regarded as assimilating deictics to other words, thus subordinating referential singularity to the transcendental conditions of language, the argument is far more subtle than this. Derrida infiltrates the realm of signification with a “referentiality” that cannot be dialectically opposed to an interior sense or conceptuality.

If iterability cannot be disengaged from the necessary possibility of non-presence, the self-identity of the referent is rendered problematic, and along with it the belief in language as a means of expression and singular responsibility. In some of his recent writings, Derrida reveals an originary co-implication of language and secrecy that gives rise to language while excluding the possibility of pure truthfulness or transparency. This secrecy does not refer to something that can be provisionally dissimulated but remains nonetheless subject to representation. Rather, at issue here is a secret that, heterogeneous to visibility and phenomenality, is responsible for the promissory and aleatory nature of

language. Such a construal anchors the possibility of truthful speech and singular responsibility in an anterior pervertibility. Paradoxically, Ricoeur's theory of discourse will be found to contain traces that call upon one to think a similar commingling of speech and secrecy, something that corroborates my contention about the "improbable encounters" between the two philosophers.

Subsequently, beginning with Derrida's reflection on the phrase "to be in memory of the other," I will unpack the aporetic structure whereby singularity and alterity are deconstituted by what makes their emergence possible.⁴⁰ A rigorous concept of singularity requires a priori the other's radical alterity, hence Derrida's concurrence with Lévinas's views on absolute exteriority. At the same time, in order for one to be able to refer to such alterity, the other has to be somewhat phenomenalizable. This exigency of a minimal contact, on whose basis Derrida reveals resources of Husserl's account of intersubjectivity that remain unexplored by both Lévinas and Ricoeur, entails yoking together necessity and chance, and leads to a differentiation between "absolute alterity" and "irreducible alterity." Derrida's approach can be seen as radicalizing, in a sense, Lévinas's thought. By virtue of his insistence on an ineluctable discontinuity between self and other, the possibility of singularity and the impossibility of a purely singular self cannot be teleologically organized. Strangely enough, it is this non-teleological structure and the corollary interruption that ensure the infinity of the Idea in the Kantian sense.

This study makes no pretence of constituting an exhaustive investigation into all the contexts and authors one could legitimately claim to have played a significant role in shaping Derrida's and Ricoeur's thought. Any such contention would be clearly out of the question considering the vast array of issues that have preoccupied the two thinkers over a period of seventy years, the complexity of the philosophical problems they have addressed, but also the sheer magnitude of their published output. Rather, these readings illuminate, on the basis of some major themes in their work, the *barely visible* difference that Lawlor identifies, and simultaneously put forward the idea of an *absolutely invisible* difference giving rise to a "'singular' dialogue,"⁴¹ promised interchanges, and improbable encounters between hermeneutics and deconstruction. Those two strands will remain inextricably interrelated throughout this book, and the second one will keep impinging, in principle and in fact, upon the first one.

Chapter 1

Ricoeur on Husserl and Freud

From a Perceptual to a Reflective Present

In his well-informed and instructive *Imagination and Chance* and, more specifically, in a brief chapter on Husserlian temporalization, Lawlor maintains that “Ricoeur’s reading of Husserl discovers that immediacy and continuity precede spatial separation and discontinuity. Mediation or distanciation, traces or absence, derive for Ricoeur from immediacy and should return to it. Immediacy, as we shall see, supports all of Ricoeur’s theories.”¹ This chapter will evaluate Lawlor’s claim with respect to Ricoeur’s approach to consciousness and temporality.

The first section will focus on the constitution of the perceptual present and on Ricoeur’s interpretation of Husserl’s account of time-consciousness in *Time and Narrative*. One of the issues at stake here is Husserl’s introduction of “retention” into the heart of the living present. How does Ricoeur interpret the relation between primary impression and retention? To what extent does he privilege identity and immediacy at the expense of difference? Does he unreservedly subscribe to the self-evidence of an original intuition, or does he, on the contrary, problematize the idea of immediate presence? How does he deal with the tension between, on the one hand, the phenomenological yoking together of intuition and the punctual *stigmē*, and, on the other, the description of time as continuous and flowing, something that compromises the rigorous identity of the now? Although Ricoeur admits that Husserl cannot be reproached for ousting difference altogether from the realm of perception, he maintains nonetheless that phenomenology construes mediation and exteriority as secondary to an originally self-present consciousness. Ricoeur’s reservation is grounded in his belief that Husserl regards perception primarily through the prism of the ego’s self-identity and immediacy.

The last two sections will establish that, for Ricoeur, Freud’s thought, by allowing for an irreducible distance in the conscious present, instantiates a radical break with phenomenology. Freud’s neurological reflections and later

metapsychological texts on the unconscious and repression directly challenge the phenomenological claims about a self-sufficient and self-constituting subject. In this light, Freud is said to be a better archaeologist than Husserl, to be capable of reaching deeper into the psyche in order to discover an origin more ancient and more secret than the transcendental ego. However, Ricoeur will eventually assert that the primordial non-presence unearthed by the psychoanalytical “archaeology of the subject” is dialectically articulated with a *telos* where the meaningful presence of a reflective consciousness is not so much a given as a task to be pursued jointly by the analyst and the patient.² Both Ricoeur’s endorsement of a continuous, albeit mediated, temporality in Husserl, and his insistence on the teleological organization of Freud’s thought will reveal the extent to which he is committed to a dialectical reading of difference and identity.

Ricoeur Reading Husserl: The Thick Present and Continuity

The first section of the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, entitled “The Aporetics of Temporality,” is a comparative investigation into various philosophical readings of time: Aristotle versus Augustine, Kant versus Husserl, and finally Heidegger.³ The Aristotelian and Kantian accounts are classified as cosmological, in view of the fact that they regard time as either an objective category or an a priori intuition that remains inscrutable and invisible. Augustine and Husserl are thought to have interpreted time in terms of its constitution within subjectivity; as a result, they are subsumed under the phenomenological approach. Heidegger reached the highest point of critical reflection and perplexity by resolving many of the aporias of Husserlian and Augustinian thought. However, he is seen as still working within the limits of a hermeneutic phenomenology that verges on hermeticism.⁴

The discussion of Husserl’s theory of temporalization, anchored directly in perception in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (1928),⁵ is strategically situated immediately after Ricoeur’s reflection on Aristotle, and is said to address many of the issues left unresolved by the Greek philosopher. The objective of this volume of *Time and Narrative* is to establish the “mutual occultation” of the phenomenological time of human experience and the cosmological time of physics with a view to affirming narrated time as a “third time” mediating between the two opposing perspectives (TN, 3:245). The discussion of Husserl functions as a rejoinder to Aristotle’s conception of time on the basis of measurable movement, and to the prioritization of the undifferentiated instant at the expense of a dialectically unified present. As a consequence, Ricoeur’s reading of Husserl makes a point, against Aristotle, in favor of the continuity and unitariness of the human experience of time.⁶

Ricoeur initially draws attention to Husserl's ambition to make time itself appear by means of an appropriate method, to submit the appearance of time as such to a direct description. In order to gain access to the internal time-consciousness freed from every aporia, Husserl had to exclude objective time and all "transcendent presuppositions concerning existents" (PITC, §1, 22). His work, therefore, begins by performing the famous "phenomenological reduction" or *epochē*, by bracketing out objective time; the latter coincides with the first level of temporal constitution where things are experienced in world time.

The second level of temporal constitution is that of immanent unities, the order of temporal objects (*Zeitobjekte*). Husserl seeks to provide an explanation of the duration in consciousness of such objects as the same from moment to moment. How is it possible for our perception of these objects to endure, and how does this lived experience come about? It is in response to these questions that his two great discoveries, according to Ricoeur, occur: the description of the phenomenon of retention (*Retention*), and the distinction between retention (primary remembrance) and recollection (secondary remembrance) (TN, 3:25–26). Husserl is interested in sensed objects and their mode of continuance rather than perceived or transcendent objects. In this respect, the central example in his discussion of retention is that of a sound, a minimal temporal object that can be constituted, thanks to its simplicity, in the sphere of pure immanence. A melody would be something far too complex to deal with on this level.

One of the first things Husserl affirms is that the immanent object that the sound is has a beginning and an end. Its beginning coincides with a now-point that corresponds to a primal impression (*Urimpression*) or impressional consciousness involved in continuous alteration. When the sound stops, one is conscious of this now-point as the end-point when the duration expires. The whole duration of the sound is made up of individual nows, each of which corresponds to a primal impression that gradually sinks back into the past as the duration proceeds toward its end. While the impression of a tonal now sinks back into the past, says Husserl, "I still 'hold' it fast, have it in a 'retention,' and as long as the retention persists the sound has its own temporality. It is the same and its duration is the same" (PITC, §8, 44). Before the sound began, one was not conscious of it. After it has stopped, one is still conscious of it in retention for a while. For as long as the sound lasts, one is conscious of one and the same sound as enduring now.

The retention of a just passed now in each actual now guarantees that the *same* sound continues to resonate throughout a succession of individual nows. Defined as a "modification" of the primal impression (PITC, §11, 50–51), retention makes possible the expansion of an immediate intuition taking place

in an actual now into a duration. Husserl designates each intuitive now as a “source-point” (*Quellpunkt*), remarks Ricoeur, “precisely because what runs off from it ‘still’ belongs to it. Beginning is beginning to continue. . . . Each point of the duration is the source-point of a continuity of modes of running-off and the accumulation of all these enduring points forms the continuity of the whole process” (TN, 3:30). “Modification” implies that each actually present now is modified into the recent past, and that the original impression passes over into retention, thereby thickening the now of perception into a broadened present including both a new impression and the retention of a just passed impression. The determination of retention as a “modification” bears witness to Husserl’s wish “to extend the benefit of the original character belonging to the present impression to the recent past” and its retentional consciousness (TN, 3:30).

Thanks to the expansion of the punctual now-point, not only is the recent past connected with the present now but also it retains its intuitive aspect even if it is no longer present *stricto sensu*. As soon as a now-point has expired, the primal intuition corresponding to it continues to exist in the form of retentional rather than impressional consciousness. The two kinds of consciousness are intimately bound up with each other and with protention, hence the transformation of a point-like *stigmē* into a thick present. One of Husserl’s major contributions to philosophical reflection on time was the idea that

the “now” is not contracted into a point-like instant but includes a transverse or longitudinal intentionality (in order to contrast it with the transcendent intentionality that, in perception, places the accent on the unity of the object), by reason of which it is at once itself and the retention of the tonal phase that has “just” [*soeben*] passed, as well as the protention of the imminent phase. (TN, 3:26)

Each tonal now of consciousness retains the now that has just passed and anticipates the next one. As a consequence, it encompasses a continuity of retentional modifications while at the same time being itself a point of actuality that shades off and becomes a recent past in order to give rise to the next now which will be itself a continuous modification of the previous one, and so on and so forth.

Commenting upon Husserl’s phrase “the sound still resonates,” Ricoeur notes that the adverb “still” entails both sameness and otherness. There is otherness not only because of the diminishing clarity of the impression of expired now-points but also because of the incessant piling up of retained contents. Far from saying that Husserl dogmatically excludes discontinuity, Ricoeur admits that he allows for a certain difference between impression and retention, and that this difference is indispensable: “[If it] were not included in the continuity, there would be no temporal constitution, properly speaking. The continuous

passage from perception to nonperception (in the strict sense of these terms) is temporal constitution” (TN, 3:33).

Nevertheless, he underlines that “what Husserl wants at all cost to preserve is the continuity in the phenomenon of passing away, of being drawn together, and of becoming obscure. The otherness characteristic of the change that affects the object in its mode of passing away is not a difference that excludes identity” (TN, 3:28). In spite of the fact that, by putting forward the lingering on of the just passed now, Husserl has introduced some otherness into the perceptual present, such otherness does not pose a threat to the continuity of the duration. Ricoeur observes that Husserl, in order to account for the provenance of continuity, splits intentionality into two interdependent aspects: one of them, designated as “longitudinal intentionality,” is directed toward the continuity between the retained and the actual now, whereas the other is an “objectifying intentionality” directed toward the transcendent correlate that is always other through the succession of nows. Retention and the longitudinal intentionality ensure the continuation of the now-point in the extended present of the unitary duration and preserve “the same in the other” (TN, 3:28).

Temporal constitution entails first and foremost continuity, even though the prefix *re-* of “retention” indicates a chasm between itself and impression. The motif of broadened perception is claimed to privilege sameness, immediacy, and continuity at the expense of a radical discontinuity. Difference is regarded as a smooth passage from intuition to retention, and is relegated to a secondary position with respect to the primacy of continuity:

The notions of difference, otherness and negativity expressed by the “no longer” [of the retained now] are not primary, but instead derive from the act of abstraction performed on temporal continuity by the gaze that stops at the instant and converts it from a source-point into a limit-point. . . . Primary remembrance is a positive modification of the impression, not something different from it.⁷ (TN, 3:30–31)

Subsequently, Ricoeur turns to Husserl’s second major discovery, and argues that his claim about the prioritization of continuity is corroborated by the apparently unbridgeable chasm between retention and recollection. On the one hand, primary remembrance retains the just passed now-point within a thick present that has some duration; it is the “comet’s tail” of a just passed source-point while being a new source-point itself (PITC, §11, 52). On the other hand, secondary remembrance or memory refers to a distant past that has no foothold in the present. Husserl deploys the example of a melody recently heard at a concert: whereas retention takes place for as long as the melody lasts and when it has just stopped, memory begins a while after the melody has ended.

After the event recalled has finished, one's memory aims to do no more than reproduce it. When one tries to remember it, the melody is "no longer 'produced' but 'reproduced,' no longer presented (in the sense of the extended present) but 're-presented' (*Repräsentation* or *Vergegenwärtigung*)" (TN, 3:32). Husserl stresses the "*wieder*" of "*Wiederinnerung*" (recollection), which marks a discontinuity between perception and reproduction, presentation and representation. *Prima facie*, Ricoeur rightly diagnoses that this account downplays the role of difference and consolidates the continuity between impression and retention:

This primacy of retention finds further confirmation in the unbridgeable aspect of the break that separates re-presentation from presentation. Only the latter is an original self-giving act. . . . The "once again" has nothing in common with the "still." What might mask this phenomenological difference is that major feature of retentional modification that, in fact, transforms the original or reproduced "now" into a past. But the continuous fading-away characteristic of retention must not be confused with the passage from perception to imagination that constitutes a discontinuous difference. (TN, 3:33)

What is at issue, then, is the difference between two types of difference: a continuous one between the just passed now and the actual now yoked together under the aegis of a broadened perception, and a discontinuous one between perception and recollection or imagination. The before-instant of impression and the after-instant of retention are different point-like nows. Yet the gap between them is considered to be a continuous one; it is this temporal continuity that gives rise to internal time-consciousness. Any *proper* difference is subsequent to this primordial continuity. Ricoeur underlines the radical discontinuity between perception and memory, whose corollary is that the *represented* past is relegated to the realm of the "as if," which has nothing in common with *presentative* intuition.

Ricoeur's discussion of the second level of temporal constitution concludes with two critical remarks. The first one concerns Husserl's privileging of the past and memory to the detriment of expectation. One reason for this is that his major preoccupation was to resolve the issue of temporal continuity, so the distinction between retention and recollection was sufficient to that end. Moreover, to the extent that the future takes its place in the temporal surroundings of the present and that expectation is integrated in those surroundings as an empty intention, Husserl did not think he could deal directly with such futural categories. Expectation is portrayed as merely an anticipation of perception: either it is characterized by the emptiness of the not-yet, or, if the anticipated perception has already become present, it has sunk down into the

past. Expectation is not regarded as the counterpart of memory, which remains, says Ricoeur, “the major guideline” of Husserl’s analysis (TN, 3:37). This remark signals Ricoeur’s belief that Husserl conceives of intuition and recollection in terms of a *fulfilled* intention alone, which somehow contravenes his declaration, in “Kant and Husserl” (1954), that the distinction between intuition and an unfulfilled intention is totally unknown in Husserl.⁸

The paradoxical effect of such emphasis on memory is its insertion into the same series of internal time where retention belongs, something that mitigates the previously established opposition between recollection and retention. If memory is directed toward a perception that has already occurred in the past, it can be aligned with retention under the aegis of the past. Ricoeur draws attention to Husserl’s contradiction whereby he first affirms a rigorous dichotomy between memory and retention, between the “*wieder*” and the “*re*,” only in order to bring them back together by inserting them into a single temporal flow: “Reproduction is itself also called a modification, in the same way as retention. In this sense, the opposition between ‘quasi’ and ‘originary’ is far from being the last word concerning the relation between secondary and primary remembrance” (TN, 3:37).

Ricoeur’s second concern is the extent to which Husserl’s discussion of temporal objects remains inseparable from a previous understanding of objective time, despite having initially set time out of play. The temporal series in which both memory and retention are inserted is a serial order made up of identifiable temporal positions (*Zeitstelle*). This is not to suggest that Husserl collapsed the material of lived experience to the formal objectivity of those temporal positions, for he cautiously distinguished between the two phases of temporal constitution: one focusing upon the immanent object and its appearance to consciousness, the other upon the identity of the temporal position. Ricoeur, however, points toward what appears to be an essential law in Husserl:

The sinking back of one and the same sound into the past implies a reference to a fixed temporal position. “It is part of the essence of the modifying flux that this temporal position stands forth as identical and necessarily identical” (p. 90). Of course, unlike what has to do with an a priori of intuition in Kant, the form of time is not superimposed on pure diversity, since the interplay of retentions and representations constitutes a highly structured temporal fabric. It remains nonetheless that this very interplay requires a formal moment that it does not seem capable of generating. (TN, 3:39)

By highlighting Husserl’s unsuccessful attempt to derive a homogeneous objective time from the lived continuum of a transcendental ego’s retentions, Ricoeur questions the constituting ability of intrasubjective temporality. The closest

Husserl gets to such a derivation is when he defines recollection as the power to transpose every instant into a zero-point or a quasi-present. This gesture marks a possible transition from the time of monadic remembrance to a world time that goes beyond the memory of each individual.⁹ But even then, this transition turns out to take for granted what it is supposed to lead to, that is, objective time. In the final analysis, Husserl cannot avoid having recourse to some a priori temporal laws and, in Ricoeur's words, "whenever we attempt to derive objective time from internal time-consciousness, the relation of priority is inverted" (TN, 3:40).

Husserl's presupposition of objective time recurs on the third level of temporal constitution, that of the absolute flux of consciousness. Ricoeur contends that it is only here that the true sense of the Husserlian enterprise comes into view, and continues: "The originality of the third level thus lies in bracketing the tempo-objects and formalizing the relations among point-source, retention, and protention, without regard for the identities, even the immanent ones, constituted here; in short, in formalizing the relation between the originary 'now' and its modifications" (TN, 3:41). On this level, which precedes all constitution, there is no identity and nothing that endures. What one finds here is just a flux of alteration, even though, absurdly enough, there is no identifiable object to be altered. Husserl sought to go beyond immanent objects and *constituted* unities toward the *constituting* level of consciousness, which he defined as absolute subjectivity. He encountered serious difficulties in providing a philosophical description of that level, hence his well-known phrases "For all this, names are lacking" and "Here, one can say nothing further than: 'See'" (PITC, §36, 100 and §38, 103). The difficulty with any description of the constituting flux is that one can either name it after whatever is constituted, or resort to analogy and metaphors such as flux, source-point, etc. One cannot help wondering here whether it is by chance that Kant had to resort to analogy in order to represent the formal conditions of experience, and that Freud also used scriptural and mechanical metaphors to account for the perceptual process.¹⁰

Ricoeur critically points out that Husserl regarded simply as intuitions the formal conditions of experience, which can be subsumed under three headings: the unity of the flux of consciousness, the common form of the now (the origin of simultaneity), and the continuity of the modes of running-off (the origin of succession) (TN, 3:41).¹¹ A question arising here is the following: How can one have knowledge of the unity of the flux if there is no constituted objectivity at this level? Here one can speak neither of identity, nor of difference, nor of distinction. Even the temporal objects of the second level are excluded and the relations between source-point, retention, and protention are formalized. Aware of this problem, Husserl tried to resolve it by differentiating a transverse intentionality turned toward the immanent object and its temporal unity from a longitudinal one directed toward the unity of the absolute flux itself.¹² The

two intentionalities are indissociable aspects of one and the same thing; they are homogeneous and intertwined with each other. As Ricoeur notes, in order to have something that endures (an immanent object), there must be a flux that constitutes itself, and the necessity of such self-constitution results from the fact that Husserl had to avoid infinite regress. The flux does not need a backdrop against which to appear, but is, as a phenomenon, self-constituting. Here is Ricoeur on this act of self-evident self-constitution:

The enterprise of a pure phenomenology is completed with this self-constitution. Husserl claims the same self-evidence in its regard as his phenomenology grants to internal perception. There is even a “self-evident consciousness of duration” (p. 112), just as indubitable as that of immanent contents. The question remains, however, whether the self-evident consciousness of duration can be sufficient to itself without relying in any way on that of a perceptual consciousness. (TN, 3:42)

Ricoeur’s objection to the idea of a self-evident and self-constituting consciousness of duration is that such a formalization and any knowledge of the unity of the flux depend on a perceptual consciousness and some constituted objectivity. Husserl’s appeal to “unity,” “succession,” and “simultaneity” presupposes objective time, for it is only on this basis that these concepts make sense. The belief in a continuous flux takes for granted the objective time that Husserl had initially set out of play. One can enter the phenomenological problematic only by bracketing out the time of nature; simultaneously, the phenomenology of time can be articulated only by borrowing from world time. The unity of the flux of consciousness entails a time divided up into now-points, so Ricoeur contends that Husserl inadvertently has recourse to objective temporal categories despite his determination to achieve a pure phenomenology.

This objection results neither from Ricoeur’s distrust of the ordinary concept of time, as is the case in Heidegger, nor from his wish to question the metaphysical implications of Husserl’s appeal to objective time. On the contrary, it is grounded, as is clear from the first lines of the discussion of Kant’s approach, in Husserl’s failure to *acknowledge* the irreducibility of certain temporal a priori:

I want to find in Kant the reason for the repeated borrowings made by the phenomenology of internal time-consciousness with respect to the structure of objective time, which this phenomenology claims not only to bracket but actually to constitute. In this regard, what the Kantian method refutes are not Husserl’s phenomenological analyses themselves but their claim to be free of any reference to an

objective time and to attain, through direct reflection, a temporality purified of any transcendent intention. (TN, 3:44)

For Ricoeur, who follows to a great extent Kant's critical philosophy where objective time always remains a presupposition,¹³ Husserl was wrong not to have realized that time as such cannot appear before consciousness, for time constitutes the very condition of appearing. Husserl is rebuked for refusing to acquiesce in the irreducibility of the intersubjective time of nature, and for seeking in vain phenomenologically to reflect on its constitution by the transcendental ego. Ricoeur's argument gestures toward an invincible time, a gesture reminiscent of Augustine's professed inability to provide a philosophical explanation of time when asked what it is.¹⁴

In the "Conclusion," while discussing the third aporia of temporality, Ricoeur maintains that "time, escaping any attempt to constitute it, reveals itself as belonging to a constituted order always already presupposed by the work of constitution" (TN, 3:261). He attributes the Kantian epithet "inscrutable" to a time that thwarts the attempts of human thinking to posit itself as the master of meaning. Finally, with a view to indicating the antinomy between a finite and an infinite temporality, he turns to lyric poetry whose elegiac tone appropriately expresses the "nonmastery and the grief that is ceaselessly reborn from the contrast between the fragility of life and the power of time that destroys" (TN, 3:273).

Ricoeur concludes his reading of Husserl by stressing that "the phenomenology of internal time-consciousness ultimately concerns immanent intentionality interwoven with objectifying intentionality. And the former, in fact, rests on the recognition of something that endures, which the latter alone can provide for it" (TN, 3:44). Husserl's analyses cannot free themselves from any reference to objective time, and fail to attain a temporality extricated from transcendent presuppositions.

Admittedly, Ricoeur is uneasy about Husserl's reduction to consciousness and the tendency to regard the perceptual present as self-constituting, self-sufficient, and immediate. One may object here that the present does not amount to a category altogether exclusive of difference, for retention is strictly speaking a non-perception. Moreover, toward the end of his discussion, Ricoeur perceptively refers to the "weightier implication" of Husserl's surprising and even "contradictory" assertion that even representation or presentification is in the final analysis a present impression (TN, 3:43): "Every act of presentification, however, is itself actually present through an impressional consciousness. In a certain sense, then, all lived experiences are known through impressions or are impressed" (PITC, §42, 116). It is by virtue of the potential disruption inherent in such admission of the nonoriginary into the identity of the present

that Ricoeur accepts, in *Freud and Philosophy*, that Husserl allows for a certain problematic of a wounded, dispossessed, and mediated consciousness.¹⁵

Nevertheless, he falls short of pursuing that insight and its weighty implications any farther and, rather, chooses to adhere to a more conventional construal of Husserl's declarations. Accordingly, he focuses on the continuous transition from impression to retention, and on the concomitant thickening of the present. Broadened perception is inseparable from an *essentially* smooth continuity where difference and discontinuity are regarded as secondary modalities to be subordinated to the continuous movement that defines the transcendental ego. If Aristotle is reproached for his failure, due to his excessive emphasis upon the individual instant, to account for the continuity of lived experience, phenomenology, for Ricoeur, succeeds in producing a more human or subjective conception of time without exposing it to the threat of an interrupting difference.

This success amounts at the same time to a failure, for the prioritization of a continuous and immediate living present signals toward a consciousness cut off from the world and unable to constitute itself and time single-handedly. Ricoeur clearly wants to keep his distance, in *Time and Narrative* and elsewhere, from a theory that, positing the transcendental subject as the first fact, considers difference to be secondary and inessential. In *Freud and Philosophy*, he regrets that phenomenology begins with an act of suspension, an *epochē* "at the free disposition of the subject" (FP, 391). Similarly, in "The Question of the Subject," he argues that Husserl's thought, in *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1931), goes much farther in the direction of an autonomous consciousness, and culminates in "a radical subjectivism which no longer allows any outcome other than conquering solipsism by its own excesses and deriving the other from the originary constitution of the *ego cogito*" (QS, 257).¹⁶

Isn't Ricoeur's accusation of subjectivism at variance with Husserl's confession, attendant upon his phrase "for all this, names are lacking," about the indeterminacy of the flux of consciousness? Such indeterminacy, however, turns out to be applicable, as Derrida usefully specifies, to the properties of the flux rather than consciousness itself.¹⁷ The latter, affirms Husserl, "is absolute subjectivity and has the absolute properties of something to be denoted metaphorically as 'flux,' as a point of actuality, primal source-point, that from which springs the 'now,' and so on. . . . For all this, names are lacking" (PITC, §36, 100). Despite maintaining that its *properties* have to be indicated metaphorically, Husserl does not hesitate to designate consciousness as "absolute subjectivity."

By deploying this expression in order to refer to an essence distinct from its attributes, is it not clear that Husserl conceived of consciousness, as Derrida notes, on the basis of presence as substance, *ousia*, *hypokeimenon*, that is, a self-identical being in self-presence which forms the substance of a subject? Is not the construal of the flux and the living present in terms of consciousness

and subjectivity the result of the phenomenological requirement that the presence of sense to a full and primordial intuition be the guarantee of all value? I will discuss this point in detail in chapter 2, but it has to be said here that the ultimate court of appeal for Husserl is the noematic presence of an object to consciousness. Therefore, conscious intuition taking place in the living present constitutes the source of self-giving evidence. Husserl was strongly opposed to any talk of a non-present, unconscious sensation or content:

It is certainly an absurdity to speak of a content of which we are “unconscious,” one of which we are conscious only later. Consciousness is necessarily *consciousness* in each of its phases. Just as the retentional phase was conscious of the preceding one without making it an object, so also are we conscious of the primal datum—namely, in the specific form of the “now”—without its being objective. . . . Were this consciousness not present, no retention would be thinkable, since retention of a content of which we are not conscious is impossible.¹⁸

Husserl establishes in one fell swoop the complicity between intuition, consciousness, certitude, and the present. None of these terms can be eliminated without causing his project to collapse. It appears then that Derrida would concur with Ricoeur apropos of Husserl’s endorsement of an immediate and self-sufficient perceptual consciousness.

By drawing attention to the transcendental self’s inability to generate objective time, Ricoeur contests the phenomenological authority of consciousness, and points out the necessity of articulating it with non-presence and exteriority. Husserl’s recourse to a priori temporal laws bears witness to his failure to set out of play not only the time of reality and history but also intersubjectivity, in which objective time is ineluctably anchored. Far from being self-evident and immediate, the unity of consciousness that Husserl strives to account for remains dependent on the exteriority of objective time, which is itself reliant upon the communalization of individual experiences. Even though Ricoeur acknowledges that the phenomenological theory of temporalization allows, perhaps at the price of a certain contradiction,¹⁹ for some discontinuity, he suggests that Husserl could have admitted more expressly to the necessity of difference and exteriority at the very core of a supposedly unified consciousness.²⁰

In this light, one is not only tempted to remain vigilant about Lawlor’s remark that immediacy supports the entire Ricoeurian edifice, but also surprised by the fact that Lawlor himself observes that Ricoeur’s criticism is aimed at “Husserl’s failure to reconcile his subjective descriptions with irreversible temporal succession.”²¹ To the extent that Ricoeur holds that the modalities of difference and exteriority, attendant upon the objective time that phenom-

enology presupposes, introduce an element of alterity into the thick perceptual present, he cannot be reproached for embracing a fully present, self-sufficient and immediate consciousness. This claim is corroborated by the concerns that Ricoeur voices in *Freud and Philosophy*, written approximately twenty years before *Time and Narrative*, regarding the phenomenological prioritization of conscious perception and Husserl's mistrust of the unconscious. Ricoeur turns to Freud in response to a double demand: firstly, to acknowledge, against Husserl, a certain non-presence as absolutely necessary and original, and, secondly, to establish that nonetheless this non-presence is dialectically bound up with a positive meaningfulness. The latter is not grasped in the immediate experience of a perceptual consciousness but is to be sought by a reflective consciousness mediated by the interaction between the patient and the psychoanalyst.

Freud's Quantitative Hypothesis and Unconscious Autonomy

In "The Question of the Subject," Ricoeur expresses a double uneasiness about what he calls "reflective philosophy" or, more hesitantly, "philosophy of the subject," one instance of which is Husserlian phenomenology (QS, 236–37). Firstly, his hesitation originates in the acknowledgment that no such philosophy puts forward an immutable proposition affirming unreflectively and unreservedly the subject's sovereignty. With respect to phenomenology, I have shown that Ricoeur accepts that Husserl does not oust *all* difference from the perceptual present. Secondly, Ricoeur's uneasiness arises from the contemporary challenge, first and foremost by psychoanalysis and structuralism, to the pretensions of immediate consciousness and to the primordial and founding act of absolute subjectivity.

In his detailed investigation in *Freud and Philosophy*, psychoanalysis is said to suspend the properties of consciousness by means of an anti-phenomenological reduction. The Freudian text situates the possibility of a certain non-presence of meaning within the very heart of conscious perception, thereby undermining the primacy accorded by Husserl to a continuous and self-sufficient living present. Ricoeur, however, wishes to reappropriate such absence by inscribing it within a teleology claimed to be inherent in the Freudian discourse itself. Accordingly, I will explore here what many commentators have affirmatively described as Ricoeur's "double reading" of Freud,²² and will also raise specific questions that this double gesture fails to address.

The part of Freud's oeuvre that remains the most resistant to phenomenological concepts such as "conscious experience," "subjective intention," "meaning," "certainty," etc., is the one designated as "energetics," which refers to Freud's neurological work and, more specifically, to his "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1950 [1895]).²³ Freud's early thought is dominated by the notion of the "psychical apparatus" conceived of on the basis of principles borrowed

from physics and compliant with a quantitative treatment of energy. Ricoeur's presentation begins by quoting the opening statement of the "Project" where Freud sets out the fundamental tenets of his theory:

The intention is to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction. Two principal ideas are involved: [1] What distinguishes activity from rest is to be regarded as Q , subject to the general laws of motion. (2) The neurones are to be taken as the material particles. (SE, 1:295)

Freud goes on to affirm that pathological clinical observation suggested to him the conception of neuronal excitation as quantity in a state of flow, and stipulates that the basic principles of neuronal activity in relation to quantity are those of constancy and inertia. According to the latter, the nervous system tends to discharge its quantities trying to reduce its tensions to zero; this is its primary function. Considering that any excitation that produces energy can be subsumed under the concept of "quantity," Freud distinguishes between quantity originating in the external world (Q) and intercellular quantity arising within the somatic element ($Q\dot{\eta}$). Whereas the organism can withdraw from external stimuli, it cannot do so with respect to endogenous ones; these have their origin in the needs of hunger, respiration and sexuality, and cease only under specific conditions. In order to bring about these conditions, the organism is required to make an effort independent of and greater than the intercellular $Q\dot{\eta}$. Therefore, it needs to abandon its original trend to inertia and to put up with a certain store of $Q\dot{\eta}$ in order to be able to accomplish such an action. The system is unable to bring the level of $Q\dot{\eta}$ down to zero, but seeks nonetheless to maintain the level of tension as low as possible and to guard against any increase of it; this is the principle of constancy associated with the secondary function. As Freud notes, "[A]ll the functions of the nervous system can be comprised either under the aspect of the primary function or of the secondary one imposed by the exigencies of life" (SE, 1:297).

Subsequently, Freud identifies two classes of neurones: the permeable ones (ϕ), which offer no resistance and retain no trace of quantity, and the impermeable ones (ψ), which are loaded with resistance and constitute the vehicles of memory and other psychical processes (SE, 1:299–300). This distinction is necessitated by the fact that any serious psychology should provide an explanation of memory to the extent that this is one of the main characteristics of nervous tissue. If memory is defined as the capacity of protoplasm to be permanently differentiated by excitation, an equally important function of the system is perception. Capable of remaining infinitely fresh to new excitations,

the receiving substance must be essentially unalterable too. The nervous system must be both permanently altered and unaltered, hence the differentiation between ϕ and ψ .

Oddly, Ricoeur does not mention almost anything at all about the complex functioning of the two classes of neurones to which Freud devotes substantial space in the "Project." Rather, he is content to refer, in very general terms, to the mechanical description of quantity on the model of physical energy, and to insist that excitation is conceptualized as a "current which flows, which 'stores,' 'fills' or 'empties,' and 'charges' neurons [*sic*]; the all-important notion of 'cathexis' was first elaborated within this neuronic framework as a synonym of storing up and filling (*Origins*, pp. 358–62). Thus the 'Project' talks about cathected or empty neurons [*sic*]" (FP, 73–74).²⁴ Then he goes on to focus on the third system related to consciousness, perception and quality (ω), while drawing attention to Freud's alignment, on the one hand, of the increase in neuronal tension with unpleasure, and, on the other, of the discharge of tension with pleasure. Experiences of pleasure or unpleasure leave in the ψ system traces that are considered to be the intermediaries responsible for translating quantity into quality.²⁵

In what sense exactly is Freud's quantitative conception said, initially at least, to defy interpretation and meaning? Why does Ricoeur consider the quantitative treatment of psychical energy and the work of hermeneutics to be mutually exclusive? Precisely because Freud's explanation, by conceiving of the nervous system in terms of a purely mechanistic principle, regards it as an apparatus essentially purposeless and, therefore, resistant to the intentionality with which psychical life is usually coupled. If the provenance of the psyche is an unconscious level dominated by automatic forces and incompatible with "quality," "reality," and "time," then every process is a mechanical reaction to the threat of an increase in quantity and unpleasure. Quality is thought to originate in quantity, and even conscious desire and wishes, says Ricoeur, are assumed to depend primarily on a mechanistic or "hedonistic" principle (FP, 80). What counts on this primordial level is measurable forces in relation to which the conscious processes of discrimination, inhibition, judgment, interaction with the external world and other persons, etc., are regarded as secondary and supervenient. By approaching the psyche in terms of quantities of excitation, currents of energy, and cathected neurones, Freud has provided an anatomy of the brain, thereby construing psychical processes as more or less static phenomena laid bare by a mechanical explanation.

For Ricoeur, the corollary of Freud's anatomical psychology is a certain determinism that is in conflict with a teleological interpretation. Quoting Ernest Jones, he points out that such a "deterministic hypothesis" prevailed over against a theory of desire incorporating the values of purpose, aim, and intention (FP, 86). The neurology of the "Project" was intended as a scientific explanation of

how the psychological apparatus functions without, however, placing this mechanical functioning under the service of a higher objective or *telos*. If there is something essentially inventive about such a quantitative hypothesis, it has to do with the conception of the psyche on the model of a machine defined in terms of its pure functioning rather than a final purpose. To the extent that Freud could envisage a machine without finality, intention, or meaning, he introduces an irreducible non-presence into the heart of consciousness and, thereby, undercuts the phenomenological belief in a living perceptual present.

The dispossession of immediate consciousness is sustained in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), whose difficult seventh chapter is, according to Ricoeur, the unquestionable heir to the "Project."²⁶ However, inasmuch as the *Traumdeutung* subordinates the systematic explanation to interpretation, it is to Ricoeur's discussion of Freud's papers on metapsychology that I will now turn in order to examine the extent to which this more mature expression of psychoanalysis corroborates the idea of an initial non-presence, independent of and resistant to meaningfulness. Ricoeur draws attention once again to the anti-phenomenological character of Freud's topographical-economic explanation. Freud adopts a systematic perspective as opposed to a descriptive one, and performs the reverse of Husserl's *epochē*: whereas the latter consists in an act of suspension at the disposal of the subject, Freud's *epochē* amounts to a reduction of consciousness, where the very control and certitude of a conscious self is put into question.²⁷

In order for such a reduction to be possible, Freud postulates, in the essay on "The Unconscious" (1915), the organization of psychological experience in three independent localities in compliance with the first topography: the unconscious (*Ucs.*), the preconscious (*Pcs.*) and consciousness (*Cs.*).²⁸ Every psychological act, considered to belong at first to the system *Ucs.*, in order to be allowed into *Cs.*, should pass a certain type of testing or censorship understood by Ricoeur on the model of the barrier (*la barre*). If it passes the testing without difficulty, it enters the *Pcs.*, and the possibility of it becoming conscious is not a remote one. If, however, the act is rejected by censorship, it is cut off from the *Cs.* and repressed into the *Ucs.* According to the topography, the process of becoming conscious

is a possibility which may or may not eventuate. Consciousness does not occur unconditionally and as a matter of course. The barrier of resistance leads us to represent the process of becoming conscious as a transgression, a crossing of a barrier; to become conscious is to penetrate *into*, to be unconscious is to keep apart *from* consciousness. (FP, 118)

"Repression," in conjunction with "topography," gives rise to relations of exclusion, which, in turn, result in the metaphors of the barrier. If the latter is

invoked whenever Ricoeur wishes to underline the difference between Husserl and Freud, it is by virtue of the fact that the separation between the unconscious and consciousness is a rigorous one, and the entailed non-presence is much more radical than that allowed for by Husserl. In the third part of *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur remarks that the main barrier dividing psychical localities is that between the unconscious and the preconscious rather than that between the preconscious and the conscious: "To replace the formula *Cs./Pcs., Ucs.* by the formula *Cs., Pcs./Ucs.* is to move from the phenomenological point of view to the topographic [*sic*] point of view" (FP, 392). Repression is responsible for dissociating the *Ucs.* from the *Pcs.* and *Cs.*, and, in this light, the unconscious is no longer determined as an implicit consciousness or latency *continuously* yoked to the perceptual present; rather, it is autonomous and wholly different from the *Cs.* The specificity of the unconscious is indicated by the fact that it is governed by its own systemic laws such as the primary process, the absence of negation, timelessness, etc., outlined in the fifth section of "The Unconscious."²⁹

Similarly, in "The Question of the Subject," Ricoeur reaffirms that these psychical localities are "in no way defined by descriptive, phenomenological properties but as *systems*, that is, as sets of representations and affects governed by specific laws which enter into mutual relationships which, in turn, are irreducible to any quality of consciousness, to any determination of the 'lived'" (QS, 237). Insofar as consciousness is denied direct access to the unconscious, where meaning is constituted, it is not the principle or measure of all things; it is, therefore, suspended or reduced. The key idea of the topography is that the unconscious is beyond the reach of consciousness, hence the demand for an interpretative technique adapted to distortions and displacements. By exposing the illusion of immediate consciousness, not only does psychoanalysis undermine the philosophies of the subject but it also establishes the anteriority and primordially of unconscious activity, which is now placed at the center of existence.

That Freud wished to affirm a distance between the *Ucs.* and *Cs.*, thereby introducing an ineluctable alterity into the heart of the conscious present, is evident in the following comparison he makes: when an unconscious thought gains access into consciousness, the ensuing conscious perception is similar to that of the external world by means of our sense-organs. By assigning psychical activity to the unconscious, psychoanalysis differentiates the conscious perception of an unconscious process from this process itself, in the same way that Kant cautiously avoided identifying a subjectively conditioned perception of a thing with the thing itself. Freud points out that, "like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be" (SE, 14:171). Commenting on this comparison, Ricoeur underlines that Freud, by endorsing the idea of *essentially* and *originarily* remote unconscious operations, questions the phenomenological preeminence of the living present and complicates the coupling of perception, certainty, and consciousness. Given that the conscious text is subject to distant impulses that originate in a system outside its own

control, it is regarded not as immediately meaningful and transparent but as a “lacunary, truncated text” (FP, 119–20).

Freud’s systematic perspective comes more forcefully to the fore when his topography becomes an economy, when he posits drive (*Trieb*) as one of the fundamental concepts of his psychology. Such a stipulation brings us back to the “Project,” for the notion of “drive” cannot be divorced from the hypothesis of the constancy principle.³⁰ An instinctual stimulus does not arise in the external world but from within the organism itself. In this respect, it can also be called a “need.” It is the function of the nervous system to reduce to the lowest possible level the stimuli that reach it. The activity of the psychical mechanism, affirms Freud in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915), is “subject to the pleasure principle, i.e. is automatically regulated by feelings belonging to the pleasure-unpleasure series.”³¹ This implies not only that every psychical operation is ultimately understood as a vicissitude of drives, but also that the source *itself* of these drives cannot become the object of knowledge.

Nevertheless, if one can talk of drives, it is thanks to the fact that their energetic component is represented by something psychical: “An ‘instinct’ appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative [*Repräsentant*] of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind” (SE, 14:121–22).³² Repression consists in cutting off drives from consciousness and not in cutting them off from their psychical representatives. This is what Freud specifically labels “primal repression,” according to which the psychical representative of the drive is denied access into consciousness.³³

In his detailed exposition of the complex role of psychical representatives, which are themselves subdivided into ideas or groups of ideas (*Vorstellungen*) and quotas of affect (*Affektbetrag*),³⁴ Ricoeur does not fail to draw attention to Freud’s terms *remoteness* (*Entfernung*) and *distortion* (*Entstellung*), which indicate the necessary distance separating the two realms in question: on the one hand, drives, unconscious activity, and the quantitative factor of instinctual energy; on the other, the ideational or psychical representatives of these drives and the possibility of gaining access into consciousness. By virtue of this irreducible remoteness, drives *as such* are averred to be energy and tension. Their biological reality or source (*Quelle*) is inaccessible: “We do not in fact know what instincts are in their own dynamism. We do not talk of instincts in themselves” (FP, 136).

The move from the topography in the direction of a pure economics and the concomitant affirmation of the anteriority and independence of drives recur in the fourth and fifth sections of “The Unconscious.” Freud’s analysis here, concerned solely with the placement and displacement of cathexis, the withdrawal of cathexis and anticathexis, veers toward the economic viewpoint, which “endeavours to follow out the vicissitudes of amounts of excitation and to arrive at least at some *relative* estimate of their magnitude” (SE, 14:181).

In addition, the nucleus of the unconscious is said to consist of “instinctual representatives which seek to discharge their cathexis; that is to say, it consists of wishful impulses” (SE, 14:186). Freud, once again, claims Ricoeur, defines “the unconscious system much more in terms of the discharge of affects than in terms of ideas” (FP, 148), thereby banishing any relations of meaning.

The reading of the papers on metapsychology concludes with a double gesture epitomizing Ricoeur’s approach to psychoanalysis in general. On the one hand, Freud is shown to favor the autonomy of instinctual and unconscious activity, hence the economic and automatic regulation of pleasure and unpleasure as the intractable provenance of the psychical system. The latter functions according to mechanistic principles devoid of any sense of purposefulness or intentionality. Such an anti-phenomenological account posits a *necessary* and *originary* non-presence, which is precisely why Ricoeur turns to Freud in order to question Husserl’s emphasis on self-evidence, immediacy, continuity, and self-sufficiency. Insofar as psychoanalysis regards difference as necessary and anterior to a self-identical consciousness, it introduces absence into the perceptual present much more decisively than Husserl did. Ricoeur stresses that unconscious desire, rather than the cogito, is the first fact of existence: “Before the subject consciously and willingly posits himself, he has already been posited in being at the instinctual level. That instinct [or drive] is anterior to awareness and volition signifies the anteriority of the ontic level to the reflective level, *the priority of the I am to the I think*” (QS, 265). As a result of Freud’s anti-phenomenology, “consciousness is now the least known; it has ceased to be self-evident and has become a problem” (FP, 133).

On the other hand, Ricoeur is keen to place the Freudian emphasis on a detached unconscious under the service of the *demand* for interpretation and meaningfulness. Following this second strand of his reading, I will now focus on the dialectical articulation between the quantitative-economic hypotheses and the possibility of attributing a meaning to otherwise purely biological processes, a possibility designated as Freud’s “semantics of desire” (QS, 263). Commenting on such a double reading, Thomas R. Koenig remarks that Freud’s naturalistic approach is considered by Ricoeur to be “only a provisional reference point which eventually is to be integrated into the existential.”³⁵ Although the necessity and chronological priority of unconscious activity is affirmed, it is teleologically and, in the final analysis, *negatively* determined as always looking forward to a meaningful *positivity*.

From a Perceptual to a Reflective Present

Ricoeur’s negative interpretation of non-presence is predicated upon his complaint that Freud’s abstract science, albeit necessary, is inadequate and cannot single-handedly provide a satisfactory account of the psychical system. Insofar

as the “Project” construes the psyche on the model of the principles of physics, biology, and anatomy, it deprives it of the properly psychical qualities that distinguish its meaningfulness from the automatism of an apparatus. What cuts Freud’s scientific explanation off “from any work of deciphering, from any reading of symptoms and signs, is the pretension of making a quantitative psychology of desire . . . correspond to a mechanical system of neurons [*sic*]” (FP, 82). On the contrary, argues Ricoeur, the “pleasure-unpleasure combination sets into play much more than the isolated functioning of the psychical apparatus” (FP, 77). He insists that Freud, dissatisfied with his natural scientific representation of the primary function, was forced to move gradually away from his quantitative conception and the metaphors of the apparatus toward a certain semantics.

This transition to a more dialectical approach is evident in his reluctance, even in the “Project,” to endorse the unpredictable and discontinuous functioning of the psychical machine. Freud is said to have affirmed the *meaningful* and *productive* transformation of quantity into quality, and the smooth passage from the primary to the secondary function. Accordingly, having hardly explained how the ψ neurones and their unconscious traces work, brief references to which are largely confined to his footnotes, Ricoeur moves to the third neuronal class related to consciousness.

One of the axioms of Freudian theory is that conscious perception and memory are mutually exclusive. Consciousness knows nothing of the quantities of excitation that constitute the origin of memory cathecting the ψ system: “Consciousness gives us what are called *qualities*—sensations which are *different* in a great multiplicity of ways and whose *difference* is distinguished according to its relations with the external world. Within this difference there are series, similarities and so on, but there are in fact no quantities in it” (SE, 1:308). Consciousness makes us aware of certain sensations by qualitatively differentiating them from other ones that belong to the order of quantity and that are registered by means of unconscious traces. How and where do qualities originate? Freud reaches the conclusion that “there is a third system of neurones— ω perhaps [we might call it]—which is excited along with perception, but not along with reproduction, and whose states of excitation give rise to the various qualities—are, that is to say, *conscious sensations*” (SE, 1:309).³⁶ The ω neurones, which will later be inserted between ϕ and ψ , are responsible for receiving qualities, or, rather, for converting external incoming excitation into quality. The ω system is moved by very small quantities, and conscious sensations (quality) come about only where quantities are so far as possible excluded. Largely permeable and retaining no memory of the sensations they receive, the ω neurones seem to be the antipodes of the ψ system at this stage.³⁷

Ricoeur defines this difference between the perceptual neurones and their mnemonic counterparts in terms of an “opposition” between receiving and retain-

ing, perceiving and remembering (FP, 76 n. 15). Such an opposition, however, does not amount to a radical heterogeneity, and Ricoeur recalls Freud's metaphorical description of Ψ and ω as intercommunicating pipes. Moreover, the perceptual neurones are linked to the mnemonic ones by means of a temporal property, a certain periodicity of neuronal motion that is transmitted without inhibition in every direction. This periodicity changes into time as soon as it enters consciousness, hence the correlation of the latter with time and reality, to be opposed to the timelessness of the unconscious.³⁸ By portraying the ω and Ψ neurones as two entities at variance with each other, and by affirming the smooth transformation not only of quantity into quality but also of periodicity into time, Ricoeur puts forward the idea of their dialectical articulation, thereby denying the quantitative system a radical alterity. As a result, the mechanical component of the apparatus is not regarded as *entirely* autonomous but as a necessary and provisional negativity to be eclipsed by quality and consciousness.

One indication, for Ricoeur, that Freud's mechanistic model is not self-sufficient is that it starts to break down when one realizes that the principle of inertia cannot adequately explain experiences such as pleasure, unpleasure, satisfaction, etc., all of which involve much more than mere mechanics. The pleasure-unpleasure combination sets into play one's interaction with the external world and other persons, a process that cannot be accounted for by invoking currents of physical energy alone. The avoidance of unpleasure implies several operations that are scarcely quantifiable and that are germane to the secondary function and the ego organization. Some such processes are discrimination, inhibition, satisfaction, judgment, observant thought, etc., which, as Freud concedes, do not function in compliance with a purely naturalistic law.³⁹

In addition, the fact that the amounts of excitation cannot be measured also signifies the inadequacy of the quantitative hypothesis. Freud's quantities, far from being proper quantities comparable to those studied by physics, have been derived from pathological clinical observation, so, strictly speaking, there is nothing measurable about them; what matters is their intensive aspect. Ricoeur underlines that all the "mechanisms" Freud describes in this early period will soon be raised to the level of "work" (dream-work, work of mourning, etc.), where agency and purposefulness are introduced into the previously neurological account (FP, 84–85).

Although Ricoeur is aware that the quantitative hypothesis will never be completely abandoned and that consciousness will always remain a quasi-cortex, he stresses the tendency of psychoanalysis to move gradually away from an organic explanation, and quotes many passages where Freud proclaims the inadequacy of his neurological model and the need for more psychical, non-anatomical categories. Such a tendency is already evident in the "Project," which "is not merely a mechanical system cut off from interpretation by its anatomical hypothesis; it is already a topography, linked by underground connections

to the work of deciphering symptoms. Hermeneutics is already present in this text" (FP, 84).⁴⁰ Freud is said to have been more and more willing to describe his concepts from both an anatomical and a psychological perspective, and it is the dialectical continuity between the two that allows for the possibilities of analysis and interpretation.

The claim about Freud's intention to distance himself from the mechanical model appears problematic, for it fails to take into consideration that his descriptions of the psyche drew increasingly upon a metaphoric of the machine, culminating in the "Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad'" (1925), where the nervous system is likened to the famous *Wunderblock*.⁴¹ Moreover, this transition from neurology to hermeneutics is authorized by the dialectical interpretation of various oppositional pairs such as memory and perception, quantity and quality, the primary and secondary processes, the mechanical and the psychical, etc. This gesture is indissociable from a teleological construal whereby one of the terms of these binaries is thought to exist for the sake of the other one, to be always in sight of the other higher term whose function is to absorb without negating the first one. Such conceptuality entails the determination of the two poles of the dialectic on the basis of a positive-negative relation. On the one hand, Freud is credited with introducing an original and necessary non-presence into perceptual consciousness; on the other, Ricoeur determines this non-presence as a provisional negativity to be subsumed by a positive and meaningful *telos*. His reading of Freud's topographical-economic model sheds more light on this dialectic.

Initially, Ricoeur laments Freud's drifting toward a pure economics in his metapsychology. The pleasure principle and the terminology of biological needs or discharge of affects are inseparable from the idea of an apparatus functioning according to a mechanistic, nonintentional principle. As long as the primary process prevails and forces of quantitative energy are dominant, "impulses coexist without any relations of meaning" (FP, 148). Although Freud's economics is instrumental in reducing phenomenological illusions and unmasking a false consciousness, it has to be supplemented by a semantics intended to restore meaning. Ricoeur claims that such a semantics of desire, whose implication is the dialectical coupling of suspicion and faith, is evident in the Freudian discourse itself.

The barrier, for instance, separating psychical localities, far from imposing an absolute limit on interpretation, is precisely what calls for the collaborative work of the analyst and the patient. In the final analysis, "The Unconscious" ends not with the *intrasystemic* laws governing each system but with the *inter-systemic* relations that make the communication between the three localities possible: "The Unconscious' ends with a significant circular movement that takes us back to the starting point, that is, to the deciphering of the unconscious in its 'derivatives'" (FP, 150). These derivatives, which are the psychical repre-

sentatives referred to earlier, function as intermediaries between the systems, as the points of transition capable of providing access, on condition that one is willing to undertake the laborious work of analysis, to the repressed contents of the unconscious. In this sense, economics forms the background of a properly hermeneutic phase: “[Psychoanalysis] never confronts one with bare forces, but always with forces in search of meaning; this link between force and meaning makes instinct a psychological reality, or, more exactly, the limit concept at the frontier between the organic and the psychical” (FP, 151).

What is one supposed to conclude from this attribution to Freud of an unequivocally hermeneutic agenda? Perhaps that one should not take Ricoeur’s words *à la lettre* when he speaks of a “barrier” separating the *Ucs.* from *Cs.* Of course, Ricoeur never said that this barrier entails a relation of radical exteriority between the two systems. On the contrary, he insists that the barrier unites as much as it separates: “In spite of the barrier that separates the systems, they must be assumed to have a common structure whereby the conscious and the unconscious are equally psychical. . . . [This structure] assures a close ‘contact’ [*Berührung*] between conscious and unconscious psychical processes” (FP, 135). And closer to the end of the book, he affirms that “the barrier functions both as a relation between signifying and signified factors and as a force of exclusion between dynamic systems” (FP, 403–404).⁴² The double functionality of the word *barrier*, not only indicating exclusion but also constituting a point of transition between distinct psychical domains, excellently serves the dialectical agenda of *Freud and Philosophy*.

Firstly, the term *barrier* is instrumental in distancing Freud and Ricoeur from Husserl’s emphasis on the transparency of a sovereign consciousness. Doesn’t “barrier,” by opposing the unconscious to consciousness and by allowing for a necessary and anterior non-presence, make Ricoeur impervious to any criticism of solipsism, subjectivism, or subscription to the immediacy of a perceptual present? “Barrier” indicates the separation of two realms determined reciprocally and in opposition to each other. The corollary of such separation is the attribution of a more or less rigorous identity to each system, which remains in principle self-identical, unaltered, and distinguishable from what lies on the other side. Hence Ricoeur’s allusions, in *Freud and Philosophy* but also in more recent work, to the indestructibility and permanence of unconscious traces.⁴³

Secondly, insofar as the barrier allows for communication and translation, what is at issue is a dialectical opposition, which is precisely why the barrier does not constitute a radical limit. The acknowledged difference between the unconscious and consciousness does not amount to an irreducible heterogeneity. The two realms are conceptually opposed to one another, which means that they share a minimal common ground, that of the common barrier. The unconscious is not conceived of on the basis of an ineluctable alterity but on that of a necessary remoteness which nonetheless communicates with consciousness. In

the third section of *Freud and Philosophy*, entitled “Dialectic: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud,” Ricoeur asserts that “the unconscious is homogeneous with consciousness; it is its relative other, and not the absolute other” (FP, 430). In this respect, he interprets the link between the two spheres as a dialectical one, and regards the transcription of content from one to the other as a teleological process.

An essential feature of such dialectics is the directionality from the unconscious to consciousness, from non-meaning to meaningfulness, from quantity to quality, from secrecy to expression. This directionality is evident in Ricoeur’s delineation of the unconscious as a “drive toward language” (FP, 453–54). Notwithstanding its unnameable and disjunctive character, the unconscious is a potentiality, a provisional state of affairs looking forward to the possibility of a meaningful present: “If desire is the unnameable, it is turned from the very outset toward language; it wishes to be expressed; it is in potency to speech. What makes desire the limit concept at the frontier between the organic and the psychical is the fact that desire is both the nonspoken and the wish-to-speak” (FP, 457). Mute at a given moment, the unconscious is congruous with phenomenality and expression, toward which it is claimed unflinchingly to tend. According to Hegelian phenomenology, to which Ricoeur’s reading of Freud is indebted, every dialectic consists in a progressive synthetic movement whereby each form or figure receives its meaning from the subsequent one. The truth of the unconscious lies in the subsequent moment of consciousness, which, having incorporated its other, assumes the form of the mediated self of reflection rather than the allegedly transparent self of perception. Ricoeur alludes to Jean Hyppolite’s designation of this complex conceptuality as a “dialectical teleology.”⁴⁴

Most of Freud’s operative concepts are arranged in oppositional pairs, which is what makes possible a dialectical correlation giving the whole system the directionality characteristic of a teleological process. Anyone “familiar with the philosophical mentality of Hegelianism,” says Ricoeur, “cannot help noticing the constant use of opposition in the structure of Freud’s concepts” (FP, 475). Some of the binaries identified are the primary and the secondary process, the unconscious and consciousness of the first topography, life and death instincts, the id and the superego of the second topography, the libido and a nonlibidinal culture, and the intersubjective dialectical nature not only of the analytical situation but also of unconscious impulses. The terms of these pairs “are all presented, as in the Hegelian dialectic, as master-slave relationships that must be overcome” (FP, 477).

Unconscious activity, then, is not regarded as imposing a radical limit on interpretation but as the negative condition of a positively reflective process aiming at self-understanding by means of recovering, with the analyst’s help, an archaic, hidden meaning. This original dialectic between the unconscious and

consciousness is instrumental both in giving rise to the archaeological urge of psychoanalysis to return to the most originary and principal psychological state, and in authorizing that other interpretative dialectic between archaeology and teleology. Firstly, the concept of “archaeology” is introduced to complement the economic point of view:

We must now see the underlying compatibility between the economic model and what I henceforth shall call the archeological [*sic*] moment of reflection. Here the economic point of view is no longer simply a model, nor even a point of view: it is a total view of things and of man in the world of things. . . . For my part, I regard Freudianism as a revelation of the archaic, a manifestation of the ever prior. (FP, 440)

Ricoeur explains that the expression “archaeology of the subject,” borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, was motivated by a “sense of depth” pertaining to the hidden timelessness of the unconscious as opposed to the temporality of a more easily available consciousness (FP, 442). Furthermore, this very timelessness cannot be disengaged from the Freudian belief in the indestructibility of unconscious traces that is the task of the analytical work to excavate. Ricoeur refers to Freud’s portrayal of instinctual activity in terms of a dark, inaccessible locality or even a chaos, and, arguably, the affinity between such metaphors and Hegel’s description of subjectivizing interiorization (*Erinnerung*) as a dark abyss is hardly coincidental.⁴⁵

Secondly, if such archaeology and what Ricoeur calls Freud’s “realism of the unconscious” lead to the dispossession of immediate consciousness, this is only a provisional phase inextricably bound up with the demand for a higher reflective consciousness: “What I wish to demonstrate, then, is that if Freudianism is an explicit and thematized archeology [*sic*], it relates of itself, by the dialectical nature of its concepts, to an implicit and unthematized teleology” (FP, 461). The necessary stage of dispossession refers to the patient’s supposedly transparent consciousness whereas the final return to consciousness at the end of the analysis pertains to a “scientific consciousness” that belongs not to a private but to a “transcendental subjectivity” (FP, 431). The reappropriation of such consciousness constitutes the *telos* of the psychoanalytical enterprise, and it is on this basis that the reality of the id has to be dialectically yoked to the ideality of meaning. The transparency of meaning must be suspended for the work of analysis to be jointly undertaken by the analyst and the patient, and for the return journey toward an ideal intersubjective meaning to begin: “I understand,” maintains Ricoeur, “the Freudian metapsychology as an adventure of reflection; the dispossession of consciousness is its path, because the act of becoming conscious is its task” (FP, 439).

The dialectic between dispossession and reappropriation, between archaeology and teleology, brings together under the same roof the psychoanalytical critique of a phenomenologically living present and the possibility of attaining a reflective present on a higher level of consciousness. Insofar as the unconscious trace that constitutes the object of archaeology functions according to mechanistic principles, it is something unnameable and unrepresentable that cannot appear as such before a *perceiving* subject; hence the acknowledgment of distance, absence, and secrecy. Nevertheless, although the unconscious itself does not appear and does not speak, it is conceived of, thanks to the linking capacity of the barrier, as a tendency toward phenomenality, language, and meaning. This tendency can be made use of by the onerous and reflective work of analysis undertaken jointly by the analyst and the analysand. Consciousness has to lose itself, to distance itself from the myth of immediate perception, in order for the *reflective* subject to achieve a genuine self-awareness through the detour of the psychoanalytical technique, another consciousness and its own working-through (*Durcharbeitung*).⁴⁶

Ricoeur's discussion leaves little doubt as to his approach to those two interpretative phases in terms of a dialectic between a positivity and a negativity. Although the diagnosis of the inadequacies and illusions of consciousness is a necessary and original stage, it is a negative gesture that has to be complemented by the postulation of a positive *telos*: "We must now take a further step and speak no longer merely in negative terms of the inadequacy of consciousness, but in positive terms of the emergence or positing of desire through which I am posited, and find myself already posited" (FP, 439). Similarly, in "The Question of the Subject," he reiterates that "the task of a reflective philosophy following Freud will be to dialectically relate a teleology to this archaeology," and underlines that "rooting subjective existence in [unconscious] desire permits a *positive* implication of psychoanalysis to appear, one which goes beyond the *negative* task of deconstructing the false *cogito*" (QS, 244 and 243). As Ricoeur explains in "What is Dialectical?" (1975), every dialectical process has to welcome negative instances, to incorporate foreign elements in order to be able to attain a higher order of truth and objectivity.⁴⁷ Thus, the appropriation of meaning through psychoanalysis and interpretation entails the negative realization that the conscious subject is an enigma or a problem for reflection rather than the measure of all things.

The Freudian insights find completion in a philosophy of reflection, where the archaeology of the subject aims at a purposeful meaning. It is on account of such a dialectics that Ricoeur's reading of Freud claims to retain the critique of immediate consciousness without, however, giving up all belief in the possibility of achieving a mediated self-consciousness. The latter is inscribed within the course of a progressive synthetic movement of what Ricoeur calls, after Hegel, "spirit" or "mind":

The subject must also discover that the process of “becoming conscious,” through which it *appropriates* the meaning of its existence as desire and effort, does not belong to it, but belongs to the *meaning* that is formed in it. The subject must mediate self-consciousness through spirit or mind, that is, through the figures that give a telos to this “becoming conscious.” (FP, 459)

The journey of self-consciousness, its mediation by an abysmal unconscious and the eventual *Aufhebung* of the perceptual present, comes to be represented by an imagery of darkness and light arrived at through a reinterpretation of *Oedipus Rex*. In response to Freud’s insistence on the Oedipal drama of childhood, Ricoeur proposes that the pivotal theme of the play is “the tragedy of self-consciousness” and Oedipus’s relation to revelation or insight, where the sphinx represents the unconscious and Tiresias the force of truth (FP, 516–17).⁴⁸ Paradoxically, Oedipus, who can see the light of day, remains in darkness with regard to his initial hubris and pretension to mastery. He can achieve spiritual insight only after his pretension has been shattered by suffering. The possibility of light and self-consciousness depends on the realization of his arrogance and false mastery: “As in the Hegelian dialectic, Oedipus is not the center from which the truth proceeds; a first mastery . . . must be broken; the figure from which truth proceeds is that of the seer” (FP, 517). It is in light of such a tendency to endorse dialectics that Jean-François Lyotard draws attention, in *Discours, figure* (1971), to Ricoeur’s Hegelian reading of Freud.⁴⁹

To what extent is Ricoeur’s dialecticization of psychoanalysis compatible with his deployment, throughout *Freud and Philosophy*, of a metaphors of language, discourse, and text in order to describe the functioning of the unconscious? If he claims that the unconscious is analogous to a linguistic process, the latter is not the transparent one of ordinary language. By virtue of repression, distortion, displacement, condensation, and pictorial representation, unconscious activity does not coincide with language, nor does it obey any linguistic laws: “It is impossible to make the absence of logic in dreams, their ignorance of ‘No,’ accord with a state of real language” (FP, 397). The instinctual representatives, which are the signifying elements in that secret realm, belong to the order of images and have little to do with ordinary language. The only case where ordinary language may be involved in the unconscious is when words are treated as images in schizophrenia or the more schizophrenic aspect of dreams. Ricoeur admits that “if we take the concept of linguistics in the strict sense of the science of language phenomena embodied in a given and therefore organized language, the symbolism of the unconscious is not *stricto sensu* a linguistic phenomenon” (FP, 399). The unconscious is operative prior to language and does not function in agreement with orderly relations between signifiers and signifieds. Ricoeur, therefore, purports to have

resisted the Lacanian belief that “the unconscious is structured like a language” (FP, 395).

And yet, this is far from saying that the linguistic analogy is altogether abandoned. Rather, Ricoeur complicates things by putting forward, following Émile Benveniste, the analogy between the unconscious and rhetoric, which is an equivocal language of tropes where the link between signifier and signified is not given but something to be arrived at by means of a toilsome process.⁵⁰ This analogy presupposes that in ordinary language there is a more or less direct relation between the sensible and the intelligible, that the access to the signified via the signifier is unproblematic and unequivocal. Such a straightforward transition is absent from metaphorical language, insofar as involved therein is the substitution of one signifier for another and the displacement of literal meaning. A necessary distance is acknowledged between signifier and signified, and the latter, not readily available to the conscious subject, is posited as a *telos* to be partially reappropriated. Repression resembles the mechanism of metaphor because it leads, in the case of dreams, to condensation and displacement of unconscious contents.⁵¹

Ricoeur cautiously refrains from affirming an absolute coincidence between metaphor and repression, for repression entails an economy of forces incompatible with the linguistic point of view. The impossibility of *totally* recovering or appropriating an unconscious meaning originates in the inscrutable nature of somatic needs and impulses. This is precisely why psychoanalytical truth always remains, for Ricoeur, a “task” or an “infinite Idea” (FP, 458), never to be actually and fully realized but regulating nonetheless the horizon within which the collaborative work of the patient and the analyst takes place.

The analogy, however, is upheld with the qualification that “the interpretation of repression as metaphor shows that the unconscious is related to the conscious as a particular kind of discourse to ordinary discourse” (FP, 403). Ricoeur refers to unconscious processes as “paralinguistic distortions of ordinary language” or a “quasi language” (FP, 404–405). No matter how much he seeks to displace and complicate the relation between the sensible and the intelligible in his metaphorical portrayal of the unconscious, the psychical representatives are regarded as signifying elements mediating between an anterior non-presence and a positive meaningfulness. If non-presence and presence are dialectically linked thanks to a middle term ensuring the smooth transition from the former to the latter, their difference is internal rather than external. I will come back to this in chapters 3 and 4, so it suffices here to stress, in an elliptical fashion, that the sensible and intelligible components of language have always been understood in terms of a dialectical relation whereby one can reach a signified content on the basis of a signifying form. The dialectical teleology Ricoeur diagnoses in the consciousness-unconscious relation is consolidated by his recourse to a linguistic or, rather, rhetorical metaphoric.

In light of Ricoeur's endorsement of a dialectical logic in Freud, but also of his attempt to introduce an intersubjective mediation into the living present of phenomenology, one has to agree with Richard Kearney's affirmation of

Ricoeur's resolute refusal of the idealist temptation—extending from Hegel to Husserl and Sartre—to reduce being to being-for-consciousness. . . . Consciousness must pass through the unconscious; intuition through critical interpretation; reason through language; and reflection through imagination. . . . The way of appropriation must always go through the way of disappropriation. There is no belonging except through distantiation.⁵²

With the reservation that my insistence on Ricoeur's dialectics is not my last word on his reading of Freud, one can pose here several questions, anticipating the investigation of Derrida's approach to psychoanalysis. To what extent does Ricoeur's dialectics do justice to Freud's supposedly major contributions to thought, namely, the concept of the unconscious and the process of repression? Does the construal of the unconscious as a potentiality on its way to meaningfulness not detract from Freud's radical thinking? What would the implications for a hermeneutics of the psyche be if Freud's bipolar distinctions were shown to be essentially nonoppositional? If it could be shown that the psychological system functions according to a differential law that infinitely problematizes the dialectical opposition of all those terms, would this not signify that any progressive movement is interrupted in a way unaccounted for by Ricoeur's reading? I will now turn to Derrida with a view not only to seeing whether his interpretation of Freud is compatible with Ricoeur's idea of a "psychical discourse" compliant with the continuist understanding of "language," "signification," "communication," "medium," "form," and "content," but also to exploring the extent to which he upholds Ricoeur's association of Husserlian phenomenology with a continuous and flowing temporality.

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Chapter 2

Derrida and Rhythmic Discontinuity

In order to counterbalance Husserl's conception of the living present in terms of immediacy and transparency, Ricoeur turned to Freudian psychoanalysis, which complicates, he claims, the idea of a self-constituting consciousness. It is worth now going back to Husserl's text, regarding it this time through the prism of Derrida's analysis in his highly controversial *Speech and Phenomena*. The first two sections of this chapter will reexamine Husserl's theory of temporalization from a Derridean perspective. I will argue that Derrida's construal is more appreciative than Ricoeur's of the incongruities of Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, and that these incongruities reflect, in turn, an originary aporia that constitutes the sine qua non of the living present and temporality in general.

The remaining three sections will focus on Derrida's reading of Freud's archaeological quest and findings with respect to an absolutely original psychical trace. Although Derrida admits to the dialectical structure of Freudian conceptuality, he also insists on the tendency of psychoanalysis to resist interpretation and teleology. In order to throw some light on such a paradoxical gesture of self-resistance, I will discuss Derrida's interpretation of certain moments in Freud's neurological and metapsychological accounts where psychical inscription is at issue. This process will be revealed to constitute a differential movement taking place on the frontier between the inside and the outside, and giving rise to mysterious unconscious traces that remain essentially heterogeneous to presence and permanence. I will also explore the peculiar temporality of this psychical writing, as well as the implications of Freud's scriptural metaphors not only for the functioning of the psyche but also for what one could designate as "mundane writing." Finally, in a quasi-circular and apparently contradictory fashion, I will investigate the possibility of discovering in Ricoeur's text indications that, despite appearances, he goes some way toward thinking the Freudian tension brought out by Derrida's reading.

Husserl's Aporia: Discontinuity and Repetition

In *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, in order to portray the problematic relationship between objective time and immanent time-consciousness in Husserl, Derrida has abundant recourse to the terms *dialectic* and *contradiction*.¹ One, therefore, might justifiably believe that this early work concurs with Ricoeur's interpretation. This vocabulary, however, is largely abandoned in *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry"* and, subsequently, a certain adjustment in Derrida's vocabulary apropos of Husserl's account of temporalization is evident in *Speech and Phenomena*, where he thematizes what he calls Husserl's "irreconcilable possibilities" (SP, 67).² For Derrida, Husserl's analyses are perplexing insofar as they are tormented by two simultaneous demands: on the one hand, there is the necessity of a faithful description of lived experiences of time, which are nonpunctual and enduring, whereas, on the other, there is the requirement that the living now be the absolute *principium* and ultimate source of authority for all knowledge.

The first necessity, whose phenomenological provenance I will now attempt to flesh out, concerns the modalities of continuity and repetition accentuated by Ricoeur. Husserl's theory was intended to make time itself appear before a pure and transcendental consciousness, hence his avowal to set world time out of play. In the form that his transcendental project took in his mature years from 1905 onward, it was defined by the attempt to reach a primordial sphere of originary lived experience (*Erlebnis*).³ With a view to opposing both empiricism and historicism, he sought to get beyond mere facts of experience and the worldly present to the eidetic structures of consciousness prior to facticity. In order for the objects and contents of such experience to come properly into view in their essence, all constituted knowledge and presuppositions originating in metaphysics, psychology, and the natural sciences had to be bracketed, hence the reduction. The latter reveals the naïveté of the natural attitude, which is now suspended together with the totality of the natural world and any judgment concerning spatiotemporal existence. By thus excluding metaphysical naïveté and everything belonging to the order of the already constituted, the reduction amounts to a removal of being leading to a primordial region of consciousness called a "phenomenological residuum" (*Ideas I*, §33, 112–14 and §§49–50, 150–55).⁴

This residuum refers to a living present in its "essential purity" and "unconditioned necessity" (*Ideas I*, §36, 120), to a transcendental consciousness directed toward an intentional and ideal object not to be confused with the apprehended thing. The distinction between immanence and transcendence is crucial here to the extent that it points to a fundamental difference between two modes of being given. On the one hand, a transcendent thing is perceived through the perspectival manifestations of its determinate qualities. On the

other hand, unlike spatial objects, the immanent correlates of transcendental experience have no hidden profiles or perspectives. Their presence before consciousness is not affected by any form of exteriority, contingency, difference, or absence; in this respect, they are given as absolute.⁵

Therefore, the phenomenological slogan “to the things themselves” must be understood as referring not to perceived objects or empirical facts but to transcendental experiences analyzable in the pure generality of their essence. Insofar as the contents of experience are treated, after the *epochē*, as self-given and immanent phenomena, transcendental phenomenology provides access to a domain of apodeictic evidence and certitude. If all reality and exteriority is excluded, if everything is ideal, if nothing gets lost by going forth in the world, space, or nature, then experience is diaphanously present to the transcendental subject.⁶

As far as *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* is concerned, the reduction of objective time would provide access to a purely phenomenological present, to a primordial temporal essence constituted within the immanence of consciousness. Paola Marrati explains that Husserl, aiming to reflect on temporality in a way that would define the specificity of phenomenology in relation to psychologism and Kant’s theory of knowledge, had to exclude not only the time of nature and the psyche but also time as the empty form of the Kantian subject.⁷ This exclusion alone could lead to a domain of consciousness that, unencumbered by naturalistic distortions, could think of an immanent time endowed with absolute evidence. The appearance of the noematic sense of time in all its purity and freedom from exteriority is facilitated by the repetitious structure of retention. The *eidos* of time hinges on the possibility of repetition within the intimacy of the transcendental consciousness, where the ideal sense of temporality can be reproduced in the absence of all contingency. An account faithful to the phenomena Husserl is interested in requires the continuity between impression and retention.

This is why Husserl insists that the punctual instant in which the present is anchored constitutes only an ideal limit that cannot be isolated as such. Section 19 affirms that “what we term originary consciousness, impression, or perception is an act which is continuously gradated. Every concrete perception implies a whole continuum of such gradations. . . . It belongs to the essence of lived experiences that they must be extended in this fashion, that a punctual phase can never be for itself” (PITC, §19, 70). The temporality described here is not punctual, and Derrida, already in *The Problem of Genesis*, drew attention to the unity or “*a priori* synthesis” of impression, retention, and protention:

I cannot reduce an originary impression to the purity of a real point, and that is a matter of essence. The absolute point is still less perceptible in time than in space. . . . It is an *a priori* necessity of the perception of time and of the time of perception that

an originary impression have some temporal density. As a result, absolute originarity is *already a synthesis* since it implies *a priori* a “retentional modification.” (PG, 62)

Husserl places both intuition and retention under the aegis of a broadened perception in section 16 too, which reiterates the indispensability of continuity: “[The] ideal now is not something *toto caelo* different from the not-now but continually accommodates itself thereto. The continual transition from perception to primary remembrance conforms to this accommodation” (PITC, §16, 63). Derrida, who cites this passage in *Speech and Phenomena*, admits that intuition is continuously compounded with retention, thereby agreeing with Ricoeur.

Moreover, he accepts that Husserl, well aware of the disturbing implications of his introduction of retention into the present, put forward the idea of a radical discontinuity between primary and secondary remembrance so as to safeguard the primordially of perception against representative memory and imagination. Section 17 refers to the *discontinuous* difference between perception and reproduction, which functions as a foil highlighting the *continuous* difference between impression and retention:

If we call perception *the act in which all “origination” lies*, which *constitutes originarily*, then *primary remembrance is perception*. For only in *primary remembrance do we see what is past*; only in it is the past constituted, i.e., *not in a representative but in a presentative way*. The just-having-been, the before in contrast to the now, can be seen directly only in primary remembrance. It is the essence of primary remembrance to bring this new and unique moment to primary, direct intuition, just as it is the essence of the perception of the now to bring the now directly to intuition. On the other hand, recollection, like phantasy, offers us mere presentification. (PITC, §17, 64)

This passage confirms the preeminence of continuity between impression and retention as well as the latter’s presentative character. Husserl’s gesture originates in the phenomenological necessity of describing the concrete lived experience of temporality, the presence of the present from the standpoint of ideal interiority.⁸ The sphere of primordially is extended to include the retentional now, whose repetitious nature alone can prepare the ground for the ideality of the living present. As Derrida remarks, “the living now is constituted as the absolute perceptual source only in a state of continuity with retention taken as nonperception. Fidelity to experience and to ‘the things themselves’ forbids that it be otherwise” (SP, 67).

At the same time, and according to a second necessity whose implications are underlined by Derrida but downplayed by Ricoeur, the idea of a smooth continuity is complicated by the fact that the lived experience of temporality must be referable to a source-point qua *absolute* beginning. In order for the perceptual present to constitute a zone of primordial experience and to function as the source of self-giving evidence, it has to exclude all absence or difference, even temporal difference; it has to be narrowed down to the punctuality of the now. Intuition has to be instantaneous, it has to take place in the present moment without any need of exteriorization, indication, or representation. Derrida makes much of this precept, and contends that, for Husserl, “despite all the complexity of its structures, temporality has a nondisplaceable center, an eye or living core, the punctuality of the real now” (SP, 62).

He supports his claim by citing the following passage, where Husserl affirms the derivation of the living present from a punctual source-point: “We emphasize that modes of running-off of an immanent temporal Object have a beginning, that is to say, a source-point. This is the mode of running-off with which the immanent Object begins to be. It is characterized as now” (PITC, §10, 48–49). The original sensation, which constitutes a self-giving presentation (*Gegenwärtigung* or *Vorstellung*), has to be distinct from retention, let alone from memory and imagination, both of which are demoted to the order of representation (*Vergegenwärtigung* or *Repräsentation*).⁹ Notwithstanding his portrayal of retention as a modification, Husserl also maintains that each sensation corresponding to a stigmatic now-point remains “absolutely unaltered” (PITC, §31, 90), thereby provoking Derrida’s legitimate complaint that “one no longer understands then how retentional and protentional modifications are still possible out of an originarity that is not modified” (PG, 67).

Despite referring in a footnote to Derrida’s emphasis on the Husserlian demand for a punctual beginning, Ricoeur is keen to draw a rigorous demarcation line between the account of a largely continuous time-consciousness and the prioritization of the point-like now in Husserl’s theory of intuition (TN, 3:283 n. 12).¹⁰ However, such a division is not justified in light of the allusions, throughout *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, to the absolutely unaltered now of the primal impression. The latter, in section 8, is defined as a generative and “productive point” (PITC, §8, 45), which implies a radical break from all anterior instants but also from the passivity of retention. This view is corroborated in Appendix I, where Husserl introduces the notion of “*genesis spontanea*”: “The primal impression is the absolute beginning of this generation—the primal source, that from which all others are continuously generated. In itself, however, it is not generated; it does not come into existence as that which is generated but through spontaneous generation. It does not grow up (it has no seed): it is primal creation” (PITC, 131).

Conceived of as an absolute beginning, the now has to be strictly self-identical and to exclude all difference and exteriority. In this respect, a certain discontinuity is introduced into the heart of the living present. This understanding of the impressional now is consonant with Husserl's "principle of all principles" (*Ideas I*, §24, 92–93), which establishes the interdependency between perception, interiority, self-evidence, and the punctual now. In addition to citations from *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, other evidence is adduced by Derrida in support of the requirement that the primordial origin and guarantee of all epistemological value be a stigmatic now, metonymically signified by the phrase "*im selben Augenblick*" from Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–01).¹¹

Despite Husserl's initial avowal to exclude world time, his analysis turns out to depend on the punctuality of the instant as the primal form (*Urform*) of consciousness.¹² This is precisely why Derrida argues that, no matter how much he wishes to extricate phenomenology from a supposedly degenerate metaphysics, and however vigorously he advocates the exclusion of all metaphysical presuppositions, Husserl endorses nonetheless the form of the present now as the temporal category capable of guaranteeing the pure appearing of an object to a transcendental consciousness. Despite his vigilance and critical attitude toward the naiveté of metaphysical speculation, Husserl's discourse presupposes a temporal category grounded in the objective time of nature. The form of the now is what remains irreducible, what even the phenomenological reduction cannot do away with. The privilege of the now is not something emanating from Husserl's concrete analyses of phenomena but is grounded in a decision that defines "the very element of philosophical thought," a thought indissociable from the values of identity, evidence, consciousness, and truth (SP, 62–63).

This observation is reminiscent of Ricoeur's critique of phenomenology. However, it is here that Derrida parts ways from the discussion of *Time and Narrative* and goes farther to argue that, far from merely presupposing objective time, Husserl goes some way toward complicating it by virtue of the double necessity already discussed. Derrida's reading is structured along the lines of a reading principle differentiating between Husserl's declared intention and his actual descriptions, hence his insistence on the following aporia: the indivisibility of the living now required by the phenomenological "principle of all principles" is inevitably problematized by the fact that its appearance depends inexorably on the possibilities of difference and repetition. In addition to the exigency regarding the origination of lived experience in the absolute now, Husserl's philosophy gestures toward the fact that that stigmatic moment is divisible and essentially repeatable.

In contrast with Ricoeur, Derrida argues that Husserl's account perhaps calls into question the very identity and originarity of the actual now as the form of time. This is the case because Husserl both designates retention as a

“not-now” distinct from the properly impressional now, and contends that the latter becomes possible thanks to that not-now. The *ideal* purity of the now does not even appear without being articulated with another now-point that is, paradoxically, both outside this absolute beginning and inside the primordial perceptual present. Retention, then, is not a contingency that befalls an already constituted living now *après-coup*. The appearance of that now hinges on retentional consciousness and the gross present:

Apprehensions here pass continually over into one another and terminate in an apprehension constituting the now; this apprehension, however, is only an ideal limit. We are concerned here with a *continuum of gradations in the direction of an ideal limit*. . . . If somehow we divide this continuum into two adjoining parts, that part which includes the now, or is capable of constituting it, designates and constitutes the “gross” now, which, as soon as we divide it further, immediately breaks down again into a finer now and a past, etc. (PITC, §16, 62)

What gives rise to the intuitive source-point is the gross present, which includes the repetitious retention. Unable to constitute itself without a more originary and complex structure, the living now appears only belatedly and on condition that it give up its actual and full presence in order to present itself under the guise of the recent past.¹³ Husserl affirms the necessity of retention as the possibility of repeating and constituting the living now through a differentiating movement. Retention confronts one with “the absolutely unique case,” says Derrida, whereby the act of perceiving gives one to perceive something that is not present, a presentation that enables one to see a non-present, a past, or an unreal present (SP, 64).

Furthermore, Derrida underscores the necessity of retention qua repeatability, whose corollary is that both recollection and retention are anchored in the possibility of repetition.¹⁴ If retention cannot be rigorously distinguished from memory and imagination, the radical difference between presentation and representation is vitiated, and, as a result, the primarily continuous character of the living present is undermined. The common root of retention and recollection, says Derrida, is a priori “the possibility of re-petition in its most general form, that is, the constitution of a trace in the most universal sense . . . a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of differance it introduces” (SP,67).¹⁵ This is not to say that Husserl sought to abolish the difference between presentation and representation, but merely to register a certain uneasiness about their absolute heterogeneity, and to emphasize that this chasm depends on a philosophical decision problematized by Husserl’s analyses themselves.

While putting forward the continuous transition from impression to retention, Husserl's emphasis on the identity and anteriority of the primary intuition also bears witness to a necessary difference between the perceptual and nonperceptual now:

If we now relate what has been said about perception to the *differences of the givenness* with which temporal Objects make their appearance, then the *antithesis of perception* is *primary remembrance*, which appears here, and *primary expectation* (retention and protention), whereby *perception and non-perception continually* pass over into one another. (PITC, §16, 62)

Husserl here both affirms the unity of the living present and casts doubt upon it by regarding retention and protention as *non-perceptions*. Although Derrida highlights the pivotal role of discontinuity, he does not simply take sides against the primacy of continuity. Rather, he reflects on the implications of the phenomenological account and stresses that its equivocality arises from Husserl's struggle to maintain two irreconcilable possibilities: the source of all certitude has to be the indivisible living now from where representation ought to be banished, but, at the same time, any concrete experience of that now depends on its continuous modification and representation by a nonperceptual retention.

Continuity and repetition, both instrumental in Husserl's accurate description of all temporal lived experience, entail a difference and a passivity that contaminate the nonrepresentational and foundational character of the living present. The latter's identity is complicated the moment retention is introduced into the heart of primordial perception. The inclusion of retention in the thick present inevitably undercuts the alleged unity and originarity of that present:

As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now, perception and nonperception, in the zone of primordially common to primordial impression and primordial retention, we admit the other into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*; nonpresence and nonevidence are admitted into the *blink of the instant*. There is a duration to the blink, and it closes the eye. (SP, 65)

That the perceptual now is not instantaneous and that the present is not simple is not something forced by Derrida upon Husserl's discourse. This nonsimplicity and the concomitant possibility of repetition are required by the concrete experience of temporality. However, the a priori synthesis involved in such experience calls into question the other philosophical exigency, the origination of presence in the punctuality of the *Augenblick*. Derrida respects those two conflicting necessities and, as Marrati suggests, plays Husserl's analysis and fidel-

ity to phenomena off against his decision regarding the necessity of punctuality and self-identity.¹⁶

Derrida does not discount Husserl's declared intention to regard the divisibility of the present as a necessary but provisional aspect of the perceptual process to be eclipsed by continuity and identity. Husserl indeed stresses the ability of retention to retain and repeat, while determining difference in a negative fashion as something simply provisional and supplementary. The generation of the living present is claimed to depend on a process whereby the impressional now is affected by nothing other than itself, by nothing *essentially* different from itself, hence Derrida's portrayal of this movement as a "pure auto-affection."¹⁷

Simultaneously, Derrida reveals another strand of Husserl's text, according to which discontinuity and difference are irreducible and originary, and, by the same token, the present and even the now turn out to be non-simple and non-self-sufficient categories. Husserl's analyses, argues Derrida, reveal the following necessity: "The presence of the present is thought of as arising from the bending-back of a return, from the movement of repetition, and not the reverse" (SP, 68). In contrast to Ricoeur's critique that Husserl presupposes objective time, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, continues Derrida, calls upon one to conceive of time anew "on the basis now of difference within auto-affection, on the basis of identifying identity and nonidentity within the 'sameness' of the *im Selben Augenblick*" (SP, 68).

It now remains to try to understand a little better this peculiar structure that Derrida's reading has brought to light. As far as the difference between the perceptual and retentional now is concerned, he insists that it can be neither reduced nor subordinated. The possibility of difference is *absolutely* irreducible and is "in fact the condition for presence, presentation, and thus for *Vorstellung* in general" (SP, 65). If it is not a matter of a provisional or contingent difference, in what terms is one supposed to think about its absolute necessity? Can Derrida sustain the irreducibility of discontinuity without, however, simply reversing the hierarchy of continuity and discontinuity? Is there an alternative way of thinking this difference? Could one determine it without subjecting it to a logic opposing the essential to the provisional? Can one think difference and sameness in terms other than those of a dialectical opposition? In other words, can one think difference and repetition together?

The point here is not to argue in favour of a resolution of Husserl's irreconcilable possibilities. Rather, it is to show why Ricoeur's argument for continuity cannot be sustained, and to throw some light on the aporetic structure that gives rise to both perception and temporality. To this end, I will have recourse to Derrida's philosophical configuration of "necessary possibility," which, despite not being specifically deployed in *Speech and Phenomena*, can nonetheless be said to characterize his thinking about discontinuity and difference, to constitute something like a master-argument, as Geoffrey Bennington points out, from

which all else flows.¹⁸ Anticipating one of my paradoxical conclusions, the necessary possibility of difference will turn out to make perception possible while disallowing a self-identical perceptual present.

The Necessary Possibility of Difference and Syncopated Temporality

In contrast with Ricoeur's construal of difference and discontinuity as negative and provisional functions to be eclipsed by the transcendental subject's living present, Derrida draws attention not simply to the necessity of retention as distinct from primary impression, but also to the impossibility of interpreting such difference as a provisional phase. If the idea of provisionality requires some directionality from intuition toward retention, Derrida's motif of necessary possibility undermines the self-identity of these two moments and, therefore, excludes the possibility of a teleological interpretation of alterity on the basis of an envisaged presence.

The philosophical reference of the living present to an absolute beginning requires that that original *stigmē* be rigorously differentiated from all anterior and subsequent now-points. Without this a priori requirement, it makes little sense to speak of an absolute *principium*. The latter's self-identity depends crucially on its radical discontinuity with other now-points, or, in other words, on the non-presence and exclusion of other nows from the actual and living now. It follows that this diastem between an original source-point and other surrounding nows is not merely an accidental fatality but the positive *conditio sine qua non* of the perceptual now. Such a radical difference from other retentional or protentional now-points is structurally necessary and inherent in the very possibility of the intuitive now. As a result, it cannot be demoted to a contingent or empirical eventuality.

At the same time, in light of the necessity of repetition, which is not just a phenomenological necessity, this requirement of difference has to be tempered with the modality of possibility. The absolute difference between the living and retentional now does not belong to the order of actual necessity, because, in that case, the perceptual now would not even appear, but to that of *necessary possibility*. This structure alone is able to do justice to the double and apparently contradictory function of retention: it is the radical exclusion of retention that gives rise to the possibility of an indivisible now, whereas, at the same time, the ideal purity of that now depends on retention's repetitious capacity. Owing, however, to the first necessity, repetition has to be conceived here in terms rather of a *minimal* repeatability or iterability than of an ordinarily understood continuity.¹⁹

Not only is the impressional now unable to constitute itself independently of absence and difference, but also its very self-identity and originariness are undercut. To the extent that it emerges thanks to the necessary possibility of its difference from a retentional trace, this movement entails a principal co-implication of presence and absence, where a certain radical alterity cannot be opposed to identity. Paradoxically, this co-implication gives rise to the *possibility* of the living now, while rendering its pure and uncontaminated presence *impossible*. By determining difference as a necessary possibility, Derrida affirms its simultaneously constituting and deconstituting role.

Difference and discontinuity cannot be teleologically construed as provisional but negative necessities, for they constitute the *positive* conditions without which the ideality and identity of the now and the present would not stand a chance. What remains implicit in Husserl's account is that the possibility of presence hinges on the more originary possibility of representation, which renders the idea of a simple origin problematic. If an absolutely irreducible alterity is instrumental in the constitution of the living present, every discussion of temporality has to take this movement seriously into consideration, and its implications have to be reflected on. Derrida's line of argument in *Speech and Phenomena* seeks to do justice to the indebtedness of the present to a discontinuous synthesis as its positive and originary nonorigin.

The temporal discontinuity entailed here is thematized in "*Ousia and Grammē*," where Derrida discusses various philosophical approaches to time. The process of temporalization qua auto-affection is defined there as an impossible possibility. On the one hand, because of the requirement of self-identity, two nows are mutually exclusive, so they cannot be simultaneous. On the other hand, for one to be able to affirm this self-identity, the possibility of a minimal simultaneity has to be surreptitiously presupposed: "The impossibility of coexistence can be posited as such only on the basis of a certain coexistence, of a certain *simultaneity* of the nonsimultaneous, in which the alterity and identity of the now are maintained together in the differentiated element of a certain same."²⁰ Derrida notes that "time" is a name for this impossible possibility. Such an originary commingling of simultaneity and nonsimultaneity, which signals the complicity between the movements of spacing and temporalization, disallows the continuous transition from one now-point to the next one and, by the same token, interrupts any teleological construal of the living present. The connectedness that the Idea in the Kantian sense allegedly guarantees has to be violently interrupted by a rhythmic syncope that constitutes the only chance of a rigorous concept of "presence" and, paradoxically, of the Idea itself.

Auto-affection, for Derrida, amounts to a differential structure that produces sameness as self-relation within self-difference, that is, sameness as the nonidentical, whether the identity of the transcendental ego, the living present

or the noematic content presented to consciousness is in question. Far from describing the sameness of a punctual *stigmē* and the indivisibility of the *auto*, auto-affection refers to what gives rise to that sameness by radically distinguishing it from another *stigmē*, which nonetheless has to repeat the first one minimally: "This process is indeed a pure auto-affection in which the same is the same only in being affected by the other, only by becoming the other of the same" (SP, 85). Thus, auto-affection bears witness to an a priori synthesis of difference and identity, presence and absence. This synthesis is the movement of temporalization making (im)possible the ordinary conception of time in terms of continuity and the corollary primacy of the present.

This structure reveals an economic articulation of motifs otherwise antinomically understood such as positivity and negativity, necessity and chance, the transcendental and the empirical, activity and passivity, actuality and potentiality, presentation and representation, life and death. In light of this uncanny operation that radically complicates the principle of identity, Derrida prefers to speak of *effects* of presence. The irreducible and (de)constitutive possibility of difference does not give rise to an identical present but to belated and discontinuous effects whose very possibility is inextricably bound up with non-presence and even death. What has, however, to be underlined here is that the delayed character of the present is not to be construed as a potentiality on its way to fulfilment, for this would amount to determining difference or absence, *à la* a certain Husserl and a certain Ricoeur, in a negative fashion as provisional and teleologically organized. Rather, the only possible outcome here is belated effects that appear on pain of always being marked by the essential possibility of alterity.

Derrida's neologism "*différance*" is intended to capture the co-implication of difference and repetition, the quasi-spatial difference between impression and retention, and the quasi-temporal deferral of the living present.²¹ *Différance* encapsulates two a priori requirements: that of a possible difference (nonidentity) and that of a possible repetition (sameness). Here is what looks like a definition of *différance* from Derrida's 1968 essay of the same title:

It is this constitution of the present as a "primordial" and irreducibly nonsimple, and, therefore, in the strict sense nonprimordial, synthesis of traces, retentions, and protentions (to reproduce here, analogically and provisionally, a phenomenological and transcendental language that will presently be revealed as inadequate) that I propose to call protowriting, prototrace, or *différance*. The latter (is) (both) spacing (and) temporalizing.²²

Différance designates the duration of the blink of the eye, the spacing between perception and non-perception, that makes possible the actual now, its sharpness and instantaneity. There is neither presence nor perception nor identity

without this primordial but divisible origin. The ideal moment of intuition, considered by Husserl as the source of all sense and evidence, owes its only chance to a logically anterior *différance*, which puts into question that moment's absolute character.

If, for Derrida, phenomenological language is inadequate, it is because the expression “*living present*” and Husserl's later concept of “*transcendental life*” occlude the positive and nonprovisional role of difference, absence, and death.²³ By determining perception on the basis of an immanent consciousness's ideal present, Husserl does not carry the reduction and the concomitant critique of metaphysics far enough, for he still privileges the ideal form of the present and transcendental life over against empirical exteriority and a merely factual death.

Derrida, on the other hand, extends the questioning power of the reduction as far as possible, thereby casting doubt upon the metaphysical security of the present, the “is,” time, and life itself. Rather than defining the transcendental and the ideal in opposition to facticity, empirical existence, and contingency, Derrida points out that the provenance of ideality is a *thinking* subject reflecting on the transgression of its singular empirical life. The possibility of the present as the universal form of all experience is necessarily grounded in the thought of a finite self: “To think of presence as the universal form of transcendental life is to open myself to the knowledge that in my absence, beyond my empirical existence, before my birth and after my death, *the present is*” (SP, 54). The phenomenological certainty about the ideality of the present as the form of time that remains uncontaminated by any empirical content originates, paradoxically, in the knowledge or realization of the possibility of death. This possibility always lurks in Husserl's determination of being as presence and ideality. One can no longer say, continues Derrida,

that the experience of the possibility of my absolute disappearance (my death) affects me, occurs to an *I am*, and modifies a subject. The *I am*, being experienced only as an *I am present*, itself presupposes the relationship with presence in general, with being as presence. The appearing of the *I* to itself in the *I am* is thus originally a relation with its own possible disappearance. Therefore, *I am* originally means *I am mortal*. (SP, 54)

If the living present and transcendental life are made possible by the logically anterior possibility of non-presence or death, this situation points toward a co-implication of life and death to which the language of phenomenology cannot possibly do justice. The realm of the transcendental is infiltrated by an originary empirical existence, finitude and facticity, all of which the *epochē* strives to exclude.²⁴

Derrida's reading of *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* undercuts the supposed ideal interiority of the living present and introduces spacing into the heart of transcendental temporality and life. The immanence of phenomenological time is contaminated by a diastem that is its positive condition. The necessary possibility of difference implies that

the temporalization of sense is, from the outset, a "spacing." As soon as we admit spacing both as "interval" or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the "outside" has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the nonspatial, which is called "time," appears, is constituted, is "presented." Space is "in" time; it is time's pure leaving-itself; it is the "outside-itself" as the self-relation of time. The externality of space, externality as space, does not overtake time; rather, it opens as pure "outside" "within" the movement of temporalization. (SP, 86)

It is in order to take seriously into consideration this absolute irreducibility of spacing and exteriority that Derrida refers to temporalization by having recourse to the terms *trace* and *writing*, as suggested in the passage from "Differance" above.

As a result of such an originary exteriority, retention does not simply follow an *anterior* intuition, does not simply take place *after* an already existing impression. The very modalities of before and after are made possible by a paradoxical movement that interrupts the continuity they imply. By the same token, the identity of the present is expropriated, insofar as its only chance is a discontinuity that will always syncopate its alleged progress toward fulfilment. The ideal presence of transcendental life is infinitely deferred, although its deferral is grounded in finitude and the possibility of death. The corollary of *differance* is a syncopated temporality, a rhythmic discontinuity always already commingled with continuity.

In his much later *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1993), Derrida refers to such a syncopated temporality while discussing Hamlet's assertion "The time is out of joint," a phrase linked to the ghost's spectral appearance on stage.²⁵ "Dis-jointed time" encapsulates the impossible possibility that gives rise to effects of presence, to spectral moments whose otherness cannot be eclipsed by an anticipated plentitude of presence. Temporal disjunction is irreducible because, rather than being a provisional negativity in the service of a higher value, it constitutes the only chance of that value, whose emergence it also forestalls:

To maintain together that which does not hold together, and the disparate itself, the same disparate, all of this can be thought . . . only

in a dis-located time of the present, at the joining of a radically dis-jointed time, without certain conjunction. Not a time whose joinings are negated, broken, mistreated, dysfunctional, disadjusted, according to a *dys-* of negative opposition and dialectical disjunction, but a time without *certain* joining or determinable conjunction.²⁶

At issue in this passage is, in the final analysis, the impossibility of an *assured* joining or continuity. The discontinuity of *différance* disrupts the dialectical transition from potentiality to actuality, and renders problematic the conceptualization of the temporal process as a forward and continuous movement toward a posited *telos*.

Without denying the fact of Husserl's assertions, one should nonetheless be able to affirm that the interpretative possibilities of his discourse are not exhausted by these assertions. Throughout *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, there is a discrepancy between the descriptions of temporal phenomena and Husserl's postulated "principle of all principles." Is not such equivocality symptomatic of the aporetic movement constitutive of presence and temporality, both of which have been shown to be grounded in the necessary possibilities of difference and repetition?

By insisting on these irreconcilable hypotheses, and by drawing attention to implications that undermine certain philosophical and perhaps ethical decisions, Derrida explores the more unsettling aspects of Husserl's analyses. He admits to Husserl's manifest intention to anchor the living present in the instantaneity of a punctual now. However, the possibility of a radical Husserl laying the foundations for a rigorous questioning of the "metaphysics of presence" is not excluded.²⁷ Hence Derrida's allusion to Heidegger's encomiastic observation that Husserl's analysis of temporality is "the first in the history of philosophy to break with a concept of time inherited from Aristotle's *Physics*, determined according to the basic notions of the 'now,' the 'point,' the 'limit,' and the 'circle'" (SP, 61).

Husserl's major insight was his affirmation of the inseparability of the source-point from the retentional instant, and his reluctance to describe transcendental life simply in terms of a self-sufficient and self-constituting present. The duration of the *Augenblick* suffices to indicate that, far from subscribing in an unreflective way to identity and immediacy, he reserved indeed a role for difference and alterity. This is why Derrida, in a note to "Freud and the Scene of Writing," points out that "the concepts of originary *différance* and originary 'delay' were imposed upon us by a reading of Husserl" (FSW, 203 n. 5). Derrida's construal acknowledges the finesse of Husserl's philosophy, a gesture that cannot be divorced from the differentiation between two reading rhythms, "commentary" and "interpretation." The complexity of this situation has to be respected if one does not want to end up with a supposedly definitive, homogenized, and therefore disrespectful version of Husserl's text.

Nevertheless, in *Speech and Phenomena*, right in the middle of the chapter on temporalization, Derrida points out that Husserl's discussion of time-consciousness "both confirms the dominance of the present and rejects the 'after-event' of the becoming conscious of an 'unconscious content' which is the structure of temporality implied throughout Freud's texts" (SP, 63). Moreover, he suggests that Freudian psychoanalysis manages to tie together the two meanings of *différance*: spacing and temporalizing, diastem and delay (SP, 149). It appears then that psychoanalysis and, more specifically, the motifs of the death drive and *Nachträglichkeit* are better suited than any phenomenological concepts to take into account the complex necessary possibility of non-presence and its delayed effects. Therefore, it is to Derrida's reading of Freud that I will now turn in order to explore how psychoanalysis negotiates the interruption of the temporal flow and its implications for presence. Such a transition is also recommended in *Freud and Philosophy*, where a certain radicalization of Husserlian themes by Freud is affirmed alongside Ricoeur's tendency to focus on the more dialectical and reflective moments of psychoanalysis.

Freud: Permeability and Impermeability, Life and Death

Freudian psychoanalysis, at least as far as Ricoeur's and Derrida's readings are concerned, can be approached in terms of three levels of analysis. Firstly, it can be seen through the prism of a more or less sharp contradistinction to phenomenology, and Freud's thought may be said to allow for a necessary and anterior non-presence at the heart of conscious presence. I have already discussed the strand of Ricoeur's reflection stressing that Freud's mechanistic hypothesis and metapsychological emphasis on drives and unconscious impulses are intended to discover an original difference that undermines the primacy of conscious perception. Derrida admits to such an archaeological tendency in Freud's thought. If Husserl concerned himself with theorizing about the eidetic structures of consciousness, absolute beginnings, and *principia*, Freud is no less of an archaeologist, obsessed with interpreting traces with a view to unearthing a more fundamental process of psychical or cultural archivization. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), Derrida notes that Freud "wants to be an archivist who is more of an archaeologist than the archaeologist," to become a "better etiologist" and "to exhume a more archaic *impression*, he wants to exhibit a more archaic *imprint* than the one the other archaeologists of all kinds bustle around, those of literature and those of classical objective science, an imprint that is singular each time, an impression that is almost no longer an archive."²⁸

Secondly, psychoanalysis may be regarded as amenable to a dialectics, whereby Freud's archaeology is coupled with the possibility of reappropriating the psychological findings to the benefit of a reflective self. The dialectical opposition

between the two poles of Freud's essential distinctions, says Ricoeur, reveals the necessity of yoking together an *archē* and a *telos*, an archaeologically discovered non-presence and the anticipated attainment of true meaning. This dialectical synthesis, unrealizable on the basis of a single subject, becomes possible thanks to the interaction between patient and analyst, and to the mediation of language. Although such a teleological approach does not discount the fact of difference, it seeks to place this fact into the service of a *telos*: it subordinates absence and difference to a futural presence and, therefore, denies them a radical heterogeneity. In "To Speculate—On 'Freud'" (1980), Derrida concurs with Ricoeur's teleological interpretation of Freud, whom he associates with the Hegel of the master-slave dialectic. He points out that every instance of initial displacement is seen as a provisional stage to be conveniently subordinated to a higher principle.²⁹

Thirdly, Derrida's approach is complicated by a further gesture focusing not so much on Freud's theses as on the implications of his dense analyses. A rigorous construal of the latter reveals possibilities that often resist Freud's more explicit archaeo-teleological formulations. Following Derrida, I will draw attention to specific moments in the Freudian text that cast doubt upon the oppositional articulation of some of the binaries explored by Ricoeur, and that therefore disrupt their dialectical organization. Accordingly, it will be shown that Freud's archaeological quest for an allegedly primary trace is seriously hampered insofar as, by the terms of the Freudian discourse itself, any such registration is nothing other than a delayed effect of an anterior *différance*. In turn, these differential effects, irreducibly marked by non-presence and alterity, cannot be safely eclipsed by psychical life, perception, quality, consciousness, life instincts, etc.

Derrida's first detailed discussion of psychoanalysis occurs in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," where one of the points in question is the process of neuronal facilitation or breaching (*Bahnung*) as the first instance of psychical inscription.³⁰ From the very beginning, he points out the paradoxical fact that Freud, in spite of his intention to provide a psychology that would be as exact as a natural science, resorts to tropology and metaphor in order to express the key concept of "facilitation." It will be recalled that Freud initially distinguishes ψ from ϕ neurones, in between which there are other complex mechanisms, the contact-barriers, whose role is both to link and separate. The ψ system, associated with memory, is relatively impermeable and permanently altered by the passage of energy, whereas ϕ neurones are permeable and retain no trace of quantity. Prima facie, the impression is given that one can straightforwardly distinguish between those two systems, on whose differentiation all subsequent dichotomies of the psychical apparatus depend, such as that between perception and memory, the primary and the secondary process, the pleasure and reality principles, life and death instincts, etc. If, however, one focuses more closely

on Freud's meticulous descriptions, one is bound to discover that a rigorous identity can be attributed to neither system.

Despite the centrality of perception and memory, it turns out that there are no *essential* differences between ϕ and ψ , which are made possible by two interdependent factors: differences in their environment and the passage of energy through undifferentiated protoplasm. The "Project" notes that ψ resistances, necessary for the faculty of memory and the accumulation of energy required by the secondary function, are actually located in the contact-barriers rather than the neurones themselves: "The resistances are all to be located in the *contacts* [between one neurone and another], which in this way assume the value of *barriers*" (SE, 1:298). And a little farther on, it is reaffirmed that "their [ψ] contact-barriers are brought into a permanently altered state," and that "this alteration must consist in the contact-barriers becoming more capable of conduction, less impermeable, and so more like those of the ϕ system" (SE, 1:300). Commenting on the paradoxical fact that the contact-barriers are responsible for the permeability or relative impermeability of ϕ and ψ , Bennington points out:

What distinguishes *phi* and *psy* neurones is not internal quality, but the properties of their contact-barriers. In other words, the "essence" of the neurones (i.e. what makes them the neurones they are) is to be found at the points of junction between them, i.e., in their *difference*, at the point of "foreign substance." The difference between *phi* and *psy* neurones is a difference *in their difference*, in their foreign-ness.³¹

What is more, their resistance or lack of it does not depend on essentially distinct types of contact-barriers but has to do with their environment, with differences in their location. On the one hand, ϕ neurones and their contact-barriers do not retain any trace of excitation because, situated in the external periphery of the body, they are exposed to greater amounts of quantity, so they have to discharge them as quickly as possible. On the other hand, the ψ system and its contact-barriers are linked to the interior of the body where the stimuli are not as forceful, so the possibility of facilitation arises. As far as the provenance of the two systems and their contact-barriers is concerned, Freud, drawing upon contemporary morphology, concludes that "a difference in their essence is replaced by a difference in the environment to which they are destined" (SE, 1:304). With a view to avoiding an arbitrary *constructio ad hoc* contradicted by histology, he shifts the differentiating factor, as David Farrell Krell remarks, from the morphology of the neurones to their topology, a gesture that is no less problematic for his neurological aspirations.³² To the extent that this "difference in the environment" is not itself an entity, it does not

lend itself to traditional scientific explanation. In this respect, its introduction as the origin of neuronal identity leads to a tension between Freud's scientific intentions and actual analyses.

If neuronal difference depends on the environment to which the neurones or, rather, their contact-barriers, belong, the external world is clearly introduced into the equation. Accordingly, Freud maintains that what gives rise to this differentiation process is the passage of quantities of excitation through the nervous system:

The path of conduction passes through undifferentiated protoplasm instead of (as it otherwise does, within the neurone) through differentiated protoplasm. . . . The process of conduction itself will create a differentiation in the protoplasm and consequently an improved conductive capacity for subsequent conduction. (SE, 1:298–99)

The fundamental distinction between the three types of neurones is the outcome of protoplasmic differentiation resulting from the passage of energy. Moreover, after the three classes of neurones have been differentiated, there is still more differentiation to come with respect to the ψ system, for it is the difference between ψ resistances that leads to the preference of a path rather than another, and finally to the production of the mysterious mnemonic trace (*Erinnerungsspur*).

The division between perception and memory depends on an anterior negotiation between the nervous system as undifferentiated protoplasm and the external world. And although such a formulation might be construed as pointing toward a frontier separating two self-identical entities, this is far from being the case. In order to reach the nervous system, quantity has to be regulated and its force has to be diminished. Freud claims that, according to the discoveries of physics, the external world is the origin of "major quantities of energy" that are in violent motion which they transmit (SE, 1:304). As immediate and unhindered contact between nervous tissue and these powerful masses would be detrimental to the former, there has to be right from the beginning an irreducible diastem between the two forces. Before any amount of excitation comes into contact with undifferentiated protoplasm, it has to be diminished by cellular protective structures designated as "nerve-ending apparatuses" (SE, 1:306). These safeguard the deeper layers by reducing the pernicious effect of exogenous quantity. They function as screens granting entry to moderated amounts of energy, which they break up into quotients that become, in turn, stimuli, and it is only as such that they reach first the ϕ and then the ψ system, where they make a first registration. The corollary of this principal resistance is a certain impermeability of that most exposed surface of the organism.

What actually gains access to the nervous structure has already been subjected to an operation of translation, for the condition of its transference from

the external world into the psyche is that it be differentiated and deferred. Psychological life is protected by means of this relative impermeability, by the creation of originary traces, even before it becomes differentiated into conscious perception and unconscious memory. This is a conviction that Freud reiterates in "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" hence the protective celluloid portion of the transparent sheet: "Experiment will then show that the thin paper would be very easily crumpled or torn if one were to write directly upon it with the stilus. The layer of celluloid thus acts as a protective sheath for the waxed paper, to keep off injurious effects from without. The celluloid is a 'protective shield against stimuli'" (SE, 19:230). Derrida stresses the significance of that initial moment of deferral, of that anterior resistance thanks to which life emerges. The possibilities of breaching, repetition and a certain memory are not processes supervenient upon an already existing life but constitute the very conditions of life and perception: "The ideal virginity of the present (*maintenant*)," says Derrida, "is constituted by the work of memory" (FSW, 226).

The distinction between ϕ and ψ and the emergence of life itself depend on a *différance* of quantity giving rise to a minimally permeable nervous system but excluding the possibility of the latter's pure identity. Impermeability or absolute separation between the two forces is out of the question, for the distinctive feature of life is its receptivity to and interaction with the world. At the same time, absolute contact or permeability would result in instant death, which entails that the delineation of the relation between nervous tissue and energy in terms of a simple topography is problematic. Psychological life is grounded in a necessary possibility of difference, whereby no stability or identity can be secured either on the side of the nervous system or on that of the external world. Whether the topical differences between ϕ and ψ or those between the system and the world are in question, Derrida observes:

[They] are pure differences, differences of situation, of connection, of localization, of structural relations more important than their supporting terms; and they are differences for which the relativity of outside and inside is always to be determined. The thinking of difference can neither dispense with topography nor accept the current models of spacing. (FSW, 204)

According to Freud's own account, it can be hardly suggested that "the passage of energy" refers to a process where an excitation of a certain magnitude comes into contact with a self-identical and already alive nervous system. Rather, it makes sense to speak of a minimal permeability. The positive condition of life—and of all functions that Freud wishes to place at its center, such as the primary process, the life instincts, perception, the pleasure principle, etc.—is a differential movement giving rise to *effects* rather than essences or entities.

What there is in the beginning, even before a first inscription in terms of an unconscious trace takes place, is not a determinable quantity that comes into contact with the psychical structure but a negotiation of forces occurring right at the frontier between what only reductively can be designated as an inside and an outside.

That perception and memory proper emerge as belated effects of an originary *différance* is corroborated by the fact that this distinction tends not toward a greater degree of difference but, paradoxically, toward sameness. The passage of energy through Ψ neurones and the creation of a mnemonic trace make these neurones more permeable and, therefore, more like φ neurones. At the same time, the latter, despite their postulated permeability, belong to an environment that becomes increasingly impermeable, insofar as it needs to protect the underlying layers by setting up resistances. Perception and memory become possible thanks to an economy between permeability and impermeability, and, if either of them were to reach an absolute degree, the result would be death in both cases. If, for instance, total impermeability or memory were to take precedence, the ensuing system would be absolutely closed and, therefore, not living. If, on the contrary, there were something like permanent perception or unhindered permeability, the nervous structure would be instantly overcome by detrimental amounts of energy. In a certain sense, total memory coincides with total perception.³³

Psychical life is defined by its capacity to receive an infinite number of impressions originating in the world, hence the priority that Freud grants to the permeable neurones, the primary process, perception, and consciousness. At the same time, such permeability depends on the necessary possibility of an anterior impermeability, memory, absence, and even death. There is no life without this a priori required diastem. The nervous system has to protect itself by setting up a reserve of traces, by a permeable-impermeable surface that constitutes the frontier between inside and outside, life and death. The movements of repetition, difference, and deferral are absolutely irreducible from this mutual co-implication of forces. The peculiar economy of permeability and impermeability brought out by this reading disallows the various watertight divisions supporting Freud's conceptual edifice, and casts into doubt the determination of the psyche and the external world on the basis of a dialectical relation between an inside and an outside.

The necessary possibilities of memory and death reveal a non-appropriable alterity, a nonnegative difference that cannot be dialectically eclipsed within the opposition of perception and memory. Rodolphe Gasché, in an illuminating account of the relation between deconstruction and dialectics, underlines the solidarity between negativity, contradiction, sublation, homogeneity, and dialectics, a solidarity that, far from excluding negativity and heterogeneity, places them under the service of the speculative unity of the totality of all oppositions:

Hegel determines difference—that is, meaningful difference—exclusively as contradiction. Difference, or the relation to Otherness, becomes, therefore, relation to the negative. . . . Difference, understood as contradiction, makes negativity one face of positivity within the process and the system of the self-exposition of absolute knowledge, or of the absolute idea. As the underside and accomplice of positivity, negativity and contradiction are sublated, internalized in the syllogistic process of speculative dialectics. The dialecticization of negativity, by which negativity remains within the enclosure of metaphysics, of onto-theology and onto-teleology, puts negativity to work.³⁴

The dialectic constructs itself out of terms that are disjoint and identifiable, as a result of which otherness is a negativity opposed to the meaningful positivity it makes possible. This oppositional determination regards negativity and positivity as interdependent, thereby affirming an initial incongruity between them while denying them a perhaps more radical heterogeneity. The negative but necessary other can always be absolutely absorbed by positivity. As Marian Hobson underlines, “[I]t is precisely this lack of independence in the negative which moves dialectical mediation and reappropriation. . . . Hegelian *sublation* is remainderless. Each stage of the dialectic has absorbed completely what has preceded it.”³⁵ The other is a resource that remains determinable and that can be fully appropriated without excess or remainder. Negativity can be put to work, can collaborate with meaning and truth in discourse in order to bear the fruits of this teleological process.³⁶

Derrida’s affirmation of a nonnegative non-presence can account for the possibility of dialectical articulation, while also revealing the impossibility of a dialectical synthesis without residue. It takes into consideration both the requirement of absolute interruption and the possibility of negotiation or contact between inside and outside, which may eventually be construed as leading to a fruitful appropriation of the latter by the former. These two necessary possibilities, of radical interruption and negotiation, far from referring to two distinct movements that would be in a relation of anteriority to each other, designate a single differential process that disjoins temporality and divides the identity of the terms to which it gives rise. The ensuing non-dialectizable effects, whose “non” is both that of opposition and that of irreducible heterogeneity, is the “before” of the dialectic, the secret and originary nonorigin that, although it makes dialectics possible, excludes the possibility of a total reconciliation.

In a fine analysis of Derrida’s *Glas* (1974), Hobson points out that this movement, where what is more than a dialectical exchange gives rise to dialectics, is designated by Derrida as “striction,” which she goes on to define as “a tension whereby what had been excluded is put into a structuring position, and

moves to a meta-level: it becomes ‘transcendental du transcendental’—but, as Derrida immediately adds, it is ‘false transcendental.’”³⁷ *Différance*, then, is not opposed to the dialectic, for to do so would be the best way to consolidate its truth and validity. On the contrary, it displaces dialectics by reaching beyond its oppositional logic toward a nonnegative and non-dialectizable alterity construed as a necessary possibility, as the quasi-transcendental condition of (im)possibility for perception and memory, life and death.³⁸

On Derrida’s reading, the very chance of life depends upon a porous frontier that prevents the psyche from becoming totally independent from a certain non-presence. Freud’s “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) thematizes this exigency in terms of an economy of life and death.³⁹ The minimal impermeability of life is now explicitly linked to an originary death. The discharge of energy is associated with the pleasure principle, as was the case in the “Project,” whereas the necessity of deferring satisfaction by temporarily tolerating unpleasure is linked to the reality principle. In the first pages, it is affirmed that it is incorrect to talk of the dominance of the pleasure principle, which, under the influence of the ego’s instincts of self-preservation, is “replaced” by the reality principle (SE, 18:10). The word *replaced* might be slightly confusing, for it gives the impression that the reality principle and the corollary impermeability come to replace the propensity of an already existing life toward total permeability. In chapter IV, however, one comes across the following formulation:

Let us picture a living organism in its most simplified possible form as an undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation. Then the surface turned towards the external world will from its very situation be differentiated and will serve as an organ for receiving stimuli. . . . It would be easy to suppose, then, that as a result of the ceaseless impact of external stimuli on the surface of the vesicle, its substance to a certain depth may have become permanently modified, so that excitatory processes run a different course in it from what they run in the deeper layers. A crust would thus be formed which would at last have been so thoroughly “baked through” by stimulation that it would present the most favourable possible conditions for the reception of stimuli and become incapable of any further modification. (SE, 18:26)

The outer crust is, strangely enough, both “permanently modified” and “incapable of any further modification,” both outside and inside, both permeable and impermeable, both ϕ and ψ . The crust represents the system of consciousness and perception, both of which constitute points of contact between the organism and the external world, hence its permeable surface that remains forever capable of receiving fresh impressions. At the same time, insofar as it is a *crust*,

this surface is characterized by impermeability and resistance to potentially pernicious amounts of excitation. On the next page, not only does Freud reiterate the irreducibility of the resistance offered by this outer layer but also closely associates it with death:

This little fragment of living substance is suspended in the middle of an external world charged with the most powerful energies; and it would be killed by the stimulation emanating from these if it were not provided with a protective shield against stimuli. It acquires the shield in this way: its outermost surface ceases to have the structure proper to living matter, becomes to some degree inorganic and thenceforward functions as a special envelope or membrane resistant to stimuli. In consequence, the energies of the external world are able to pass into the next underlying layers, which have remained living, with only a fragment of their original intensity; and these layers can devote themselves, behind the protective shield, to the reception of the amounts of stimulus which have been allowed through it. By its death, the outer layer has saved all the deeper ones from a similar fate. . . . *Protection against* stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of* stimuli. The protective shield is supplied with its own store of energy. (SE, 18:27)

Although all this was already in the “Project,” Freud now expressly contends that impermeability is there from the very beginning, that the outer layer retains traces of quantity and that, most importantly, a certain death is the condition of life.⁴⁰ This is a point Derrida makes much of in “Freud and the Scene of Writing” where he underlines that Freud’s analyses disallow the possibility of an *already* existing life independent of an originary death. There is no anterior life that comes to protect itself against a subsequent and accidental death threat posed by unhindered excitation. The only chance of life depends on the organism’s partial death whereby dangerous masses of energy are differentiated and delayed right from the start. Psychological life has to die in order to become alive, which is to say that non-presence is constitutive and absolutely ineluctable, hence Derrida’s rhetorical question: “Is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death, through deferment, repetition, reserve?” (FSW, 202).

If one admits to an irreducible death as the corollary of the *différance* between permeability and impermeability, the primacy or anteriority that Freud sometimes grants to the primary process, permeability, perception, the pleasure principle, life instincts, etc., is complicated. Does this admission, inherent in

Freudian discourse, not undermine all the essential distinctions and dialectical oppositions of psychoanalysis? If the outermost surface of the system functions at the same time as a frontier letting in energy and as a protective shield absorbing the impact of external forces to the benefit of the underlying layers, is this not to say that there is no rigorous division between the outer and deeper layers to the extent that they are both defined in terms of permeability and impermeability? Moreover, does the idea of the crust not point toward the necessity of a trace more originary than the supposedly first inscription taking place in the unconscious? Does that differential trace not undercut the belief in a first time in general? Does Freud's acknowledgment of a principal resistance not constitute a safe criterion for concluding that psychoanalysis is indeed able to unearth a more archaic trace than the phenomenological living present?

First Inscription and *Nachträglichkeit*

In light of what has been affirmed thus far, the facilitations in the mnemonic system constitute belated transcriptions of relations between forces already translated and repeated several times, transcriptions that, what is more, take place only thanks to the differences between resistances offered by the ψ neurones. The latter's contact-barriers become more capable of conduction, more like the φ system, so, notes Freud, "we shall describe this state of the contact-barriers as their degree of *facilitation* [*Bahnung*]. We can then say: *Memory is represented by the facilitations existing between the ψ neurones*" (SE, 1:300). However, these facilitations have to be different from one another, because if all ψ contact-barriers offered equal resistance, then memory would not emerge. If memory takes place whenever *certain* neurones are facilitated, this means that there must be some reason why some neurones rather than others are preferred for the facilitation to pass through. The reason is that the resistance offered by ψ is not everywhere equal. Thus, Freud amends his previous assertion: "*Memory is represented by the differences in the facilitations between the ψ neurones*" (SE, 1:300).

This, according to Derrida, is an unexpected and revolutionary claim because memory is considered to originate not in a trace left in the psyche by an amount of excitation but in quantity inextricably linked to the difference between ψ facilitations. The problem here is that Freud introduces into his description, once again, a difference that cannot become as such the object of scientific observation. Does this gesture not render problematic his declared intention to furnish a neurological or even biochemical account? Moreover, if facilitation is marked by non-presence, the ensuing trace is so heterogeneous that it resists any attempt at dialectical appropriation. Here is Derrida on the irreducibility of difference:

We then must not say that breaching without difference is insufficient for memory; it must be stipulated that there is no pure breaching without difference. Trace as memory is not a pure breaching that might be reappropriated at any time as simple presence; it is rather the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches. We thus already know that psychic life is neither the transparency of meaning nor the opacity of force but the difference within the exertion of forces. (FSW, 201)

In view of the fact that the process of facilitation is by definition already a difference of forces (neuronal resistance to incoming excitation), Freud's conclusion above can be rewritten as follows: memory is represented by the differences between Ψ neurones that are themselves the effects of differences as much between the neuronal classes as between the nervous system and quantity. The mnemonic trace as the first psychical inscription depends on an originary *différance* and does not result from the encounter between two rigorously defined entities.

To the extent that absence and difference constitute a priori required possibilities, they split from the very beginning the identity of everything they give rise to, such as psychological life, the neuronal classes, the unconscious trace, external energy, and consciousness. The mnemonic trace is not something permanently present that one may appropriate; it is the effect of a differential process taking place outside a teleological horizon. Referring to the supposedly first instance of inscription, Derrida maintains that

there is no present text in general, and there is not even a past present text, a text which is past as having been present. The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united—a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are *always already* transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with reproduction. (FSW, 211)

The ultimate signified/signifier of psychoanalysis, far from being a self-identical impression waiting immobile to be unearthed by an archaeologist, arises as a trace of an anterior (im)permeability, as a deferred effect grounded in other traces, themselves the effects of a still more primordial network of forces. Psychological writing reveals a principle of undecidability according to which it is simply impossible for psychoanalysis to reanimate a first impression. In order to describe the trace's deferred presence and temporality, Derrida draws attention to Freud's "*Nachträglichkeit*" and points out its link to *différance*. *Nachträglichkeit*, he notes, and the irreducibility of the "effect of deferral" constitute Freud's true discovery (FSW, 203).

Nachträglichkeit, already mentioned in the section of the “Project” where Freud is dealing with hysterical repression, refers to a peculiar psychological temporality or causality that cannot be adequately represented by presence and continuity.⁴¹ While discussing the compulsion of his patient Emma of not being able to go into shops alone, and the two memories related to that unintelligible fear, Freud introduces *Nachträglichkeit* to describe the following phenomenon: an “experience” is not experienced as such in the first instance but is revised and reworked in later life thanks to organic maturation in combination with the occurrence of an event similar to that “first” experience. The initial event, usually of a sexual nature, is not properly perceived by the subject at the time of its occurrence and has no significance, but is repressed and retained in terms of unconscious memory traces. When a similar event occurs in later life, the unconscious material of the “first” time is rearranged according to the new circumstances, and is endowed with new sexual significance and pathogenic force; in other words, it becomes traumatic only belatedly. The deferred action of the “first event” is responsible for the affective charge with which one experiences the second event, although one is not aware of this *nachträglich* process. Strangely enough, the “first event” is experienced for the first time belatedly during its quasi-repetition in the second event. The latter cannot be claimed to be a mere repetition or memory of the first one, for the first one was never really experienced, but, at the same time, it does constitute a repetition insofar as the affective charge of the first event is deferred until that later occurrence.⁴²

The temporality of *Nachträglichkeit* cannot be accounted for by the continuous and flowing time of consciousness. Rather, it implies a necessary possibility of discontinuity that constitutes the positive condition of the second experience while complicating its self-identity by regarding it as a first experience in a certain sense. Derrida describes this strange temporality by alluding to the meaning of the term *Nachtrag* in epistolography and its unsettling implications for the value of presence in general:

Nachtrag has a precise meaning in the realm of letters: appendix, codicil, postscript. The text we call present may be deciphered only at the bottom of the page, in a footnote or postscript. Before the recurrence, the present is only the call for a footnote. That the present in general is not primal but, rather, reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the living present—such is the theme, formidable for metaphysics, which Freud, in a conceptual scheme unequal to the thing itself, would have us pursue. (FSW, 212)

This formulation calls upon one to rethink the role of repression qua borderline between the unconscious and consciousness, a dichotomy considered

to be “the fundamental premiss of psycho-analysis” (SE, 19:13). In light of *Nachträglichkeit*, the frontier between those two psychological “regions” can be regarded neither as a point of continuous transition, nor as a barrier preventing entry altogether. Rather, it has to be approached as a permeable-impermeable borderline, as a result of which unconscious traces *must* remain, in principle, unreadable, although not totally unreadable.

On the one hand, unconscious experience becomes accessible by virtue of a minimal contact with consciousness. Hence Freud’s assertion that repressions that have failed will have more claim on his interest, as the successful ones will for the most part escape examination.⁴³ In the case of Emma’s hysterical repression, the second experience becomes possible on the basis of the phenomenalizability of the anterior event repressed into the unconscious. The trace has to give up its absolute exteriority with respect to consciousness, so it has to be minimally repeatable by the subsequent *nachträglich* experience. On the other hand, a certain unreadability is required if the unconscious is not to become a mere modality of consciousness. If it is to be a rigorous concept worthy of its name, the unconscious has to hold on to its necessary possibility of difference from consciousness and to retain a minimal secrecy that should not be construed as a negative or provisional necessity.

The separation between the unconscious and consciousness does not constitute a conveniently bridgeable gap but a differential diastem where distance and alterity are bound up with a minimal repeatability. *Nachträglichkeit* points to a lack of transparency that opens the way for psychoanalysis and interpretation, while complicating the stability of the unconscious trace and disallowing the certainty of any interpretative venture.⁴⁴ It does not seem preposterous to suggest that Freud at least gestures toward such a paradoxical situation, when he describes the relation of consciousness to the unconscious as “the first shibboleth of psycho-analysis” (SE, 19:13).

The necessary possibilities of absence, difference, and repetition entailed by *Nachträglichkeit* reveal a discontinuous “relation without relation” (*rapport sans rapport*).⁴⁵ Such conceptuality undercuts the ordinary teleological (topographical, dynamic, or economic) understanding of that relation, for, by adding a differential twist to it, it excludes the dialectical opposition of presence to absence. *Nachträglichkeit* and its temporality can be said, by extrapolation, to be as inconceivable as *différance* is “if one begins on the basis of consciousness, that is, presence, or on the basis of its simple contrary, absence or nonconsciousness. It is also inconceivable as the mere *homogeneous* complication of a diagram or line of time, as a complex ‘succession’ ” (SP, 88). The notions of the “unconscious” and “consciousness” remain essentially unable to do justice to the rhythmic discontinuity at issue here because they partake in a conceptuality that understands absence and difference, in the best-case scenario, as provisional and negative necessities on their way to plenitude. I have already indicated the extent to which Ricoeur favors such a dialecticized version of psychoanalysis.

Nachträglichkeit, which is applicable not only to the unconscious trace whose pathogenic force emerges only belatedly but also to the very production of that trace, complicates the logic of dialectics. To the extent that the mnemonic trace appears belatedly as the effect of another more originary trace—the differential co-implication of permeability and impermeability—it does not assume the status of a *first* inscription to be excavated by Freudian archaeology. The trace arises as the deferred effect of an anterior weave of traces, something that undermines the idea of presence in general the very moment it gives rise to its only possibility and chance. *Différance* and *Nachträglichkeit* point as much to the porous boundary between consciousness and the unconscious as to the (im)permeable frontier between life and death. Derrida underlines that the verb “to defer” (*différer*) involved in these motifs

cannot mean to retard a present possibility, to postpone an act, to put off a perception already now possible. That possibility is possible only through a *différance* which must be conceived of in other terms than those of a calculus or mechanics of decision. To say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why “originary” must be understood as having been *crossed out*, without which *différance* would be derived from an original plenitude. It is a non-origin which is originary. (FSW, 203)

The so-called first inscription does not constitute a present possibility but the *nachträglich* outcome of an uncanny commingling of presence and absence. This commingling casts doubt upon the idea of a simple origin or a first time, and divides the identity of unconscious experience right from the beginning. No origin and no first time, then, but also no presence and no plenitude.

In order to respect the nonappropriable alterity of this originary nonorigin, Derrida occasionally has recourse to the figure of the “absolute past.” In a different context, in a discussion of Hegel’s *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*, he couples the absolute past to a memory that excludes a dialectical transition from absence to presence. Such memory directs one toward the immemorial or the unrememberable, toward a past that no archaeological, archival, or psychoanalytical endeavour, however assiduous, could successfully or conclusively recover. This originary memory, which conditions the mnemonic faculty that Freud associates with the unconscious, “stays with traces, in order to ‘preserve’ them, but traces of a past that has never been present, traces which themselves never occupy the form of presence and always remain, as it were, to come—come from the future, from the *to come*” (MPM, 58).⁴⁶

Nachträglichkeit gives rise to the unconscious trace while preventing one from conceptualizing its relation to consciousness in terms of a before and an after. By drawing attention to its syncopated temporality, Derrida tries to think

difference outside an archaeo-teleological horizon. The outcome of his reflection is that the past and the future cannot be regarded as modifications of a present but, rather, have to be thought of on the model of an absolute past infiltrated by an unmasterable future.⁴⁷ The psychical trace belongs to an absolute past whose radically promissory nature disallows the possibility of future actualization or arrival. Even the idea of progress toward an infinite and nonrealizable *telos* is violently interrupted by the discontinuous and economic character of *Nachträglichkeit*, although “economy” here refers to an unstable differentiation rather than a dialectical articulation.⁴⁸

Freud was arguably unable to think through, at least as straightforwardly as Derrida does, this originary conjunction of presence and absence as the arche-trace (de)constitutive of the first psychical inscription. This is the case, first and foremost, because Freudian concepts, in the words of Derrida, “without exception, belong to the history of metaphysics” (FSW, 197). I indicated in the first chapter the extent to which the terms *unconscious* and *consciousness*, for instance, lend themselves to an ethico-teleological understanding of absence and presence. However, Derrida acknowledges that Freud nonetheless *invites* one to think, especially by virtue of *Nachträglichkeit* and its rhythmic discontinuity, the trace that makes presence possible while complicating its purity and identity. Derrida is beguiled by psychoanalysis because of Freud’s devotion to something like an absolute past and the thought that the present is always already *re-constituted*.

But, it will be objected, this was already the case with Husserl, whose gross present and retention point toward a differential reconstitution at the very heart of transcendental life. Is it not by virtue of this difference that Husserl describes the living present, on the basis of a Kantian Idea, as an infinitely deferred *possibility* that never phenomenizes itself? Freud’s originality, nevertheless, consisted in that he took more seriously into account this originary complication and ventured to think its implications for presence a little more explicitly than Husserl did. As a result, not only does Freud call upon one to reflect on the non-simple character of the present but also goes some way toward admitting to the *impossibility* of thinking or perceiving this non-simple and originary nonorigin. In this light, Bennington identifies a difference between Husserl and Freud, stressing that psychoanalysis provides the resources to think the unlimited possibilities of, say, science in terms of an impossibility.⁴⁹ In support of his claim, Bennington cites a passage from “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” where Freud, commenting on the openness of biology to infinity, notes that “we may expect it to give us the most surprising information and we cannot guess what answers it will return in a few dozen years to the questions we have put to it. They may be of a kind which will blow away the whole of our artificial structure of hypotheses” (SE, 18:60). The idea that his hypotheses may be blown away by future developments suggests that Freud had considered,

to a certain degree, the impossibility of gaining access, securely and definitively, to a present being, whether that be the psyche, the unconscious trace, or the external world.

Bennington's observation is corroborated by Derrida's remark that Freudian discourse is not "exhausted" by belonging to a metaphysical and traditional conceptuality (FSW, 197–98). Derrida's reading maintains the tensions of the Freudian text and takes into account the originality of Freud's thinking and the precautions he took vis-à-vis conventional concepts. At the same time, Derrida recognizes that Freud did not sufficiently reflect on the historical and theoretical sense of these precautions. This is why Krell remarks that deconstruction pursues Freudian psychoanalysis "both to dismantle it and to enter under its spell."⁵⁰ Freud's scriptural metaphors will help me clarify further these tensions emanating from the double necessity inherent in psychoanalysis: that of borrowing all of its concepts from a metaphysical tradition and that of displacing the same concepts.

Scriptural Metaphors

Ricoeur likens the working of the psyche and, more specifically, of the unconscious to a linguistic operation, even though he specifies that it functions along lines analogous to rhetoric rather than ordinary language. Derrida, by contrast, underscores Freud's tendency to represent the perceptual apparatus in terms of traces, marks, and writing, a metaphors that became more and more refined over the years, until the "Note" where the psychological system is compared to a writing machine.

In the "Project," Freud conceived of memory on the model of neuronal facilitation, which clearly amounts to a process of effraction. About a year after this work had been written, notes Derrida, Freud, in a letter to Fliess, describes the psychological system for the first time in terms of writing and inscription, and his discourse is dominated by terms such as "sign" (*Zeichen*), "registration" (*Niederschrift*), and "transcription" (*Umschrift*) (FSW, 206).⁵¹ The same metaphors is systematically deployed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where dreaming is compared to a type of writing, and dreams to texts to be interpreted. In addition, in a text from 1913, Freud asserts that "it is even more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with a language. In fact the interpretation of dreams is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphs."⁵² If the corollary of this metaphor is that the content of dreams or unconscious activity in general is comparable to a text, and if one pays heed to Freud's suggestion in the "Project" that dreams follow old facilitations, then this psychological text has to be understood on the model of the palimpsest: a text superimposed upon

another, the marks of the former following, to a certain extent, anterior traces preserved in the unconscious. The task of the hermeneut, accordingly, would be to decode the superimposed and ciphered script in which the dream-content consists. Dream interpretation constitutes a decoding method seeking to bring to light the meaning of an encrypted message.

Freud's scriptural metaphoric reaches its crescendo in the "Note," where the psychical apparatus is represented by the *Wunderblock*. The analogy of breaching and the tracing of a trail introduced in the "Project" is transformed into a metaphoric of the written mark, spacing, and *graphē*. Freud's descriptions have now become much more rigorous. However, the reference to pathbreaking and traces is maintained across this gap of thirty years, and so is a metaphoric of the machine. The main framework of the neurological conception of the perceptual process is replicated in the "Note": Ψ neurones become a slab of dark brown resin or wax, while the ϕ system takes the form of the transparent piece of celluloid that constitutes the upper layer of a sheet. The latter's bottom layer, which represents the ω neurones, is made of a thin translucent waxed paper that lightly rests on the upper surface of the wax slab when the machine is not in use (SE, 19:228–31).

What is at stake here? In the final analysis, there is nothing dramatically new about this scriptural analogy and the association of the psyche to a certain typography. Plato had already instigated a long-standing imagery of impressions and iconography by introducing in *Theaetetus*, in the famous discussion of perception and memory, the metaphor of the imprint on a slab of wax.⁵³ Why is Freud's comparison of psychical processes to inscription so vital, and why does Derrida devote such a large part of "Freud and the Scene of Writing" to a discussion of these graphic analogies? What does the act of inscription ultimately entail and what is one to understand from the representation of psychical content by text? Does Freud conceive of the stratified writing taking place across the different levels of the psyche in a traditional way? Is transcription understood as a continuous transference of content from one place to another, or is there something more complex involved therein? Is the aforementioned instability of the mnemonic trace not contradicted by Freud's scriptural metaphor, inasmuch as writing ensures the durability of the mark?

In trying to address some of the above issues, I will refer to Derrida's double reading gesture, whose first strand is not dissimilar to the second tendency of Ricoeur's double reading of Freud. On the one hand, the emphasis is placed on mundane writing and the functioning of the psyche is reduced to a continuous operation, whereby a signified content remains largely stable and essentially recoverable. On the other hand, attention is drawn to the fact that Freud's analyses point toward an originary psychical writing affirmative of a necessary possibility of difference. In this case, the expression "psychical writing" is not a simple metaphor presupposing what writing is but signifies a strange

infiltration of the proper by the metaphorical, where the “essence” of writing is paradoxically revealed on the basis of a reflection on the psyche.

According to the first gesture, insofar as Freud’s scriptural metaphors introduce an element of spatiality and topography into the psyche, they can be said to consolidate the belief in the permanence of the unconscious trace. Given that one of his main concerns from the very beginning was to provide an explanation of the aptitude of the nervous system for retaining traces, writing was an obvious candidate as a representative of this aptitude. After all, the distinctive feature of the written mark is precisely its durability. In the “Project,” Freud even attempts to depict the different systems of neurones and the facilitation process in terms of graphic, spatial drawings, hence Derrida’s suggestion above that no thinking of difference can radically dispense with topography.

It will be recalled that Ricoeur too insists on Freud’s association of the mnemonic faculty with durability and permanence. Unconscious experiences are unforgettable and available for transcription into consciousness, he asserts, adding that the trauma remains the same even though it may be inaccessible: “In particular circumstances, entire sections of the reputedly forgotten past can return. For the philosopher, psychoanalysis is therefore the most trustworthy ally in support of the thesis of the unforgettable. This was even one of Freud’s strongest convictions, that the past once experienced is indestructible” (MHF, 445).⁵⁴ On this reading, “psychical writing” constitutes a metaphor presupposing, faithful to the spirit of a dominant *scripta manent* tradition, the spatial stability and durability of the text qua product of the scriptural act. Psychical content is analogous to a largely immobile text lending itself to interpretation.

Admittedly, unhappy with a rigid construal of spatiality and writing, Freud sought to radicalize it by means of his dynamic model. As a consequence, he challenged the fixity and generality of the code at work in unconscious activity but also in interpretation and analysis, and acknowledged that there is no self-identical locality where one could reach in order to recover a signified content or an original experience.⁵⁵ And yet, even if the dynamic model displaces a simplifying understanding of writing and translation, even if it allows for some instability or mobility, still, it is compatible with the dialectical structure usually assigned to a written mark and its meaning. Although Ricoeur recognized that the unconscious and instinctual impulses cannot be portrayed as belonging to a reservoir of readily accessible traces, he nonetheless affirmed that they are essentially representable and, therefore, amenable to the hermeneutic work of the analyst. Even Freud’s dynamic model is congruous with the analogy between psychical content and a script or a text that, however unstable or cryptographic, allows for interpretation. The scriptural representation of the psyche is not completely abandoned. Rather, the model of writing used as one of the terms of the analogy is becoming more and more refined.

Derrida does not discount such a dialectical reading and admits to Freud's commitment to the possibility of recovering primary impressions. He alludes, for instance, to Freud's ambition, despite his denigration of popular dream-books for their simplicity, to come up with a largely fixed key of interpretation, and to his temptation to compile a complicated "dream-book" (SE, 5:351).⁵⁶ Despite accepting the necessity of instability or non-presence, Freud considers this necessity to be a phase subordinated to the demand for meaningfulness.

Derrida contends that a similar logic is at work in the penultimate paragraph of "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," just before the moment I discussed at the end of the previous section, where the relation between scientific observation and theoretical language is at issue. Freud recognizes the exigency of having recourse to the figurative and inaccurate language of psychology in order not only to describe but even to perceive whatever it is that one observes. However, he appears optimistic that one day such inaccuracy or deficiency may be removed if one were to deploy "physiological" or "chemical" terms (SE, 18:60), which are less figurative than the psychological ones. Freud defines this necessity of borrowing from a figurative language in terms of a provisional and empirical eventuality. In Derrida's words, he "often describes this structural necessity as an external and provisional fatality, as if the provisional were only what it is, provisional. A very classical logic: suspense is provisional, the borrowing supposes a proper fund, the notes and the coins must be guaranteed in the final judgment" (SF, 384–85). A large part of Freud's conceptuality is governed by a teleological structure germane to the *possibility* of meaningfulness. The latter does not have to be conceived on the basis of actual presence, but may be seen, as Ricoeur argues, through the prism of an infinite task, a thought that introduces the Kantian Idea into psychoanalysis. Meaningfulness is not posited as an attainable *telos* but as an idea regulating a horizon of infinite psychological, cultural, or scientific progress. Psychical content is thought to be homogeneous to interpretation. Therefore, its comparison to a more or less durable text persists and the analogy between psychical processes and mundane writing is upheld. Freud's scriptural representation of the psyche gives rise to psychoanalytical hermeneutics and opens up a horizon of truth within which this hermeneutics operates.

According to an alternative reading gesture, Derrida refrains from subscribing unequivocally to the conclusions of a certain Freudianism focusing exclusively on Freud's declarations. Rather, he underscores that other strand of psychoanalysis, whereby the accounts of psychical processes can be shown to call for an originary type of writing radically resistant to the idea of the trace's availability and even dynamic permanence. The interest of Freudian metaphors, for Derrida, lies not in its ability to illuminate the unknown (the psyche) by having recourse to the known (writing), but in the demand it makes on one to reflect on the difference itself between the known and the unknown, the

explicit and the implicit, presence and representation, signifier and signified, consciousness and the unconscious, perception and memory.⁵⁷ In seeking to shed light on the psyche's complex functioning, Freud's scriptural metaphors have implications that exceed the ordinary conception of inscription and textuality. If the psychoanalytical gesture is radical, it is because, taking nothing for granted, it invites one to think what a text is and what the act of writing ultimately implies. Freud's analogy between the psyche and writing, far from simply endorsing a given model of inscription, renders the latter enigmatic by comparing it to the *nachträglich* functioning of the nervous system. Psychical inscription amounts to an originary writing that complicates the more or less unproblematic scene of interpretation described above.

In light of *Nachträglichkeit's* differentiating and deferring movement, if the unconscious trace cannot be reduced to a signified content to be translated, it is because its simple presence is always already problematized. To the degree that the unconscious text is ineluctably marked by difference, psychical writing cannot be understood in terms of conventional writing, which presupposes not only a clear-cut distinction between signifiers and signifieds, but also a *certainty* that the latter can be reached by means of the former. The necessary possibilities of non-presence and repetition imply that no certainty is possible, for the value of presence itself is made possible by differential traces. Derrida points out that Freud's break with tradition consisted in that he construed psychical functions on the basis of a writing incompatible with motifs associated with mundane writing, such as the sensible signifier, an intelligible content, permanence, communication, etc. As a result of the (im)permeable frontier between two complementary necessities, those of life and death, there is no such thing as a self-identical experience that the hermeneut could unearth once and for all, something that complicates the teleological organization of signifier and signified.

If the movement and temporality involved in this *nachträglich* writing are other than those of mundane writing, why does Derrida insist on the term *writing*? Because the latter, whose corollary is a certain exteriority, resists the determination of unconscious activity on the basis of a content enclosed within the interiority of the psyche. Writing is bound up with exteriority and spatial difference. By deploying this term, Derrida seeks to indicate that it is a quasi-exteriorizing process that constitutes the condition of the supposedly interior unconscious trace. He grounds the very interiority of the psyche in an exteriority that is not simply that of a spatial outside, thereby questioning the originariness, ideality, and sovereignty of the psychical signified. The scriptural analogy conjoins interiority and exteriority, whose paradoxical relation is upheld not only by Freud's metaphors but also by his use of the quasi-spatial word *memory trace*. In this light, the signified of psychoanalysis, the unconscious trace, is placed in the position of a signifier, and it is precisely this reversibility of

roles that renders problematic any teleological organization of the psyche, and that prevents the assimilation of originary writing to an ordinary scriptural act. As Derrida notes in *Of Grammatology*, the consequence of what he calls in that book “arche-writing” is that “the signified is originary and essentially . . . trace, that it is *always already in the position of the signifier*.”⁵⁸

Originary writing, then, refers to a movement distinct from the smooth transition from a sensible and durable signifier to a signified content. The outside of the psychical signified does not describe a spatial entity, an absolute exteriority that the interiority of the psyche can always appropriate. Rather, it refers to a differentiating and spacing process that constitutes, for Derrida, the *sine qua non* of writing in general: “Diastem and time becoming space; an unfolding as well, on an original site, of meanings which irreversible, linear consecution, moving from present point to present point, could only tend to repress, and (to a certain extent) could only fail to repress” (FSW, 217). At issue here is a spacing of time and a temporalizing of space, a movement reducible neither to a merely spatial differentiation nor to the interior process of a temporal deferral. The *nachträglich* temporality of originary writing refers, as Krell puts it, to a “silent, spacing *periodicity* [that] would displace the *Nacheinander* of time, letters, quality signs, reality signs, and all such durable traces in wax.”⁵⁹ Inasmuch as this movement entails a co-implication of presence and absence, it undoes the marks it produces at the very moment of producing them.

In view of *Nachträglichkeit* and the problematic frontier between perception and memory, the primary and secondary processes, the permeable and impermeable neurones, life and death, the psyche and the external world, one can claim, with Derrida, that Freud complicates the logic of dialectical opposition by, at least, pointing toward an alternative thinking about the borderline between the terms of these binaries. Freud may be said not only to affirm the *provisional necessity* but also to allow for the *absolute irreducibility* of non-presence and difference, thereby calling for a thinking that would undermine that other commitment of his to the possibility of decipherment. Hence Derrida’s remark that Freud’s discourse is not *exhausted* by belonging to a traditional conceptuality.

This construal brings out the strange tension inherent in Freud: there is the obsession with delving deep into the psyche with a view to discovering and interpreting archaic traces and impressions, but simultaneously the nature of such traces is admitted to be so complicated that the project of analysis is rendered not just difficult but impossible. Freud’s texts invite one to take into account the radical forces of resistance disallowing, right from the beginning, recuperation or reactivation. They bear witness to a thinking of the trace in terms of an absolute past, which has serious implications with respect to the possibility of reawakening an unconscious inscription to presence. Accordingly, Derrida speaks of a principle of undecidability or interminability that reveals

an internal resistance of psychoanalysis to psychoanalysis and that problematizes the attribution to Freud of a predominantly teleological structure.⁶⁰

Now, in response to the demands that my initial contention about the improbable encounters between Ricoeur and Derrida makes upon me, I would like to put forward the following paradoxical hypothesis: the deconstructive effects of undecidability, interminability, and the impossibility of acceding to the force of unconscious activity, as revealed by Derrida, haunt Ricoeur's interpretation of Freud too. In spite of what the first chapter affirmed regarding the dialectics of Freud's essential distinctions, there are certain moments in Ricoeur that cast doubt on his hermeneutic declarations and insistence on dialectics.

Despite appearances, these moments do not have so much to do with the admission, right in the middle of the chapter on the archaeology of the subject, to the *impossibility* of a totally successful interpretation: "Perhaps, we said, the possibility of moving from force to language, and also the impossibility of completely recapturing that force within language, lies in the very emergence of desire" (FP, 440). Although Ricoeur will never cease extolling the merits of interpretation, he affirms the impossible adequation between instinctual force and psychoanalytical meaning, and accepts that the unconscious refers back to "a substrate that cannot be symbolized" as it imposes a limit on any *finite* construal that claims to be without remainder (FP, 454). No doubt, the word *impossibility* tempers the possibility of *completely* capturing the mystery of the unconscious within language and thought. An infinite tension is introduced between the recognition of this impossibility and the belief in the possibility of an infinite progress toward a Kantian Idea never to be in fact attained, but also between the two readings of Freud examined in chapter 1. Without denying that an unequivocal interpretation by a finite being is impossible, still, Ricoeur associates this impossibility with an empirical and negative finitude that has to be articulated with the demand for a transcendental and positive meaningfulness. In consequence, impossibility and all the concepts attendant upon it, such as the unconscious, force, drives, etc., are seen through a teleological prism that denies them a radical independence.

A more disruptive maneuver occurs in another context, where Ricoeur comments on the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the psychoanalytical reading of the Oedipus story stressing the impossibility of reappropriation, and, on the other, a hermeneutic one postulating a possible meaningfulness: "Despite the affirmation of the dissymmetry of interpretations," he notes, "the 'positive' interpretation has never finished evening the score with the 'negative' interpretation."⁶¹ Firstly, this sentence appears to recognize the *absolutely* excessive character of Freud's negative interpretation, which was intended to reduce the illusion that meaning might be finally restored. Notwithstanding the positive-negative dissymmetry and Ricoeur's wish to assign an eminently

positive role to the reading that aims to restore meaning, his text now confirms an absolute limit imposed on every attempt at reappropriation. What might the provenance of such a limit be if not a radically heterogeneous impossibility? As a result of this heterogeneity, the score between the two interpretations will never be even, and, as he remarks on the same page, one is prevented from “placing oneself comfortably in the triumphant position of hermeneutics.”

Secondly, it is of the utmost significance in the above sentence that the words *positive* and *negative* are placed within inverted commas. The latter bear witness to a hesitation about determining possibility and impossibility on the model of the opposition between positivity and negativity. Ricoeur’s use of inverted commas bespeaks an uneasiness about construing the inaccessibility of the trace and the corollary interpretation as merely *negative* stages. The possibility of ascribing a positive value to this inaccessibility is left open, which entails the reversibility of these terms and complicates the teleological directionality from a negative toward a positive construal. In this sense, Ricoeur’s text calls upon one to take seriously into account the role of this ineluctable impossibility as the very condition of interpretation and psychoanalysis.

A similar moment occurs in “The Question of the Subject.” I have argued that Ricoeur’s archaeology of the subject endorses a Hegelian teleology of spirit that dialectically relates a negative instinctual ground to a positive intersubjective aim. And yet, one comes across the following phrase: “This apparent loss, of the *cogito* itself and of the understanding belonging to it, is required by the strategy of the work of mourning applied to the false *cogito*. . . . The loss of the illusions of consciousness is the condition for any reappropriation of the true subject” (QS, 244). If the only chance of such a reappropriation is predicated upon an anterior loss, is this not to say that this loss assumes the role of a *positive* condition of possibility? To the extent that loss is instrumental in the emergence of a true self, it is associated not only with necessity and originarity but also with positivity. Does Ricoeur’s text not problematize here the clear demarcation line between the positive and the negative, the essential and the contingent? The attribution of a transcendental status to loss appears to be converging with Derrida’s identification of a certain death as the only chance of life, consciousness and reflection.

Finally, in *Freud and Philosophy* too, Ricoeur’s teleological arrangements are undercut when his text admits that the analogy between rhetoric and the unconscious collapses in light of the fact that unconscious traces occupy the position of both signifier and signified *at the same time*. He claims that the reversibility of roles intrinsic to this situation has no linguistic parallel and goes on to wonder: “Can one treat as a linguistic element an image that would be in the position of both the signifier and the signified? What linguistic character is left in the imago if the latter functions indifferently as signifier or signified?” (FP, 404). Both rhetorical questions gesture toward an undecidable co-impli-

cation of roles that disallows the self-identity of each element and excludes the continuous transition from signifier to signified, from the external to the internal, from the world to the psyche. All these oblique moments, dispersed within Ricoeur's discourse, outflank a teleological interpretation that strives to suppress the irreconcilable tensions in Freud. They also complicate his relation to Derrida and invite one to regard the encounter between the two thinkers as a "singular dialogue" rather than simply a confrontation.⁶²

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Chapter 3

Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self

The discussion of Ricoeur's readings of Husserl and Freud indicated the extent to which his philosophy, while resisting the belief in an immediately available perceptual present, favors the idea of a mediated and reflective self posited as a task rather than as a datum. With a view to displacing and reinterpreting subjectivity, Ricoeur has reflected on the intricate and multifaceted problem of present consciousness, and has been willing to take on board, up to a point, the challenge posed by Freudian psychoanalysis to the so-called philosophies of the subject. In this light, he has not only reformulated the concept of subjectivity but also wrested it from transcendental subjectivism.

This chapter will focus on other ways in which Ricoeur's thinking, mainly in *Oneself as Another* but also in other works, allows for a certain difference within the very heart of identity. This difference appears under the guise of numerous mediations whose outcome is a self that has passed through various phases of dispossession. The first section will examine one of the major contributions of Ricoeur's theory of discourse: the mediating role of language and the singularity of the speaking subject. The second section will be devoted to a discussion of the relation between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, which instantiates the mediation of selfhood by time and change, and which will lead to the dialectic of the narrative and the ethical self. In the third and fourth sections, I will explore the responsible self as this emerges from Ricoeur's account of the ethical intention of the good life and the notion of "benevolent spontaneity," both of which are intimately bound up with the overarching dialectic of selfhood and otherness. These thematic axes will serve as guiding threads into Ricoeur's development of a hermeneutics of the self, whose main virtue is that, in his own words, it provides access to a self "that will neither be exalted, as in the philosophies of the cogito, nor be humiliated, as in the philosophies of the anti-cogito" (OA, 318). In assessing Ricoeur's success in negotiating such a position, I will try, throughout this chapter, to understand a little better his characterization of his philosophy as a return to Kant via Hegel and to draw attention to some of the tensions that such a perspective entails.¹

The Singularity of the Speaking Subject

In "The Question of the Subject," Ricoeur proposes to negotiate a point of contact between reflective philosophy and the objections raised to it by psychoanalysis and structuralist linguistics. What these two schools of thought have in common is "a consideration of *signs* which questions any intention or any claim that the subject's reflecting *on* himself or the positing of the subject *by* himself is an original, fundamental, and founding act" (QS, 237).

Structuralist linguistics, according to Ricoeur, questions the specifically Husserlian correlation of the transcendental ego to a theory of meaning. If every being is to be described, for Husserl, as a phenomenon, as appearance, and, consequently, as the intended meaning of one's lived experience, then meaning, whose bearer is the subject, constitutes the most comprehensive category of phenomenological description. Meaning functions as the universal mediation between the subject and the world. To the extent that meaning is inseparable from a linguistic theory, Ricoeur subscribes to Merleau-Ponty's observation that Husserl moved language into central position, and maintains that "one can present phenomenology as a generalized theory of language. Language ceases to be an activity, a function, an operation among others: it is identified with the entire signifying milieu, with the complex of signs thrown like a net over our field of perception, our action, our life" (QS, 247).

The criticism leveled by structuralism at such coupling of subjectivity and signification is that it subordinates the latter to the former. For phenomenology, language "loses itself as it moves toward what it says, going beyond itself and establishing itself in an intentional movement of reference. For structural linguists, language is self-sufficient: all its differences are immanent in it, and it is a system which precedes the speaking subject" (QS, 251). Structuralism, for Ricoeur, defines signification as an essentially autonomous process, thus it refuses to place it under the aegis of intentionality. It regards language not as a mere medium at the disposal of the conscious subject and directed toward an intended reality, but as a self-sufficient system, as the structural unconscious presupposed by the idealism germane to phenomenology.

In response to the structuralist objections to Husserl's supposed solipsism, Ricoeur wishes to maintain a balanced stance. On the one hand, he takes into account the challenge of structuralism, thereby keeping at bay the Husserlian idea that meaning and signification emanate from a self-sufficient consciousness. On the other hand, he does not subscribe unreservedly to such a critique, for his intention is to reinscribe subjectivity having assimilated the lessons of structuralism. Accordingly, he allows for both the structuralist challenge and the insights of phenomenology with a view not to unearthing, following Husserl, a primordial sphere of subjective experience as the origin of language, but to achieving a return to the self by way of its other on the basis of a rigorous dichotomy between semiotics and semantics.

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