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PART I



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I

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Like the transcendental illusion to which he refers in *Donner le temps 1*, for example (*DLT1*, 46/*GT1*, 30), there is a form of reason analysed by Derrida which contravenes the formal rationality it springs from.¹ For Kant 'transcendental illusion' – a kind of post-Baconian 'Idol of the mind'² – arises when the judgment becomes detached from its positive moorings in experience, and enjoys for a while the sensation of being powered under its own steam: it suffers the 'illusion' that it can generate its own conditions of functioning, 'transcendental' in only a phoney, adventitious or delinquent way. A schema such as this is a far cry – and on several counts – from analyses offered by Derrida (much too much conflating and aligning of Derrida with varying 'precursors' gets accepted these days as sufficient exposition), and yet this motif of a rationality capable of going against itself, or beyond itself, makes for a powerful link in the singular, sprawling history of ideas that provides a context for the present discussion.

I wish to let this context be dominated for now however by Hegel, not Kant. For it is in Hegel especially and in Derrida's readings of him that an interested party can look for and find that spoliation of reason by something within its precincts that reveals *autobiography* to be perhaps the most fertile, if an unlikely, place for working on ideas of reason 'itself'. I mean the internecine attack, dramatic in Hegel, by what remains autobiographical in reason even as the latter craves accession to a universal language purged (by definition) of elements too special, too personal, too finite even or even too subjective not to qualify that universality and speckle the flawlessness of its completion.

¹ Transcendental illusion is discussed by Kant in the second division of the 'Transcendental dialectic' in the *Critique of pure reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd impression (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education, 1933), pp. 297–99. Hereafter referred to as the *First critique*.

² It will be recalled that the *First critique* takes its epigraph from Bacon.

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Too subjective? But Hegel insists on the necessity of subjective 'moments' – such as self-consciousness³ – on the way to reason, on the way to absolute knowledge, that is; any universal or absolute which attempts to do away with such moments will be unfounded and as spurious as the transcendental illusion in Kant. Yet these moments are just as destructive as they are necessary, Derrida argues, and with a destructiveness very different from the enablingly destructive self-superseding of the subjective in Hegel. Nothing enabling redounds from such 'moments' according to Derrida, their subjectivity (as it was for Kierkegaard up to a point, in his reading of Hegel) unconfined to a dialectical moment, unsubmitable to philosophic method, tending rather to spread and invade the dialectic as a whole – a whole which, precisely because the ascent towards it through the part, the subjective, has been hijacked, never properly attains its own form, though it maintains its desire for such. Hence a Derridean emphasis upon what *remains* subjective in Hegel, upon what is left over after all the dialectical reprises have been triggered off. Long after the subjective has been taken up and incorporated in the universal, there are remains: a remarkable specificity which is the 'subject' of this book – a tendency rather. This tendency is the tendency of the autobiographical, not unlike the Uncanny in Freud,⁴ to burst through the subjective, throwing it into disarray. It should have remained behind forever or been taken up into the universal, but this return of what is even more specific within the subjective than the subjective, this *alter ego*, disobeys. We could even describe it (very gingerly) as the dehiscence of the literary into the philosophical. Either way, the specificity hitherto trained by concepts of subjectivity for the synecdochic relationship between specific and general, part and whole, harbours a rather less educable force within it which may be called autobiographical.

That would be an initial, if gross, rationale for picking up Hegel as a counterweight to Derrida – the fact that it appears (to Derrida) that in Hegel particularly, though by no means exclusively, the limits of reason are not set by reason solely but get defined surreptitiously by

3 See, for example, the section on the 'Actualisation of self-consciousness' in *The phenomenology of spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 211–35. Hereafter referred to as *The phenomenology of spirit*.

4 'The "Uncanny"' in *The Pelican Freud library*, vol. xiv, *Art and literature*, trans. under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 335–76.

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damagingly autobiographical elements. These elements take at least three forms, forms which perhaps don't separate naturally but which for rhetorical purposes I spell out:

1. The admixture of elements of 'the life' with those of 'the work'.
2. The internal or autobiographical deconstruction of a principle of reason *at work in the work* by something paradoxically requisite to it – by what Derrida has called an originary ruin, indeed a principle of ruin (*MDA*, 72/*MB*, 68–9).
3. The impossibility of a finite autobiography, or a closed subjectivity, in a relatively ordinary psychological or empirical sense.

The relation between these elements demands some gloss, but perhaps the employment of the term 'autobiography' in the first place needs more justifying. It is not after all without some disingenuousness that 'autobiography' can be used as a synonym for subjectivity, or self-identity, or subjective self-identity, and so forth, and I do not wish to use it as such: it is a term too streaked with literary colour, and with a sense of being folded out into a field of experience at a more contingent or erratic or deregulated level than the quite serious terms of 'subjectivity', etc. 'Autobiography' can scarcely claim the conceptual generality that those more philosophically credible terms obviously do; it is too weak, both as a term and a phenomenon. But its weakness is what gives it force. Its concentration of (from a grand philosophical point of view) ignominious characteristics, the literary and the erratic, makes the presence of the autobiographical in the body of philosophical reason an irritant. That is the interest of it. It is decisive on account of the inalienability of its presence there, and these opening chapters will try to argue that out. It becomes a *general* fact about rationality that it can never be general enough, not least because in order to be formed generality has to be *engendered* with a *genitivity* that always involves against its wishes a commitment to or contract with a sort of 'low' specificity, more intractable than the subjective, that we shall call autobiographical.

Autobiography holds this usefully discreditable status, then. The relation between its three forms isolated above breeds complexity, one of the preliminary reasons being, in fact, the very poverty of its status – a status which can be respected, presumably, only by an irony that in examining it will refuse to accord autobiography so philosophical a substantiation of its internal relations as it (autobiography) also beseeches. As *for* those relations, the following can be stated in a way that perhaps resists being measured by irony after

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all. If, for example, elements of the life seep into those of the work (form number 1), and if, additionally, the content of the work is itself prone to the coming undone of what it propounds (form number 2), then the coming undone affects in principle not only that content of the work but also the life partly confused with it (form number 3). This sequence of thought will then have confounded the division that was basic (form number 1) between life and work, not to mention the consequence of this – viz., that ‘the life’ in its indivisibility now breaks up as it disseminates through the work from which it is not finally different, thus shattering the premise of a finite subjectivity (form number 3), a violence collaterally performed already in the combined coming-undone of both work (form number 2) and life (deduced in the previous sentence). And so on. Against the spirit of autobiography one could then mount a higher level of generality in order to declare the interanimated complexity of these relations to denote in its own right an autobiographical circularity or enclosedness of the theme we are addressing, but only so long as we remember that our distance from such a theme, our ‘objectivity’ with regard to it, remains formidably difficult to ascertain for we are being at the same time too philosophical and not philosophical enough in our attentions. That these amount to more than sophisticated twinings on a braid will be seen in the fact that they can subvert in its ideality the project of a ‘pure reason’ whether Kantian, Hegelian or otherwise.

But it is not just a question of status, a master philosophy compromised by an association with an inferior, even hybrid, literary genre, the autobiographical – though that would be bad enough. Nor a question of an unavoidable, let us say unconscious, narcissism which would propel self-reflections of the philosopher into his or her work. Nor yet of a corruption of this into the bad taste encouraging the vain philosopher to talk too much about him- or herself. What then? The notion of a narcissism still stands, but in altered form, as a narcissism no longer stipulating a return to the self. Instead, the autobiographical detour which pure reason cannot but take and continue taking through the realm of the literary and the contingent, through the realm of what by compression will be called *writing* later on, suspends the autobiographical and the rational together in a synthesis both special and general, in a strange state chronically unsuited to rhetorical or philosophical classification. In it, narcissistic recuperation will have to be put off indefinitely because it lacks a free locus for its special operation. That this state may be registered as autobiographical is

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permitted by the graphical in it, writing giving off effects of finitude which are neither subjective nor wholly distinguishable from, since they are indeed effects of finitude, the results of subjectivisation.

All of this may appear very enigmatic, and may remain so even after the 'proofs' of its force as an argument have been displayed. What matters most is that autobiography can be revitalised as a concept of sorts by extending the more received ideas of it as pertaining to a psychological and self-reflexive subject with a life and a history and a work proper to it, towards a new determination by writing. Further on we shall press Derrida's case for 'autobiography of the writing' according to which the distinction life/work (or spirit/letter) becomes enthralled to a less intelligible but more fundamental intensity that could never be filtered – or *only* be filtered – by philosophies of the subject.

But for now I shall focus on the second of the forms of the autobiographical elements given above. I give this prominence because it raises propaedeutic issues as to the aptness, efficacy and interests relative to the present discussion, of reason *per se*. This second form is the one where the project of a pure reason finds itself irremediably poisoned by a foreign body perversely necessary to it, both poison ('*Gift*' in German) and cure (the giving of a dose of medicine, a 'gift' in English).⁵ We take up the motif of a rationality at odds with itself – cautiously, however, for there must be a degree of naïveté in speaking of a 'motif' in a 'history of ideas' when that history encompasses critical and speculative philosophies far from naïve in their own attitudes to both 'history' and 'ideas'. A motif of 'rationality against itself' could not, first of all, be a 'motif' to the extent that the latter implies a rational continuity, a ratio and a rhythm which are our motifs to scramble. So, at Derrida's instigation, one resorts to a less logical, more mythological idiom the better to activate these rationally excessive or incremental traits. When reason outstrips itself there can result only narrative effects, mythological in that they conjure genealogies of such *essential* complexity that they resist philosophical or rational generalisation. It is not a ruse for *dramatising* what is paradoxical or hypotactical in reason, but of accrediting the

⁵ For Derrida's work on the implications of this paradoxical linguistic coincidence, see in particular 'La pharmacie de Platon' in *La dissémination* (LD, 69–196/D, 61–171) and the first volume of *Donner le temps* (DLT1, 53, including note 1/GT1, 36).

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more-than-singular moments of reason with their own density, thinkable on the condition of the narrative attenuation in time which they themselves will have enforced. One learns to speak of war, of absolute war between 'necessity' and 'desire': 'between my desire and Necessity ... there is an absolute war' (*A*, 32, my translation). A history of ideas gives way to a different kind of narrative, comprising fiction at its source, an exuberant and unquenchable genitivity by which the history of ideas cannot remain totally unaffected and, as we shall see, to which, at crucial moments, it has recourse.

A second set of complex relations. It is in the mode of a surprising inversion that Derrida invokes these mythological or legendary words, necessity and desire, writing, 'I would oppose desire to necessity, to *ananké*' (*L'O*, 153/*TEO*, 115). Where one might have associated necessity with Truth in its imperiousness, on the one hand; and desire with the reluctant, vengeful self preserving its own pleasure against the truth's too harsh light, on the other; now the opposition will be made to work in reverse. Now desire is the province of philosophy; philosophy's attempts on truth first and foremost a means of preserving itself through a coherence of its method fixed beforehand by the prefabricated limitation of its object. That it seems is philosophy's desire, the instinct for self-preservation, or a will to truth. Necessity, by contrast, turns accordingly into the figure of something more necessary for its very incalculability, more indomitable or unavoidable for the power of its elusiveness, than truth – whose relative import will also have to be revised. 'Truth' can be understood rather as a pretext, an invented condition, a token of systemic order for the philosophical system pursuing it (in vain, of course, as it is the condition of its own pursuit, philosophy wanting to *be* truthful) than the absolute cause outside its own system that philosophy hopes to mistake it for. In other words, truth most certainly is *necessary* – necessary for a philosophical effectuation of philosophy's aims, necessary in the sense of expedient or being-necessary-to, an abetting precondition. The quality of truth's necessity suffers, however, through such an orientation of it. For strictly speaking necessity gathers only in its absolute unyieldingness before comprehension, so that its alliance with truth will have to be dissolved. If truth appears now as another figure of philosophic enablement and a gratification deferred so as to stabilise and enhance the philosophical intentions for it, necessity shies away from its company. What we are seeking under the name of necessity could not form the object of a pursuit. The more

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necessary necessity has rather to be *chance*. Why? Because chance necessarily defies systemic coherence.

Ahead of us appears 'a certain interfacing of necessity and chance, of significant and insignificant chance: the marriage, as the Greek would have it, of *Ananké*, of *Tukhé*, and *Automatia*' (MC, 24/MCh, 6). Nothing satisfies as well as chance the provision called for by necessity that a human system meet its limit before it. Chance is asystemic by definition. If it could be systematised, its chanciness would have been annulled.

On this reckoning, however, perhaps chance would not in its necessity be other than truth, not in the necessary imperviousness to thought of its necessity. That is, philosophy may argue into credibility the mis-taking the *methodological* position of truth (the condition of its own pursuit) for a position that is *transcendental*, or independently true, but the greater interest stems from this: neither truth nor chance lies fully either within or without the system of reason that is obscurely determined by them in the necessary ambiguity of their borderline position. Necessity forms an alliance with chance precisely because of this liminal force that styles chance as both truly necessary because beyond appeal, and hard to tell apart from a truth considered without favour to either methodological or transcendental interests. Very subtly, then, chance maintains the systematicity of the philosophical system in its desire. It reveals and produces for thought, by exceeding them, the system's borders, thus making the system possible as coherency; but equally, *qua* necessity it withdraws irrevocably from detection by that system, prohibiting the system from closing upon itself, thus in a symmetrical gesture making the system impossible. 'Necessity comes, not to say No to desire, but to explain to desire that its condition of impossibility is also its condition of possibility' (A, 92, my translation, cf. ADF, 120/AOF, 134). It should be added that desire has more to it than being a dumb recipient of these explanations: desire emerges nowhere other than in the incompatibility of these propositions, i.e., in the identity of its conditions of possibility and impossibility. The skewedness of desire's conditions serves to constitute the desirousness of desire; desire desires *because* truncated or misaligned in its constitution. Will it have gone unnoticed that this is already to give a sketch of desire worlds apart from subject-based philosophy and psychology?

The reversal is so extraordinary that we cannot leave it at that. Consider: chance becomes disclosed as necessity, thus flying in the

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face of the ready opinion saying just the opposite, that chance is, in fact, 'by definition', hardly necessary at all, its impact negligible, let alone conclusive. The reversal of sense (of common sense) works by cultivating the force of that weakness (this will also be the secret of autobiography's strength). Chance commands from the *irreducibility* of its weakness. As we shall see, no reduction offers itself because there is hardly anything there of chance to reduce: that it is not really 'there' at all, and then only unpredictably, affords it a power of unslayable, fugitive invisibility. No chance of nullifying chance – a priori – a necessity whose aprioristic character turns out to be quite unique. Certainly a large terrain may be reclaimed from chance by calculations of probability and a scientific prediction of the future, but the length and breadth of that terrain remain irrelevant in their fundamental incompetence for capturing chance in the non-negotiable principle of its *alea*. Which provides a further motive for a certain mythologisation of philosophy's terms: the non-negotiability has something like the force of destiny or fate. Chance shuns the dimension of reason, foreign to reason's topography of calculations because foreign to topography *tout court*, yet reperussing there as if by godly caprice.

Again 'by definition' there can be no response, at least on a graph of consciousness, to the chancy eventuality that pre-empts, disarms and circumvents in advance rational response. Yet by writing as it were *against* itself (against desire), a rational discourse, if it remains one in it, can perhaps sensitise and nuance this occlusive situation of absolute war, absolute destruction of reason, so salvaging something for thought. This impossible strategy, not chosen but imposed, is Derrida's:

I write against my desire. I know very well that between my desire and necessity – what I call Necessity with a capital N in *La carte postale*, like a character – between my desire and Necessity, and those necessities which dictate to me what I write, there is an absolute war. (*A*, 32, my translation)
 If this counts as a strategy, one of submission to necessity, then, owing to the reversal of sense now operating, this strategy can be said to produce effects more akin to an emancipation, though not the strategist's. For to write against desire is to write against philosophy's systemic mastery, creating in its vacuum a tensile environment for the multiple impacts of chance without affecting to predict them.

It has been called 'play'. Caught up too in this concatenation of reversals, this 'concept' must inevitably be adjusted too, it being 'the concept of play' which 'announces the unity of chance and necessity

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in calculations without end' (*MDP*, 7/*MOP*, 7). The unity of chance and necessity sheers away from its strategic subjectivisation in rational experience while molesting the borders of it, borders that are supratopographical, indeed bringing rational experience into being as nothing but borderline experience without positive content (and therefore without unproblematical 'being'). This semi-neutralisation or deconstruction of subjective rational experience heralds the crowding in of – it is this that can be called play – a new dynamic, neither material nor ideal. 'Play' might be taken in the sense of the 'play' in a mechanical apparatus, a degree of 'give' in the system, a certain amount of slack not quite proper to the specifications of the machinery but allowing it its motility over and above its power source. The play can be good or bad, lucky or devilish. It can no longer be decided *who* plays or *what* plays, for the verb in this active indicative form requires the presence of a subject we shall lose the right to direct and whose subjectivity, determined in its rationality, will have been entirely reconfigured. Any *pleasure* derived from this *play* becomes hard to apportion, and in any case its submissiveness before necessity – which by the rules of common sense should be what pleasure most rebuts – sends us off on another trail: to look for what there is in the psychoanalytic theory of *masochism* that might help in drafting pleasure's concept, assuming it could exist in conceptual form. Such is the transformation exacted by this reversal: to write *against* desire is to play:

You are the only one to understand why it really was necessary that I write exactly the opposite, as concerns axiomatics, of what I desire, what I know my desire to be, in other words you: living speech, presence itself, proximity, the proper, the guard, etc. I have necessarily written on the other side – and in order to surrender to Necessity. (*LCP*, 386/*TPC*, 363)

One must learn to hear this play in Derrida of the simultaneous subjective and asubjective writing that is strictly neither of those things. Possibly it is autobiographical, where we distinguish again the autobiographical from the subjective. The autobiographical modulation of play takes the work away from its being determined in opposition to the life. *All* of these terms are being given over to reconsideration.

I turn to Hegel, then, as my *point d'appui*. Continuing first with the pseudo-motif of reason-counter-reason, necessity and desire, I examine Hegel's protocol for philosophical enquiry. The next chapter,

Read the Book of Esther online. Study Scripture verses with commentary, concordances, and use highlighting, underlining, take notes in the Bible. This summary of the book of Esther provides information about the title, author(s), date of writing, chronology, theme, theology, outline, a brief overview, and the chapters of the Book of Esther. Author and Date. Although we do not know who wrote the book of Esther, from internal evidence it is possible to make some inferences about the author and the date of composition. It is clear that the author was a Jew, both from his emphasis on the origin of a Jewish festival and from the Jewish nationalism that permeates the story. The Bible book of Esther is a dramatic account which can give us insight into God's special and purposeful plan for our lives. The story gives us six powerful lessons about courage, divine timing and God's supreme love. Story of Esther in the Bible. As scripture reveals, Esther is a Jewish woman living in Persia and reared by her cousin Mordecai. I imagine Esther as a drop-dead gorgeous woman with flawless olive skin and a tantalizing personality. She charmed King Xerxes so much that after deposing his prior queen, he could have chosen any woman he wanted but he chose Esther. Of course there is a scoundrel in the story, too. Haman is a vengeful and egotistical advisor to the king.