



Any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

*John Donne, Meditation 17, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*

### I a pre-text: a confession of a melancholic narcissist

**A** situation: X died yesterday; tomorrow is the funeral; and I will have survived.

Today, what remains to be mourned?

Tonight, what remains to be said?

Now, “what remains to be heard, read, thought and done” (JL 475)?

Will you listen to a story?

The remaining question, the debris of melancholia split open, laid bare: “For *whom* does the bell toll?,” for “thee” or for me?, or for both?, or for neither of us?

I am back, still in mourning; I have failed to conclude my mourning. Mourning, observes Sigmund Freud, is an extended reflex, a regular and normal psychic “reaction to the loss of a loved one/object” (MM 252). The psychogenic economy of self-preservation is such that what I do when in mourning, according to him, is to restore my psychic equilibrium through the recuperative “work of mourning” (253–55), that is, by the gradual forgetting of the loss of the beloved through the acknowledgement of the verdict of reality or by the immediate replacement of the lost love by a new one. With this, he says, the work of mourning can be “completed,” i.e., economised.

But still I am mourning. So I am a melancholic, melancholia being more “profound,” “painful” than mourning, more “idealistic” in its cathetic orientation, as Freud says. Is this

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### A MEDITATION ON KNELL, FUNERAL MELANCHOLIA AND THE QUESTION OF SELF-REFLEXIVITY “to whom would the reflexive be returned?”<sup>1</sup>

merely a question of degree? No, look at the point where the analogy fails: the melancholic “knows *whom* he has lost (as the mourner does) but not *what* he has lost in him” (254):

In mourning we found that the inhibition and loss of interest are fully accounted for by the work of mourning in which the ego is absorbed. In melancholia, the *unknown* loss will result in a similar internal work and will therefore be responsible for the melancholic inhibition. The difference is that the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see *what* it is that is absorbing him so entirely. (Emphasis added)

A puzzle after a puzzle: the lost object in the case of melancholia is the ego; with such a transformation of an object-loss into an ego-loss, with the

identification of the ego with the abandoned object, “the disturbance of self-regard” (252) ensues.

Then, I am an inquisitive melancholic whose failed act of mourning is “narcissistic” (MM): “libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation” (ON 66). True, I “point to a loss in regard to my own ego” (MM 256; 254–56), to a certain loss in the ego, not to the object lost: I draw attention, both my own and yours, to the interminable mourner in myself, obscurely and obsessively “absorbed in the work of melancholia.” True, something absorbing is lodged in this work, namely an element of “insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure.” This way, my ego, when suffering a profound mourning, “regresses” – to original narcissism. Overwhelmed by the irrecuperable, immeasurable sentiment of loss, of ego loss, “the melancholic displays something else which is lacking in mourning – an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale.”

Self-absorbed, I am observing myself. I, a Freudian melancholic, am a “self-critical” (MM 254) narcissist, the “critically observing agency” (ON 91; MM 256) experiencing the death of the other in the form of “obsessional self-reproaches” (MM 267), in a form often “heightened into philosophical introspection” (ON 91; MM 255). We have now reached the climactic passage in “Mourning and Melancholia”:

... the melancholic’s disorder affords the view of the constitution of the human ego. We see how in him one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and as it were, takes it as its object. Our suspicion that the critical agency which is here split off from the ego might also show its independence in other circumstances will be confirmed by every further observation. We shall really find grounds for distinguishing this agency from the rest of the ego. What we are here becoming acquainted with is the agency commonly called “conscience.” ... In the clinical picture of melancholia, dissatisfaction with the ego on moral grounds is the most outstanding feature. (256)

In the inexorable march of melancholia, Freud sees, I see, something peculiar, peculiarly ineradicable: elements (MM 254–56; 260) of self-reflexivity resembling the radical solipsism of pain, the list of which could be endless: “self-reproaches,” “self-tormenting,” “the circuitous path of self-punishment,” “distressing self-denigration,” “self-dissatisfaction,” “self-accusations,” “extended self-criticism,” and so on. I, the relentless melancholic, am a bereaved super-ego, self-observing excessively, morbidly, in the face of the shock. I refuse to, although wishing to, sleep (MM 260). That is, I am forced to be vigilant. Such is the force of melancholia, of a failed mourning: “(T)he law of mourning ... would have to fail in order to succeed. In order to succeed, it would well have to *fail*, to fail *well*” (FM 173).

My mourning wishes to fail well, correctly, precisely. Hence, the irresistible question: am I not mourning for *my* loss?, my *own* loss? My worry here, deflected as such, is reflexive to that precise extent: what if the bell ends up tolling for *me*, rather? What if my act of mourning is, after all, a mere reflex action? My problem is not André Marlaux’s: “there is no death. There is only ... me ... me ... who is going to die.” No, the problem is: “there is no death. There is only ... me ... me ... who remains alive.”

Jacques Derrida, the auto-analytic eulogist, shows a similar hyper-reflection syndrome. A most revealing case of philosophical melancholia is his funeral oration delivered on 27 December 1995, later revised into an article (A), where he reflects on the death of Emmanuel Levinas and at the same time the impossibility of mourning for the one who died. The eulogist is in double mourning – for the double loss. With this, questioning the very possibility of mourning becomes a mode of mourning:

Whom is one addressing at such a moment? ... With tears in their voice, they sometimes speak familiarly to the other who keeps silent, calling upon him without detour or mediation, apostrophising him, even greeting him or confiding in him. This is not necessarily out of respect for convention, not always simply part of the rhetoric of oration. It is rather so as to traverse speech at the very point where we find ourselves lacking words, and because all

language that would return to the self, to us, would seem indecent, a sort of reflexive discourse that would end up coming back to the stricken community, to its consolation or its mourning, to what is called, in a confused and terrible expression, “the work of mourning.” Concerned only with itself, such speech would, in this return, run the risk of turning away from what is here our law – the law as *straightforwardness* or *uprightness* [*droiture*]: to speak straight on, to address oneself directly to the other, and to speak *for* the other whom one loves and admires, before speaking of him. (1–2)

Before “moving beyond anxiety” (3, Emmanuel Levinas cited), in order to become “stronger than death,” I must think, ask myself, again: “whom is one addressing in such moment?” Reflecting on the occurrence of my mourning, I become melancholic. Trying to keep all my reflexes in check, instinctual or cultivated, I get lost again. I rebound, awkwardly: I revert to a question captured by melancholia, a question that, having lost its object of inquisition, retains the form of the loss, namely

to whom would the reflexive be returned?  
à qui renverrait ici le réfléchi? (Derrida 1993b,  
34/13)

What now? What remains to be done? In what follows, I trace back this ghostly turn of hyper-reflection, hoping that my obsessional need for self-criticism, my guiding narcissism, my “insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure,” may interest you. If I do this under the signature of Derridean melancholia, that may secure – if not necessarily double – your interest. I ask you to mourn, to stay, with us.

## 2 a context: jacques derrida the mourner

Derrida the mourner is not news. Derrida has been hearing and experiencing death long enough. It has been accompanying his questions around language, more specifically, around the act of writing. Even before the publication of *Glas* (1974), his proper name or signature – the instant loss of which he anticipates, mourns and enacts – had been carrying the trace of death all

along. Examples are abundant: the death of/in speech (*Of Grammatology*), the centre (*Margins of Philosophy*), living-presence (*Speech and Phenomena*), the father (*Dissemination*), the signatory singularity of the I (*Limited Inc.*), and so on. As David Krell observes, “... a certain tension persists in Derrida’s labours, between the obligation to sign and the impossibility of signature: unhappy to dither, yet not wishing to prevaricate, Derrida nevertheless cannot blithely sign. His relation to signature ... is one of *mourning*” (13).

Derrida the mourner is, however, a relatively new phenomenon in some sense: firstly, his acts of mourning have become more concrete, more explicit and more painful; secondly, the focus of his mourning has shifted notably from “one’s own death” to the death of the other (or others). Relatively recently, in a series of writings on mourning and the rituals around the event of dying, such as “Circumfession,” *Mémoires: For Paul de Man*, “By Force of Mourning” and “Adieu,” Derrida has shown that he is not only a philosopher of and for “the other,” but a son, a friend and a disciple. As he himself grows old, Derrida uses the increasingly frequent, literal deaths of his beloved ones as the (disturbingly) timely occasions for reflecting on the question of what it means to survive a dying mortal, to live a mortal life. I recall here many eulogies he has been writing sporadically for the last two decades, recently gathered into a volume, *The Work of Mourning* (2001c). Derrida’s renewed philosophical awareness of “the death of the other” is also well documented in less private writings such as *Cinders*, *Gift of Death* and *Spectres of Marx*, all three of which, put together, seem to reflect the general mood or ethos of the post-*Glas* Derrida, Derrida the survivor. “To whom would the reflexive be returned?” One can translate this question of address, of destination, into the idiom of *Glas*: what “remains” of absolute knowing? Put more melancholically, what about the “remains” of it? Here is a thought concerned with that which is dying but not dead *yet*:

Mourning, for its part, has to do with a certain lasting impression, and a dogged depression, concerning our situation at the end(s) of meta-

physics: we remain trapped within it, or in the remnants of it, suspended in its systems and vocabularies, precisely as those who are destined to be remains and remainders. Mourning has to do with what remains: a certain transience, a ravelling of the thread, an irremediable loss. (Krell 153)

It is against this backdrop that my reading of Derrida the mourner unfolds.

The focus of my reading is on the figure of the reflective reader or the reader of the self traceable in the eulogistic texts – funeral orations, words of tribute, and memorial essays – of Derrida: a philosophically disciplined kind of melancholic whose passion for the Levinasian self-criticism or “uprightness [*droiture*]” (A 3) transforms the self-tormenting, self-accusative energy of melancholia into a textual labour of mourning. The Derrida I am thinking of is “an ant at work as an insect strangles, compresses, disciplines itself laboriously in the corset of annuli” (Derrida 1997; see also 2001b, 331–33): the analyst of the self who uses himself as a quasi-phenomenological object of analysis and is therefore, in that sense, theoretically narcissistic. The Derrida I am going to present is one who “engages in a theatrical re-animation of the textual space of philosophy’s passion” (Wood 3), responding to the demand, force of thinking, even when “philosophy (or all theory) is lost sight of”; who listens attentively to, writes around, the equivocality of the (two) end(s) of metaphysics, namely, “its *telos* and its death” (Derrida 1972, 161/134); who, none the less, remains loyal to metaphysical philosophy. The focus of my reading, in other words, is on “the critical agency” at work in Derrida’s scene of mourning, the Freudian melancholic subject (see section 1) who asks: “for whom does the bell toll?” Within this framework, I wish to consider both the powers and the limits of theoretical (or reflective) narcissism. For this, I look into the mode of Derrida’s aporetic mourning which, I will show, is hyper-analytic; my aim is to draw your attention to the procedural self-reflexivity of philosophical melancholia. Three points will be highlighted.

First, incomplete mourning manifests not so much a pathological defect but a philosophical capacity of the mind that, even in its explicitly

“narcissistic” phase, remains structurally hospitable to the other. The contention here, put more emphatically, is that mourning not only is, but *is to be* incomplete, interminable; this, one may argue further, is where deconstruction resists psychoanalysis, where supplement differs from compensation.

Second, Derrida’s deconstructive mourning rests upon textually mediated relations to the other; one crucial implication of this, which I cannot elucidate in this essay, is that a deconstructive move towards the other resists a straightforward translation into ethical terms. To illustrate this point only briefly, Geoffrey Bennington’s contention, for instance, that “deconstruction cannot *propose* an ethics” (64ff.; emphasis added), seemingly blunt, is, in fact, in tune with the kind of hermeneutic hypersensitivity deconstruction demands; “the non-ethical opening of ethics can be seen ... in the fact of reading, for example, this, here, now” (66). What remains absolute here, absolutely urgent, is the “duty of reading” (66–68) or “*call* for reading.” The problem is: the readerly responsiveness or alertness of deconstruction is not easily convertible into a sense of responsibility, for the “gaze” of the dead, as we shall see, becomes topoanalytically – that is, through the analysis of its (a)topos – incorporated into a process of reading as the *remains* of panoptical reason. Such deconstructive gestures towards the other, irreducible and irreducibly hermeneutic, do not spring from a “face-to-face” encounter with it. Rather, Derrida’s ethical moves originate from a “text-to-text” engagement with the other, which testifies to the impossibility of an unmediated, untextured, pure relationship of one to the other. Although Derrida’s injunction to read bears the Levinasian trace (cf. Bernasconi; Critchley 70–73), insofar as it lacks an unfiltered commitment to a first philosophy, he remains a post-Heideggerian or post-metaphysical thinker of the double, who refuses to reciprocate the “retarded metaphysicality” of the Levinasian demand, namely “I must be me and no one else” (Critchley 70), the demand that is neither hermeneutical nor hauntological but unequivocally ethical.

The third point, then: the “loss” or destabilisation of autonomous selfhood, resulting from

the inscription of the dead in the space of meditation, does not disable but, on the contrary, enlivens the process of mourning in some paradoxical way. In other words, the sentiment of loss sensitises a reasoned mourning, the particularly nocturnal quality of which, as we shall see, reveals some allegorical truths about the temporal condition of reading – that is, of living a mortal life.<sup>2</sup> The key points of contention I wish to establish in this essay, I have already stated. But what follows, despite being a mere demonstration of them, may still interest you, if I say it represents the process of my own textual encounter with – or narcissistic appropriation of (?) – Derrida, repetitive yet each time singular.

### 3 a starting point: derrida the hyper-analytic mourner

Let me begin with the 1996 essay “Resistances” where the triumphalist reductionism of Freudian psychoanalysis is questioned, “resisted.” Derrida’s refusal to complete his mourning is a dogged determination to remain melancholic in the Freudian sense of the word. Derrida’s hair-splitting “hyperanalyticism” which he himself “identifies with ‘deconstruction’, is characterised by its oblique obedience [cf. Derrida 1993b] to the law of resistative analysis: the law of a ‘one must analyse endlessly’ – including ‘the “one must” of analytic desire’” (R 34–36).

Must one resist? (R 1)

... the paradox of a double “one must”: “one must,” to be sure, analyse the “one must” of analytic desire as the desire to undo a composition or an originary contamination so as finally to attain a primitive, proper, or elementary simplicity that would be by rights the sole and true point of departure, the sole legitimate beginning. ... (R 36)

The irresolvability of the paradox of a double resistance (one must resist<sup>3</sup> the very resistance of and from the limits, whether philosophical or psychoanalytic) induces, as well as secures, a philosophical insomnia often translated as the Derridean vigil, the incompleteness of mourning. “Must one resist?” – this question itself remains incomplete: resist what, exactly? The object is missing; what is being resisted is the very insti-

tution of the object of resistance. And it is this very incompleteness, the very restlessness, the very inexhaustibility of the “anticathectical energies”<sup>4</sup> of antinomian defiance, that causes the auto-analyst’s vigil, the excess of consciousness. The thought here, to use Derrida’s mock-Hegelian formulation, is: “The excess of mastery ruins mastery” (DJF 103). Later, in an explicitly autobiographical context, he says similarly:

... Insistence leads to difference, ... to the impossibility of identification and totalisation. Mine ... is an *excessively* philosophical gesture: a gesture that is philosophical and, at the same time, in excess of the philosophical. And raising the stakes – how to be more than philosophical without ceasing to be philosophical? – marks with its hubris all the themes I have dealt with. (2001a, 40)

Derrida qualifies such “endurance” (R 36) of the auto-resistance of analysis, analysis’s fatal insomnia, as “*passion*”: the end(-point) of analysis, the unanalysable.

In Derrida’s hyperanalyticism, taken as an offshoot of theoretical narcissism, I hear two words crossing out each other constantly: self-analysis and failure. At stake here is the philosophical ego’s responsiveness or fidelity to the Enlightenment ideal of “one must [*il faut*]” that resembles the infinite demand of the Freudian super-ego, of the law of the father, from whom nothing, we are often told, must escape; “I have had occasion to say that deconstruction is a project in favour of the Enlightenment, and that one must not confuse the Enlightenment of the 18th century with the Enlightenment of tomorrow” (2001a, 54). This auto-resistative hyperanalyticism “inherits and takes inspiration from the Enlightenment” (R 35); and yet, as Derrida goes on to point out, it also “analyses tirelessly the resistance that clings to the thematic of the simple” (2001a, 51–53) – tirelessly to the extent that the formal simplicity of “one must” also comes under scrutiny. The very notion “nothing must escape” cannot escape the deconstructive gaze of the hyperanalytic I; and that gaze, Derrida often emphasises, must remain open to the future (*l’avenir*), welcoming what is to come.

The hyperanalyticism of deconstruction is wedded to the theoretical I’s analytic desire for

self-understanding, often embodied in the super-ego's melancholia: "When in his heightened self-criticism, he (the melancholic) ... has come pretty near to understanding himself; we only wonder why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind" (MM 255). Deconstruction is a theatre of philosophical illness. The mourner who questions, "am I not mourning for myself?" and, by extension, "to whom would the reflexive be returned?," does not mourn naturally or pre-critically but hyper-reflectively, hyperbolically even. Such an I capable of *excessive* self-criticism or self-reading, namely, the I of "*plus d'un*," has always been a driving force behind Derrida's heterological, self-parasitic writing. Recall, for example, the post-Husserlian, grammatological thesis on the irreducible openness in the inside, articulated in *Speech and Phenomena*; the originary duality or fold of the I/eye, demonstrated in "the Double Session" of *Dissemination*, which escapes the Platonic-Hegelian order of mimesis; the overflowing or lack of vision at the source-point (*punctum caecum*) of "I see (with tears)" staged in *Memoirs of the Blind*, and so on. Most recently in an essay entitled "Et Cetera ...," Derrida says:

"Deconstruction" marks still an *excess* of fidelity, as is often the case, to a certain phenomenological inspiration. ... The transcendental reductions themselves pluralise themselves, radicalise themselves in a sort of *hyperbolic* upping of the ante. And once they carry themselves off abyssally, link onto or interrupt each other, one can think of this multiplicity as of a polyphony – more than one *alter ego* in the same *ego*, etc. ... (T)he multiplicity of reductions can be carried by the more or less discordant concert of several voices. Deconstruction, through all these reductions, ... is already more than one voice. (296; emphasis added)  
the ambiguous excess ... (301)  
And in the beginning, there is the *and* ... (282)

A certain "theatre of the 'and'" (EC 301): what interests us is deconstructive thinking's theatrical capacity to be affected, guided and doubled by its spectral double, namely, its interminability. What is at stake is Derrida, the hyper-discursive (not

meta-<sup>5</sup>), "subtly hyperdialectic"<sup>6</sup> thinker armed with anticathectical energies of the melancholic; Derrida, the Husserlian super-ego deconstructing itself, haunting, doubling, pluralising itself. Here, I am assuming that drama is not so much in thinking about action (collected "Acts") as in thinking about thinking (e.g., "Perish the thought!" in *Hamlet*); "to whom would the reflexive be returned?"

Pay attention to the pull of narcissistic self-absorption which exposes the indefinable yet constitutive otherness of the self (cf. Radden 218–19), an irreducibly heteroreferential dimension of autooecesis (P 33). Having lost, having "failed" to maintain, its self-referential stability, the melancholic's I is already inhabited – touched, threatened and complicated – by the ghostly mark of the other, of the exterior, of the different. Derrida the questioner, the thinker, the writer, seems to live with and "work"<sup>7</sup> through the experience of "decentering ... the *ego cogito*" (SM 161–62/98), with and through "the infinite paradoxes of what is so calmly called narcissism" (Derrida 1993b, 34/12), with and through "the very concept of narcissism whose aporias are ... the explicit theme of deconstruction" (SM 161–62/98):

This trauma is endlessly denied by the very movement through which one tries to cushion it, to assimilate it, to interiorise and incorporate it. In this mourning work in progress, in this interminable task, the ghost remains that which gives one the most to think about – and to do. Let us insist and spell things out: to do and to make come about, as well as to let come (about).

What this paradox, aporia or even trauma of narcissism is, what this "ghost" of cogitation is, I seek to clarify in the next section by reading "By Force of Mourning" in some detail. A guiding thought here is: the loss of subjective autonomy the melancholic suffers, which leads to an analytic self-immersion, is, seen otherwise, the gift of the other, the other given as an unreturnable, aporetic gift. An example of such a gift is the gaze of the dead the melancholic mourner is unable to ignore, to which we shall now turn, unless the boredom of repetition has already put you to sleep.

#### 4 moving from eulogy to problematics: moved by the gaze of the dead

The point is to analyse not simply behaviour, ideas or ideologies, but, above all, the *problematizations* in which a thought of being intersects “practices” and “practices of the self.” ... With its reflexive vigilance and care in thinking itself in its rigorous specificity, such an analysis thus calls for the *problematization of its own problematisation*. (DJF 115)

We are all looked at ..., and each one singularly, by Louis Marin.

He looks at us. *In us*. (FM 189)

Louis Marin is dead; Derrida is in mourning, again. Derrida is speaking of him – or rather, “speaking *to and for*” and *through* him, the ghost of Marin. This I say in the spirit of the Levinas-Derridean “law” of direct address noted above (see section 1); later in “Adieu,” Derrida writes, “if he [Levinas] no longer responds, it is because he is responding *in us*, from the bottom of our hearts, *in us* but before us, *in us* before us – *in* calling us ...” (13; emphasis added).<sup>8</sup>

Derrida is speaking to and for Marin, as well as to and for his audience, in a de facto eulogy worked into a conference paper. There, Derrida articulates as well as practices what he refers to, again, as the “law” (FM 173) or “mechanism” or “principle” of mourning: “the law of the law, always in mourning,” namely, “the failure of mourning” (174):

The law of mourning = to “fail *well*” (173) to complete mourning

This formula, a melancholic residue within the Freudian economy of mourning, demonstrates a truth about deconstructive mourning: to mourn is to disagree with the dead; to keep engaging with them.

The difference between “to/for” and “of” at stake is that between spacing and packaging; to speak *to* or *for* the other, dead or alive, is to await, “anticipate” an answer, to allow the other to speak by putting oneself in the position of a patient listener, whereas to speak *of* the other is to stop waiting, to assimilate the other into the pre-existing categories of linguistic representa-

tion, into, for instance, the typical format of a successful eulogy in which the dead are spoken *of*, as if disposed *of*. The difference at issue is that between addressing the other and objectifying it; in the first, we see a gesture of openness, immeasurable in itself, whereas in the second, elements of closure are saturated with spoken certainties and reflexive comforts, often illustrated by, as Derrida points out, “the image commonly used to characterise mourning” (187) in this “era of psychoanalysis” (174), namely, that of “interiorisation, idealisation, introjection, consumption of the other.”

Why does this difference matter? What does the difference mean *to* Derrida, the (unsuccessful) mourner?

“Louis Marin is ‘*in us*.’” Here, two different kinds of interiority are evoked at once: on the one hand, the interiority of fond memories edited and shared as such, and on the other, the interiority of reflective mood already exposed to the turbulence of experiencing the other *in* the self. The first is the evidence of narcissism, and the second, the impossibility of it. The Derridean experience of mourning is a *movement* of a gaze from the first to the second: trembling, imperceptible, yet originary.

This “movement” Derrida describes, in an interview entitled “There is No *One* Narcissism,” as a necessary, “general” economy of love and mourning:

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

one – of death, narcissism does not abdicate absolutely. (199)

The twofold meaning of the sentence “Louis Marin is ‘in us’” should now be clearer. When read as an expression of “little narcissism,” it means: Louis Marin the interiorised other is looked at, spoken of, by us. Taken as an expression of “big narcissism,” the same can be read as: Louis Marin is already outside, “leaving ‘in us’ only images” (FM 188) which, in turn, see us. The second meaning of the sentence, the second mode of “narcissistic reappropriation of the other,” takes the form of passive reciprocation of the gaze of the dead: if the first is a case of “appropriation” of the other, the second, *ex*-appropriation, an acknowledgement that Louis Marin, the irreversibly other, the irreducibly other, has already occupied a space *within* our psychical “topology or tropology” (188), ineradicably so that he still looks at us *in* our meditations, “each one singularly”:

We are all looked at, I said, and each one singularly, by Louis Marin. He looks at us. *In us*. He looks in us. This witness sees in us. And from now on more than ever. But what might this indicate that would not be a mere rhetorical commonplace? It would indicate an *absolute* excess and dissymmetry in the space of what relates us to ourselves and constitutes the “being-in-us,” the “being-us,” in something completely other than a mere subjective interiority: in a place open to an infinite transcendence. The one who looks at us in us – and *for whom* we are – is no longer; he is completely other, infinitely other, as he has always been, and death has more than ever entrusted him, given him over, distanced him, in this infinite alterity. However narcissistic it may be, our subjective speculation can no longer seize and appropriate this gaze before which we appear. (189)

The excessive gaze of the dead, which Derrida the mourner interiorises, enables him to speak *to* and *for* the dead; yet it also forces him to recognise that it is, in principle, impossible for him to speak *of* the dead in any completely subjective manner. Hence, the *movement* of the auto-deconstruction of narcissism: the initial experience of narcissism leads to an experience of the impossibility of it.

What, then, causes such a shift, such an “inversion of the gaze” (FM 188; 188–89), such a sudden intrusion of the other into the interiority of a Narcissus? Such is the power of death. Note a sudden shift of power attested by the temporality of mourning: “He is secure and now can never mourn” (Percy Shelley, *Adonais*); I *was* secure but *will* mourn forever. Put differently, the movement from “I-am-here-you-are-there” to “you-are-not-there-but-here-where-I-used-to-be” is caused by the death of the other that is the ultimate disruption of the stability of interpersonal dialectics. By not being “there,” the other deprives me of the narcissistic privilege of looking from “here” (cf. Dastur 46): “That is the excess and the dissymmetry: we bear *in ourselves* the gaze that Louis Marin bears *on us*”; now, “we’re seen in the gaze” which itself remains invisible, impossible to reflect. In other words, the gaze of the dead is infinitely larger than that of the mourner; “this excess ... brings about the limitless enlargement of the image. Its power of dilation gives it its greatest force in the mourning of the absolute of ‘force.’” The inscriptive power of the gaze of the dead is such that it intrudes upon the privacy of the mourner, fatally yet necessarily: “in my relationship to myself, he is here *in* me before me, stronger or more *forceful* than me” (emphasis added). The power of the gaze of the dead is such that it even mediates the mourner’s self-relation.

Something is being torn apart, profoundly and infinitely: a melancholic mourning, taken as an experience of losing the illusion of pristine interiority, is the “mourning of our autonomy, of everything that would make us the measure of ourselves” (FM 189). With the forced entry of the dead into the life of interiority, the old world expires; the formal symmetry between life and death, between inside and outside gets broken. Through the spectacle (*mise en scène*) of *intra*-subjective or *intra*communal suffering, what takes place is, as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, the “first-laying-bare (*mise à nu*)” (xi–xiv) of the fragile structure of that interiority, of the constitutive limits of narcissism, whether individual or collective. Infinite mourning is possible because the gaze of the dead is undying; infinite mourning is necessary because life is too large to be



forgotten by a slumbering little narcissism. Infinite mourning is, in some sense, a good thing. But it is also a source of infinite pain.

In "Psyché: Inventions of the Other," the text dedicated to the memory of his dead friend, Paul de Man, Derrida thematises the procedural narcissism of mourning, again, in some explicit terms: he does so by exposing his own narcissistic "wound" of articulated self-reproach. He asks how "speaking to the other" is possible and why, despite its difficulties, it is necessary:

The possibility of stating the other or speaking to the other. ... The issue is unmistakably that of death, of this moment of mourning when the breaking of the mirror is the most necessary and also the most difficult. The most difficult because everything we say or do or cry, however outstretched toward the other we may be, remains *within us*. A part of us is wounded and it is with ourselves that we are conversing in the travail of mourning and of *Erinnerung*. Even if this metonymy of the other in ourselves already constituted the truth and the possibility of our relation to the living other, death brings it out into more abundant light. So we see why the breaking of the mirror is still more necessary, because at the instant of death, the limit of narcissistic reappropriation becomes terribly sharp, it increases and neutralises suffering: let us weep no longer over ourselves alas when we *must* no longer be concerned with the other *in ourselves*, we *can* no longer be concerned with anyone except the other *in ourselves*. The narcissistic wound enlarges infinitely for want of being able to be narcissistic any longer, for no longer even finding appeasement in that *Erinnerung* we call the work of mourning. Beyond internalising memory, it is then necessary to *think*, which is another way of remembering. (P 31)

What is painful is not that the other is dead but that my consciousness remains alive.<sup>9</sup> This is the ultimate poignancy, irony of mourning, described above as the "*sharp limit*" of narcissism that increases *and* at the same time neutralises suffering. The neutralising power of narcissism testifies to its procedural strength which, in turn, reveals its constitutive fault, that is, its inability to deal with the pain of bereavement directly. Such a relentless, internal duality

of mourning, remaining unmanageable in itself, causes the "infinite enlargement of the narcissistic wound," the spiral oscillation between the neutralisation of suffering and the enhancement of it. "We *can* no longer be concerned with anyone except the other *in ourselves*": this is about narcissism as an enabling condition of mourning. "We *must* no longer be concerned with the other *in ourselves*": this is about narcissism as an obstacle of mourning. It is then necessary to *think*, as Derrida affirms, through this aporia, through this pain of cogitation, and yet beyond the memory of one's own pain. One must think with the dead; "death brings out into more abundant light" the invaded interiority on trial, for, to borrow Nancy's formulation again, "death is the very signature of being-with" (89). And that signature we must, we can, and we do, carry until the day we die.

The moral here is: procedurally, we the mourners are all narcissistic; when moved, touched, pushed further, however, we can no longer be who we used to be. Such is the violent and violently paradoxical force, the absolute here-ness, of mourning which allows the Derridean work of mourning to unfold. In summary, then: mourning is a twofold experience of interiority and exteriority, "a learning of the impossible" (FM 172): it is (1) an experience of speculative interiority resembling ultimate solipsism, which induces the "terrible solitude" (Derrida 1986, 53/33) of originary self-deprivation: it is (2) an experience of the uncanny exteriority of the self, an experience of "moving right before the eyes of the other":

Louis Marin is outside and he is looking at me, he himself, and I am an image for him. At this very moment. There where I can say *cogito, sum*, I know that I am an image for the other and am looked at by the other, and especially by the mortal other. I move right before his eyes, and the force of this image is irreversible. (FM 189)

Mourning is the internal wound of narcissism that both strengthens and weakens a body of thought. And it is this wound that makes the mourner *think* again, in another way. With this, the reader of the dead is transported to another

space and time of reflection, to a scene of hauntology: “the twilight space of what is called mourning: the mourning that follows death but also the mourning that is prepared and that we expect from the very beginning to follow upon the death of those we love” (176).

#### 4 towards the hauntology of reading: “as if i’m still on the eve of reading”

At this point, I am reminded of three words that keep coming back, and will probably keep returning, to the Derridean scene of mourning: “re-reading, last night”:

Rereading some of his works late into last night, the following passage imposed itself upon me more than I read it ...<sup>10</sup>

I wanted last night to reread a few pages from this prodigious book,<sup>11</sup> which was for me ... the first and best guide. ... I reread, smiling, smiling at him ... (A 11)

I could recognise its unailing mark in all his great books ... which I am re-reading today, in admiration ... (JL 490)

I am going to continue – or begin again – to read Gilles Deleuze in order to learn, and I am going to have to wander all alone ...<sup>12</sup>

It was, in the end, the experience of this time of reading that I discovered. ... I was thus read, I said to myself, and staged by what I read; I found myself caught up in the time of his time, inscribed, situated by this other present. ... And my sadness ... still resonates in the very scope and score of his time. ... It would be necessary to accede or do justice to this torsion of the time of reading ... (FM 189–90)

I am rereading him right now in wonder, better no doubt than ever before. I would like to quote everything, read or reread everything aloud. Everyone can – everyone should – do this.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of feeling moved, I find myself distracted: I see Derrida re-drafting his funeral orations, re-writing his relations to the dead, “working” on his texts through the night. Am I being simply perverse? No, I am expressing a critical sympathy for Derrida the mourner, or rather, a renewed interest in the aporia of narcissism.

In this Derridean compulsion to re-read the dead, I see the co-existence of, and a constant interaction between, the procedural reflexivity of self-interestedness and the inaugural future-anteriority of the other that “calls for” a reading including a heteroreferential reading of selfhood. For Derrida, eulogy, taken as a textual work of mourning is, first, a reactionary echo, a protection of the mourner’s self-consciousness from the aggression of time (e.g., W.H. Auden’s “stop the clock”); and yet it turns into an inventive echo, “a miming of a starting-over” (P 31) that stages nothing other than the *allegory* of the other, a renewed invitation of the irreversibly other into a scene of mourning – the word invention understood here as both *inventio* and *in-venire* the coming-in of the other (43–45):

The *venire*, the event of a novelty that must surprise, because at the moment when it comes about [like the death of the other] there could be no statute, no status, ready and waiting to reduce it to the same. (43)

Indeed, each time Derrida reads, re-reads the dead, despite the routine uniformity of the act, the singularity of each death remains pronounced: “deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all” (P 42), affirms Derrida. “What else am I going to be able to invent?,” asks Derrida repeatedly, if not *an other* reading of and for the other?, if not *an other* relationship with the other? As Bennington observes likewise, “in this situation in which one’s duty is to read in respect for what makes reading possible ..., one’s duty, or the duty of that duty, is to be *inventive*” (67); the infinite longevity of the gaze of the dead – the infinite transcendence of the other – enables the mourner to question the very viability of the monologic economy of narcissism which, in turn, opens itself to a more generalised economy of narcissism that is inclusive, although aporetically, of the other. The gaze of the dead not only invades but, more curiously, invents the interior of the mourner, the interior that “assures the resonant communication of the two”<sup>14</sup> ends of man, namely, life and death: “the ear repeats, without a voice, inventions of farewell” (Wallace Stevens).

There still remains the question of the *economy* of deconstructive mourning: the question of

to what extent the dialectical self of self-restitution is involved in converting the threat of invasion into a chance for invention, given that, as Derrida himself says, “deconstruction also holds to be a chance as much as a threat (the threat is also a chance, there would be no chance without threat, that’s an *axiom* that recurs frequently)” (EC 296; emphasis added). To what extent is Derrida’s deconstructive work of mourning a theatre of self-consciousness? To the extent that death is inventible:

And to be sure you have seen nothing come.  
The other, that’s no longer inventable.  
“What do you mean by that? That the other will have been only an invention, the invention of the other?”  
“No, that the other is what is never inventable and will never have waited for your invention. The call of the other is a call to come, and that happens only in multiple voices.” (P 62; inverted commas in the original)

Clearly, the most tempting figure for this absolute ... is death, that which has a relation to death, that which is carried off by death – that which is thus life itself. (Derrida 2001a, 58)

Death is quick; reading is slow. A slow supplementary reading often accompanies a quick death; mourning, an inventive reading of and for the dead, begins well before and after the un-inventable death takes place. Reading is therefore both anticipatory and anachronistic. In a text-to-text encounter between two souls mediated as such, what is being read is then, shall we say, the mutual mortality: each other’s “exposure to death” (A 3, Levinas). This is what Derrida had to say, in conclusion, about the constitutive mortality of Marin entrusted to his readership:

... The incontestable authority of death begins before death, and ... death begins its work. Death’s watch [*veille*], the time of this book,<sup>15</sup> had begun long ago for Louis Marin, well before the eve [*veille*] of his death. This is why this book cannot be closed, why it interrupts itself interminably. And however prepared I might have been for it, I read it too quickly. In a sort of haste that no mourning will be able to diminish or console. It happened to me too quickly, like Louis’ death. I feel as if I’m still on the eve of reading it. (FM 192)

Not knowing when, nay whether, I will be able to return to this passage, I am going to raise one last question: does not a textual encounter with the other carry a seed of fetishisation, that is, a risk of textual reification of the other? Yes and No: Yes, if the theoretical narcissism of reading remains merely a symptom of the intellect’s addiction to study; and No, as long as the incontestable authority of death, reflected in the text of the dead, can be ex-appropriated as an irreducible excess in life, as a constant source for the auto-resistance of narcissistic reading. Derrida’s mantra, “to whom would the reflexive be returned?” – is this an empty doubling of the reflexive, or a passionate gesture of philosophy resisting the trap of *cogito*? Likewise, am I, in raising that question, merely duplicating Derrida’s gesture?, or adding a different, “multiple voice” to the concern? I may never know the answer before, or even after, I die.

But, just “two more words before I give up” (JL 490), nay, “before I forget” (EC 301): X died yesterday, tomorrow is the funeral, and I will also have died; in the meantime, I shall continue to read, trying to return, in advance, the debt I will have owed to someone who will some day take care of my corpse.



## notes

1 Special thanks to Roger Starling and the reviewers of *Angelaki* for their generous and helpful reading of earlier drafts of this essay.

2 No extensive discussion of Freud or Levinas as read by Derrida will be undertaken in the present essay, which concerns Derrida the reader more than his readings.

3 Rather than accept or retribute, as Immanuel Kant does, for example.

4 “The sleeplessness in melancholia testifies to the rigidity of the condition, the impossibility of effecting the general drawing-in of cathexes necessary for sleep. The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing on itself cathetic energies – which in the transference neuroses we have called ‘anticathexes’ – from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally

impoverished. It can easily prove resistant to the ego's wish to sleep" (MM 262).

5 "... not a critical question, but rather a deconstruction of the critical limits, the reassuring limits that guarantee the necessary and legitimate exercise of critical questioning. Such a deconstruction is not a critique of critique, according to the typical duplication of post-Kantian German ideology ... [but an] overflowing contamination ..." (SM 98/162–63).

6 Derrida contends: a "subtle violence" of reason, its "hyperdialectic and hyperchiasmatic resources cannot be completely formalised, that is, can no longer be dominated by a metalanguage" (DJF 97).

7 "... [O]nly those who work, only those who take risks in working, encounter difficulties. One only ever thinks and takes responsibilities – if indeed one ever does – by undergoing the aporia; without this, one is content to follow an inclination or apply a program" (DJF 113).

8 Read also: "Whatever the truth, alas, of this inevitable interiorisation (the friend can no longer be but *in us* ...), this being-in-us reveals a truth to and at death, at the moment of death and even before death by everything in us that prepares itself for and awaits death, that is, in the undeniable anticipation of mourning that constitutes friendship" (FM 188).

9 "The drama, it seems, is not so much that we lose the friend after death but that we can no longer lose them; they who were once so distant become all too close, too close because now only within us" (*The Work of Mourning* 27, editors' introduction).

10 "Text Read at Louis Althusser's Funeral" in *Deconstruction: A Reader* 475.

11 Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*.

12 "I'm Going to Have to Wander all Alone: Gilles Deleuze" in *Deconstruction: A Reader* 487.

13 "Letter to Francine Loreau" in *The Work of Mourning* 99.

14 "(In Memoriam) Paul de Man" in *Deconstruction: A Reader* 470.

15 Louis Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses*.

## abbreviations

### writings of freud

MM "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. James Strachey. Vol. II of the Penguin Freud Library. London: Penguin, 1991.

ON "On Narcissism" (1914). *On Metapsychology*.

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DJF "To Do Justice to Freud." Trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

EC "Et Cetera ..." Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*. Ed. Nicholas Royle. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000.

FM "By Force of Mourning." Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. *Critical Inquiry* 22 (winter 1996).

JL "Friendship-Above-All: Jean-François Lyotard." Trans. Ramona Fotiade. *Deconstruction: A Reader*. Ed. Martin McQuillan. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000.

P "Psyche: Inventions of the Other." Trans. Catherine Porter. *Reading de Man Reading*. Ed. Lindsay Waters et al. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989.

R "Resistances." Trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*.

SM *Spectres de Marx*. Paris: Galilée, 1993a. *Spectres of Marx*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. London: Routledge, 1994.

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