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Autoimmunity

Deconstructing Fictions of Illness and the Terrible Future to Come

Alice Andrews

PhD Thesis

2011

Goldsmiths

University of London

Department of Visual Cultures

Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed:

Date:

Alice S Andrews

Abstract

Autoimmunity, a term from the life-sciences, refers to that strange behaviour where an organism's defences turn on and against its own tissues. Autoimmune disease marks this process as a painful, suicidal, and terrifying relation to one's own body. Taking an autobiographical approach to autoimmune illness, this thesis examines the autoimmunity of the *autos* 'itself' in order to deconstruct a paradigm of immunity that paralyses one within process of self-destructive-defence. With Jacques Derrida's appropriation of autoimmunity the term enters a deconstructive philosophical discourse. For Derrida, autoimmunity attacks not (only) the body but immune defences themselves and names the opening of the body to the future 'to-come.' And yet, the use of this term is couched in a rhetoric of terror that emphasises the threat of even worse events 'to-come.' This thesis explores whether the trauma of autoimmunity need necessarily emphasise an exponential threat that only refers to the worst. Or, whether this trauma might be 'treated' in a manner that affirms autoimmunity. Amongst the treatments employed are various narratives of science and science fiction. Chapter One explores the relations between biomedical and deconstructive autoimmunity and treats their traumatic symptoms psychoanalytically. Chapter Two employs the immunitary logic of systems theory to comfort my dis-ease, a dis-ease I share with the laboratory animal. While Chapter Three turns to the biopolitics of immunity and Roberto Esposito's account of an affirmative biopolitics. However, while each of these 'treatments' attest to the possibility of opening the terror of the trauma to-come to the promise of better, they also repress, suppress, and ignore the possibility of a radical finitude, which, for Derrida, is essential for any ethical relation. Yet, if a radical finitude here takes on the character of the worst, it must be emphasised that it is an autoimmune finitude, for better *or* worse.

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Introduction

Introducing Illness

Why speak in this way of autoimmunity? [...] In order to situate the question of life and the living being, of life and death, of life-death, at the heart of my remarks.

– Jacques Derrida *Rogues* (2005, 123)

Autoimmunity is an illness that affects the ‘self,’ the self as an ‘*autos*’ that is a once biological, psychological, political and philosophical. By introducing the theme of illness into this thesis I am introducing, infecting, and contaminating this ‘self’ with an ill or an evil that affects it with a certain negativity: a ‘self’ infected by an ‘other’ to produce a seemingly ‘improper,’ ‘ill-functioning’ self. Yet, the impropriety of the self in the case of an autoimmune illness names this infection not as a *hetero*-infection, but as an *auto*-affection that auto-infects itself. Autoimmune disease refers to a seemingly ‘self-inflicted’ physiological illness where a body’s immune defences – that supposedly protect an organism from harm – turns on and against its own constitutive elements to paradoxically, and suicidally destroy its self through the very act of defending its self.

The particular ‘self’ that this thesis primarily addresses is *my* self – my body, and my life – which has been adversely affected by an autoimmune disease. By writing an autobiographical account of an autoimmune illness I investigate the paradoxical condition of a self-defensive destruction of the self as it affects *my* life, the life of a western, twenty-first century woman. Yet, the experience of this autoimmune paradox, begins to question the very stability of this self I name as ‘my own.’ It opens ‘my’ life to an uncertainty and an unknowability that produces a painful suffering – both physically and psychologically – accelerating towards a certain terror of the radically unknown and the finitude of death. As I

write my autobiography I treat the symptoms of an autoimmune illness by attempting to learn about my affliction, to make-known the destructive processes that are seen now, terrifyingly, to come from within. I treat my uncertain, painful, suffering self with biomedical, psychoanalytic, philosophical and fictive narratives that attempt to return me to myself. Yet, in light of the awareness of an insecurity inscribed within the very act of self-protection, will these protective, immunizing strategies themselves repeat the trauma of a suicidal autoimmunity? Will the experience of a physiological autoimmune illness accelerate and to come to affect and infect not only my bodily self but ‘the self’ in general, and the very presumption that any ‘one’ might be immune to the ‘other’? Or, will, perhaps, these narratives of immunity and autoimmunity, of illness and its treatments, open to new, productive, and affirmative ways of thinking about illness and the world in which it ‘lives’? In order to introduce the terms of this thesis, and to situate my autobiographical narrative of illness, I begin by locating the terms immunity and autoimmunity within a contemporary discourse that begins, already, to mark the instability of a secure, safe, immune self.

Immunity

Immunity is a term that for almost two millennia has referred to the juridical and political condition of being exempt from the collective responsibilities of a shared communal living. To be im-mune in the juridical sense of the word is to be exempted from the duty, obligation, and debt of the *munus* that is shared in com-munal societies. Here immunity names the construction of boundaries between those inside and those outside the law. In his book *A Body Worth Defending* (2009), Ed Cohen charts the political, philosophical and biomedical genealogy of the term immunity from this legal precedent in the Roman *polis* (immunity-as-exemption), through its translation into a militarized logic (immunity-as-defence). According to Cohen, immunity-as-exception first functioned to affirm the universality of the law by including *within* it that which it excludes: the act of legally designating the other as other to the law renders this ‘other’ quasi-*internal* to the law, thus *immunizing* the law against its other (41).

However, once a modern preference for an historical, material, and immanent nature produces individuals and states rooted to their bodies, immunity-as-exemption takes on a defensive tonality. As will be examined in Chapter Three, in the mid-seventeenth century a Hobbesian logic of self-defence comes to be translated into a western political model of immunity (Hobbes 1839-45; Cohen 2009, 55-67). Immunity-as-defence employs a logic of war and hostility that attempts to protect and defend legal, political, geographical, and material bodies from an environment now conceived of as hostile, so that “wars that were previously thought – and fought – as rivalries among princes [...] now come to function as a means of ensuring peace” (17). In the nineteenth century this conception of immunity as a bellicose peacefulness comes to be translated, via a metaphorical transplantation, into the biological body, where the immune system – its antibodies and lymphocytes – are seen to respond to the ‘invasion’ of a foreign body by attacking and destroying it (Cohen 2009, 34-38; Tauber 1994). Bioscience finds within the term immunity a metaphor for the empirically perceived processes of the biological organism, and it is this representation of immunity that continues to inform contemporary practices and discourses of biomedicine today. For Cohen however, this metaphor serves not to simply illuminate the natural, internal mechanisms of living organisms, but to *perform* a means of treating them in a manner that obscures the constructed socio-political character of its reasoning:

immunity offers a peculiar hybrid of military, political, and biological thinking that ‘naturally’ negates the distinctions between these realms. Rendering biological immunity as an organism’s active process of defense, scientific medicine deftly fuses bellicose ideology (which sees environmental challenge as a hostile attack) with a political notion of legal exemption (which nevertheless affirms the law’s universal applicability). (6)

Immunity’s contemporary popular and biomedical meaning combines the political sense of a body’s war with its environment *and* its ‘legal’ sense of an incorporation of that environment, to name a process of ‘immunization’ that

exempts the body from its communal other by means of attack. This juridico-political mapping of the organism in bioscientific narratives leads Cohen to ask: “if the way organisms coexist evince our political and juridical precepts so immediately, does this mean that medicine after immunity constitutes politics by other means?” (6). Cohen is here referring to Karl von Clausewitz’s famous formulation in the early nineteenth century: “War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse with a mixture of other means” and Foucault’s later reversal of this to “should we say [...] politics is war pursued by other means?” (qtd. in Cohen 2009, 6). For Cohen, biomedical immunity continues *both* war and politics by other means so that the ‘immune’ organism becomes “a biopolitical life form through and through” (7). Cohen’s genealogy traces the manner in which immunity incarnates modern notions of personhood to detrimentally naturalise the individual as the privileged site of identifying and treating illness, and in so doing obscures other non-combatant means of healing illnesses. It is this modern narrative of immunity that has produced the particular presumptions of an immune individual – and the narrative of the ill-functioning immune system – which I am addressing in this thesis. In light of Cohen’s opening of a naturalised biomedical discourse to the constructions of political and juridical narratives my autobiographical account of illness, and the presumption of a stable *autos* that it addresses, will be seen to open to alternative treatments.

While Cohen pursues a genealogical approach through which to question and render apparent the constructed nature of modern biomedical discourses of immunity, Donna Haraway in her essay “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse” (1991) examines the ‘postmodern’ context of immunity within the myriad discourses of bioscience itself. According to Haraway, the power of bioscientific language, with its “stunning artefacts, images, architectures, social forms and technologies” shapes and continually reproduces the experience of illness in a mobile and elusive manner, both culturally and clinically (204). Just as Cohen argues that bioscience assumes the metaphor of boundary maintenance, hostile environments, and a hierarchical self/other recognition from the politico-judicial discourses of modernity, Haraway seems to suggest that at the end of the

twentieth century bioscience is also inflected with a postmodern reading that troubles this modern account and its doctrines of representation and mimesis.¹ Haraway's 'postmodern' body comes to the fore in the 1980s and is the product of the denaturalization of symbolic systems of culture, literature, and science, where relational differences rather than mimesis produce signification, and where context becomes, not a field to be represented (as hostile), but an artefact that can be altered at will (207). In the context of postmodernity the immune system is thought as a construct that functions as a communication system forming mobile boundaries of recognition and mis-recognition sustained through networks of power and knowledge:

the body ceases to be a stable spatial map of normalized functions and instead emerges as a highly mobile field of strategic differences. The biomedical-biotechnical body is a semiotic system, a complex meaning producing field, for which the discourse of immunology, that is, the central biomedical discourse on recognition/misrecognition, has become a high stakes practice in many senses. (211)

For Haraway, there is no ontological opposition between the organic, technical, textual or mythical – between the inside or outside – so that the stakes of immune system discourse becomes a matter of how the ascription of “a one” – one unit, one individual, or one self – is manifested and maintained. An ‘individual’ – in no longer being assumed as a natural given as in the modern bioscientific legacy – is seen in Haraway's reading, as a “strategic defence problem;” where the defence of particular boundaries is determined by various differing narratives of political, cultural, scientific and material contingencies (212). As will be seen in Chapter One, bioscience integrates this ‘postmodern’ connective theory into its

¹ Cohen's reading of the philosophical, political and social history of the term immunity makes the important point that the fluidity found in postmodern readings of bodies affected by an open relationship to biotechnologies etc., does not produce an ontological shift precipitated by these new technologies or systems as is often argued (see for example Massumi (2002), Thacker (2004) Clough (2008)). But rather that the presumption of a closed body is an historically situated construct produced in modernity and the body is to be thought as always already vulnerable. For Cohen, these newer postmodern, *political*, treatments of the bounded body produce, differ and defer the political presumptions of the modern body (2009, 284 n.13).

immunological narrative in Niels Jerne's network theory (Jerne 1974). For Jerne the immune system responds not to an invading 'other' but to an indefinite series of internal differences, so that a 'self' does not passively await a transgression of its boundaries, but is always already actively responding to 'its own' network connections which now *incorporate* the 'other' within its 'self' (Jerne's network theory of immunology recalls, therefore, returns to the logic of the inclusive exclusion of the juridical immunity-as-exemption). Within *this* "strategic assemblage called self" the misrecognition or transgression of boundaries produce particular situated 'information malfunctions' that come to be determined as disease, a disease which then comes, in turn, to be treated in a similarly contingent manner.

For Haraway, "[l]ife is a window of vulnerability. It seems a mistake to close it" (224). For closing this window within a narrative of defence and invasion produces, she argues, a culture unable to abide its own uncertainty and permits the exponential threat – in the cold war era from which Haraway is speaking – of radical nuclear 'defensive' strategies. For Haraway, the "perfection of the fully defended, 'victorious' self is a chilling fantasy" (224). But it is a "fantasy" that continues to hold sway today in the accepted bioscientific discourse that persists, despite Jerne's intervention, in defending the concept of self and other, defence and attack. This fantasy can be seen too in a political discourse that secures boundaries, populaces, through acts of war or immigration policies; and in the individual and biopolitical treatment and care of the 'healthy' and the 'ill.' In light of what Haraway sees as an *affirmative* vulnerable life that can be detrimentally closed within cultural and scientific narratives of defence and disease, she suggests one should look to the many cultural representations of the immune system to determine if "there is a way to turn the discourse suggested by Jerne [...] into an oppositional/alternative/liberatory approach" (220). Haraway briefly sketches such a reading of immunity through contemporary bioscientific language, metaphors and popular culture – including science fiction – and it is this approach that I will employ, and extend, in my own response to the question of immunity in this thesis.

In being unable to do justice to the full complexity of these myriad political, juridical and biomedical discourses within the scope of this thesis, I instead trace a more particular, specific and situated path where the conditions of illness affects *me* (as well as what it means to say ‘me’), and where each of these discourses cross and contaminate one another. My brief account here of two contemporary responses to the question of immunity suggests that the deconstruction of presumed immune boundaries becomes an important task when addressing a life affected by illness. However, in the particular and situated account of the real pain and suffering of an immunological disorder the desire to defend and secure a healthy immune self remains strong and persuasive. As I attempt to treat and alleviate the trauma of illness, the question of what it means to name and affirm a vulnerability at the heart of life attains a certain urgency. The urgency of responding to a particular case of suffering necessitates attending, not only to the deconstructability of an immune self, but also to the fearful risks (and the defensive responses to this risk) that this deconstruction can effect. It is with the term *autoimmunity* that attention is drawn to the fear, and even the terror, which remains somewhat obscured within Cohen and Haraway’s seemingly affirmative opening of the bound immune body to the possibility of new liberatory cultural, political, and scientific narratives.

Autoimmunity

The concept of autoimmunity appears within bioscientific discourse in 1900 when the immunologists Paul Ehrlich and Julius Morgenroth first suspect that an organism’s immune system might react against its own tissues (1957 [1900]). Ehrlich and Morgenroth employ the term “*horror autotoxicus*” to indicate the “innate tendency” of the immune system to avoid self-reactivity. In autoimmune diseases, however, the full horror of self-toxicity is manifested when this presumed innate tendency fails and an *excessive*, hypersensitive immune reaction attacks the immune system’s own body causing painful inflammation to potentially fatal ends. Yet the “horror” of this self-defensive attack lies not only in the manifestation of painful, physiological symptoms and an individual’s death, but also in the threat that this self-reactivity marks for the concept of self

that continues to be strongly (and perhaps excessively) defended in contemporary biomedical practices (see for example Sarkar 1996; Waters 1994). The excessive immune reactions of both the living being and immunological discourse, *autoimmunely* rebound upon the very thing they attempt to defend: for the organism this effects the painful symptoms of disease and a potential death, for the discourse of self and other in the biosciences, this produces an inalienable paradox that refuses to be explained and that disrupts the security of its terms – how and why the self reacts against itself remains an unanswered question for defenders of self-non-self discrimination.

Returning to the political and juridical sphere a similar process of autoimmunization is repeated. As Roberto Esposito has argued in his philosophical history of immunity explored in his book *Bíos*: “immunized identities of small states are nothing but the counter-effect or the crisis of an allergic rejection to global contamination” (2008, 50). Esposito argues that this allergic reaction against a hostile infection of the global other, negates the vital force of political life, limiting a state’s ability to expand. And further, the more a particular political body sees itself to be under threat the more it seeks to defend itself against this threat in an exponential increase in immunitary acts. When this immunization reaches excessive levels – as seen in the logic of the Cold War that Haraway refers to, or in the current ‘war on terror’ – then, in Esposito’s words: “the immunitary machine demands an outbreak of effective violence on the part of all contenders” (147). This outbreak of violence appears then to double back on the defended body, threatening it with, for example, a radical nuclear destruction or internal terroristic acts, as well as juridical limitations on individual and collective liberty (as seen in current Western political policy-making that seeks to ‘combat’ terrorism). As the logic of defence and attack – whether narrated via the discourse of bioscience or political science – comes to refer to the threat of a potential autoimmune attack, the central question of this thesis will be: how might it be possible to defend oneself against the terrible effects of an ill or an evil, caused not only by the threat of a hostile ‘other,’ but also by the very effort of self-protection itself? Is such a defence possible or even desirable? According to both Esposito and Haraway’s accounts of

immunity, the reversal of self-defence into an exponential autoimmune threat is the result of an undeconstructed presumption of a properly immune and invulnerable self. For them, the necessary response to this attack – the treatment for this autoimmune illness – lies in affirming the vulnerability at the heart of life. In Chapter Three of this thesis I will explore in detail Esposito’s affirmative deconstructive treatment of this autoimmune crises in the (bio)political realm. However, there is another treatment of autoimmunity and of the deconstruction of a stable immune self that will mark the investigations of this thesis most consistently, and this is the deconstructive potential of the term autoimmunity ‘itself’ as it has been traced in the philosophical work of Jacques Derrida.

Derrida’s use of the bioscientific term autoimmunity also names the ability of an undeconstructed immune ‘self’ to threaten the worst forms of self-destructive self-protection in the manner outlined above (1998a; 2003; 2005). However, in Derrida’s characterization, this self-defensive act attacks not only the self, but also the concept of self as such, so that a supposedly ‘immune’ self is always in the process of deconstructing itself. For Derrida, autoimmunity is “that strange behaviour where a living being, in a quasi-*suicidal* fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (2003, 94 *emph. Derrida’s*).² In this definition an autoimmune act does not *close* the immune body within a process of excessive defence, rather it destroys a living being’s ability to protect itself and *opens* it to infection and contamination. According to Derrida, the risk of paralysis produced by an assumed absolute or excessive immunity calls for “the event of the interruptive decision” (2005, 35). For, in order to live on and survive, a living being *requires* the other – an other space, an other time, an other event – which *both* nourishes *and* threatens its ability to live on (109). This opening immediately infects the *autos* with an impropriety that autoimmunely negates its presumed immunity. In this sense then the inclusive exclusion of juridical immunity-as-exemption already marks, for Derrida, an *autoimmune* vulnerability at the heart of the immune self, for the

² I will return in Chapter One to the specific character of this definition of autoimmunity given by Derrida, which both problematically and productively disrupts the biomedical definition as I have presented it so far.

very process of immunization, which functions to incorporate the ‘other’ into the ‘self’ is always already defers the full presence of the self as such.

Like Derrida’s deconstructive use of the terms trace, *différance*, *pharmakon*, supplement etc. autoimmunity marks within every attempt to maintain, protect, repeat or persist, a spatial differing and a temporal deferral of pure presence. Autoimmunity, like *différance* is, in Michael Naas’ words, “a deferring of the relationship to the other (whence its immunity) and a referral or deference to the other (whence its autoimmunity)” (2008, 135). These strange paradoxical “quasi-concepts” of autoimmunity, trace, *différance*, supplement etc., are introduced by Derrida to mark the limitations of specific metaphysical concepts, assumptions of certainty, knowledge, or purity. The term trace, for example is employed by Derrida to deconstruct the authority of linguistics and the naturalised assumptions of processes of signification that speak of a western ‘logocentric’ bias (1976). For Derrida, words and concepts only receive meaning within a sequence of differences, that is, differences between insides and outsides within a specific space and time, a topography and a historicity, where meaning, truth, and presence will therefore be in a state of continual flux. A ‘textual’ trace, in distinction to language or signification (which implies a stability between signifier and signified), relates to alterity, to the alterity of the past or a future that was never lived – and can never be lived – as present (Derrida 1976, 70). The notion of trace refers not to language as such, but to a prelinguistic marking, that gives the possibility of language. Trace, therefore, marks the very movement, the ‘protection’ and the risking of ‘*life*’ as it repeats differs and defers itself in its marking:

No doubt life protects itself by repetition trace, *différance*. But we must be wary of this formulation: there is no life present *at first* which would *then* come to protect, postpone, reserve itself in *différance*. The latter constitutes the essence of life. Or rather: *différance* not being an essence, it *is not* life, if being is determined as *ousia*, presence, essence/existence, substance or subject. Life must be thought of as trace before being determined as presence.

This is the only condition on which we can say that life *is* death
(1972, 80-81 emph. Derrida's)

If life must be thought of as trace before being determined as presence, and if life protects itself through an inscription that marks a deathliness *within* life then autoimmunity, which both defends and destroys, also marks the trace of life which is no longer to be thought as merely biological, but the protection and the risking of life 'itself,' by itself as it traces itself *as* 'other.' Therefore, like both Cohen and Haraway, Derrida finds the notion of an immune life to be infected with the other, with other discourses and other meanings that produce a mobile and vulnerable self at the heart of the logic of immunity. However, unlike Cohen and Haraway, Derrida does not attempt to reinflect the term 'immunity' with an affirmative vulnerability to deconstruct the "chilling fantasy" of a fully defended self. He instead chooses to mark the deconstructive potential of immunity through the altogether more negative term 'autoimmunity.' The question of why Derrida employs this term with its attendant discourse of horror and destruction will be further question explored in this thesis.

The force of Derrida's deconstructions of metaphysical concepts traces itself differently as it is repeated throughout his work in specific contexts, for example: the term 'trace' addresses the limitations of the linguistic turn in philosophy (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 76); *pharmakon* marks writing as both a poison and a cure – a writing that Plato characterizes as an evil or an ill that disrupts the proper presence of speech (2004a); *bêtise* marks a certain inability to judge the boundaries between human and non-human animals (2009); and autoimmunity traces an insecurity of the defensive strategies of political and other bodies in the context of terror, terrorism, technology and war. Therefore, Derrida's *autoimmunity*, in distinction to Haraway and Cohen's vulnerable *immunity*, works from within a specific discourse that speaks of the terror and the trauma of deconstruction. Derrida's most extensive elaboration of autoimmunity appears in the interview "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," where he addresses the terrorist events of September 11 2001 and the American and global

response to these events (Derrida and Borradori 2003).³ For Derrida, the terrorist attacks on September 11 can be considered as a suicidal autoimmune attack because the democratic freedoms of the American state (its 'open' borders, its technical know-how, its aeroplanes, infrastructure and defences) were turned against it (95). This unconscious and unexpected 'self-induced' attack enacted a terrible and terrifying loss of life that installed a vulnerability within the nation's consciousness. Derrida characterises this sudden perception of vulnerability as traumatic, for nobody saw this event coming (though, perhaps they could have), and in not having foreseen this 'self-inflicted' destruction, the trauma refers on to other possible attacks that might come again, unforeseen, to inflict even worse events. For Derrida, all attempts to mourn, archive and overcome this trauma – via, for example, its repetitive imaging in the media – deny the fact that the autoimmune opening to the other is fatal (inevitable and deadly) (99). According to Derrida, the real terror and the real trauma of the event of September 11 lies in the fact that it “has as its tragic correlate not what is presently happening or what has happened in the past but the precursory signs of what threatens to happen,” a threat “which will be *worse than anything that has ever taken place*” (96-97 *emph.* Derrida's). Worse, perhaps, because the next event may not even be visible – it might be a biological war, or an attack on the global information network – the visible and painful event of an autoimmune attack infects the immune self with a trauma that stems from an unforeseen future that remains to come (98-99). This is an infection that results from the self-opening of one's nation, body or self to an “enemy” that is “always lodged on the inside of the system it violates and terrorizes” :

³ The term autoimmunity first appears in passing in Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) and *The Politics of Friendship* (1997), but receives its first extensive elaboration in his essay “Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone” (1998a). In “Faith and Knowledge” Derrida deconstructs the immune, sacred and holy character of religion by suggesting that religion requires the mechanisms of technology – its machine-like repetition, is media and teletechnologies – in order to secure itself. In Derrida's reading, both religion and technology require each other in order to survive, but both must attack the other (and therefore also themselves) in order to attempt to remain what they are. Also in *Rogues* (2005a), Derrida elaborates how the political institution of democracy is seen to turn around an autoimmune defence of liberty and equality that necessarily limits these ideals. Here I focus on Derrida's discussion of autoimmunity in the context of terror and terrorism for this speak most clearly to the context of illness as I am addressing it in this thesis, however, each of these trace of the autoimmune highlight the trauma and the risk of autoimmunity *and* immunity.

the most irreducible source of absolute terror, the one that, by definition, finds itself most defenseless before the worst threat would be the one that comes from ‘within,’ from this zone where the worst ‘outside’ lives with or within ‘me.’ My vulnerability is thus, by definition and by structure, by situation, without limit. Whence the terror. (2003, 188 n.7)

Each iteration of autoimmunity in Derrida’s thought highlights the fear, cruelty and terror that manifests itself when one is seen to destroy oneself through protecting or maintaining oneself. It is for this reason that I will trace this deconstructive inscription of (auto)immunity in the context of my autobiographical account of, and response to, autoimmune disease. The trauma of a devastating autoimmune illness, effects a diagnosis and trauma that refer my own painful attacks on to the threat of worse events. This trauma – and the fear and terror that it precipitates – risks paralysis and therefore *necessitates* an interruptive decision to open my petrified body. I will, in the course of this investigation, decide to pursue many differing treatment options that will explore the efficacy and the ethics of responding to illness. These treatments will recall that other Derridean term ‘*pharmakon*,’ where the cure also traces within it the effects of a poison (2004a). Yet, I will follow most closely the effects of treating autoimmune disease with the deconstructive term autoimmunity for it is this that speaks from within *both* the logic of immunity and its political genealogy of exemption, *and* autoimmunity with its bioscientific sense of defence and attack, horror and loss, which remains a powerful and affective trace within my autobiography. Autoimmunity, therefore, speaks not only to the necessity of self-infection to maintain and affirm the promise of a vulnerable life, but it also highlights the risk, horror and terror of this move. Yet, as this thesis shows, the terror of autoimmunity is itself not immune to a deconstructive force and within the terror of self-destruction there is also marked a promise and a hope of better. As I follow the traces of autoimmunity in the context of an individual illness – an illness that opens onto other collective and political ills – I will be following the path of what Derrida terms an aporetic logic (1993a), where the *experience* of the paradoxes of autoimmunity are rendered palpable, and where the ordeal of an

undecidable decision as to the appropriate response to these ills must be undergone.

‘Methodology’

The instant of decision is a madness, says Derrida (1992b, 26). And yet, there is a method in this madness and madness in the method. The decisions I have taken to investigate the question of autoimmunity and illness through an autobiographical account that attempts to *learn* about autoimmunity, names a methodology as a pursuit of knowledge. In attempting to make-known the biological, scientific, historical and philosophical accounts of autoimmunity I seek to treat and respond to a particular case of suffering. Yet, as soon as autoimmunity is treated deconstructively, these decisions and their methodologies are rendered insecure. “Deconstruction is not a method,” Derrida says as he responds to the claims of a deconstructive *strategy* in the reading and interpretation of texts (1985, 3). And further: “it is not even an *act* or an *operation*” (3, *emph.* Derrida’s). Deconstruction, for Derrida, is that which happens, it does not require a representative consciousness, an ego, or a self to implement it, “*It deconstructs it-self*,” losing its ‘own’ construction (4). The particular inflection of deconstruction as autoimmunity makes this even clearer, for in the case of autoimmunity it is the very security of an *autos*, its autonomy, its ability to act and to decide, which is deconstructing *itself* (2005, 109). Autoimmunity infects every decision and every methodology with an unconscious, *unknown* and undecidable other. Therefore, ‘my’ ‘treatment’ of immunity with a deconstructive autoimmunity is a ‘treatment method’ that loses its own purpose and sense, instituting a madness into the decision: it is a treatment that is imposed on me, I did not choose it as such.

Therefore, as I treat with a deconstructive autoimmunity and other narratives of autoimmunity, I also treat with them in the sense of the negotiating with these differing discourses. In *Negotiations; Interventions and Interviews* (2002b), Derrida follows the etymology of the word ‘negotiation’ and its sense of “not-ease, not-quiet,” “no leisure,” which marks within the term a mobile process

where settling into a position or stopping becomes impossible (12).⁴ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘to treat’ also means, “to deal or carry on negotiations (with another) with a view to settling terms” as well as “to deal with behave or act towards (a person, animal, etc.) in some specified way; to ‘use’ (well, ill, properly, reverently etc.)”; or further, as a noun. ‘treat’ refers to “something highly enjoyable; a great pleasure, delight, or gratification” (OED 1989). Each of these senses of ‘treating’ and ‘treatment’ – as negotiation and as ‘use’ and as gratification – will be implied as I employ these terms in this thesis. Yet, I would also inflect these with the etymology of negotiation where Derrida finds an impossibility of settling these terms.⁵ For Derrida, one *must* always negotiate with (treat with) the other: “one must negotiate with the situation, with hypothetical imperatives. One must calculate” (12-13). But this calculation or decision is not an operation or a method that can be determined in advance; it remains an hypothesis, for the other remains, for Derrida, always unknown and unknowable.

I must negotiate with the situation where an ill is within ‘me,’ this is nonnegotiable. And, therefore, within the madness of the decision there must lie a certain methodology. The methodology I decide to employ is, however, a hypothetical methodology: the hypothesis of an autobiography that seeks to learn, treat, and (auto)immunize a particular ‘self’ against the sufferings and the terrors of an acute and chronic illness; the hypotheses of bioscience, and science fiction (film and literature) that ‘infect’ the ‘self’ with fantasies of stability and health; and the hypotheses of (bio)politics that open this ‘self’ to communal ills. The autobiographical self writes an *autos* and a life while attempting to negotiate ‘ethically’ with all these others, and particularly with the radical alterity of death that threatens to put a stop to the negotiations once and

⁴ Derrida also argues that in ‘choosing’ his deconstructive terms, in this case ‘negotiation,’ “I did not really choose it, it has imposed itself on me in a recurrent way for a very long time. Why? This word is no more perfect and no more univocal out of context than any other: therefore, I also had to *negotiate* its usage, bend it according to its folds [...] but also bend it to my writing [...]. I appropriated the etymology for this new writing (ethical or political)” (1985, 12). It is such a negotiation, bending and writing that I undertake in the use of the term ‘treatment’ and ‘autoimmunity’ in the context of the writing of the dis-ease of the *autos*.

⁵ The etymologically of ‘treat’ itself refers to the Latin *tractāre*: to drag or draw, and therefore also to a certain marking of a *trace* that infects its mark with the *unsettling* negotiations with others (OED 1989).

for all. Yet, as illness, evil, or death are inscribed (or inscribes themselves) *within* my life, will my negotiations ever settle the debate ‘once and for all’ and ease my dis-ease? For Derrida:

if there is an ethics of negotiation, it is as much in the sense of moral law as it is in the autobiographical [...]; it is a feeling, an affective relation I have to myself of being someone who cannot stop anywhere. This can be both the feeling of a *duty* [...] but also a passivity without which one could not be certain that one might not settle in it. (12 emph. Derrida’s)

In responding to the ‘duty’ of not stopping anywhere (and least of all at ‘one’s own’ death), the *munus* of the (auto)immune inscribes an affective and passive ethics that necessitates, in Derrida’s terms, not settling the affective relation of the self to the ‘other’ within any fantasy of a healthy, necessarily affirmative life. The autobiography I write will negotiate with this ethical imperative as it nonetheless attempts to treat and lessen the painful suffering of an autoimmune illness.

It is im-possible to write from a site that does not cite a certain ‘*autos*,’ a ‘self’ that inscribes itself with a violent force and a power that is marked by narratives of security and immunity. Yet, the inscription of ‘my self’ in the particular situation from which I speak, in being also a citation, opens this ‘self’ to a context-less self that can be appropriated by *anyone*. My autobiography is, therefore, not to be read as mine alone. I will trace a self that is by turns a naïve self, a curious self, a knowing self, a cruel, absent, powerful, and powerless self, as all such inscriptions can appear. But while this (auto)biography opens to all others, the *specificity* of my personal account will account for the necessity of responding, each time, to a very real suffering as well as to the desire to lessen this suffering by turning to the science (fictions) of health, safety and immunity. For may there not be a need to treat oneself to some comfort in the face of an exponential threat of an autoimmune life and the terror that it marks? It is the

cultural, political, psychoanalytic and personal narratives of treatment that this (hypo)thesis explores.

Overview

Chapter One begins from the situation of the sickbed and explores the problematics of learning to respond to a traumatic diagnosis of autoimmune disease. This chapter will explore various processes of rendering the unknown known in an effort to defend against a self-induced threat. I treat the trauma of my diagnosis with various narratives: firstly, a comforting and distracting science fiction film (David Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone* (1983)), which narrates the problematics of an autoimmune trauma, and secures this trauma with the comforting ideology of an heroic end and the return of a powerful self. Secondly, I learn from the narratives of bioscience and treat my ill self with the pharmaceutical products of its empirical knowledge. Thirdly, I enrol in what Sigmund Freud calls his psychoanalytic "school of suffering" (Freud 1953 [1909], 209). Here, I attempt to learn how to immunize the psyche against the trauma of the unknown by translating the experience of suffering into pleasure. However, within each of these 'knowing' narratives a certain autoimmune death drive traces itself. Each of these immunizing strategies are seen to rebound upon the self, perpetuating and increasing the experience of an ill *within* their protective processes. Does this death drive name an inescapable and exponential experience of the terror of the worst form of suicidal defence? Or might the full force this death – which, as Derrida makes clear, still remains 'to come' – also mark the promise of better?

Chapter Two returns to the narratives of science and the pharmaceutical treatments of illness. This chapter moves from the specific concern of treating myself, to an investigation of the treatment of others, and specifically the laboratory animal with whom I share an experience of suffering and sacrifice. Building upon the immunological narratives introduced in Chapter One, I explore the promise signalled in Niels Jerne's network theory through the related logic of systems theory. Following Cary Wolfe's work on the concept of

autopoiesis I ask whether this immunological narrative – which names not a closure of the body to the other, but an openness *from* closure – can reconstruct a system of thought that need not succumb to a rhetoric of terror and paralysis (Wolfe 2003, 2009). By drawing parallels between autopoiesis’ understanding of ‘communication’ and Derrida’s ‘trace’ I open myself to the shared human and nonhuman ability to suffer. I consider how autopoiesis reconstructs the deconstructions of autoimmunity by ignoring its founding (petrifying) paradoxes; and I consider how the deconstructions of autoimmunity *require* the reconstructions of autopoiesis. However, will it be possible to settle on this more mobile reconstructive deconstruction? Or will it remain necessary to negotiate with an other that remains unknown and unknowable in order to avoid settling on a method of construction that might present but another dishonest fiction? Autoimmunity is seen here to dwell *within* the paradox that systems theory ‘ignores.’ It is from this im-possible dwelling place that autoimmunity ‘defends’ the ‘self’ and the ‘other,’ deconstruction *and* reconstruction, precisely by risking them.

In Chapter Three I turn away from the explicit reference to my ‘self’ and my ‘own’ suffering to engage in an analysis of immunity in its biopolitical context. The writing of ‘life’ and ‘self’ is not erased however, but is instead opened to the inscription of political norms that construct boundaries between forms of life. I engage with this differently inflected ‘autobiographical’ context through a close reading of Roberto Esposito’s recent interventions in the field of biopolitics. I undertake this reading because, in Esposito’s book *Bíos: biopolitics and philosophy* (2008), he diagnoses immunity as the essential and problematic biopolitical paradigm. For Esposito, the modern character of political defences rests upon the logic of an immunitary negation that limits the vital and *necessarily* risky processes of life ‘itself.’ The horizon of this immunitary logic is characterized by Esposito as a devastating autoimmune closure that destroys life as biopolitics reverses into thanatopolitics. It is Esposito’s project to mark a new affirmative semantics within this negative logic, where the risks of infection of paradoxes and contamination are not negated but affirmed. In this chapter I therefore treat the repetitious terrors of an autoimmune life with a promise of an

affirmative biopolitics that seeks to render it impossible to privilege one form of life above another: a healthy life above an ill life, a human life above a nonhuman animal life, a self above an other. I open Esposito's oblique analysis to a fictional telling of a future biopolitical world where just such a vital biopolitics is traced (Geoff Ryman's science fiction novel *The Child Garden* (2011)). This fictional tale marks, however, both the promise and the risk of such a manifestation of a 'biological continuum.' By introducing Derrida's deconstruction of biopolitics in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), I will consider if the deconstructive trace of autoimmunity will once again mark Esposito's 'defensive strategy.' Will the experience of an autoimmune paradox disrupt his decision to settle on a properly affirmative treatment that seeks to infinitely defer the very worst autoimmune act?

The intention of this thesis is to respond to the worst forms of violence that are perpetuated *within* the fictions and the fables, the narratives and the knowledges of illness. This response seeks to protect the promise of perfectibility, hope and life, and thus it seeks to lessen the horror, pain and suffering that (auto)immune illness produces. However, I find marked in Derrida's reading of autoimmunity an 'ethical' 'duty' not settle the question of responding to these ills through strategies of repression, ignorance or affirmation of the paradoxes of a suicidal defence. It is through the experience of a chronic, paradoxical autoimmune disease that the impossibility of settling the question is most palpably marked, for in the repetitious appearances of pain *and* comfort, death *and* life, better *and* worse, I find that I must continually respond, repressing, ignoring *and* affirming the paradox of autoimmunity by turns as I negotiate with the terrors and the promises of an autoimmune life.

Chapter One

Treating (with) Autoimmunity

1.

Introduction

I am feeling unsettled, antsy and on edge. I can't sleep, and I can't focus. Cocooned in my blanket against the cold – I'm too hot. Feverish perhaps? I am sick. Nestled into my sickbed, surrounded by the trappings of comfort, I am uncomfortable. Incapacitated. I struggle to recall myself: I call to mind the relative comfort of illnesses past: my mother performing her nursing duties, offering me forbidden treats – a welcome day off school, day-time television, a film proffered as distraction from the seeming failure of my body. Then, there was a sense of security and consolation for I was experiencing nothing but a childhood illness; a normal, expected, anticipated sickness; a discomfort endured in order to build my immunity, to secure my body against a common pathogen as a means to protect and strengthen my future self. Recovery was foreseen, expected and enacted. Now, however, here, there is an apprehension, an apprehension of finality felt in my aching bones. An awareness perhaps of worse now to come...

Now is worse for my illness is chronic, debilitating and uncanny, a strange, familiar, and yet 'unnatural' sickness. It is worse because my illness is not the result of a pathogen, a bacteria or a virus attacking my body, there is no 'other' who is threatening 'me.' My body is attacking itself. I am told that my own defences – my immune system – is, for reasons unknown, attacking that which it *should be* safeguarding. I am told my body's defensive efforts are enacting that which it *should* seek to avoid: a threat to the cohesion of the body. My illness, I am told, is autoimmune: "a condition in which the body produces an immune

response against its own tissue constituents” (Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary 2011). I have systemic lupus erythematosus, or lupus. A name which has conjured a spectral wolfishness within me, manifesting as a terrifying series of repetitive attacks by a predator that turns out to be myself, myself as werewolf: foe as friend, other as self. In this sickbed there is no (m)other to protect and comfort me, I must comfort myself, and so I set to work. I work upon the narratives of my illness. As an invalid, I remember my past, I rehearse my history, rehearsing it in preparation for a future still to come, a future that threatens worse.¹ For I am already being carried now in a hearse of ‘my own’ making, embarking, too soon, upon a funeral procession that is marking its way towards my death.

The quotation of a ‘self’ introduces this narrative of autoimmune illness. This chapter will turn around this example of a self as it produces various narratives of immunity and autoimmunity that both secure and threaten it by turns. This is the telling of a tale of an illness that *assumes* a self. It both assumes a self in that any narrative of an *autoimmune* disease must already presume an *autos* as a self with a certain power to locate and secure itself; and it assumes a self in that it seeks to take control of an individual self who attempts to *return* to herself through confronting and comforting the sufferings of illness. Yet, the case of autoimmune disease gives us to see the *autos* – and thus also the autonomy and automaticity that it presumes – to come under attack by the very defences it employs to assure itself. This chapter will ask: if there is an autoimmune self-defensive destruction of the self in the experience of illness, how might the very real, painful, and fearful suffering of this dis-ease be treated? In the light of this paradoxical and suicidal situation, might any treatment, any defence, or immunization against this threat be seen to *also* threaten an autoimmunization? Might the trauma of ‘my’ illness refer on to other autoimmunities, as the desire to protect accelerates through this experience of insecurity? The problematics of

¹ A reference to Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* (2006, [1889-1930]) is more than implicit in this narrative. Proust, who writes a certain autobiography of a life remembered and re-written from his sickbed, addresses the involuntary and the voluntary return of the self to oneself through memory. How this *retrieval* of the past – of one’s own history and memory – might function in the autobiography of autoimmunity is one of the themes of this chapter.

a personal, individual, situated autoimmune self, in appearing here as a citation, an example and an exemplar, will be seen to be capable of being appropriated by any *one*. That is by *the* one, as any ‘one’ assumed to be whole, safe and immune.

The strange, uncanny, repetitious attacks of the autoimmune disease mark a certain biological ‘death drive;’ a death drive as a force that seemingly ‘wills’ the life of the body – *my* body, *my* self – ever closer towards death in a suicidal action. This is a particular, situated, personal and embodied experience as a painful, petrifying suffering. It is this suffering that calls, in this instance, for a response. This chapter explores the demand to respond to, to take account of, to treat, explain and resolve the threat to *my* life in all its singular urgency. But it also accounts for how this urgency refers on beyond my individual conscious experience to a generalised autoimmune condition of life ‘itself.’ I pursue a reading of four responses to this condition – or four ‘treatments’ – that each seek to alleviate the troubling account of the autoimmune self-destructive defence of the self through instituting a ‘return’ to ‘wellness,’ and a to return to a certain stability of the self. Firstly, I rehearse the narratives of science in an attempt to explain and *make known* the seemingly inexplicable causes of this illness. I explore how the metaphor of immunity in the biosciences produces the paradigm of a biological self as a ‘self-not-self’ dichotomy, and how biomedicine acts to combat the pathology of autoimmunity within this paradigm (Tauber 2002; 1994). Secondly, I treat the unconscious psychological trauma of autoimmunity and its effects, which manifest as a compulsive repetition of an unknown traumatic event. Employing Freudian psychoanalysis I explore how the repetition compulsion can be viewed as an attempt to immunize the psychic organism by incorporating, *naming* and ‘mastering’ the trauma in order to provide resistance against any repeat attack. Using Freud’s “speculations” on the death drive, my painful, diseased, and terrifying path towards death is ‘comforted’ by a psychoanalytic treatment (Freud 1955 [1920]). This treatment seeks to return illness to its properly pleasureable path towards death – a death reconfigured here as a pleasureable, peaceful quietude. And thirdly, amidst these theoretical turns around and to the self, I distract myself from the pain and disease of my sickbed by watching a favourite movie, a movie that tells the tale of

trauma, ‘psychosis,’ and an apocalyptic autoimmunitary act, and which treats and *resolves* this trauma in a heroic return to the agency and autonomy of a ‘happy ending.’

What each of these treatments attempt to enact, what they desire and fetishize, is a return to a self that remains closed to the threat of the other – the other as disease, pathogen, destruction, pain or suffering. From within my experience of illness this goal seems desirable indeed. And yet, it is this conception of the *autos* that is precisely shown to be threatened in the case of autoimmunity. By immunizing the self against attack, by excluding the other, each of these treatments will be seen to threaten to re-produce the very threat they seek to avoid. Autoimmune disease can be characterised in its (bio)logical effects as an *overactive*, *over-the-top*, *excessive* defence of the self. In the bioscientific narrative, the defensive immune system – as ‘self’ – reacts so severely to repress the threatening ‘other’ that this attack rebounds upon ‘the self.’ This *hypersensitive* immune reaction locks the one who suffers within a terrible, painful, paradoxical relation to his or her ‘own’ body. It locks *every* presentation of a whole, immune, healthy self within a petrifying paralysis that rejects even the ‘other’ that remains *necessary* for the living-on of life. This is autoimmune disease as excessive closure; a closure that strengthens the boundaries of the ‘self’ to the point of their isolated disintegration, to the point of a *certain* death. This destructive disintegration will be seen to threaten to accelerate towards even worse autoimmune reactions as its treatments repeat and reinforce the narrative of a necessary immunity of the One on an ever larger scale – even on an apocalyptic scale of *the worst*. In this chapter I explore the manner in which the above responses to a pathological autoimmunity might not only re-produce the autoimmune effects they seek to avoid, but also accelerate them in a spiral towards possibly catastrophic effects.

My fourth ‘treatment’ turns to Jacques Derrida’s appropriation of the bioscientific metaphor of autoimmunity that confers on the term a deconstructive force. Derrida’s treatment of autoimmunity deconstructs precisely the assumption of a secure, immune *autos* that produces the paralysis of autoimmune

disease as closure. Derrida names biomedical autoimmunity as “that strange behaviour where a living being, in a quasi-*suicidal* fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (2003, 94 emph. Derrida’s), it works, Derrida claims, by “protecting itself against its self-protection by *destroying its own immune system*” (1998a, 73 n.27 emph. mine). This seemingly inaccurate (though, perhaps, ‘strategic’) definition, names autoimmunity as attacking not *any* tissue in the body, but precisely the body’s immune system and its ability to defend itself, thus naming the self-opening of a ‘body’ to whatever or whoever may come.² Therefore, the effort to defend ‘the self,’ in Derrida’s thinking, does not exclude ‘the other’ but includes it in an autoimmunitary move that implicates a heteronomy in the autonomy of self. I return in the chapter that follows to the full implications of this move by Derrida, but for now it is sufficient to say that what this autoimmunity produces is a ‘suicide’ of the *sui-*, or the *autos* itself, and that this opening to ‘whatever comes’ is marked as both necessary to life and as *terrifying*. It is terrifying because the unforeseeability of the other that comes refers, in the context of an autoimmune trauma, to the potential threat of worse, worse because in being unforeseen it cannot be prepared for or defended against. This, Derrida indicates, is a necessary and unassailable trauma that stems from the unforeseeability of the future ‘to-come’ (2003, 97), and marks an *autoimmune* death drive.

Yet, in *Rogues* (2005), Derrida suggests that it is not only this suicidal opening of the *autos* to the *heteros* that terrifies, but *also* the always possible defensive response that constructs a narrative of the One, as the “automobilic and autonomic turn or, rather, return to self, toward the self and upon the self” (2005, 10). This re-turn to the power of One “tortures” Derrida in an inquisition “where one is not only put *in* question but is put *to the* question” (7). Therefore, for Derrida, the attempted re-turn to self, to the power of a sovereign-self *also*

² Derrida’s reference to autoimmunity here seems to be taking AIDS as its model, for it is in the case of AIDS that the immune system itself is attacked. However, AIDS is not always considered as an autoimmune disease as the ‘attack’ is the result of a viral infection and not, originally at least, from the body’s own defensive actions. Some researchers suggest, however, that the HIV virus induces a further autoimmune response beyond the direct effects of the virus (Andrieu, Even, and Venet 1986). I will return in the chapter that follows to the implications of Derrida’s characterisation of autoimmunity in this manner, as, whether or not this misrepresentation was intentional, it produces interesting deconstructive consequences.

tortures and terrorizes for, as I have already suggested, it is this narrative of return that seeks, in the narratives I will be following, to close the self to the other in a painful and paralysing totalising move that speaks *only* of death. Therefore, for Derrida, there appears to be terror on both sides of the autoimmunitary moment, both in the insecurity and the *assumed* security of the *autos*: an autoimmune closure names a terror of totalising self-destructive paralysis, *and* an autoimmune opening that admits the other that is apprehended to threaten worse. In this doubly tortuous and paradoxical experience of self we can see what Derrida names as “the law of a terrifying and suicidal autoimmunity” (18). In the chapter that follows I will consider how Derrida’s autoimmune move treats this terror homeopathically, employing a certain autoimmunitary act to ‘(auto)immunize’ autoimmunity, so that the treatment, or the tool, which ‘maintains’ life, becomes implicated in the pathology as well as in the cure – to produce an autoimmune law.

If, for Derrida, immunity *always* secretes autoimmunity in an “implacable law of the self-destructive conservation of the ‘subject’” (55), then does the terror of my autoimmune condition remain irreducible? Will *every* treatment speak of this terror of an unforeseen threat? If, when immunity increases so too does autoimmunity, will this terror accelerate to petrify and therefore paralyse *any* ability to act in the name of my life and health? If life and survival inevitably secrete autoimmune reactions, as Derrida suggests, then how might one negotiate the risks that any treatment of disease, pain, and suffering produces? How might I enact a decision regarding the risks of my treatment options with – as the doctors request – ‘informed consent’? For the purpose of this investigation, I will experiment with all of the treatment options on offer, I will decide to take some risks, as I must if I wish to survive or to find a more pleasurable, less cruel and less terrifying path towards death. But in doing so I will remain attentive to the ‘terrible’ narrative of autoimmunity as it traces itself through these treatments.

Illness questions one’s capacity for living-on. It demands a response, as a countermove in order to reassert a body’s ability to survive, a securing of the organism against the antigen of an invading microbe, a shoring of the boundaries

to the self, and a closure therefore to the other that it is not. This is the immune paradigm where the body becomes battleground. Immunity marks the exclusion of the self from the other, the separation of the citizen from the obligations of society, the conservation of the safe and sound. In the cocooned space of my sickbed, I have excluded myself from contact with other bodies, but not in order to save them from infection – there is no need. My body is not fighting the invasion of a contagious bacteria or virus. It is not an assault by a foreign body that is making me sick, but an experience of a confusion between self and other, my immune defences are attacking my own healthy tissues. For reasons unknown.

In my early twenties I began to experience pains in my joints, strange pains, as hot and urgent as they were dull and fleeting – inconsequential. Uncannily inconsistent they would come and go in a peculiar repetition. An ominous repetition. The marker of this experience was not just a marking of the presence of a pain or a bodily discomfort, this repetitious marking of my body referred itself back, back to a hereditary trait, to the memories of a mother's own pains, to an 'awakening' of a genetic sequence as an actualisation of a potential threat. I knew that autoimmune diseases ran in my family: my mother, father, the great and the grand fathers and mothers, have all repeated this genetic propensity, passing it down as an unwelcome legacy. But ominous too, these repetitions, in their referring *on*: The immune system's attacks on my joints are continually inscribing my body, wearing down the ligaments, cartilage and bone, and in the interval the bone re-grows, locking the joints in place, closing the gap that allows for movement and pulling a future into my youthful present. A future of pain and disability. An elderly decrepitude before my time. A disjointed present. But worse. The disease, I now know, threatens worse. It could continue to attack my skin, heart, lungs, my kidneys, blood, and brain. It is questioning my ability to live-on, making me increasingly aware of my coming death. A death now apprehended, threatened and 'foreseen': auto-antibodies causing a blood clot perhaps, a heart attack? Or maybe an attack on my brain, altering my personality, my self, or putting me to sleep, into the indefinite sleep of a coma...

In the disjointed ‘now,’ here in my sickbed, the illness has advanced; the pain in my joints is joined now by a low grade fever, an overpowering fatigue, pleuritis and muscle aches... As I secure my self by separating myself from my life, from my living of the ‘good’ life, I use this time given to me to look to the character of my illness, I try to find some comfort in the medical, philosophical and autobiographical narratives of autoimmunity. I try to find some means to understand my strange suicidal behaviours, to attempt to offer myself a prognosis and foresee what the future may have in store.³ However, as I look to this future that is threatening me now with worse, and as my body fails me, I seek too to distract myself from my dis-ease. I comfort myself by watching a favourite movie: David Cronenberg’s *The Dead Zone* (1983), a tale of prophesy and a future that threatens the suicide of the planet in a nuclear apocalypse, a tale of a man and his coma, of an elided present and a future foreseen – a future foreseen in an effort to pre-empt, and make safe the coming of ‘the worst.’ It’s okay, this future, it’s a fiction, it hasn’t happened – yet.

Yet, maybe all these comforts, all these efforts to protect against my fear, may be but false guardians of my psychic order. Maybe, like the sentinels in my body, these guardians are but double-agents: protecting, though only while, traitorously, threatening something unforeseen, something worse.

I.

The Dead Zone I

The Dead Zone to come

I will begin with the end. I will disrupt the proper order of events by beginning with what will have been the end of David Cronenberg’s film *The Dead Zone* (1983). In speaking out of turn, and out of order, I am here anticipating *the* end.

³ This narration can be seen as a certain effort to employ a restorative narrative, this process of narration in illness has been addressed by Arthur Frank where he speaks of the efforts by the chronically ill to tell stories in order to make sense of their suffering and to heal themselves. For Franks there are three forms of restorative narrative: restitution (which anticipates getting well, and privileges the technology of the cure), chaos (where the illness seems to stretch on forever, with no respite or insight) and quest (where illness leads to insight and thus allows the ill person to become someone new) (Frank 1995). This chapter will speak through and across such stories.

At the very end of *The Dead Zone* – a film made at the height of the Cold War era – we are given to see the event of a nuclear apocalypse when John, our protagonist, prophesizes its imminent arrival. This anticipated end marks not only the grand finale of the film, but also the grandest of finales in its citation of a nuclear catastrophe as the total self-destruction of humanity, its history, its future – its archive. I begin by anticipating the film’s grand finale because this trope, this figure of nuclear war as the total, unconditional, remainderless self-destruction of the archive of humanity, conditions all of the narratives and theoretical moves to be addressed here. This is for several reasons: firstly, because nuclear war is, perhaps, *the* exemplary case of a terrifying autoimmune process where the self-defence of sovereign-states risk the utter destruction not only of themselves, but also of their archive as a whole. And secondly, because this autoimmunity, this radically self-destructive defensive move of nuclear war, is anticipated and *foreseen*, it is seen – in the film and in the politico-discursive field – to be both a possibility and a terrifying threat that affects a relationship to alterity and the future to demand a protective response. I look to this film and its narratives of seeing – of seeing the future as prophetic certainty – in an attempt to dis-close the autoimmunities inherent in this ‘knowledge’ of, and attempted protection from, a foreseen threat; *and* to suggest how this anticipated autoimmunity comes to inflect the promise of the future with a promise of worse.

What could be worse than the anticipated autoimmune acts of the Cold War era? Following Derrida, I will come to mark as ‘worse’ those autoimmune events that are not external to the logic of self-maintenance but necessary to it, and that *remain unseen* and *unforeseeable*. For there is a third reason why this anticipatory end conditions the narratives under investigation here: this citation of the nuclear apocalypse, in *remaining* to come, in not being here yet, in being but a citation of a future that is already marked and archived (by the future anterior where it already ‘will have been’), will open the narrative, in the end, to the uncertainty of the unforeseen. According to Derrida, “[t]o deal with this enigma of the future anterior and the conditional [...] is to deal with the problem of archivization, of what remains or does not remain” (1998b, 39-40). Derrida, in his essay on the nuclear question “No Apocalypse not Now” (1984), deals

precisely with this enigma of the remainder and, implicitly, also of the future anterior.⁴ According to Derrida, nuclear war can *only* refer to “the *total* and *remainderless* destruction of the archive” (27, *emph. mine*). It can only refer to this remainderlessness, this absence, this no-thing, because this is the only possible referent that *remains* outside of the archive – of humanity, of life, of any *possible* trace (28). This remainder that remains in the remainderlessness of the nuclear event is *nothing*. Nothing remains in the limit case of a *total* nuclear war. This apocalypse (as revelation) reveals in its blinding flash, no revelatory knowledge: it is then no apocalypse (27). In remaining to come, this ‘event’ – which would be nothing – can only be anticipated, it can only exist through prophetic or scientific projections, that is, through discourse and narrative. In Derrida’s aporetic logic, this ‘nothing,’ by not appearing *as such*, traces itself by leaving a mark by precisely leaving nothing *but* the archive that refers to it. What, therefore, remains of this nothing is a discourse that is never final, that can never mark the end for the *last* time, with certainty. What the ‘nothing’ of the nuclear – what Derrida might call the *khōra* of the nuclear – gives, is the very possibility of life, of survival, as “*sur-vivance*.”⁵ This *sur-vivance* names a living-on, as more-life, that is also *more than* life (Derrida 1979), so that it is constantly threatened *and* secured by the event of a “remainderless self-destruction of the self, auto-destruction of the *autos* itself” (1984, 30). We can already trace here, then, the paradoxical logic of a deconstructive autoimmunity at work. For here, the life of the *autos*, or *the* one, protects itself by repeating and re-inscribing itself only by anticipating an *absolute* danger of this future (*avenir*) that remains to come (*à venir*). The future “to come” is therefore not,

⁴ See also Derrida’s *Cinders* (1991a) for another iteration of this concern with the remainder – I will address this text in the conclusion of Chapter three of this thesis. Also, in regards to the apocalypse and ‘the end’ see Derrida’s ‘On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy’ (1993b)

⁵ See Derrida’s collection *On the Name* (1995a) for his detailed discussion of the term *khōra*, that Derrida re-interprets from Plato’s *Timaeus*. In Plato the *khōra* is describes as opposing the world of Forms, it is the place of perfect disorder, chaos and change that keeps the world in motion and therefore gives form (Plato 1997, 30a 53b). For Derrida, the *khōra* is re-inflected as a non-place, a formless-form, or an im-possibility, which gives nothing and in *giving* nothing gives the very possibility for the arrival of every other thing. Although Derrida does not use this term *khōra* in “No Apocalypse, Not Now,” his presentation of nuclear war as an im-presentable event, which cannot come, but which conditions and gives form to all other events, lends comparison to his reading of the *khōra*. Catherine Malabou has also made this connection in *Counterpath* (Malabou and Derrida 2004).

according to Derrida, the future anterior, a future (*futur*) that can be anticipated and named and immunized against in advance, it is a future to come (*à venir*) that disrupts and presents itself as a threat to the boundaries of each and every one:

The future [*à venir*] can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity. For that future world [...] for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue. (1976, 5 *emph.* Derrida's)

There is no “exergue,” no apocalypse, no outside – as an elsewhere or an alibi – for this future, because it remains ‘nothing.’⁶ Yet, there is a concomitant danger in this context, and this is the danger of that *comes* with the inscription of the future anterior as a future (*futur*) that is named as known, as certain, and protected as such in a manner that ignores the “monstrosity” of the future to come (*à venir*). As we will now come to see in my analysis of autoimmunity in this chapter, this is a future that conditions and presents the unrepresentable to-come, the nothing, the *khōra* of the autoimmune as terrifying, and threatens, *unforeseen*, and uncertainly, the ‘worst’ form of paralysing autoimmune closure.⁷

The nuclear age names, perhaps, the first time ‘in history’ that such a radical totalization of life *is said* to be possible, so that everything that happens in the nuclear age stands out against the background of this im-possibility (20). Yet, this age has not yet passed. Indeed, the awareness of this possibility increases as the autoimmune future comes to promise worse insecurities. Insecurities that

⁶ See Derrida’s *Without Alibi* (2002e) for his treatment of the necessity of thinking, “without alibi,” beyond the acts that are possible for a subject. I will return to this question of the alibi in regards to the “cruelty” that is to be found in it, in my discussion of the death drive that follows.

⁷ “The worst” in Derrida’s thought, seems to name an act of totalization, so that the figure of a total nuclear war would be the figure of the worst. However, as I will explore in what follows, this pure worst remains to come, therefore it is the ‘totalization’ that separates the one from the other, which *presents* the worst. Hence Derrida’s implementation of such “mixture-elements” as the *pharmakon* (1981, 127), and autoimmunity, this formulation of the worst will be made clearer as I proceed to address the nature of Derrida’s autoimmune move in this chapter.

may not trace themselves visibly in the discursive field as an anticipation of a ‘mutually assured destruction.’ As Derrida argues in his interview “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides” (2003), post September 11, terror is seen to be capable of coming *unforeseen* from within the very function of the ‘immune system’ of the body-politic – from its aeroplanes that destroy ‘its own’ buildings, from its laws that destroy ‘its own’ freedoms (2005). But worse: the next terror-plot, according to Derrida, may employ, not aeroplanes – which can be seen, and relayed around the world in a traumatic compulsive viewing – but chemicals, bacteria, or information technology, so that now one can ‘see’ or apprehend that the “worst can simultaneously appear insubstantial, fleeting, light, and so seem to be denied, repressed, indeed forgotten, relegated to being just one event among others” (2003, 99).

Nanotechnologies of all sorts are so much more powerful and invisible, uncontrollable, capable of creeping in everywhere. They are the micrological rivals of microbes and bacteria. Yet our unconscious is already aware of this; it already knows it, and that’s what’s scary. (102)

It is scary because such acts, should they come, would be terrible indeed. But it is scary too in that the denial, the repression and the suppression of this possibility to come, through the attempted immunization of the state, the body and the psyche – through a “war on terror” and limitations of democratic freedom in Derrida’s example (2003, 2005) – can only ever perpetuate the *unconscious* trauma of the autoimmune threat that limits and closes life to the coming of the ‘other.’ An ‘other’ that must promise perfectibility *as well as* terror. For Derrida, the awareness of possible autoimmune acts that may come unexpectedly – as in the case of September 11 – traumatizes the psyche and institutes a repetition compulsion and an autoimmune death drive. I explore the character of this death drive as I treat my own symptoms, as I watch a film, and explore the narratives and the autoimmune treatments of my illness.

Having rushed already towards the end in order to defer its finality and condition

its unconditionality, I will proceed now to take a slower path onwards, by looking back to the narratives of *The Dead Zone* and of autoimmune illness. In *The Dead Zone* the problematics of immunity and autoimmunity, terror and trauma, the death drive and survival, are staged and put to the question. I will explore these intersecting narratives in light of an anticipated end – as a suicidal death, that is both *my* death and the death of *every* one – which remains to come. Yet, in the film and in ‘my own’ experience and exploration of illness and its narratives, the uncertainty of the future is repressed and suppressed, it is rendered *known*. I will explore how, why, and to what end, these narratives are constructed, and how the terror that they produce might be treated. I will, therefore, return in ‘the end’ to the specific location of the traumatic and terrifying future to-come in the moment of nuclear apocalypse, to consider how the relation to this future to come ‘treats’ the trauma of ‘autoimmune’ illness. The future “to come,” or the *khōra* of the autoimmune, is figured in *The Dead Zone* as the ‘dead zone,’ the ‘zone’ that, like nuclear apocalypse, reveals nothing, and therefore gives, gives pain, suffering, responsibility and the arrival of the radical alterity of ‘the gift.’

Anticipation

(Interval)

The Dead Zone tells the tale of John Smith (Christopher Walken). John, with that appellation of the archetypal Everyman, was an Everyman. He was a good teacher, and a good son, and he was soon to be married to become a good husband and a good father. He was man with a plan – he had his future all mapped out. That is until a fateful – nearly fatal – night and the coming unforeseen of an accident: a car crash on a rainy night, a trauma, a coma, and a five year hiatus from the living of his life. On the very evening of his accident, John had made a promise to his girlfriend, Sarah – a promise as a statement of fact: “I am going to marry you, you know.” He could foresee this future as he had it planned. However, this anticipation when spoken with such certainty, anticipates too – within the conventions of this filmic narrative structure – the moment of disruption that soon comes to intervene in this moment of happy

expectation. On that fateful evening, after seeing Sarah safely to her door, John postpones spending the night, claiming, “some things are worth waiting for.” Yet, this act of deferral, this expectant waiting, opens his future to the dead zone and the accident and to a different kind of living, when a milk truck – transporting that most nourishing and life-sustaining fluid – crosses his path.

With a cut and a splice Cronenberg abruptly re-locates John – and me – from the frantic scene of the accident to another altogether more sedate scene: the sedation of a nursing home. With the flash of light on a screen, in the blink of an eye, an interval is elided. By obscuring from view the trauma room, its treatments and drugs, and the five long years of sleep, Cronenberg pulls the future, for the viewer and for John, into the present. John awakens then to a present that is his ‘wrong’ future, he is forced to live a life without his future as it had been promised, and significantly, and traumatically, it will be argued, without his future *family* as the very figure of futurity, reproduction and survival.⁸

What has been elided in this filmic splice? The story that is not told is that of the treatments of John’s sick body: the drugs that are given to sedate him, the trauma of the ‘trauma room,’ the dead zone of the coma. At the omitted site of our second sickbed, a second body is experiencing a crisis; it is, perhaps, a second citing of a body’s autoimmune crisis. One might fill the voided interval by imagining John lying inert in his hospital bed, motionless but for the rise and fall of his of his breathing. One might imagine an uncanny movement, an abrupt regularity, a mechanised breath: John’s life being sustained by the machines of artificial respiration. In order to live-on, in order to keep his bodily ‘self’ alive, John has had to unknowingly admit the ‘other’ of the machinic apparatus. This technical prosthesis, while ‘artificially’ extending and securing John’s life, threatens him too. It threatens his ‘wholeness’ as a living organism, his autonomy as a living being, *and* his future. These nursing machines, by caring

⁸ This normative assumption of the family – or child – as being the representative of the future (and of future redemption) has been taken up by Lee Edelman in terms of queer theory, and the homosexual exclusion to this future in his book *No Future: queer theory and the death drive* (Edelman 2004). Edelman’s thesis, however, calls for a refusal of this futurity, and in his reading John’s loss of his family might be embraced. I however, will follow the more normative narrative of loss in order to approach a reading of an autoimmune futurity and death drive.

for and conserving John's life, separate him from the living of his 'good' life. In this 'dead zone,' John's life has been rendered bare: without agency, without a family life, or a political life, without *his* 'good life', John is *merely* alive. As Giorgio Agamben has argued this production of 'bare life' strips away a qualified form of life (as *bíos*) by reducing life to its biological layer (as *zoē*). This 'baring,' for Agamben, renders such life killable (a 'murderless' killing would ensue for John were the doctors to 'pull the plug') as, John 'himself,' his qualified life, is imagined to have been already vacated from the life of his body (Agamben 1998).⁹ What the interval of the coma produces via a technical supplementation, is a loss of agency and autonomy that threatens John's *autos* 'itself.' In Agamben's terms, the apparatuses of bioscience produce a separation that 'autoimmunely' excludes a biological self (*zoē*) from an individual self (*bíos*) to produce 'bare' unqualified, killable life. What is left is a waiting. And, in this interval, in the name of John 'himself,' a seemingly necessary faith is placed in the practices of bioscience in order to maintain the hope and anticipation of his *return* to 'himself' and his 'good life.'

2

Treatment I

Bioscientific Legacies

The elision of this interval in *The Dead Zone*, the omission of the time and the place where a life hangs in the balance precariously situated between life and death, omits an aspect of the narrative of illness that requires analysis.

⁹ In *Homo Sacer* (1998) Agamben links the state of "bare life" (a discussion to which I will return in Chapter Three regarding the negativity of biopolitics in regards to autoimmunity) to the condition of the "overcomatose" (160-161). The *overcomatose* person is one whose vital functions have effectively ceased except for the medical treatment and intervention, so that life would end were treatment removed. Agamben asks: "Who or what is the overcomatose person?" What is a life that lies *beyond* coma? (161). The designation of a person as overcomatose, he suggests, is the result of a political (sovereign) decision that produces "bare life," by excluding this life from politics, from language, agency and autonomy. This exclusive inclusion of bare life within political life renders this life subject to the will of the other (here the doctor) who is permitted to decide to end that life without this being named as murder. The situation of the coma therefore threatens the presumption of the *autos* 'itself.' Although there is an uncertainty as to whether or not John's coma may be described as "overcomatose" – due to the continued anticipation of his return to himself through his medical treatment – this does not preclude the imaginary effects of this exclusion in this instance.

Therefore, I pause in my reading of the film to ‘fill the gap’ and to merge this narrative with the telling of my story that *materialises* the problematic of a paradoxical self.

For the last ten years, I have lived with a chronic and periodically life-threatening autoimmune condition. This experience cannot be elided, dismissed or forgotten (although I may wish that it could be). What this experience perhaps produces is a means of thinking about illness – and the world in which it ‘lives’ – which refers both to the palpable and tangible paradoxical body, and to a narrative that *assumes* a biological ‘self’ that is not excluded – or should not be excluded, or stripped bare – from an individual ‘self.’ This site of illness (both mine and John’s – and perhaps everyone’s) draws a certain philosophical lexicon of ‘self’ into a contagious contamination with a biological one.

After an initial period of illness that manifested as inconsequential pains and disturbances to the smooth running of my youthful body, a crisis of unexpected ferocity precipitated a hospital admission and a diagnosis: “your immune system is attacking your skin and your blood,” I was told by my doctor. “You are allergic to yourself,” he declared. This was a puzzling pronouncement that did not quite sit right with my inherited understanding of my bodily mechanisms, so in an effort at clarification, he tried again: “you are eating yourself alive!”¹⁰ A confusing and rather frightening explanation of my illness was conveyed by this medical practitioner who sought but to illuminate, as simply as possible, my condition for me. So, to assist me in comprehending this bizarre diagnosis of my body’s rebellion, I was given leaflets and websites, books and textbooks to assist me in my search for an understanding of my illness. One such source explains:

¹⁰ See E. Cohen’s autobiographical account of his experience of the autoimmune condition Crohn’s disease in his essay “My self as an other: on autoimmunity and “other” paradoxes” (2004), which relates a similar experience of diagnosis, and the questions that it produces (the “eating yourself alive” quote is his (7)). My own account here offers a comparable reading of ability of this experience to question the foundations of ‘the self’ in immunology and philosophy, however, my concern is to treat the possible fear, terror and real danger that this reading opens to – as well as the possibilities for thinking immunity otherwise that is the focus of Cohen’s essay.

Lupus is a chronic inflammatory disease that can affect various systems of the body, especially the skin, joints, blood, and kidneys. The body's immune system normally makes proteins called antibodies to protect the body against viruses, bacteria, and other foreign materials. These foreign materials are called antigens. In an autoimmune disorder such as lupus, the immune system loses its ability to tell the difference between foreign substances (antigens) and its own cells and tissues. The immune system then makes antibodies directed against “self.” These antibodies, called “auto-antibodies,” react with the “self” antigens to form immune complexes. The immune complexes build up in the tissues and can cause inflammation, injury to tissues, and pain [...] it may cause serious and even life-threatening problems. (Lahita 2011)

So my ‘self’ is attacking my ‘self’ as it tries to defend its ‘self.’ Yet this simplified explanation – produced as collaboration between the ‘knowing’ Dr Lahita and the unknowing patient, myself – did little to answer *how*, and *why*, my immune system is ‘eating me alive.’ This, the medical staff seemed to find impossible to explain. Nobody knew why. For, in the bioscientific world of rational experimentation, autoimmune diseases present a certain paradox. The founding assumption of modern immunology is that the very purpose of the immune system is to defend the self by distinguishing between ‘self’ and ‘non-self’ (Burnet 1969). This theory indeed describes very well the case of infection by an ‘alien’ pathogen, and has been used to amazing and life-saving ends in its application – through the use of vaccines, and immunizations of all kinds that build tolerance, through *learning* and incorporating the other – but it does not account for the manifestation of autoimmune conditions. What my autoimmune disease painfully materialises is an uncertainty that resides in the bioscientific designation of ‘self,’ the ‘self’ that is attacked by the ‘self’ as ‘non-self’ in *autoimmunity*.

As Ed Cohen has argued in his extensive exploration of the origins and the

trajectory of the metaphor of immunity in the biosciences, the use of the paradigm of ‘self/non-self’ (SNS) has obscured a conceptual collapse between “diverse biological elements, here defined as the organism’s ‘own,’ with and as ‘the individual’ who is implicitly specified as their ‘owner’” (Cohen 2004, 8, 2009, 2003). This conceptual collapse of the individual-self with the biological-self indicates, for Cohen, that there may rest a philosophical presumption in the narratives of immunological illness. We can, perhaps, begin to see this presumption at work if we look both to the philosophical etymology of ‘self,’ and a narration of the historical empirical practices of science at work. Derrida, in his reading of the etymology of the term *autos*, links this Greek term to its Latin counterpart *ipse*. *Autos* (self) translated as *ipse* (he himself) confers on the self a certain meaning of possession, property and power, designating the master of the house, “the oneself as master in the masculine: the father, husband, son, or brother, the proprietor, owner, or seignior, indeed the sovereign,” (Derrida 2005, 12). This *ipseity* of the self links the *autos* to a masculine authority of the one who knows, the one with the power to decide and to rule, to rule over the home (*oikos*), the political (*polis*) and the professional realms. Handing the legacy of this power down from father to son, the concept of the sovereign self can be seen to construct the narrative of immunology.

In 1881 Elie Metchnikoff, the first theorist of biological immunity, recounts in his memoirs (his autobiography that remembers and archives for the future) his empirical ‘discovery’ that immunity functions as a form of bodily “host defence”:

One day when the whole family had gone to a circus to see some extraordinary performing apes, I remained alone with my microscope, observing the life in the mobile cells of a transparent star-fish larva, when a new thought suddenly flashed across my brain. It struck me that similar cells might serve *in the defense of the organism against intruders*. [...] I said to myself that if my supposition was true, a splinter introduced into the body of a star fish larva, devoid of blood vessels or a nervous system, should

soon be surrounded by mobile cells as is to be observed in a man who runs a splinter into his finger. This was no sooner said than done. (Metchnikoff qtd. in Cohen 2009, 1 emph. Metchnikoff's)

Metchnikoff's auto-biography can be seen here to condition his relation to, and his enacting of, empirical science: A man alone at home, a sovereign master of his home, a father, and a ruler over the *oikos*, partakes in an economy of knowledge, and meaning – of work – and experiences a flash of genius.¹¹ He has an epiphany: mobile cells “might serve *in the defense of the organism against intruders.*” As Ed Cohen, who cites this text, suggests, by identifying with and as an intruder (an intruder into somebody *else's* ‘home’ and economy), Metchnikoff has already *anticipated*, via an imaginative leap, the introduction of the splinter as an intrusion, and *then* proceeds to enact it as such. Reasoning that the reaction must mark the antithesis of this presumed aggressive action, the starfish's response can then only be configured in terms of defence (2009, 2). In 1881, this re-cognising of the protective act in the organism, transplants (via a sleight-of-hand) the military and juridico-political concepts of friend, enemy, and self-defence, into the lexicon of bioscience for the first time.¹² In further linking this defensive act to the legal concept of immunity as exemption from duty (a term that dates from the birth of the Roman *polis* (43)), the metaphor of immunity-as-defence is born. And as my doctors repeat and reinscribe Metchnikoff's assumptions in their pronouncements and in their literature, this metaphor becomes the historico-philosophical legacy that continues to condition the discourses of immunology today.

What Metchnikoff's narrative of discovery both obscures and reveals, however, is that the expectation that anticipates the return of the *autos* in the body of

¹¹ In this quote Metchnikoff, and his family are also seen to rule over animals – the “extraordinary performing apes” – in Chapter Two I take up the question of the relationship between the authority of ‘man’ over ‘an animal’ in regards to experimental science and animal testing.

¹² It was Thomas Hobbes who, in the seventeenth century, naturalised the concept of self-defence in the juridico-political discourse (Cohen 2009, 55-67). For Hobbes self-defence names the first “natural right” of man to secure his bodily fear (Hobbes 1839-45). This Hobbesian political philosophy that naturalises self-defence in the political sphere is then naturalised in regards to a biological self by Metchnikoff. I will return to explore Hobbes' relation to immunity in a biopolitical frame in Chapter three.

another *enacts* the description of empirical events. Metchnikoff's expectations of the future *produce* a future that is then rendered certain through an empirical validation. A presumed self-identity (*ipseity*) is translated into the persona of an intruder, then into the organism of the star-fish, *and then into its cells* (which are imagined to possess a certain autonomy in their ability to locate, name and respond to the intruder as 'non-self' or 'other'). The legacy of this *ipseity*, which has been translated into biology, marks the contamination of a Western political philosophy with a Western bioscience. In producing and canonizing a biological self as a certainty, Metchnikoff strengthens the narrative of the One powerful self, but he also ignores the uncertainty of his experimental process. He ignores the fact that this self requires the 'other' of the philosophical and political narrative in order to sustain itself. In his ignorance of his unconscious supplementation of the biological, Metchnikoff also ignores the fact that these narratives not only protect the logic of the *autos* but also come to unexpectedly reveal the instability of this logic, and of Metchnikoff's life work. This instability, which appears to have already been present in the designation of the biological 'self,' therefore also produces the *inevitability* of the interruption, the failure of this security that *traumatizes* as an experience of the *loss* of a secure self.

The theory of SNS immunity-as-defence renders the seeming contradictions of an autoimmune condition paradoxical, unexplainable and *unnatural*. What my experience of autoimmune disease materialises, however, in a painful and unignorably, tangible manner, is that this presumption might be flawed. In *my* self the immune self is seen as 'other.' Yet, what this historical narrative of the self indicates is that the self might *always already* have been other, that sovereign *ipseity* has always been vulnerable, both to the pathogen, *and* to itself, a self that sovereignly designates the categories of self and non-self *before* it is empirically observed as such. In (autoimmunely) ignoring its vulnerability this immunology *produces* the fear of that which does not correspond to its narrative. The absence of a stable self is narrated in autoimmunity as a *loss* of self, which in becoming unnatural and pathological, terrorizes the sick individual beyond the experience of a bodily pain to threaten the expectation that the self is itself.

As I study the narratives of immunity, my autoimmune disease comes to provide an initial indication that the paradox that autoimmunity names is not confined simply to the designation of a disease. It indicates that *every* ‘self’ might always already be ‘other,’ both self and non-self at once, securing and destroying its own categories. There are at least two responses that come of this new ‘knowledge’ of uncertainty in my biological and my individual self, two trajectories that can be followed. One would be to return to the study and discussion of what the self might be in bioscience and in philosophy, in order to investigate if it might be possible to locate a more rigorous, less suspect, presence of ‘self.’ One response, therefore, would be to fear the threatened loss of a stable self and to anticipate and enact its return by increasing security and attempting to understand and render known the causes of autoimmunity. The second response, however, might be to attempt to think the self otherwise, to think differently the place of the body and illness in the world to provoke some productive differences in the way we think these relations. A response then that does not fear the loss of self but embraces it and renders it productive. Both of these trajectories will be followed in this chapter.



However, after my diagnosis, amidst the pain, and very real threat to my life and the narratives of a suicidal consumption of my self, by myself, I could not yet foresee a productive opening of my disease to new ways of thinking and living. The uncertainties that *all* these narratives produced – or rendered visible – seemed only to threaten *my* life, a life that was then seen as mine and no one else’s. Then I foresaw only pain, seclusion, infirmity and an impending death. I was *frightened*. I had lost something. I had lost what I had previously anticipated: a full and healthy future life, I had lost the expectation of a happy, good life, and a future family – for even pregnancy becomes very risky amidst the autoimmune mechanisms of lupus. Not only was my life being threatened but so too was my legacy. In response to my fear came a willingness to take *any* treatment available. I decided to take the drugs that bioscience had produced through their research. I took the immunosuppressant drugs that act, not to cure

the disease (for its cause is unknown), but to treat its symptoms. The drugs *suppress* my over-active immune response, they suppress the bodily ‘self’s’ presumed ‘self.’ Yet in doing so they also opened my body, again, to the threat of the ‘other,’ to infections and other worse diseases that might come unforeseen and unexpectedly to enact a more painful life, or even accelerate my path towards death. I could not protect against these threats for ‘I myself’ had destroyed my immune system’s ability to recognise the threat and defend itself. In securing *my* life I had, once again, only increased my insecurity, repeating and confirming the autoimmunity of my immunitary acts.

3.

The Dead Zone II **Traumatic Returns**

In *The Dead Zone* the interval is elided. The space and time of the coma – the doctors’ masterful, sovereign decisions, their diagnoses and machinic treatments – are passed over. Therefore, the question of John’s status as comatose, a status that names a rift in the conflation of his biological life (*zoē*) with his individual life (*bíos*) is obscured. However, in the interval, I have experienced an uncertainty in the very assumption that conditions Agamben’s naming of comatose life as a bare life, for, perhaps this rift between lives is but another rendition of an always present rift in any designation of a certain ‘self’ as a life that is one with itself. Perhaps this rift is always already present, perhaps one is always already *both* self *and* other, *zoē* and *bíos*; perhaps, one is always already ‘killable’ and killed by a *suicidal* autoimmunity.¹³ What Cronenberg’s filmic cut and splice enacts then is a suppression of an experience of an uncertain self. An elision that merges one self with another as John ‘returns’ to himself and awakens from his coma. Yet, this return proves not to be as secure or as joyful as one might expect. What the elision enacts for John is a certain ‘time travel,’

¹³ There is not the space to address the full implications of this deconstruction of the self for Agamben’s theory of the biopolitics of bare life here, I will however return to this question in Chapter Three, where Agamben, Esposito and Derrida will be discussed in relation to a biopolitically inflected autoimmunity and Derrida’s deconstruction of this terminology (see Derrida 2009, 305-334).

where his 'normal' relation to the future as happy expectation is interrupted by the 'monstrosity' of the arrival of a wholly unexpected future. John awakens to a present as a future that is not 'his own,' to a *loss* of his expected and anticipated future; and in his return to himself John is markedly different. The trauma of the unexpected event, of his opening himself to the treatment as technical supplement, has stripped John of all his markers of 'himself,' of his sovereign *ipseity*: Who is he now? Where and when is he now? Where is his home, his family, his work?

Yet, something has been given too in the dead zone of the coma: John awakens with the gift of second sight, a prophetic seeing of the future as certain, as *known*. John's treatment, which sought to return him to himself, to health and to normality, has, in this science fictional tale, turned him *paranormal*.

Coming Round

John 'comes round' in a setting devoid of the signs of illness. He is confused. The dead zone of the coma has elided the marks of his trauma – the wounds on his body –and when told of his accident John is bewildered: "No bandages" he remarks. We see him struggling to unpick the sutured gap that has been imposed on his body and his mind. Yet, the most significant marker of this gap comes via John's relations with those at his bedside. In the hospital the hospitable doctor, a stranger, tells John: "You have been our guest here for some time." In bestowing on John the category of 'guest,' the doctor masterfully welcomes him not as a patient, who patiently waits to leave, but one who is welcome, invited and accepted into the economies of illness. This host's sovereign welcome markedly differs from John's lack of sovereignty: in not having *decided* to accept the host's invitation John has not (yet) performed the role of the guest by engaging in the exchanges of a response-ability that the logic of hospitality demands. For the past five years John sees that he has been a dependant, a 'parasite,' only *taking* sustenance and not *giving* anything in return, he has been aware of no ethical, social or personal relations with the nursing staff – or the nursing

machines.¹⁴ What the doctor's sovereign bestowal of the category of guest marks here, in the logic of hospitality, is an immediate obligation that confers on John an unconscious debt, a responsibility to acknowledge, if not to repay, the gift of the other, a gifting that will come to shape the very problematic of John's survival. Immediately upon awakening John's relations are, again, scripting his future – though differently.

Yet, it is John's family relations that most significantly mark his awakening. As Richard Doyle has noted in his analysis of *The Dead Zone*, it is the figure of the family that provides John with any sense of relation to the future, for

[f]amily, in this rendition, becomes the obligatory passage point for any encounter with the future whatsoever. Family, with its repetition of the tired old laws of lack, remains the hang-up that will not be interrupted. (Doyle 2003, 150)

It is these “tired old laws of lack” that John now acutely experiences. John's mother, upon reuniting with her son, struggles to reclaim him as her own, as *her* child. A religious woman, Vera marks John's awakening in biblical prose: “You've been lost for five years, and now reborn unto me.” John's ‘rebirth’ from the dead time of his coma has threatened Vera's role as mother, the nursing machines have usurped her life-giving capacities and she is left merely with the possibility of *rhetorically* wrestling back the power of birth into her maternal realm. Vera uses these words as a means to protect or re-inscribe her position as mother, to narrate away her threatened loss.¹⁵ As, according to Doyle:

¹⁴ See Michel Serres' *The Parasite* (1982) for an excellent exploration of the ambiguities of the host/parasite relation. See also Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality in *Of Hospitality* (2000), where the *necessity* of welcoming the other unconditionally is conditioned by the *necessity* of its impossibility (for this would destroy (remainderlessly) the guest (*hôte*), *hospes*, home, and the host (*hôte*)). We will come to see in my reading of the film how John's status as guest will produce similar ambiguities that will here pertain to the strange and terrifying logic of autoimmunity.

¹⁵ This rhetorical power again references the means of narrating the promise of an expected future and creates a discourse that seeks to name and temper a perceived threat by reclaiming this future for the self.

In naming it *as a birth* Johnny's mother both marks the threat to heterosexual reproduction posed by his revival and manages it through recourse to the maternal body. [...] For if life can emerge out of multiple connections to machines, the role of heterosexuality in the propagation of a human future becomes visibly questioned. (2003, 153)

The role of heterosexuality in the propagation of a human future *has* become *visibly* threatened. First, John sees that he has lost his chance of becoming a husband and a father with the woman he loves. His forestalment of his night with Sarah has caused another future to befall them both: she has now married another and has borne his child. In Vera's words, Sarah now "cleaves unto another man," and this cleavage has split John along the line of his natural weakness: his desired and expected future life, his reproductive future, his legacy, has been lost. Sarah's child is introduced to John as "His Majesty" but John is no longer subject to this Freudian 'Kingdom of the baby' where the child holds dominion and his word is law (Freud 1989, 556). But secondly, John's connection to the machines has birthed a new self without the involvement of a mother or a father; it has birthed a new subjectivity, for whom a 'rightfully' human future is now propagated, not by his children, but by machine-induced visions. The machines have instituted a new way to live and live-on in the face of John's insecurities; a new narrative of survival is threatening the stability of 'the self.'

Compulsion to Defend

John's awakening that returns him to 'himself,' and to health, was traumatic. It marked a sudden and unexpected awakening to the wrong future. Not long after awakening, while still in his hospital bed, John repeats this moment of awakening to a future out of joint – to a future he knows to be 'real' and 'true' but in which 'he himself' does not belong: He prophesies a future in which his nurse's home is ablaze, with her daughter inside. John again and again repeats such prophetic awakenings, compulsively. Following Sigmund Freud's

psychoanalytic theory, I will treat this repetitive seeing as a repetition of a trauma, a repetition that seeks to defend John's psyche, organism, or body (these markers of a certain 'self' are also conflated here) against the sudden disruption of its cohesion. Trauma can be defined as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations or other intrusive phenomena," such events are not able to be fully grasped consciously as they occur and are thus repressed to return only belatedly (Caruth 1996, 11).¹⁶ Freud describes as traumatic:

any excitations from outside [an organism] which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield [of the psyche, which attempts to resist overly external disruptions] [...]. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. (1955, 29)

For Freud, such events disturb the organism so dangerously because the coming of event had not been foreseen or expected. Traumatic neuroses occur, for Freud, only after a "sudden fright." Such suddenness cannot result then from fear or anxiety, as fear requires a definite object, and anxiety expects and prepares for danger, protecting the organism in advance (1955, 12). An *unexpected* fright marks a *terror* (*schreckte*) that institutes a traumatic neurosis manifesting as a repetitive seeing, a compulsion to re-enact the memory of a trauma that was not sufficiently grasped as it occurred, to be instead repressed by the conscious ego (*Ich*) in the unconscious id (*Es*) in order to protect against the full force of this disturbance. John's moment of awakening suddenly with no preparation, to a future in which he can no longer perform the roles of husband, father, and son –

¹⁶ According to Freud, in consciousness excitations do not leave behind any permanent change in the psychic apparatus, if however these excitations are strong enough to break through the protective shield of the psyche they produce a memory trace. In the case of trauma these excitations prove to be so disturbing that all consciousness of the disturbance is 'repressed' (cathected) in the unconscious in order to be relieved (via an "anticathectis") at a later time (Freud 1955, 27-30).

for which he had prepared himself so thoroughly – has traumatised him.¹⁷ It has instituted a *defensive* measure that manifests as a compulsion to repeat and re-enact the moment of awakening to a future marked by loss. John’s compulsive visions attract familial relations: firstly in the apparition of the nurse’s daughter in a burning house: “Your daughter” says John, “is screaming.” Or to the doctor: “Your mother... She is alive!” One could interpret these visions, perhaps, as an effort to overcome the loss of John’s family by returning lost family members, and therefore, to act as a certain ‘dream’ of a pleasurable wish fulfilment.¹⁸ However, these visions see only the *wrong* family members – they are not his own, like Sarah’s child is not his own – and thus, John seems not to be fulfilling a wish in his repetitive seeing, but to be compulsively repeating his terrifying unexpected fright as a re-enactment of a loss that repeats the pain, or the ‘unpleasure’ of living in the wrong future.

Yet, how does this repetition compulsion defend John? How might the return of a painful, unpleasurable, experience secure him against the threat his awakening has enacted on his psychic organism? According to Freud’s theory of the pleasure principle, an organism should *only* seek pleasure, that is, it should seek to lower the level of repressed excitation in the unconscious (which it experiences as unpleasure) by discharging this unwanted excitation into consciousness (which is experienced as pleasure) (Freud 1937). In ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1955) Freud asks: Why might the organism’s psyche compulsively return to the moment of trauma, through dreams, hallucinations or fantasies, when the pleasure principle suggests that such a repetition should be avoided at all costs (1955, 13)? Why, then, does the psyche appear to contradict itself in a self-defensive attack on itself? Freud answers this question by arguing that the traumatic event is repeated in order to create, in retrospect, the anxiety whose absence was the cause of the traumatic neurosis, so that the repressed memory can then be released into conscious experience in a safe and non-

¹⁷ The fact that this trauma at the moment of awakening is not marked by a physical trauma (“no bandages” says John) only increases its traumatic effect according to Freud (1955, 33).

¹⁸ In chapter three of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1954 [1900], 98-105) Freud describes all dreams as the fulfilment of wishes or unconscious desire, this is a theory which Freud later revises in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1955 [1920]) in his analysis of the compulsive repetition of unpleasure in traumatic neuroses as we will shortly come to see. See also (1955, 32).

threatening manner. In attempting to defend itself, the organism ‘infects’ itself over and over with the unconscious memory of an excessive force that threatened and continues to threaten it in its repressed form. This self-*inoculation* seeks to incorporate the threat into conscious awareness so that it may then be retrospectively defended against and released safely. This repetitive seeing, therefore, acts as an *immunization*: the psyche as immune system attempts to *learn* how to provide resistance and defence against repeat ‘infection,’ so that John can learn to *tolerate* the ‘unpleasure’ of his trauma in the social reality to which he is subject.¹⁹

However, John’s repeated immunizations do not *appear* to master his trauma. For, although his prophetic visions do produce knowledge (a knowledge of the future and therefore of what is to come), in the visions he sees but is not seen, he is a spectral father out of time, he can *only* see.²⁰ John’s knowledge is a *certain* knowledge, his ‘normal’ expectations of the future are repeated as a certitude; with the result that in this future he cannot speak or be heard he cannot *act* for every act has already been determined in advance. As, in Derrida’s words, “an action that simply obeys knowledge is but a calculable consequence, the deployment of a norm or program. It does not engage any decision, or any responsibility worthy of these names” – or any *autonomy* worthy of the name (2003, 133). What the visions repeat for John is his *inability* to act as a sovereign, deciding, masterful self. He, therefore, remains without agency in the present and the future, and is thus unable to live the free, happy, good and pleasurable life that he wishes for. John’s act of immunitary psychic self-defence appears to have *over-protected* him. The immunization has given birth

¹⁹ It is what Freud calls the ‘reality principle’ that conditions the ability of the unconscious to relieve itself of its excitations or repressions. The relief of excitations is the primary process of the unconscious for this relief is experienced as pleasure and is the aim of the pleasure principle. However, the ‘secondary process’ of the reality principle defers the gratification of certain repressed memories for social, cultural or other reasons (which would prove too disturbing for social acceptance and would manifest as neurosis or psychosis). The skill of the psychoanalyst is to permit the repressed memory to be relived not as an instant gratification, but as a tolerance of unpleasure until it can be safely relieved through the non-invasive effects of dreams and other phenomena (Freud 1955, 20).

²⁰ This seeing without being seen marks what Derrida calls the visor effect. In *Specters of Marx* (1994) Derrida sees this visor effect at work in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* where the ghost of Hamlet’s father appears out of time, and sees without being seen, to demand responsibility in a world that is ‘out of joint.’ It is this ghostly role of the father that is also haunting John.

to an *autoimmunitary* closure, as an over-the-top, over-protective defence that rejects the unknown and paralyses his ability to respond. Once again the cure appears here in the guise of a poison. It appears, perhaps, that John's trauma cannot be mastered. But worse: the visions – as he is told by his doctor – are killing him, they are 'eating him alive.' The psychic attacks begin to manifest as a somatic disorder, weakening his body in a further *suicidal* drive towards death. John, like his mother, appears to require the narrative – and the vision – of a stable, powerful self in order to maintain his pleasureable life, and yet, this narrative and its compulsive vision only autoimmunizes his *autos* and threatens it with worse. Maybe the only way for John to return to the pleasurable lack of psychic and bodily disturbance will be for him to return himself, not to *himself* but to the peacefulness of death. Maybe the only end to his painful repetitive trauma would be for John to kill himself.

Interval
(Perhaps)

Lupus began by attacking my joints, a wolfish repetitive attack by a predator who turned out to be myself. As the joints are threatened, they lose their integrity: the wolf begins to chew down on the bone, the bone tries to recover from its wound, it re-grows, attempting to regain its integrity. But it overcompensates. It fuses the joints together, clamping them in place – my body is braced. It is braced by an anticipated future, a future foretold by my paralysed movements, a terrifying future that itself paralyses as the effect of a fright, a fright of the orthopaedic saws, and a *certain* on-going infirmity. It is braced by my fore-telling of what is to come, by my autobiography that writes, out of joint, a prophesy of certainty.

As I repeat the unpleasurable consequences of my autoimmune illness, as I mark again and again the threat to myself, enacted by myself in my decisions to treat the symptoms of an illness, am I also 'compulsively' repeating the effects of a trauma? As I look to the narratives of immunity, the insecurity of the self, and of *my* self, is repeated. As I *decide* to imbibe the immunosuppressant drug I only

weaken myself. As I distract myself with a film I only see this insecurity repeated. Might it be possible to learn from these events in order to come to terms with, to expect and accept this threat, and to thus defend against its ability to disturb me? To determine this it would be necessary to diagnose the *cause* of the trauma and to treat it. The medical literature suggests that the cause of autoimmune diseases might be genetic: a legacy passed down the family line as a propensity for disease. But genetic markers mark only a propensity and not a certainty (only an uncertain knowledge and an expectant waiting). I am told the genes are ‘switched on’ by something else: perhaps by an accident as a physical trauma, perhaps by an infection, where the sudden appearance of an ‘intruder’ disguised as ‘self’ causes a misrecognition (Lahita, 2011). Nobody knows. Perhaps, then, in the absence of a *physical* cause, the cause might be psychological. Perhaps I am suffering from a form of hysteria, where dysfunctional relations to social manifestations of rational order produce pathological and somatic effects (Schapira 1988, 42).²¹ Perhaps, I am protecting myself not from illness as such, but that *the illness* is protecting me from the difficulties of a social life relieved by staying home, in bed, avoiding work, seeking to return to the comfort of a mother’s care and a father’s protection (Cohen 2005, 104)?

Yet, it is the ‘perhaps’ that seems to be repeated here, as an uncertainty of a repressed cause that refuses to come to light, repeating only its *unknown* trauma. Even for Freud, the real, historical traumatic event that supposedly precedes the symptoms of a repetition compulsion is not so secure, or as easily resolved as it might at first seem. Freud, in his analysis of trauma in hysterics, problematizes the originary status of a traumatic event by arguing that it was not necessarily a real historical experience *itself* that was traumatic, but the delayed revival of the event as a *memory* that is only retrospectively marked as traumatic (Freud 1886).

²¹ Perhaps, as the etymology of the Greek term *hysteria* (uterus) suggests it is my womb – as the site of my child-bearing legacy – that is the problem. A problem that might manifest as what doctors today call “somatoform disorder” where physical symptoms appear *without any known physical cause*, and result from a dysfunctional relationship with social manifestations of *reality, order and reason* (Schapira 1988). For Freud’s analysis of hysteria as a mode of protecting the patient from psychic stress, by, for example, allowing the sufferer to avoid an unpleasant experiences, see, for example, his “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1886) and also his Dora case study and co-authored *Studies in Hysteria* (1963 [1905]; Breuer and Freud 1974).

This temporal logic of what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* or “deferred action” produces, he argues, a dialectic between two events, the ‘real’ event and the event of its recollection, neither of which were *intrinsically* traumatic. This is a dialectic that produces confusion between whether it is the ‘inside’ or ‘outside,’ ‘self’ or ‘other’ that *causes* the trauma. The deferral marks, for Freud, a temporal delay – or interval – in which a memory is available *only* via a deferred act of unconscious interpretation that *then* represses the event that has been *inferred* as traumatic, for Freud suggests that “there are no ‘indications of reality’ in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect” (Freud 1985 [1887], 264).²² Therefore, the site of the trauma becomes obscured: perhaps it resides in the historical past, or perhaps in a fictive revival that narrates it in the present as traumatic.

Yet, perhaps, in the repetition of the ‘perhaps’ of the trauma, the trauma is of the perhaps ‘itself.’ The conditionality of the perhaps, the uncertainty of its designation is, perhaps, the very ‘dead zone’ of my trauma. Perhaps this trauma might *remain* repressed in the unconscious however often it may be repeated. Does this, perhaps, mark a trauma from the future that remains to come, a trauma of the *only* certainty: *the* end as death? Is it a death that, in not yet being present as certainty, appears in life only as a present uncertainty as a “monstrosity” and an “absolute danger” as Derrida suggests (1976, 5)? For what is being repeated seems to be an insecurity, what threatens *me* as ‘me’ is that this uncertainty may never be secured against, that it cannot be mastered, even in its naming, and that this names the death drive of the *autos* and thus of any possibility of my return to a healthy self. Might this death drive be produced in *every* defensive act as an autoimmunitary death drive? And, if so, how might *this* compulsive repetition be treated?

4.

Treatment II: Psychoanalysis Life Pleasure Death Pleasure Life

²² See also in this regard Laplanche and Pontalis’ work on the temporality of fantasy and sexuality (1986), and Leys’ *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000).

Before turning to Derrida's treatment of an autoimmune death drive I will consider a further Freudian psychoanalytic treatment of this strange and seemingly 'unnatural' logic of self-destruction. This Freudian treatment will attempt to return unpleasurable, painful, traumatic repetitions *back* to what he figures as an organism's "proper path": the pleasure principle, a principle that will be seen to refer not only to life but *also* to death. In Freud's structural account of the psyche – which comes to complicate and supplement my somatic account of illness – the id the ego and the super-ego are seen to mediate any relation to the body and to life (Freud 1935).²³ For Freud, the id (*das Es*) marks the non-phenomenal unconscious as the dark imperceptible location of the instincts, a strange 'archive' of repressed memories, and the primary site of the instinct for pleasure that seeks instant gratification in the release of these disturbing repressed excitations. The ego (*das Ich*) represents the conscious and preconscious aspect of the psyche that *wishes only for pleasure*.²⁴ Yet, the *Ich* must negotiate between the desire of the *Es* for instant gratification and the worldly reality in which this gratification might prove socially disruptive and thus unpleasurable. The *Ich* defends the psyche by 'sublimating' or transforming the instinct for pleasure into socially acceptable forms. The super-ego (*das Über-Ich*) further limits the pleasurable wishes of the *Ich* and the instincts of the *Es*, as it represents the psyche's conscience that seeks to align the subject to external moral norms; it is the *Über-Ich* that prevents the *Ich* from killing itself in the pursuit of pleasure. It is, therefore, the stability of the *Ich* that counts in Freud's account of the pleasure principle, for it is the *Ich* that negotiates between the world, the *Über-Ich* and the *Es*, and allows the psyche to achieve some form of sublimated pleasure. An *Ich* destabilized by the *Es* via the all too forceful return of the repressed, or limited too excessively by a guilty conscience or a worldly reality, produces neuroses, hysteria, psychoses and illness.

²³ The pain that my body experiences physically in the mechanisms of my autoimmune disease are not, I am suggesting caused wholly by a psychic disturbance, but rather that a psychic disturbance may supplement the discomfort of the body, in myriad undecidable ways.

²⁴ James Strachey's now accepted translation of Freud (in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*) translates the German *Es* (it), *Ich* (I), and *Über-Ich* (over- or above-I) as id, ego and super-ego. This translation, however, obscures the meaning of these terms in the German, I will therefore use continue to use the German when referring to these for reasons that will become clear.

I suggested above that John's traumatic repetition compulsion represents an excessive disturbance from the repressed memory of his trauma. This compulsion, in attempting to defend him retrospectively, disturbed his *Ich's* ability to sublimate, in a socially permissible manner, the instinct for pleasurable release of this excitation. This has made John sick through further disturbing his psyche. I also suggested that John might respond to this sickness by desiring a suicidal end to his suffering via a self-destructive act. However, according to Freud, "we cannot conceive how the ego [*das Ich*] can consent to its own destruction" for, in Freud's account, the *Ich* can *only* wish for pleasure and not self-destruction (2001 [1917], 252). What John wants to kill, or destroy, in Freud's terms, is not his *Ich* as such but a certain subjective-self – or "*Ich*-subject" (Smith 2010). John's subjectivity has been produced by the repetitive disturbances of social, political and biological realities that 'narrate' and unite the *Es*, *Ich*, and *Über-Ich* in a certain way. For John, this narration has produced a sick subject, and it is this that is treated as the *object* of his destructive wish, a destruction that is turned outwards by the *Ich*, in order that it may return to its own pleasurable path (252). John's seemingly suicidal desire appears, therefore in Freud's thinking, to be a desire for murder and not suicide. He wishes to kill the particular subject, self or *autos* (the *sui-* of suicide), which is manifested as *other* to *its own* pleasurable wish to release his trauma. Freud's *Ich* (ego) does not mean 'I myself' as the Latin *ego* is often translated into English (OED 1989), but an 'I' that exists without any stable 'self.' The ego, for Freud, is simply an apparatus that wishes for pleasure, it knows *only* this. In this psychoanalytic logic, the defence of 'the self' is shifted to a defence of the pleasure principle 'itself.'

Therefore, in Freud's analysis, pleasure – a pleasure that will cure psychic illnesses – is to be achieved not by returning the patients to themselves as such, but by relieving psychic tension via any available route. For Freud, that the psyche will take pleasure wherever it can be found results in it being open to suggestion that helps to guide the immanent repressed wishes of the *Es* towards their pleasurable release. Yet, Robert Rowland Smith has argued that it is not

only suggestion, as Freud suggests, to which the ‘*Ich*-subject’ is open. For Smith, it is also affected by persuasion, rhetoric and ideology in the “marketplace activity” that “barter” for sublimation as it competes with others for pleasure socially, politically and psychically (Smith 2010, 159).²⁵ In this reading, many multiple subjective-selves or ‘*Ich*-subjects’ can form as the psyche is *influenced* (and disturbed) by various ideological narratives. For John, (and, perhaps, for myself) it is the ‘ideological’ narrative of a stable self that has, in the past, produced and sustained a homeostasis in the experience of pleasure (the comforting narrative of a future suffused with pleasurable expectations of autonomy, fatherhood, and legacy – reason, cures and certainty). The disruption of this pleasurable ideology, which reveals an *unstable* self, produces psychic disturbance and unpleasure, and, for John, trauma, and illness. Therefore, in order that John may return to a pleasurable path it seems necessary for him to find this pleasure somewhere other than in the fabled security of the self – he requires a new *Ich*-subject to form and to negotiate with the world on behalf of his pleasurable instincts. However, John has become so attached to his libidinal desire for the role of the father – and the sovereign *ipseity* it confers – that he refuses to relinquish this concept of the self and instead repeats the unpleasure of its traumatic disturbance. Freud describes such a case of attachment in his analysis of the case of Wolf Man:

Any position of the libido which he [Wolf Man] had once taken up was obstinately defended by him from fear of what he would lose by giving it up and from distrust of the probability of a complete substitute being afforded by the new position that was in view. This is an important and fundamental psychological peculiarity, which I described [...] as a susceptibility to ‘fixation.’ (Freud 2001 [1918], 115)

²⁵ Suggestion, for Freud, is merely a mechanism that matches up with a repressed wish, and allows for its release, it therefore only ever allows for the release of a wish that *was already present* in the psyche. For Smith however, the psyche is also open to *persuasion* as a force that may alter the psychic balance *as well as, hopefully*, permitting the release of pleasure. I will return to this point in my reading of the Freudian death drive that follows.

John's fixation on his libidinal desire 'autoimmunely' condemns him to, and closes him within, an overactive defence of a certain ideology of selfhood that is unable to relieve his trauma. Yet, for Freud, this 'autoimmunity' is not inherent to the *Ich* 'itself,' the *autos* that is destroyed by the psyche's 'immune system,' is to be seen as *other* to the *Ich*'s pleasure-seeking self. In Freud's logic, the self that effects the psyche negatively is not the psyche *itself*, but the product of an ideological, rhetorical effect produced through an *external* narrative of the 'marketplace' that negotiates for a return to pleasure. It would be the task of psychoanalysis to help John's *Ich* find a substitute route through this external 'marketplace' to relieve his fixation on this *certain* self, and to satisfy his libidinal drive to achieve the pleasure of a restful quietude.

This psychoanalytic treatment treats autoimmunity by turning its destructive tendency outwards and away from the singular function of the psyche. Is there, therefore, no autoimmunity to be found here in the psyche? Is the psyche, as Freud seems to suggest, incapable of destroying itself so that an autoimmune self-induced death would be impossible for the psyche *itself*? In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1955), Freud "speculates" that, yes the psyche is incapable of destroying itself, but *also*, yes, it is capable of inducing its own death.²⁶ How are we to understand this strange claim? If the primary process of the psyche is the search for pleasure, and if pleasure is figured as a lack of unpleasure – so that it is affected by no external (or internal) disturbances as a peaceful state of restful quietude – then pleasure begins to look a lot like death. Death is not absent in Freud's psychic mechanism; instead it becomes its very goal. The uncertainty of an autoimmune self is replaced in Freud's psychic apparatus by the certainty of the psyche's *own proper* instinct – or drive – for pleasure. The repetitions of pleasurable release, give the vicissitudes of life as they detour around various worldly limitations, but "beyond the pleasure principle," they are ultimately driving towards a pleasurable quiet, undisturbed non-destructive death. The 'autoimmunity' that the psyche itself enacts is, therefore, not terrifying or

²⁶ The fact that Freud tempers his theory of the death drive by naming it as a "speculation" will prove significant in the analysis that follows here (1955, 24). The character of this thesis as a speculation is also taken up by Derrida in his essay 'To Speculate – on "Freud"' (1987b), I will turn to Derrida's deconstruction of Freud's death drive in the final section of this chapter.

traumatic, but known, comforting and pleasurable. Freud describes this death drive in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in the following way:

Every modification which is [...] imposed upon the course of the organism's life is accepted by the conservative organic instincts and stored up for further repetition. These instincts are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new. Moreover it is possible to specify this final goal of all organic striving. It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons – becomes inorganic again – then we shall be compelled to say that '*the aim of life is death*' and looking backwards, that '*inanimate things existed before living ones.*' (Freud 1955, 38 emph. Freud's)

Yet if, as Freud argues here, death is a necessity that "knows no exception" then why does he find in the psyche the need for a *drive* towards this death? This drive is required, according to Freud, because the psyche must "ward off" external *unknown* disturbances that would further defer its return to pleasure/death. The necessity of deathly pleasure is, therefore, *seen* by the psyche not as a necessity, but as a desired goal that is threatened by the external modifications of life. These modifications, as disturbances, are stored in the psychic archive in order to be repeated later through a pleasurable release when negotiations with external conditions permit. Therefore, self-preservative, self-asserting acts, for Freud, are not the 'masters' of the psyche, they are but "component instincts whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow

its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those that are *immanent in the organism itself*,” for the psychic organism wishes to die “only in *its own* fashion” (1955, 39 *emph. mine*). The psyche, therefore attempts to ward off new disturbances so that its old disturbances, which are immanent to it, can be released on *its own* path back towards death.

However, the logic of Freud’s psychic apparatus, seems to suggest that the organism must remain resolutely closed to *all* external forces: there can be no external force *as such*, for a disturbance that was truly foreign would not be recognised by it – the psyche knows *only* its own immanent drive for pleasure. Therefore, external modifications *as soon as they appear* would surely be incorporated into the psychic apparatus and repeated only in terms of their pleasurable release. Even when experienced as unpleasure – as in the case of trauma – repetitions are but a means of relieving internal tensions via a belated ‘inoculation’ that is but another manifestation of the pleasure principle. In the psyche all external forces would, therefore, be either wholly unknown to it or incorporated into its *one* sovereign drive: the pleasure principle as principal, and the death drive as its obscure master. Here we therefore encounter an ‘autoimmunitary’ act where a self-referential defensive act is necessarily, in all cases, the guardian of a pleasurable past to which it must inevitably return. Does this treatment of autoimmunity comfort the instability of the ‘self’ and the threatening character of death? Can autoimmune illness be reconfigured, not as fearful acceleration towards a future death but as a welcome return to it?

For Freud, the deferral of death as pleasure is produced via the modifications of life that are repeated and relieved as pleasure, a pleasure that is nothing other than the repetition of this earlier deathly pleasure of the inanimate. In Robert Rowland Smith’s words: “Put at its most tautologous: life, that is pleasure, seeks death, that is pleasure, that is life” (2010, 69). This Freudian flattening of terms within the One Master drive of psychic life removes all difference in the repetitions that defer death. For Freud, the “deceptive appearance” of change is in fact the *same* deferral of death, rather than a *deferral* of the same death. The

deception renders all difference within the psyche fictive, as Freud states: “there are no ‘indications of reality’ in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect” (Freud 1985 [1887], 264). Yet, if this is the case, then how is Freud able to suggest that the pleasure principle reveals the certain truth of an *unconscious* death drive that is “its own”? If the memory of a traumatic event exists not in external reality but as an immanent belated narration of this memory as traumatic, then wouldn’t the psyche exist always in a state of belief rather than certainty? And wouldn’t Freud’s own pleasure principle (that tells of the death drive) become but another uncertain fiction?

As Smith claims, in the fictive unconscious, the *Ich*-subject would be unable to gauge its own truth and would thus be capable of appropriating *all* fictions as ‘its own’ (160). This self-appropriation of the external disturbance *might* correspond to its desire to release ‘its own’ immanent excitations in order to return it to ‘its own’ death, but it could equally institute a completely new fiction that would encourage the *Ich*-subject to, for example, go to war, or to take a drug that is also as a poison. Would this new fiction be incorporated into the psyche’s own circuitous path back to death, or lead it towards a *new* radically destructive and autoimmune end? What would be the difference? The difference appears to be named by Freud as the difference between a comforting, proper and pleasurable death and a painful, improper destructive one. Yet, if all difference is but a deception, a fiction, or a narrative of the same, then as soon as an external disruption is ‘known’ to the psyche (as soon as it is effected by it and has thus incorporated it), there is no *real* difference to be found between the threat of destruction, and the immanent promise of relief from an external (now internal) threat. Destruction and pleasure would be rendered indifferent. There is, therefore, nothing to be risked in these repetitions of life, for life would be *sure* to return to a deathly inanimate state that could well destroy it, but this now immanent threat is *narrated* as *its own* comforting pleasurable end.

Except, of course, there is everything to be risked. For, the flattening of terms here has not resolved the fear of an autoimmune drive to death; it has merely

named the possibly ‘diseased’ and painful path that it follows as ultimately referring only to pleasure even amidst the worst pain. The psychoanalytic cure cures not the symptoms of illness – for symptoms could always return in every ‘deceptive’ repetition of a cure as an unpleasurable pleasure – it seems to merely relieve the trauma of its uncertainty by narrating its end to be a *certain* deathly pleasure that is never put at risk. And yet, even this goal appears not to be so secure. For, if life, that is pleasure, seeks death, that is pleasure, *that is life*, then does not the remainder of pleasure in death ‘risk’ returning to life? Might the minimal inanimate state of death, once ‘returned’ to, be modified by an unexpected, unforeseen external force to be once again deferred *differently*? Might Freud’s defensive deferral in fact mark, as Derrida claims in his reading of Freud, a *différential* defence, as a deferral *and* a differing of life-death ‘itself’ (Derrida 1972, 80-81)? Might Freud’s immune death itself be destructively autoimmune? And, indeed, might there still *remain* the threat of a *remainderless* death, one that would destroy *all*, but that cannot be repeated and relieved in a return to pleasure for it remains to come?

5.

The Dead Zone III

No Apocalypse

John was born in ideology. His *Ich*-subject has been persuaded, through the rhetorical devices of myriad narratives, to construct the ideology of a stable self. In bioscience (and the narratives of SNS and the organism), in language (*autos* as *ipseity*), in politics (the family, the nation the body-politic) and in literature and films (etc.), depictions and expectations of stability have assumed that a self-closed to the other will secure life, survival and pleasure. Incorporating this ideological modification of life into his own psyche, John repeats this now immanent disturbance as he seeks to return to death in his own fashion. Yet this peaceful path has been disturbed by an unexpected trauma that this *Ich*-subject finds impossible to relieve through the subject position of a powerful master, sovereign or father. In the marketplace where John’s *Ich* barter for some

sublimated pleasure, he has become fixated on the pleasure that the role of a sovereign-self *should* afford, no other path is deemed sufficient for John.

Awakening to a future out of joint, awakening in the wrong future, John is traumatized by the unexpected, unforeseen event. He repeats the trauma of the unexpected arrival of a new future in order to immunize himself against this threat. But in this narrative the desire to respond in the position of a powerful *knowing* sovereign-self paralyzes him. John's 'gift' of second sight cannot be exchanged as he would like, he is unable to barter for pleasure in the psychic, social or familial economies. This gift, in Derrida's terms, is a gift that refers to the character of a 'pure gift,' a gift, which *to be a gift* expects nothing in exchange. For, in Derrida's terms – in distinction to the traditional theorization of the gift²⁷ – to give in the proper sense of the word is to give with no intent of return, with no debt being incurred:

If there is gift, the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving (let us not already say to the subject, to the donor). It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. (Derrida 1992c, 7 emph. Derrida's)

The gift that John's trauma gives, speaks to this aneconomy of the pure gift, but it causes John's psychic economy to crash: The news of John's abilities soon becomes common knowledge in the community in which he lives and he is hounded. Letters keep coming, revealing to John a veritable glut of lack, he

²⁷ Derrida's intention in re-thinking the nature of the economy of the gift as aneconomic, is to deconstruct Marcel Mauss' anthropological theorization of the gift as a form of social exchange (1954), and to further critique Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural development of this into a unconscious and collective-symbolic exchange (1987); for Derrida, the gift, to be a gift can be exchanged neither openly nor unconsciously.

complains of continual pleas for him to use his psychic powers to recover “lost dogs, lost children, lost lives” all demanding he return the lost to a family who mourns them. But these letters never receive a response, for as we have seen, John has rendered himself incapable of response-ability in face of these losses; in wanting to know too much, in wanting *certainty*, he has produced an inability to respond, responsibly, and masterfully. Everything is already given so that John has nothing left to give.

Yet this is merely a *fictive* certainty that John needs to dispel in order to find an alternative route through which to relieve this trauma. He needs to interrupt his closed fixated psyche by welcoming a new narrative of self. In a consultation with his doctor, who while attempting to cure his ills, makes a suggestion: “you are killing yourself,” the hospitable doctor says. And this suggestion, I suggest, corresponds perhaps to John’s repressed wish to ‘kill’ the self that has so fixated him, to relieve him of the repetition of his unexchangeable gift. And this is no sooner said than done. In his next vision John is *given* something else to ‘see’: “In the vision there was something else – something *I couldn’t see*... A blank spot, a dead zone.” Having accepted an alternative position of an unstable suicidal-self, John now sees an instability, and an uncertainty in the future, something that *isn’t necessary*, the gift of a secret. This ‘gift’ of an impossible undecidable ‘dead zone’ to which John now is in relation is not in Derrida’s words an

ineffable exteriority that would be transcendent and without relation. It is this exteriority that sets the circle going, it is this exteriority that puts the economy in motion. It is this exteriority that engages in the circle and makes it turn. (Derrida 1992c, 30)

The gift that John receives from this dead zone, is no longer a gift of knowledge, but a gift of the unknown, of the *secret*, a gift – a *present* – that in being ‘present,’ annuls the pure gift that requires no response, for its very presence necessitates a response (1992c, 13). However then, of course, in this logic, John’s gift has *always* been present – it has been known and at work in his

psyche and in this narrative – and he has *always* already been responding to it giving the very narrative we have been following. However, John had repressed the secret, denied, and suppressed it, and in doing so had paralysed himself, making himself sick. In relieving this repressed trauma John, *sees* that he is able to alter this future and *accept* the arrival of the unforeseen event. This uncertainty is no longer terrifying for John, for he has ‘immunized’ himself against the perceived threat of the unforeseen future via his compulsive repetitions. What he instead sees in this zone of undecidability is a promise, a promise of the possibility of relief, and release, as he now works to answer the demands made on him by his debt invoked by the community’s hospitality, as he works to employ his gift in exchange for pleasure while, hopefully, following his *own* path back to death.

The narrative of *The Dead Zone* is performing its own death drive towards its end in its own fashion.²⁸ John’s final act of prophetic seeing, as we have already foreseen, sees the coming of a nuclear apocalypse, and, in light of this vision, John’s tale can now be seen to be repeating the Hollywood trope of an heroic end. For, while being open to suggestion (suggestions that corresponds to his repressed wishes), John is also open to other more *persuasive* influences that also affect his path. John has been infected by the ideological narrative of heroism, and this is an ideology that takes him all the way to his death.

What is it that John sees in this vision? He sees the autoimmune destructiveness of his own life translated into the political and military sphere. He sees a candidate for senator (a popularist neofascist politician) in a future where, as President of the United States, he attacks his enemies by detonating an atomic bomb. But this attack not only attacks his enemies, in a chain reaction it attacks and destroys the very possibility of the survival of life on the planet. He, the one with the power, the sovereign head of the most powerful nation in the world, secures the narrative of his own power by *destroying* the whole world. The repetition of this narrative of the one sovereign power, immune to the other – to

²⁸ See Nicolas Royle’s chapter ‘The Death Drive’ in *The Uncanny: An Introduction* for an analysis of how the death drive functions within narratives (2002, 84-102).

all others – has only this end in its sights as it is repeated in the narratives of politics and war. Absolute immunity without the any other would be death ‘itself.’ Our own ‘St John of the Apocalypse,’ foresees this nuclear apocalypse, a *blinding* flash of light as revelation. This threat demands a response, and, as he is now free to act in light of this now *uncertain* knowledge, and as he repeats heroic narrative conventions, he sets out to employ his gift responsibly. In one final suicidal act he assassinates the senator in a pre-emptive strike and he saves the whole world from a *final* destructive and unpleasurable death.

In this seemingly ‘self-destructive’ act, has John in fact followed only his own proper pleasurable path to death by revealing and releasing his archived excitations, or was his a death that was destructive, manipulated externally by ideologies of self-sacrifice? What would be the difference? In my analysis of John’s illness we have seen have encountered a repeated effort to render the unknown known, which effects a closure of the psyche to the unknown. This knowledge has been seen to affect a pathology but also a cure. Psychoanalytic treatment is an art of illumination; it attempts to find a means of releasing repressed memories by ‘bringing them to light.’ Yet this is not always possible, as for Freud too there is a dead zone of the dream, vision or hallucination: “There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure [...]. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown” (Freud 1954 [1900], 525). In the deepest recesses of the unconscious *Es*, there is no phenomenal access, and this uncertainty renders each analytic interpretation uncertain, its meaning fluid, and its diagnosis inexact. Indeed my analysis may have been inexact: John’s compulsive repetitions may have been repeating not his awakening to a future out of joint, but the machinic repetitive respiration of his coma, or his car crash, or his infantile sexual rejection, his loss of his birth mother, or his response to the host, or indeed *anything* – the analyst cannot know for this memory might remain a fictive element hidden in the archival recesses of the unconscious. What is perceptible is only a symptom of an unknown cause.

Yet, even this navel of the unknown, which “has to be left obscure” gives birth to an ‘illumination’ as Freud posits the necessity of a drive to death that is ‘revealed’ by the mechanisms of the pleasure principle. In thus removing the radicality of the unknown, in making it a known unknown, Freud removes all of its terror. We are prepared in advance for a teleological future that is but a return to the past – even if via unexpected and *seemingly* destructive paths. Freud therefore removes the terribleness of the autoimmune act, as the psyche attacks itself *for* itself. What we are therefore left with in Freud is, perhaps, a *fear* of an unpleasant life, but this fear is treated with the teleology of a comforting death.

Yet, this ‘revelation’ of the death drive *is* still obscure, it is an unproven, unknown speculation on Freud’s part. For even when John employs his gift and *gives himself death*, this death is not as final as it might seem. His responsible exchange of gifts, which seek to repay his debts, leaves a remainder in a legacy of the whole world. John’s death leaves a remainder of both pleasure and unpleasure: his life is narrated in the news: the tale of a man with disturbed mind, the unknown assassin, the good man gone bad – for he killed an innocent man for *no known reason*. So that even in death John lives on, populating these living narratives that are to be repeated again.

What remains of John’s death is a series of questions to which Derrida gives voice:

How does one give [death] to oneself in the sense that putting oneself to death means dying while assuming responsibility for one's own death, committing suicide but also sacrificing oneself for another, *dying for the other*, thus perhaps giving one's life by giving oneself death, accepting the gift of death, such as Socrates, Christ, and others did in so many different ways? [...] How does one give oneself death in that other sense in terms of which *se donner la mort* [to give oneself death] is also to interpret death, to give oneself a representation of it, a figure, a signification or destination for it? [...] What is the relation

between *se donner la mort* and sacrifice? Between putting oneself to death and dying for another? What are the relations among sacrifice, suicide, and the economy of this gift? (Derrida 1995b, 10 emph. Derrida's)

An answer to these questions would be an answer that answers by revealing nothing. Perhaps, one can give oneself death only autoimmunely: an autoimmune *autos* and an autoimmune death, give both the other in the self, death in life and life in death. Perhaps the relation between sacrifice, suicide, and the economy of the gift is an autoimmune relation in which each term becomes uncertain and risked. Perhaps the death drive is always destructive, perhaps it infects all repetitions. Perhaps, what John doesn't see in the dead zone, what is radically unknown and unknowable in the blinding flash of the apocalypse, reveals *nothing*, no apocalypse, not now. Now only a painful repetition of an uncertainty that promises no necessary comfort, but rather persuades and dissuades on its aporetic path. Perhaps the comfort of the Freudian death drive represses the trauma that remains unknown and unknowable, a trauma that could come only monstrously and cannot be protected against for it remains to come.

Interval
(please)

In the interval *my own* physiological and psychological death drive continues on a path towards a death that will have been mine alone. This is a death I appear to be giving to myself – consciously or otherwise – as a projection, a destination, and a suicidal inevitability. In light of this death and in light of the unpleasurable path on which I travel, comfort seems desirable indeed. A little pleasure, or relief would be welcome. Yet, in light of the distracting narratives of autoimmunity and its (autoimmune) treatments I have been following it has been suggested that there is a need to relieve myself of a fixation on a stable-self, or of a certain future to achieve any relief. Could a new more uncertain, less

teleological path be found for me to follow, one that doesn't threaten worse? Some doctors suggest a path for me to follow.

Although, Burnet's theory of self-non-self (SNS) immunology dominated the field of immunity for the latter half of the twentieth century, a challenge to this assumptive incorporation of the philosophical *autos* within a biological 'self' was proposed by Niels Jerne as early as 1974 (Jerne 1974). Rather than seeing the immune system as distinguishing between self and other, Jerne posits an immune system that is essentially self-reactive and interconnected. For Jerne, the responses of attack or tolerance that the immune system enacts depends not on intrinsic foreignness but on context. In Jerne's theory there can be no foreignness as such, for if a substance were truly foreign it would not be recognised at all by the immune system. Therefore, the immune system forms an ecological structure that draws the environment (the outside/the other) into its definition as a system that knows only itself – itself which is, therefore, already also other to itself (Tauber 2008). Because each and every response the immune system makes can only react to itself, the autoimmunity, or auto-reactivity, of the immune system thus comes to be seen as a normal physiological function that serves a key role in maintaining the organism. Autoimmunity in this account, is not necessarily destructive, but marks an essential component of the survival of the organism. However, unlike in my reading of Freud's psychic presentation of this structural topology, this incorporation does not render the 'other' of the environment the same as the 'self' to become absorbed within the one 'self-preservative' drive of pleasure (self-preservation of pleasure not the 'self' that is). Instead, the immune system responds to constantly differing internal conditions that defer the stability of its terms and which can both threaten *and* preserve its function.

Jerne's theory was met with strong resistance by the proponents of SNS immunology (who have remained fixated on the stability of the metaphor of a biological self) and it is not until recently that this alternative treatment of autoimmunity in the biosciences has gained prominence. Following this logic, Polly Matzinger has established a 'danger model' of the immune system. Here

the immune system responds to local events that signal ‘danger’ not due to their foreignness but due to a quantitative change *within* the organism that exists in a continuum of auto-reactivity (Matzinger 1994; 2002). Thus, the organism can attack what is construed by traditional immunology as self if this ‘self’ is seen to be threatening. Therefore, in this analysis, danger and destruction are internal to the system and life is lived in a permanent state of fluid, unpredictable vulnerability.²⁹ Could this opening of the ‘self’ to include the ‘other’ of the environment within its systemic function – so that threat, danger and otherness as well as maintenance, process and self, is seen as internal – effect a more productive paradigm to consider the relation to the self in autoimmunity? Could the internal threat that differs and defers the presence of the self be embraced?

What the instability of the biological ‘self’ gives me to think is a position where ‘not knowing’ with certainty whether a substance is threatening in advance, not knowing if it is ‘internal’ or ‘external’ does not terrify, trouble or disturb the system, it rather gives the possibility of learning something new. What is new in this uncertain logic is the possibility of learning to treat the organism’s ills not simply in terms of its physiological effects, but also in regards to the environment in which this organism lives, an environment that can be seen to affect and treat its afflictions. In light of this new bioscientific logic, illness must also be thought ‘ecologically’ so that it is not merely a question of cells, tissues and their interactions, but also a question of personal, political, and philosophical narratives and materials in which symptoms take on their significance and are directly or indirectly effected. Can this bioscientific reconfiguring of autoimmunity as a necessary *good* that maintains life, suggest a more open, fluid, treatment of its physiological and psychic effects? Can I find here a new, more pleasurable treatment for my excessive autoimmunitary reactions that promises something better than painful side effects, trauma or a teleological and irresponsible death?

²⁹ However, a question remains here as to what happens to the concept of the other and its *unknowability* once the self is enlarged to incorporate the other as known. Whether this immunological narrative simply refigures and enlarges the concept of self, without fully deconstructing it will be discussed in detail in following chapter in relation to systems theory.

To treat my uncertain symptoms I decide to try an alternative, complementary, supplementary medicine: homeopathy. Homeopathy treats illness by instituting a highly diluted preparation of a substance that would cause the same symptoms in the organism (an ‘other’ that is the ‘same’). Rationally and scientifically this paradoxical treatment should not work given that the process of dilution usually removes from the homeopathic remedy all pharmacologically active molecules (Ernst 2005). And yet, in many cases it does appear to work. It works because it treats not through pharmacology but through an ‘ecology’ that influences and *persuades* via environmental influences that effect the brain, mind and body. The bioscientist Edzard Ernst says:

I still think homeopathy works, the question is: why? After years of research, I think the answer now is conclusive. It works because of a very long empathic consultation. It's a powerful placebo effect. (Ernst qtd in Cohen 2011, n.p.)

Homeopathy works, Ernst suggests, through the power of persuasion, though belief and suggestion, which marks the calming, pleasing effect of the placebo. A placebo – literally meaning ‘I shall please’ in Latin – functions to lessen tensions through “long empathic consultations” – an analysis of sorts. This ‘analysis’ produces physiological effects as the brain “buys into the bogus treatment” releasing opiates that diminish the ‘danger signals’ in the body and therefore also any (auto)immune reaction (Callaway 2009). But it also produces personal, subjective and psychological effects that act to dilute the definition of illness as a stable scientifically objective pathology. Here autoimmune illness is itself autoimmune, the very concept of illness can come to mark an unstable, context specific construct that need not always refer to a negative experience, but rather one that provides new ways of thinking about the body, illness, and the world in which they ‘live.’ The uncertain self, and the uncertain treatment of the autoimmunity can be narrated in a manner that ‘pleases,’ distracts, and comforts while not determining anything in advance.

Yet, even with the assurance of other, broader, more promising and less painful treatments, there remains a profound risk to be found here, for a pleasure that is not determined in advance must necessarily retain this risk. The long sustained treatment of my homeopathic consultation, the persuasive effects it has on the body and the person, could ignore or distract from the threat of unexpected, unconscious and invisible results of this treatment. What if the placebo effect treats only my pain and thus serves only to obscure the life-threatening physiological effects of the still progressing illness? What if the ‘doctor’s’ suggestions suggest that homeopathy could cure an incurable disease and lead me all the way to death? What if, that is, the future to come contains as much threat as pleasure in its promise? My final treatment of autoimmunity in this chapter, will explore how Derrida’s deconstructive use of autoimmunity functions as a certain ‘homeopathic’ treatment, and as a “long empathic consultation,” which deconstructs the pleasure of the placebo – and the pleasure of distracting, influential, narratives, fictions and in general – to open them all once again to the terror of the worst autoimmune event, a terror that is paradoxically seen by Derrida to be necessary and irrepressible if there is to be any future life, or pleasure at all.

6.

Treatment III: Homeopathy Autoimmune Death Drive

The more I research the character, mechanisms, and effects of autoimmunity – the more I *learn* about this condition – the more I see autoimmunity to be at work everywhere. The more painful, disturbing, and distressing the experience of autoimmunity appears to be, the more it is experienced as a threat to life, health, and pleasure, and *the more I foresee a need to protect against* its pernicious effects on my life and my death. And yet, every decision I take in an effort to provide a protective treatment only appears to repeat the autoimmunitary act. The decisions I have taken to treat autoimmunity with bioscientific reason, with psychoanalytic theory, or with distracting narratives of pleasurable resolution, have indicated that these decisions have lacked any power

to secure the ‘self’ against that which threatens it. The sovereign, powerful, autonomous, decision produces, each time, unexpected, and often unwanted, results. For Derrida, the “undecidability” within every sovereign decision marks the *deconstructive* force of autoimmunity:

[The decision] is where the cruel autoimmunity with which sovereignty is affected begins, the autoimmunity with which sovereignty at once sovereignly affects and cruelly infects itself. Autoimmunity is always, in the same time without duration, cruelty itself, the autoinfection of all autoaffection. It is not some particular thing that is affected in autoimmunity but the self, the *ipse*, the *autos* that finds itself infected. As soon as it needs heteronomy, the event, time and the other. (Derrida 2005, 109)

The event of the decision *requires* the *autos*, or *ipse* – the powerful, self-determining sovereign – to affect itself, by opening itself and infecting itself with, the ‘other.’ An ‘other’ that defers *and* differs self-presence, deconstructing the self’s ability to decide rendering each decision’s effects unknown and therefore undecidable. Autoimmunity, in Derrida’s usage, appears therefore to be yet another name for what he calls “deconstruction.”³⁰ Yet, in Michael Naas’ words: “whereas ‘deconstruction’ often lent itself to being (mis)understood as a ‘method’ or ‘textual strategy’ aimed at disrupting the self-identity of a text or concept [...] ‘autoimmunity’ appears to name a process that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere” (Naas 2008, 124). Derrida himself, suggests that his addition of the term ‘autoimmunity’ to his deconstructive lexicon provides a means for him to both address the *unconscious* “perversions” of deconstruction (2005, 110), and to situate “the question of life and the living being, of life and death, of life-death, at the heart of [his] remarks” (123).³¹

³⁰ As I showed in the introduction Derrida suggests that autoimmunity shares the deconstructive force of other deconstructive terms such as *pharmakon*, *aporia*, and *double bind* (2005, 35). And we could add to these the different but comparable terms *trace*, *cinder*, *bêtise*, *supplement* etc.

³¹ In Derrida’s reading of Deleuze’s distrust of psychoanalysis in “The Transcendental “Stupidity” (“Bêtise”) of Man and The Becoming-Animal According to Deleuze” he appears to open the logic of self-destructive-defence that pertains to autoimmunity not only to the psychoanalytic unconscious but also to the non-conscious: “One doesn’t need the word

Autoimmunity, therefore, comes to name, for Derrida, a certain unconscious and inevitable auto-infection of life with death, to mark a death drive which is at the heart of life 'itself' (1994, 51; 2003, 96; 2005, 55). This is a death drive that doesn't just affect the bodies of texts or psychic systems, but also political institutions, nation-states and discourses.³² Including, therefore, the discourse of illness and the practice of its treatment.

If autoimmunity were not at work in each and every decision, and in each and every defensive or resistive act, then the immunity of the One (body, *autos*, discourse...) would close it to every other, to produce, as we have seen, an extreme form of isolation. John's closure to the radical alterity of what Derrida calls the future 'to come,' as an *unforeseeable* future, produces a powerlessness of the decision and of sovereign *ipseity*. John is able only to follow a programme, and thus does not, in Derrida's words "engage any decision, or any responsibility worthy of these names," he has attempted to immunize himself against the autoimmunity – the undecidability – of the decision (2003, 155). Just as Freud's closure of the psyche to this radical alterity produces a programmatic, pleasureable death that ignores the responsibility of responding to the destructiveness that nonetheless appears to reside there. And just as my physiological closure in an overactive immunization produces, paralysis, pain and isolation. Yet, this closure – this immunity to autoimmunity – is, of course, itself autoimmune. It is but a fictive, ideological construct that inevitably destroys itself as it defends itself. Rejecting or killing the other – an other that is necessary to the survival (*sur-vivance*) of health, pleasure and life – is to be seen, in each and every conscious and unconscious decision, to risk the destruction of the deciding self. The stronger this reaction against this other is, all the stronger

"unconscious" or any theoretical or metapsychological construction – the I, the id, the super-ego [...]. It is enough, a minimal condition, that we take into account the divisibility, multiplicity, or difference of forces in a living being, whatever it may be. It is enough to admit that there is no finite living being, human or nonhuman, that wouldn't be structured by this differential of forces between which a tension, if not a contradiction, cannot not locate or be located in different *instances*, apparatuses if you will, one resisting others" (Derrida 2007, 58-59). Derrida's aim here is to open the 'autoimmune' relation of "*bêtise*" not only to the human unconscious but to the unconscious of animals and other living beings. I will be pursuing the question of 'the animal' in regards to autoimmunity in Chapter Two.

³² Derrida uses the deconstructive valence of autoimmunity to deconstruct the discourses, texts and concepts of religion and teletechnology (1998a), September 11 and the "war on terror" (2003), and democracy (2005).

may be the effects of its rebound on the self – as we have seen in the limit case of the annihilation of the other in the discourse of nuclear war, an annihilation that threatens to also annihilate the annihilator *himself*.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter (29) Derrida defines autoimmunity as the biological process where a living being “‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (2003, 94 *emph. Derrida's*), it works, by “protecting itself against its self-protection by *destroying its own immune system*” (1998a, 73 n.27 *emph. mine*). Derrida’s definition of autoimmunity therefore signals immediately its deconstructive potential of opening bodies to others. Yet, as I have already noted, the bioscientific literature seems to suggest that Derrida’s definition is inexact, for autoimmunity, it tells us, “can affect various systems of the body” attacking any of its tissue constituents – it rarely attacks the immune system *itself* (Lahita 2011). Does Derrida’s seeming misrepresentation of autoimmunity mark a forced translation of a biomedical term into a deconstructive one? Or does this perhaps mark an intentional move on Derrida’s part to name each and every constituent part of a body as both defensive and offensive, so that *every* constituent of *every* body comes to be inscribed within an (auto)immunitary logic that always opens each ‘one’ to its ‘other’?³³ Whether or not this was a conscious decision of Derrida’s, the result is a representation of autoimmunity that seems to break its ties with its biological origin and the question arises of why to use this biomedical term ‘autoimmunity’ at all (Haddad 2004, 39).

But *does* Derrida’s definition in fact break its ties with the biological meaning, or merely with the traditional SNS definition of immunology? We could, perhaps, read Derrida’s definition as an analogy of Jerne’s contextual, ecological immune

³³ Samir Haddad has also addressed this discrepancy in Derrida’s definition, but he finds this discrepancy problematic (2004). If, as seems to be the case, Derrida’s definition opens every part of a system to being a part of its defensive system, then, Haddad claims, in Derrida’s reading of politics and democracy in *Rogues*, we would find the political to become a “militarized totality” (40). This would represent, for Haddad, a political system without much promise (39). For Haddad, this logic removes the specificity of Derrida’s attack on the defensive structures of the military, police and politics. However, it seems to me that Derrida is attempting to open the promise and the threat of the autoimmune beyond these defensive powers in a move that confers on *all* a responsibility to act and react to the risks of autoimmunity in the political – or indeed any – system.

system. For Jerne and Matzinger, the immune system knows only itself, it reacts only to itself so that auto-reactivity – or autoimmunity – becomes a normal and ubiquitous process. In knowing only itself, all ‘others’ are absorbed into the ‘self’s’ immunitary function. Each cell can ‘defend’ the body by maintaining a ‘normal’ non-threatening function, or ‘attack’ the body by disturbing its function. In this sense then every attack would both ‘attack’ and ‘defend’ the immune system ‘itself.’ Therefore, what both the philosopher Derrida, and the bioscientist Jerne permit in their definitions of autoimmunity, is an opening to the other that *maintains* life, promising a continually evolving relation between self and other, security and threat. This definition of autoimmunity produces, as we have seen, alternative ways of thinking, treating, and living in relation to an ‘other’ that is now ‘*within,*’ ways which break with the presumption that this inherent instability is *necessarily* threatening.

This life sustaining character of autoimmunity is clear in Derrida’s reading of the term, it is that which permits the very possibility of novelty, progress and perfectibility:

autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes [...]. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event. (2005, 152)

And yet, this treatment of autoimmunity that seems to lessen the threat of its seemingly destructive mechanism and render it both necessary and even desirable, is incomplete in Derrida’s reading. Derrida’s use of the term autoimmunity is nearly always qualified with adjectives such as ‘terrifying,’ ‘terrible,’ and ‘cruel,’ for example: in “Faith and Knowledge”: “this terrifying but inescapable logic of the autoimmunity of the unscathed” (1998a, 73), in “The Animal that Therefore I am”: “this terrible (and always possible) perversion” (2002d, 415), and in *Rogues*: “the law of a terrifying and suicidal autoimmunity” (2005, 18). The inflection of terror that Derrida brings to

deconstruction with his use of the term autoimmunity marks what seems to be a significant shift in rhetoric. Why might Derrida want to highlight the terror of the deconstructive moment, rather than inflecting deconstruction with a promise of better?

Perhaps firstly, because the disruption of an *assumed* security can always be experienced as unexpected, disturbing, and therefore terrifying: when diagnosed with my autoimmune condition the stability of my body, my decisions, and acts had gone previously unquestioned, so that the perceived loss of this security traumatized my own sense of psychological and physiological self-awareness. Secondly, because, when this disruption occurs, the seemingly ‘natural’ response to treat the affliction and re-secure the self, only repeats the insecurity it attempts to remedy: when this assumption of sovereign power is seen to be at work in the political and military spheres the responsive autoimmune results can be foreseen to be accumulatively catastrophic on a global scale. But thirdly, this deconstructive autoimmunity is terrifying because, like the threat of nuclear apocalypse in the cold war era, *one should have seen it coming*.³⁴ The insecurity of my *autos*, my decisions, and my body was *always already* present: in the narratives of science, I have seen this insecurity to have already been at work, in the Freudian logic of the psyche – the paradox of self-defensive destruction was already in play. The mediation of the other has *always* brought the other within me. I could have, and perhaps should have, foreseen and prepared for the arrival of the always immanent and imminent autoimmune event that so terrified me.

But worse than this, according to Derrida, the autoimmune deconstructive moment marks a necessary terror, for the threat that it marks comes not from the ‘other’ *within* the ‘self’ but from the radical alterity of the unforeseeable future to come. This terror arises from an (unconscious) ‘knowledge’ that there is something that cannot be immunized against for it lies outside of all knowledge.

³⁴ In Derrida’s analysis of autoimmunity in “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides” this terror of not having foreseen an already immanent threat marks one of the many autoimmune moments of the terrorist attacks of September 11. Here, Derrida suggests, one could have foreseen the threat if one had been attentive to the historical effects of the cold war, and other terrorist events that were visible prior to this date (2003, 91).

As we have seen in Derrida's reading of the nuclear apocalypse, there is a remainder that remains to come in the threat of the worst event. What remains to come here is the pure event, the absolute worst event that would be *nothing*. This would be the remainderless destruction of *every* thing, every trace of life: an absolute unconditional immunity against every other, for there there would be no other; the absolute gift that gives without requiring a response, for there there would be no one and no thing to respond; the absolutely secure death that would be nothing. This is the 'threat' that remains to come. But, for Derrida, what autoimmunity gives us to 'see' is worse than the threat of nuclear apocalypse. What is worse than this threat, what is even more terrifying, is the traumatic knowledge that the threat of the worst event may not come from the *foreseen* event of nuclear war. It may not be foreseen at all, and therefore it may not be warded off through discourse, diplomacy, or a hero's pre-emptive strike. What autoimmunity give us to 'see,' in Derrida's reading, is that every event, decision, system, or discourse is open not only to the 'other' that is within life and that maintains and creates more life, but to the radical alterity of the unknown other whose effects could precipitate the very worst event, unexpectedly and catastrophically. This radical alterity is, therefore, to be paradoxically located *within* every decision and every autoimmune act, that undecidably enact the arrival of the unforeseen event.³⁵ It is this that traumatizes the unconscious for Derrida:

We are talking about a trauma, and thus an event, whose temporality proceeds neither from the now that is present nor from the present that is past but from an im-presentable to come (*à venir*). A weapon wounds and leaves forever an unconscious scar; but this weapon is terrifying because it comes from the to-come, from the future, a future so radically to come that it resists even the grammar of the future anterior. (Derrida and Borradori 2003, 97)

³⁵ As Derrida suggests: "the most irreducible source of absolute terror, the one that, by definition, finds itself most defenseless before the worst threat would be the one that comes from 'within,' from this zone where the worst 'outside' lives with or within 'me'" (2003, 188 n.7).

Because this trauma comes from the future to come, no matter how often it is repeated, no knowledge of it can be secured, no belated expectation or preparedness can immunize against it once and for all. Each time this trauma repeats itself, it repeats itself anew, differently, in an always unforeseen and uncertain arrival of the event in all its possible monstrosity. And yet, worse: the arrival of the event, and thus the possible coming of the worst event, may not even be perceptible. Autoimmunity, in being at work everywhere, in opening every moment to the event from the future to come, unconsciously produces events where the “worst can simultaneously appear insubstantial, fleeting, light, and so seem to be denied, repressed, indeed forgotten, relegated to being just one event among others” (99) and “our unconscious is already aware of this; it already knows it, and that’s what’s scary” (102). Any treatment of an autoimmune trauma, any analysis that seeks to relieve its effects, could only ever risk the arrival of another, possibly worse event, unforeseen, and perhaps unseen. Any effort to make the threat of the event to come known, so that it may be treated, would only produce a fictive pretence that this event is over and done with, that it can be mourned for, archived in the unconscious – or in the narratives, discourses and logics – of life, to be relieved and overcome through its repetitious pleasurable release. It would only repress the unconscious knowledge that this trauma can and will repeat itself, again unexpectedly:

all these efforts to attenuate or neutralize the effect of the traumatism (to deny, repress, or forget it, to get over it) are but so many desperate attempts. And so many autoimmunitary movements. Which produce, invent, and feed the very monstrosity they claim to overcome. (99)

Yet, could the trauma of the future to come, in repeating only an unforeseeable event, not promise the arrival of a happy, and pleasureable event as much as an unpleasurable, terrifying one? Indeed, Derrida admits that, of course, it can and must, for the repetitions of this trauma are the very repetitions of life ‘itself’ (96). However, once the unexpected arrival of a *threatening* event has been archived in the memory, in the narratives and discourses of life, once it has been rendered

conscious and known and repeated as such, then the repetitious appearance of the event to come can come to be inflected with a promise of worse to come. That Derrida employs the term ‘autoimmunity’ from the archive of bioscientific terminology, immediately locates the deconstructive problematic within the terms of defence and attack and, therefore, the sense of threat and terror are never far away. As my own bones archive the effects of an autoimmune event, or as my diagnosis affects my very sense of what is ‘mine,’ then narratives of loss, pain and unpleasure are constructed and are themselves archived to be repeated again. Such narratives mediate my relation to the future, to produce *expectations* of an unknown event (my death) – one which is narrated as fearful and threatening. Amidst the complementary therapy of my placebo treatment I come to imagine only worse events – an ignored illness an obscured threat; amidst the psychoanalytic therapy I see not a pleasurable path to death, but an unknown painful and unpleasurable one; and in the biomedical treatment I imagine side-effects, infections, or worse. In locating itself *within* this archive of painful autoimmunity effects, the terror Derrida marks in the autoimmune opening to the future to come appears to become truly *petrifying*. How does one act at all in the light of this threatened autoimmune paralysis that refers, perhaps always, to a terrifying future to come?

Homeopathy

The archive that has constructed this terrifying relation to the future to come is the archive of an illness. It is the archive of an immune system which learns, incorporates, and treats the other by absorbing and/or attacking the ‘other’ as ‘self,’ conserving and repeating this knowledge for a future that *will have been* sick. It is the psychic archive of memories that remain and repeat themselves in the name of a future ‘return’ to death. It is the biography and the autobiography that learns and writes the technical histories of science and the narratives of illness. But this is an autoimmune archive, one which is itself ill, *mal d’archive* in Derrida’s words – an ‘ill,’ ‘hurt or ‘evil’ archive, a ‘poorly archived’ archive – or, as Derrida’s book of this name is translated by Eric Prenowitz, an “archive fever.” In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996), Derrida turns his

deconstructive analysis to the notion of archiving with regard to memory, materiality, and technicity, an archiving of the past for the future, an archiving which is public and accessible, open to ‘discovery,’ but one that refers also to an autoimmune death drive. The archive’s fever inflames it, and agitates it: in my bodily, material, autoimmune archive this inflammation creates a monument of my bones as the inflammation carves them into stone, an enduring and memorable marker of pain and disease that refers to a certain future; in Freud’s psychic archive death is the enduring monument archived in a past to which it seeks to return to in the future, through its re-discovery. But, in Derrida’s reading of the archive’s ‘feverishness,’ this fever causes an agitation that is “anarchic” and “*archivolithic*” (2004, 10).

As we have seen in Freud’s account of the death drive, the cruelty, suffering and destruction – which I have archived in my analysis of autoimmunity – refers the autoimmune act not to a destruction of *itself*, but to, in Derrida’s words: “a suffering that would *play at enjoying* the suffering of a making-suffer or a making-oneself-suffer *for the pleasure of it*” (2002c, 240 *emph. mine*). The death drive’s drive to destruction, its cruelty and suffering, *appear* in Freud’s archive only as pleasure, the death drive *itself* never appears as such, it, in Derrida’s words, “operates in silence” leaving only its “erotic simulacrum” (2004, 11).³⁶ And yet, Derrida finds in psychoanalysis a discourse that signals an opening to a “beyond of the beyond of the pleasure principle” (2002c, 241). For Derrida, psychoanalysis is the one exemplary discourse that opens itself to this ‘beyond of the beyond,’ for psychoanalysis opens to the unknown, the unconscious, the non-phenomenal ‘elsewhere,’ which itself has no elsewhere: “Psychoanalysis [...] would be another name for the ‘without alibi’” (2002c, 240). What psychoanalysis gives us to think, in Derrida’s reading, is an alibi that is ‘without alibi,’ without an elsewhere of destruction, suffering and cruelty that

³⁶ For Derrida, Freud’s death drive remains resolutely separate from the pleasure principle, Derrida says that it is ‘mute’ (*stumm*), as it never appears as itself, only in the guise of the pleasure principle (Derrida 2004, 10). See Robert Rowland Smith’s criticism of what he sees to be Derrida’s over hasty reading, for Smith this silence of the death drive remains for Freud only a hypothesis – and not a very likely one at that (2010, 94-95). However, Freud’s professed uncertainty does not appear to render Derrida’s reading inexact, but rather to confirm the uncertainty that the pleasure principle is principle and that the death drive and its destructive impulses remain external to the pleasure principle itself.

would only refer to themselves “before any knowledge, before any theory and any practice, even before any therapeutic” (240). For in the radical alterity of the unconscious, nothing can be known, its radical non-presence has no presence at all, ‘beyond’ the pleasure principle and thus ‘beyond’ the death drive is the nonplace of death itself, cruelty itself, evil and ill itself. Psychoanalysis might be the exemplary discourse which opens its archive to this unconscious (non-conscious) space of death without alibi, of a death *to come*; but, Derrida suggests, it does not represent the only means of treating the cruelty, destruction, or evil that appear when the pleasure principle, and the death or sovereign mastery drives work elsewhere in its name (240).

Following Kelly Oliver, I suggest that Derrida’s deconstructive treatment of the archive, of immunity, the self, of life and of death, marks a certain ‘homeopathic remedy,’ a remedy that treats pathogenic symptoms with a version of the very symptom it seeks to neutralise (Oliver 2009). The beyond of the beyond that Derrida finds in psychoanalysis’ unconscious, or in the future to come of the apocalypse without apocalypse, or in each and every archive, marks the elsewhere of an unconditional purity of the name – the name death, evil, gift, hospitality forgiveness, cruelty etc.. According to Oliver, Derrida employs these figures of hyperbolic purity (which remain without alibi), in order to treat and render all *manifestations* of such purity impure:

We need a dose of one kind of purity – hyperbolic purity – as an antidote to another kind of purity: one ideal of purity takes out the other. We could say that Derrida proposes a purity “worthy of its name,” a purity *of* the name or *of* the concept for the sake of avoiding implementation of discourses of purity on the bodies of those deemed impure. (Oliver 2009, 112)³⁷

³⁷ In his recent work, Geoffrey Bennington has taken up a discussion of the use of the phrase “worthy of the name” in Derrida’s work. Like Oliver, Bennington sees the dignity – the worth – of the name in the unconditional purity of, in Oliver’s terms, the homeopathic and quasi-transcendental other. But for Bennington the result of this immunization by the unconditional results in the dignity of the name existing, as I am arguing here, only in a contaminated form, that is, in life, and not in its ‘purity’ (Bennington 2010, 2009).

In Oliver's reading of Derrida's homeopathic treatment, however, she reads this treatment as a means of *protecting* archives and discourses against a pernicious closure of those deemed to be pure against others that are deemed to be impure. In distinction to this, she claims, Derrida's treatment of autoimmunity *risks*, rather than protects these differences (127-128). But, of course, as we have already seen, the paradoxical logic of autoimmunity is always already necessarily inscribed right within this homeopathic protection, paradoxically, productively and riskily.

In the case of autoimmunity, whose archive refers again and again to the threatened arrival of ever worse events, the figure of the worst takes on the character of such an uncontaminated 'purity.' The worst becomes a figure of totalization, as the complete appropriation or extermination of *all* others. As, for Derrida, "what is put at risk by this *terrifying* autoimmunitary logic is nothing less than the existence of the world [...]. Absolute evil, absolute threat, because what is at stake is nothing less than the *mondialisation* or the worldwide movement of the world, life on earth and elsewhere, without remainder" (2003 98-99). The remainderlessness of a totalising eradication of all others, and all reproducibility, presents us with a figure of the worst that begins to look like the silence of death, a pure death uncontaminated by life, or by pleasure, it is an "evil" that exists only for its own sake: "*mal pour mal*," names, for Derrida, the force of the death drive itself (13).

If we treat the archived terror of the autoimmune death drive homeopathically with this pure terror as the worst terror, then all other terrors of the autoimmune become impure simulacrums of this "evil for evil's sake." The 'purity' of the worst becomes diluted in the process of its application: purity, in Derrida's terms, can leave no traces *of its own*, for the appearance of what is proper to it, in being totalising, would eradicate all trace of itself. In this sense then, the worst, as death, autoimmunizes itself, it risks its own existence in its defence of itself, it is shown to be an *autoimmune* finitude. The force of the death drive, its 'drivenness' therefore names only a weak force, a force without force – like the medical homeopathic treatment it has no 'active' ingredients remaining after its

diluted application – the death drive, its cruelty and the suffering appears *in* life, in discourse, only *as if* it were present. The ‘as if’ of death appears as suggestion, persuasion, fictions and narratives (of science, health, the self, and others) and leaves traces in the very physiology of the remaining archive – whatever it may be. The im-possible presence of a pure death can *never* arrive, death will always autoimmunize itself as it repeats itself – otherwise it would be absolutely *nothing*. This results in death not only being deferred through the disruptive interruptions of life, as we have seen in Freud, but also differed. The death drive is not, in Derrida’s thinking, the *same* deferral of death (a death that is archived as a memory of a pleasurable peaceful past), it is the deferral of the same death, producing an aporetic path to death, without end, ‘protected’ as it is *in life* via a *différential* relation.

In *Rogues* Derrida says he will “risk speaking [...] of a transcendental pathology and even a transcendental autoimmunity” (2005, 125) (but we should hear here of course “quasi-transcendental,” for the transcendental autoimmunity is of course autoimmune), so that autoimmunity, *as if* it were transcendental, becomes, paradoxically, an implacable law. An autoimmune law that allows for the possible-*impossible* experience of the worst, *securing* it in fact, for it secures the necessary opening of each One, each totality, to the trace of the other; like *différance*, the double-bind, the *pharmakon*, the aporia etc.. But what autoimmunity contributes to these and other Derridean terms is a cross-contamination that inflects deconstruction with a certain terror, cruelty and riskiness of the death drive. However, what this treatment secures in its very riskiness is the possibility of opening also to the promise, and to pleasure (for if a risk is to be a risk it must not be certain). In Elizabeth Rottenberg’s words then autoimmunity becomes for deconstruction “a protection of another order [...] a super-protection – a protection beyond self-protection” (Rottenberg 2006, 13). What autoimmunity protects is risk, in order to *conserve*, maintain and sustain the ‘promise’ of the future, for *better or worse*.

The ‘placebo effect’ of this long consultation with the radical alterity of the death drive, does give pleasure in its relieving through narratives, suggestion, and

persuasion – which defer and differ the arrival of an absolute purity – but this pleasure is not a guaranteed pleasure, for the worst now appears only in life and it must be responded to as such. Because death is *not* yet nothing, it repeats its trauma from the future to come to leave not static archives as a monuments to a past pleasurable death, or a past trauma of a lost healthy self, but impressions of pleasure and pain, cruelty and hope which need not remain as they are but can repeat themselves anew. The *arrival* of ‘the worst’ calls for a response, it calls for one to attend to and treat the symptoms of an archive fever, which threatens to paralyse and petrify, and this treatment can and must be undertaken as responsibly as possible, a responsibility not to ignore, repress or suppress the impossibility of the future to come.

5.

‘The End’

The archive I produce as I attempt to learn, treat and respond to the appearance of an illness in my life is not an archive that is mine alone. I can give myself this representation of life, and give myself a representation of a suicidal death only as an *autoimmune* life, and an *autoimmune* suicide. The death that is given here in this chapter is not given by myself as such, but also by the ‘other’ as it is projected, and narrated through various philosophical, psychoanalytic, scientific and science fictional accounts. *My* death remains to come, it may never be mine as such – to be *experienced* by me in the singularity that would be ‘my death.’³⁸ In attempting to mourn in advance for this death *to come*, I have repeated narratives of pleasurable ends: in a film that refers to a catastrophic end that never comes, in the telling of a death drive that can *only* ever return me to a pleasurable death, and in placebo effect where science and narrative meet to offer a more pleasurable path to death.³⁹ Yet, amidst all of these distractions from the

³⁸ See Derrida’s *Aporias* (1993a) for his analysis of the “syntagm ‘my death’” (22). This death, ‘my death’ in quotation marks both the singularity of each and every death, and the same death that is everyone’s – a death of every one. This death like the death of the death drive cannot be experienced as such according to Derrida, it is the experience of an impossibility, an aporetic path to death that leaves its traces in a life that lives-on.

³⁹ See my essay “Autoimmune Illness as a Death-drive: An Autobiography of Defence” for my analysis of the ‘seriousness’ of these different archives (Andrews 2011).

pain and trauma of my afflictions, I have risked wandering, as Derrida says like a “suicidal sleepwalker [...] blind and deaf *alongside the unheard-of*” (1982, 21 *emph.* Derrida’s); wandering blindly into the threat of an unforeseen terrible, and *differently* painful death. However, the repetitious attacks of my illness, the constant reminder of the paradoxes of my bodily archive and its disruptive, feverish effects have not permitted me to resolve the trauma of an autoimmune death so peaceably. The *palpable* effects of autoimmunity refer me again and again to the effects of this uncertainty, confirming that the more I learn, the less I know – but confirming too that the less I know the more I am open to the possibility of responding differently to the archives of illness. I can respond differently by not attempting to protect my future, or my life as I had it planned, but to open to the possibility of new repetitions of the trauma of the future to come, for better *or* worse. Yet there is something I do still wish to protect against, and this is the manifestation of the worst *in* life: the closure of the self within a *certain* self, chronic illnesses, nuclear apocalypses or worse unseen effects. The ‘worst’ events in life seek to close themselves to the other and can thus only repeat the narratives of terror in repeating this impossibility. It is, therefore, impossible *not* to treat these autoimmune effects that appear in life; autoimmunity is being treated with, consciously and unconsciously, in the very repetitions of life-death ‘itself.’ Comfort from, and treatment of, my feverish traces is desirable and even necessary, but the risk that this runs is necessary and desirable too, which means that within every state of ease is a dis-ease. One has to respond to the autoimmune other for better or worse – the end is never in sight. In light of this gift of the secret one must, as Derrida says:

know still what one *wants to say*, *know how to give*, know what you want and want to say when you give, know what you intend to give, know that the gift annuls itself, commit yourself [*engage-toi*] even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance. (Derrida 1992c, 30)

My curiosity, my desire to know, see and inform myself about my disease and its effects is also, as Derrida notes in his seminar series *The Beast and the Sovereign*

(2009), linked to the *cura* of *curiositas*, which also takes care, provides care, cares for and treats in the name of a cure (296). In treating with autoimmunity, I have in this chapter turned the riskiness of this *curiositas* on myself, turning around myself, losing, returning, relinquishing and reclaiming myself in different guises. However, the riskiness of this curiosity and its autoimmune effects also cares for and treats the ‘other.’ In Chapter Two I will turn again to address the question of the ‘self’ and autoimmune illness with regard to the mechanisms of a scientific curiosity that implicate the ‘animal other’ in the tortuous turn of the autoimmunitary motion. In responding to the worst autoimmune events in my life, events that cause me pain and suffering, I am opened too to a community of sufferers who share the *munus* – the duty, burden and gift – of the autoimmune.

Chapter Two

Treating (with) the Other

1.

Introduction

Having moved too quickly in the preceding chapter through the telling of a tale of ‘my’ autoimmune disease – rushing too quickly towards an end that never comes – I have let other voices be silenced. In this chapter, therefore, I return to ‘my’ self and the responses that ‘my’ autoimmune disease has provoked, in order to explore more responsibly the effects and the repercussions of one particular treatment strategy. The autobiographical self I return to in this chapter, is my naïve self, the one who, newly informed of her autoimmune diagnosis, is terrified as to what the future may bring. It is the sick-self who, prior to the homeopathic Derridean treatment of autoimmunity, seeks comfort from the effects of this illness and this frightening diagnosis. This autobiography speaks of the biomedical treatment of ‘my’ life, ‘my’ body and ‘my’ death, which has not just affected *me*, but has also affected the lives, bodies and deaths of others. In this chapter I return to consider the effects of my decision to treat my symptoms with the pharmacological immunosuppressant drugs, drugs which treat lupus only through the sacrifice of ‘animal others.’ And I also return to the narrative of an ecological immunology, presented by Niels Jerne and Polly Matzinger to address in more detail the value and the repercussions of this theory. The possibility of satisfying my curiosity in regards to the character of autoimmune diseases, has been made possible only through science’s own avid desire for knowledge, a ‘knowledge’ gathered through empirical experimentation – experiments which are conducted on animals. Biomedicine treats illness by treating the laboratory animal as an economical unit, depriving this other of what is supposed to be proper to him or to her: his or her proper habitat, home, function or even life. The care (*cura*) of curiosity, can cure or it can not cure, it can treat badly or it

can treat well, this chapter will explore the double-bind of this curiosity as I respond to the autoimmunitary acts that deprive both ‘my self’ and ‘the animal other’ of sovereign propriety.¹



There is a disease of the immune system, an autoimmune disease, where the immune response attacks the body, any part of the body, stealthily, repetitiously, and unpredictably. This disease is called lupus: an invocation of the wolf then in this figure of illness. The beast as disease who devours, whose bite ravages and ulcerates the skin of its victims leaving the marks of its jaws, jaws that gnaw on the bones in an repetitious arthritic decay, immobilizing their prey, forbidding the power of flight and the will to fight. The beast who makes one breathless as it inflames the lungs and the heart with a fright, a fright born from the fear of their very disintegration. But also a becoming wolf: this disease’s most revealing sign, its most visible insignia is the tell-tale rash that appears on the casualty’s face, across the cheeks and over the nose, signalling the markings of a wolf. The self as becoming-wolf for the ferocious beast that is the disease lupus, in being autoimmune, is, of course, also one’s ‘self.’² The ‘sovereign’ self as immune system attacking itself.

This rash, as emblem, is also a mask, resembling the form of the black velvet masks of the masked ball, which, as Derrida recalls in his seminar series *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), are nicknamed *loup* (wolf). And with this reference to Derrida, we must also recall with him that the wolf – beyond the beast who bites and who thus threatens a literal consumption of the physiological body – is also a figure, a fabulous character, one who is narrated in tandem with the figure of the sovereign.³ The motif of the mask then becomes, for Derrida,

¹ See Derrida’s *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009) for his discussion of this double bind of curiosity in the treatment of others, both human and non-human animal others (296).

² This is a “becoming-wolf” I will distinguish from the “becoming-animal” of Deleuze and Guattari (1988). Here I refer more to becoming as a rhetorical and physiological analogy to the wolf.

³ Derrida, in *The Beast and the Sovereign* explores the fables and the narratives that relate the character of the sovereign to various beastly animal characters, in particular he addresses the

the mask of a powerful sovereign who “sees without being seen” (2009, 6).⁴ The sovereign-wolf is hidden by this mask, who in being, for Derrida, but a figure or a fable, is phantasmatic, and absent, but one whose absence –

bespeaks at the same time power, resource, force, cunning, ruse of war, stratagem or strategy, operation of mastery. The wolf is all the stronger, the meaning of its power is all the more terrorizing, armed, threatening, virtually predatory for the fact that in these appellations, these turns of phrase, these sayings, the wolf does not yet appear in person, but only in the theatrical *persona* of the mask, a simulacrum or a piece of language i.e. a fable or a fantasy. (Derrida 2009, 6)

Yet, what may be the character of this absence when the wolf of which I speak, speaks of *and on* the body itself? For Derrida, this theatrical mask ‘speaks of’ the “*insensible* wolf” invisible and inaudible. Hidden by its stealth, one cannot see or hear it coming (6). Perhaps a certain narration (by scientific convention) of the defensive immune system as the organism’s ‘sovereign’ decision-maker – deciding between self and other – could be described as wolfish.⁵ Such a wolfishness could thus also be thought not only as an armed and threatening predator, but also in analogy to the nurturing she-wolf.⁶ This would be a she-wolf who suckles, raises and watches-over the vulnerable, protecting the organism from harm by nourishing and feeding the limits between self and other. This fabled *feminine* wolf would be hidden then by the smooth, unobtrusive

fables of La Fontaine, such as “The Wolf and the Lamb” (2009, 7 ff). The figure of the wolf I am invoking here is not to be thought as a literal wolf, the ‘real’ wolf that can also be narrated through an ethology that would trouble the long philosophical treatment of the wolf as beastly, violent etc. (for a criticism of this tradition see Midgley (1973)); in fact it is the very absence of this ‘real’ wolf that Derrida ‘presents’ here, the wolf ‘as such’ cannot be known, seen or sensed, it exists as an unknown alterity that can only be spoken through the fabulous.

⁴ This seeing without being seen recalls the powerful seeing of the Ghost/King Hamlet’s father that Derrida speaks of in *Spectres of Marx* (1994) where the mask is the visor of the King’s amour, that allows him to command via his spectral absence. The difference that Derrida marks with the term *le loup* (mask – a mask worn mainly, we are told, by women), as we will shortly see, is the femininity of this otherwise very masculine, powerful and phallic form of seeing.

⁵ As we have seen in Chapter One conventional scientific literature tells of an immune system that is capable of distinguishing, on behalf of the ‘body proper’ between self and non-self (Burnet 1969).

⁶ See for example the fable of the she-wolf who suckled the abandoned twins Remus and Romulus at the foundation of Rome (Derrida 2009, 9)

‘healthy’ functioning of its protective acts, where the immune ‘decision’ is not necessarily sensible, and where only a masterful and ‘masculine’ scientifically sovereign fabulation can speak of that which cannot be experienced or known *as such* – only narrated to explain a bodily function that would remain otherwise *insensible*.⁷

But this fabled protective wolf then ‘acts-up,’ it steps onto the theatrical stage with its war paint applied and shows itself under the bright, artificial lights. The mask then becomes not a disguise but an emblem of aggression and sickness made visible through the markings of a wolf and its terrorizing ravaging of its *own* body. Lupus-the-disease shows itself through a facial blush, a blush that, on the face of it, is also a mask of shame, revealing to the story-tellers in the bright glare of the limelight that something has gone wrong in their narrative and requires fixing, putting to rights and remedying: the ‘sovereign’ immune system has become autoimmune, it has become *diseased*. The visible markings of disease upon the body opens that body and allows medical science to narrate the processes of disease, to diagnose and implement an additional strategy of defence through medication, explanation and therapy. This opening involves the individual body immediately in a community and a discourse with its own aims to protect and maintain its sovereign power, a discourse that masks the *individual* behind the face of the disease, an individual who becomes but a statistic in the pursuit of the continual productive economy of life, knowledge and progress.

However, in this staging of a wolfish narrative of illness, the beast presents itself not only through its visible and theatrical persona of the mask, it is read also in the senseless ‘sensibleness’ of the agonising and insistent attacks on the bones,

⁷ The sexual difference that marks the two wolfish figures I am employing here is remarked on by Derrida throughout *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009) (*La Bête et le Souverain*). In “Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name” (1985) Derrida draws from Nietzsche’s autobiography a distinction between a dead and masculine language, and a living feminine body: ‘this is who I am, a certain masculine and a certain feminine [...] The mother is living on, and this living on is the name of the mother. This survival is my life whose shores she overflows. And my father's name, in other words, my patronym? That is the name of my death, of my dead life” (16). I will leave this relation – here between the ‘dead’ language of a masculine, sovereign science and a ‘living’ feminine and natural body – to continue to work unseen as they question and confuse themselves in this chapter.

joints, lungs, heart, kidneys, and skin. And it is this insistent demand for attention that the body makes in its agony that will hold this chapter hostage; drawing it, limping, through the repetitious telling of a specific and situated bodily fear of autoimmune self-protective-destruction. A fear, and also a terror, which *makes one tremble*, and yet, even in this faithful return to the situation of suffering we will be unable to ignore the *ungraspable* character of the force of such illness for, as Derrida reminds us:

One doesn't know *why one trembles*. This limit to knowledge no longer only relates to the cause or unknown event, the unseen or unknown that makes us tremble. Neither do we know why it produces this particular symptom, a certain irrepressible agitation of the body, the uncontrollable instability of its members or of the substance of the skin or muscles. Why does the irrepressible take this form? Why does terror make us tremble, since one can also tremble with cold, and such analogous physiological manifestations translate experiences and sentiments that appear, at least, not to have anything in common? This symptomatology is as enigmatic as tears [...]. We would need to make new inroads into thinking concerning the body, without dissociating the registers of discourse (thought, philosophy, the bio-genetico-psychoanalytic sciences, phylo- and ontogenesis), in order to one day come closer to what makes us tremble or what makes us cry, to that *cause* which is not the final cause that can be called God or death (God is the cause of the *mysterium tremendum*, and the death that is given is always what makes us tremble, or what makes us weep as well) but to a closer cause, not the immediate cause, that is the accident or circumstance, but the cause closest to our body, that which means that one trembles or weeps rather than doing something else. What is it a metaphor or figure for? What does *the body mean to say* by trembling or crying, presuming one can speak here of the body, or of saying, of meaning and of rhetoric? (Derrida 1995b, 55 emph. Derrida's)

Despite the insistent *sensibility* of the wolfish attack on the body, for Derrida, this wolf remains insensible, it remains to be thought only through the simulacra of language that becomes the fable or fantasy, for the “cause closest to our body” *cannot be known as such*. So, whilst attending to the figure and presence of illness this chapter will also trace the insistence of a Derridean ethics that demands that the decisions of science, and particularly bio-science, must remain undecidable and open to a future, and a present, that cannot be known. For science does not yet understand or know the cause of this biological autoimmunity, its meaning or its ‘sovereignty,’ the body’s ‘decision-maker’ remains masked and powerfully hidden. Derrida, as we have seen, figures this openness, in the deconstructive function of the term autoimmunity. One question that this chapter will address is: How may one think deconstructive immunity in tandem with an autoimmune disease that continues to return so insistently to demand comfort? How may one remain faithful and ‘ethically’ open to both the specific and situated individual case of suffering, *and* the promise of a deconstructive future that secures only a risky relation to the promise, via the force of the absent threat? The ill body requires the protective she-wolf *and* the beastly sovereign predator to both immunize *and* autoimmunize its body for its own survival, and thus it requires also the risk, as we saw in chapter one, that the sovereign and protective decision, could, in a snap of its jaws – or a gaping yawn – consume all.

In order to follow these various ‘demands’ made by the body and the ethics of the future, I will stage a series of narratives: The narration of an ill subject plagued by a bodily fear and an errant immune system, whose acute suffering will continue to turn my head and my thoughts back to a corporeal sensibility. Second, the narration of a certain Derridean deconstruction that hyperbolically ups the ante on this situated suffering to expand, without limit, the autoimmune condition towards the complexities of an aporia that *protects*, autoimmunely, the promise of the future to come as the worst to come. And finally and centrally, two narrations of science, explored via second order systems theory, and science fiction, which attempt to *reconstruct*, comfort and inform the risk of the autoimmune as it is presented to the ill subject, situated alone (but for all these

narratives) there in her sickbed, and for whom such fictions are no less real, affective, terrorizing for bearing the name and the function of a ‘fiction.’

Crossing this stage will be the recurrence of various animal figures: the fabled, monstrous and nurturing animal, the sovereign beast, and the laboratory animal, a futuristic animal and a bio-engineered, becoming-animal. These figures will act out and upon the fabled limits between forms of life, life and death, life and non-life, proliferating these limits by donning theatrical personas and masking, always, the absence of a ‘real’ animal, which does not yet appear in its own name.

2.

Comfort, Compassion, Community

In the closed cocooned space of the sickbed comfort is sought against the ravages of illness. This is an illness where the wolfish immune system within has become a predatory protector preying upon the material contingency of my body. Ulcerated sores are biting through flesh, teeth are chewing down on bones – this wolf within is enacting a petrifying, paradoxical closure, locking me within the limits of its protective cage, limiting my bodily capabilities and ability to act on and in the world. The immune-self here refers itself to the body as ‘self’ in an overactive, over-the-top immune defence that can only destroy itself, suicidally. But, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Derrida supplements this biomedical narrative of autoimmune closure in order to perform a deconstructive move. For Derrida, the emphasis of the autoimmune condition falls not on the paradoxical self-referential *closure* of the organism, but on the fact that, in order to survive, to live-on and persevere, a living being must destroy that which defends it. It must attack and lower its own immune response with, for example, the biotechnologies of immunosuppressant drugs; thus opening it to the other, to the promise of the new, which both sustains *and* threatens (Derrida 1998a). A paradoxical opening then, which, housed in the logic of defence as it is, is always potentially terrifying.

Once my ill health has been treated and I am protected by the rationalisms of science – by the scripting by its logical pharmaceutical prescriptions – the wolf within me is pacified. During his drug-induced slumber my cage is opened. And yet, this act that frees my bound body also awakens me to the spectre of another caged animal. For this seeming freedom has come to pass only via the *literal* caging of a laboratory animal. In having been subjected to the curiosities of science, the lab animal has provided the information necessary to produce the immunosuppressant drug (an animal/human hybrid antibody), and the comparative body-as-system to test the effects and safety of this drug for the benefit of *human* health. The ‘wild beast’ is here ‘trained’ by science, objectified, caged, and employed to alleviate the pain and terror of *my own human* imprisonment. An animal sacrifice has occurred then in the name of my health and productivity, indicating a larger sacrificial structure, which for Derrida, opens a space for a “noncriminal putting to death” (1991b, 112). What may be the nature of the distinction between human and animal that designates an animal’s suffering as being less violent than my own – its killing as noncriminal? How is this suffering and this violence communicated and ignored? Does the animal suffer in silence, being as it is without speech? This chapter will consider the extent to which the hypostatized limits between the human and animal can be both maintained and productively undone by contemporary scientific theory and its (auto)immunitary movements.

One cage opens onto another in the effort to defend life. While Derrida focuses with his deconstructive autoimmunity on the fact that this cage can, and must, always be opened to the future to come (*à venir*) – what remains equally clear in the enacting of the drama of illness and science is that nonetheless the cage returns as comfort is sought from the threat of illness: a cage that both protects one from a threat and locks one securely in with it. One could say with Thomas Jefferson that “we have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go.” Jefferson’s wolf presents the slavery of man as a dilemma which both threatens and preserves the American state, and where “Justice is in the one scale, and self-preservation in the other” (Jefferson qtd. in Cohen 2000, 21-22). The wolf whose ears I hold however, will muddy the tracks between

these calculative scales of justice and self-preservation, between races and species, slavery and freedom.

Diagnosed with an autoimmune disease one may be affected by the fear, pain and trauma of the threatening other that now resides within, a fear that is only *affirmed* with every effort of protection. Yet, we must recall that Derrida's terror of the autoimmune is a terror of closure and paralysis that necessitates a deconstructive 'protection' that opens it. Thus this terror goes beyond the bodily. Its aporetic logic, in its 'machine-like' inevitability, accelerates hyperbolically, inflecting the unforeseen future to-come with a trauma of worse to-come. For Derrida, autoimmune openness infects all movements of survival, including the life of the social and political body, opening it necessarily to the wholly other and a *remainderless* destruction as the final totalising limit of an infinitely secure cage (Derrida and Borradori 2003). From my sickbed, a bodily discomfort is opened to the worst in its effort to survive, and comfort is sought. Can the autoimmune condition escape this logic of fear? Can the immune paradigm be disrupted in order to think an affirmative survival where the limits of life no longer sacrifice the other? What may be the ethics here of opening the closed body to the production of the new? This chapter, from the perspective of the sickbed, will now look to four narratives of science and its fictions that address the ethics of defence and comfort in the blinding light of an undecidable autoimmune self-destruction.

After my diagnosis my doctor suggested I take part in a new drug trial to test the efficacy of the immunosuppressant drug infliximab for the treatment of lupus.⁸ This marks the beginnings of a whole new pharmacological narrative for my body, for the human body, and the science that governs it. This is a narrative that promises to assist to desist the excesses of my immune response, it promises to comfort my suffering, and maybe even to cure its symptoms... Yet, at the same time, the prospect of this treatment strategy provokes in me an anxiety and even a certain terror, for no-body knows what the future of this drug regime will be. My anxiety is heightened when I recall that the pharmaceutical company

⁸ Such a drug trial was recently undertaken, see Uppal, Hayat and Raghupathy (2009).

Parexel recently received wholly unexpected results to all of their hypotheses in the first line human trial of their pharmacological product. Designed as an anti-inflammatory treatment to limit the immune response, this product enacted instead a deadly and excessive immune reaction: extreme swelling, organ failure, and intensive care, a life hanging in the balance, amputation, life-long disability.⁹ Why was this reaction so unexpected? Why was it not foreseen and the patients protected? The protocols were followed, and the drug had, as part of the normal course of pharmaceutical development, been tested on animals – with excellent results. Yet, human subjects proved to be so significantly different from these non-human animals in their biological make-up that – not only did they not benefit from the drug’s presence in their bodies – their lives were catastrophically threatened. The means and methods of chemical and technical communication between these two systems failed. Now, as I wait to begin my treatment, I feel myself akin to the animal, being as I am reduced to a biological substrate, my reactions appropriated for statistical analysis, informationalized for data collection, made useful for a future of pharmaceutical funding programmes, research papers, and economic exchange. Becoming animal as guinea pig, I am now to be radically opened to the drug, a drug that, I am told, exists only thanks to an animal whose body is similar to mine, therefore, to an animal’s becoming human – in its role test subject and in its role as donor: the new drug I am to ingest is an engineered chimeric monoclonal antibody, an immunosuppressive antibody of hybrid human and mouse DNA.

With the appearance of this mouse in my narrative, comes the image of another mouse, Donna Haraway’s OncoMouse™ (1997). Haraway’s – or more exactly the biotech company Du Pont’s – OncoMouse™, is a laboratory organism that links commercial, academic, legal and medical domains. Labelled as a human invention, OncoMouse™ is a transgenic organism manipulated to act as a “model system” for experimental science, and thus who, in Haraway’s words, “bears our suffering; [...] signifies and enacts our mortality in a powerful, historically specific way that promises a culturally privileged kind of secular

⁹ In March 2006, six out of eight healthy test subjects were taken seriously ill after an unexpected reaction to the trial of a new anti-inflammatory drug TGN1412 for the treatment of arthritis and other inflammatory autoimmune conditions (BBC News 2006).

salvation – a ‘cure for cancer’” (2008, 76). Yet this narrative of secular salvation, Haraway insists, must not assume the logic of sacrifice, for such mice “are somebody as well as something” (76). For Haraway, OncoMice, in being (along with the human) both subject and object, require a response and a recognition that cannot be calculated in regards to a sacrificial exchange that balances categories of worth (76). Haraway, a scientist and a scholar, works on the intersections of science, culture and nature in order to account for the unaccountability of the sacrificial moment. She employs her knowledge of science, its protocols and assumptions, to read sciences’ relations with animals differently. Pursuing an ethnographic methodology she attempts to write “through the eyes” of OncoMouse™ (1997, 52). Yet “the beady little eyes of the laboratory mouse” that Haraway uses “to stare back at [her] fellow mammals” (52) are eyes that I am able to ‘see’ only through the mediated play of Haraway’s evocative and persuasive story-telling. In being without the privileged sight of the ethnographer, one trained in scientific protocols, one engaged in and with the mice of the laboratory, I remain unable to see through the eyes of the mouse that is to shape my body and my thoughts. This animal other remains, for me, as an absent presence.

Writing then from a different locale than that of Haraway, I want to think with her the shared relations of use between human and other animals, while observing that that the animal others who trouble and affect me are largely absent from my environment. As Carol J. Adams has noted, this absence of the animal other – who nonetheless shapes contemporary western narratives of science and survival – results in “an extreme distancing from the experience of most nonhuman animals” (2009, 50).¹⁰ For Adams, the “verbal silence of nonhumans” and “the restriction on access to their inner spaces” (54), produces a complicitous silence that results in nonhuman animals appearing only through a cultural referent. Adams recounts how information on the animal in received in postmodernity is changing, vivisection has become biomedical research and is

¹⁰ This is a similar point to that made by Butler in *Precarious life* (2004) but here in regards to the human other rather than the animal other, that is, if the precariousness of other’s lives do not appear as such, then we will not be moved, and we will have no ethical relation, which, for Butler is Levinasian in form, as a turning away from the face of the already dead (2004, 150).

vindicated as such, testing animals (in vivo research) becomes a testing of an isolated part of an animal (in vitro research) obscuring the animal to which this refers. Nonhuman animals, for Adams, are increasingly encountered through cultural forms, stories and characters who produce and absorb a sympathy more ‘properly’ directed to the ‘real’ and yet absent animal. It is this estrangement and denial of human co-dependence on nonhuman animals that Haraway is attempting to unravel in her ethnographic writings. Yet, Haraway sees more promise in the “naturalcultural” processes of story-telling than Adams does, viewing these as avenues to “possible material, affective, practical reworlding[s] in the concrete and detailed situation of here, in this tradition of research,” suggesting that “[m]aybe sf worlding – speculative fiction and speculative fact – is the language I need” (2008, 93). In being confined to my sickbed and without Haraway’s privileged access to this tradition of research, I am limited to reading speculative fiction and speculative fact, reading Haraway – reading through her eyes through the eyes of OncoMouse™ – reading Adams and reading too my own bodily relations of use with my animal fellows to whom I relate, but cannot see. How might I respond to the discursive victims that both comfort and discomfort my ailing body, how can I meet with these other species?

Lupus haunts me: a wolf, a mouse, an ape, a sovereign, and a slave meet in its absent presence. Stories speculate there without any secure foundations, returning and referring forwards and back, consciously and unconsciously, as they did for the neurotic Wolf Man. The neuroses of Wolf Man, narrated in Freud’s psychoanalytic case history, gives an account of a narrative of a spectral wolf – seen in a childhood story book, a bed-time tale, and a dream – and which refer, according to Freud, to an unconscious trauma, one which repeats itself again and again in the narratives of his life. The conscious/unconscious repetition of a wolfish figure in my own narrative provides a system of reference that open me both to terror and comfort as the absent presence of the animal other both secures my bodily failures and opens me to an absence which is neither present nor unconscious, but radically heterogeneous – the absence of death.

3.

First Fiction: Fictions of Science

*The first little pig built his house with straw and when the wolf huffed and puffed and blew his house down, the first little pig took shelter with the second little pig who had built his house with sticks; and when the wolf huffed and puffed and blew his house down, the first little pig and the second little pig took shelter with the third little pig who built his house with bricks, and when the wolf huffed and puffed and puffed and huffed ...*¹¹

From the situation of the sickbed I first seek comfort from the pain and anxiety of illness in the productions of science. Pairing Derrida's autoimmunity with Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's biological, and Niklas Luhmann's sociological, use of autopoiesis in second order systems theory, I will consider how the paradoxes of a self-destructive-relation-to-the-self are supplemented by the de-paradoxifying and thus, perhaps, comforting narratives of science and scientific theory.¹² That is, how the deconstruction of a Derridean autoimmunity can be reconstructed via the logics of autopoiesis.

In order to consider the manner in which autopoiesis could comfort the deconstructive terror of the autoimmune it will be important to develop a reading of systems theory that suggests a certain compatibility of this contemporary bioscientific theory with Derridean philosophy.¹³ Maturana and Varela, like Derrida, are able to deconstruct transcendental dualisms of metaphysics by opening scientific thought to a non-representational and productive relation to its environment, where a re-conception of the relation between 'the human' and 'the

¹¹ A nursery-tale told and re-told in many forms, 'The Story of the Three Little Pigs' first appeared in print in the 19th century in *The Nursery Rhymes of England* by James Halliwell (1886). I use my own re-telling here to gesture towards systems theory's logic of structural coupling and the infinite regress of threat and response without the solid foundations of a perfectly secure 'house' which I discuss in the following section.

¹² Second order systems theory is distinct from first order systems theory in its awareness that the observers of any system, mechanical biological, social or otherwise, are implicated within the system itself. First order systems refer to closed systems and second order to open systems (von Foerster 1981).

¹³ See Cornell, (1996), Schwantz (1995), Teubner (2001), Wolfe (2003, 2009), for similar claims for a compatibility between deconstruction and systems theory.

animal' is no longer reified through – as will be our example – the possession of the ability to 'language.' Might it therefore be possible to find a deconstructive comfort from the closures of a reified scientific knowledge that subjugates the animal in this more open and creative narrative of science? Can one 'make-do' without the hyperbolic terror and 'uppings of the ante' that we find in the insistent insecurity of Derridean autoimmunity? Or might this thinking remain, still, too closed for comfort?

With regard to this I will be following closely the manoeuvres of another wolf, here through the work of Cary Wolfe. Wolfe performs in his texts *Animal Rites* (2003), and "Meaning as Event-Machine" (2009) a skilful analysis of the similarities and differences between Derrida and systems theory in terms of species, language and meaning. However, I will argue that Wolfe has himself been somewhat wolfish in his analysis through the manner in which he masterfully maintains, or protects, the limits between these two disciplines, one as 'reconstruction' and the other as 'deconstruction.' By introducing into this debate the *logic* of immunity and the *paradoxes* of the autoimmune, I will indicate how it is exactly the immune paradox that 'immunizes' the possibility of a *risky* contamination of deconstruction, reconstruction, biology and systems theory that makes clearer perhaps the wolfishness of Wolfe's Derrida. I will therefore, following Derrida, complicate, multiply and *feed* the limits between autoimmunity and autopoiesis in order to think an ethics of suffering that neither ignores the animal other, nor ignores the inescapable necessity of risking exactly that.

What Doesn't Kill you Makes you Stronger

By rethinking the paradoxical problematics of inside and outside, self and other (the beast, the sovereign, the predator, and the prey) in regards to systems theory, it is possible to avoid both the charge of positivism and empiricism levelled against traditional, orthodox scientific thought. For Maturana and Varela – the founding thinkers of autopoiesis in the biosciences – a living system is established upon the distinction between inside and outside, or rather, system and

environment (1980). An autopoietic system is a system that can both maintain, produce and *creatively* re-produce itself. It is able to do so because such a system permits itself to be both open and closed *at the same time* – remaining *operationally* closed, but *structurally* open to its environment, and thus representing the paradox of alterity. The result of this is that in terms of its function an autopoietic system *can know only itself*, it does what it does, repeating and maintaining its own processes, whilst remaining blind to what lies outside of this operation. However, in remaining “structurally coupled” to its environment the autopoietic system is open in terms of its structure in order that this structure can be changed without any effect upon the system’s function or operation. Thus, environmental changes that impact on a system are ‘seen’ by that system only if they perturb its ability to operate. Such perturbations then act as a trigger for the system to complexify its structure and modulate its states in order to maintain its operation, resulting in a creative evolution of ever more complex systems that, nevertheless, can ‘know’ only themselves due to their autopoietic closure. Biological systems as autopoietic unities then, for Maturana and Varela:

specify biological phenomenology as the phenomenology proper to those unities with features distinct from physical phenomenology. This is so, not because autopoietic unities go against any aspect of physical phenomenology – since their molecular components must fulfil all physical laws – but because the phenomena they generate in functioning as autopoietic unities depends on their organisation and the way this organization comes about, and not on the physical nature of their components (which only determine their space of existence). (Maturana and Varela 1987, 51)

By re-conceptualising the relation between inside and outside in these terms autopoietic systems overcome the dual problems of representation and solipsism: operational closure prevents the system from claiming any faithful or deterministic re-presentation of a surrounding reality; and structural openness avoids this closure resulting in a phenomenological solipsism that would deny

any possibility of 'knowing' such an external 'reality' (1987, 169). I will return, in what follows, to the exact nature of this operational closure and this means of overcoming the paradox of the self-referential in regards to deconstruction. But first I will analyse the manner in which systems theory may help one to think the problematics of immunity, illness, and the ethical limits between human and animal. I shall focus on the role of communication, meaning and language and the discomfort and comforts of the relations that these produce.

The immune system can be considered as an autopoietic system. We have already encountered this systemic theory of immunity in Chapter One in regards to the ecological immunology of Niels Jerne and Polly Matzinger (69-71), a theory that Francisco Varela supplements with the logic of autopoiesis (1991; 1994). The traditional self-non-self representation of immunity presented by Burnet, suggests that the immune system is housed in the body of a particular organism or 'structure' in order to defend it from harm, that is, protecting its 'self' from the infiltration of the 'other' that may threaten its cohesion. However, as we have seen, from a systems theoretical perspective the immune system functions *as a system* by virtue of a founding distinction between 'itself' and its environment, where, 'self,' is inscribed on both sides of the divide so that the 'other' can only be known from the perspective of the self (as non-self), resulting in the tautology that self is self. Every system is founded on this paradoxical self-referentiality as operational closure. Yet in being structurally coupled to the environment, the system can learn, complexify, and 'tolerate' the presence of any structural, technical, or material element so long as it does not perturb its operational function outside the limits of its possible adjustment. For Varela, Jerne and Matzinger, such a re-presentation of the problem resolves the necessity of finding an explanation for how the immune system defends itself from an attack by something it *recognises* as other, a process which has been so difficult to account for within scientific methodology. This results in the event that has been traditionally narrated as an "attack" by, for example, an invading pathogen (which has somehow been recognised by the immune system as other and therefore counterattacked) now being rethought as a perturbation of the function of the immune system. This perturbation triggers – without prescribing

– a response in order to maintain the autopoiesis as operational closure of that system.

However, this simplistic view of the founding distinction between system and environment becomes more complex once one considers how one autopoietic system, the immune system say, functions in relation to other co-determining systems, such as the nervous, circulatory or respiratory systems. Here one would need to make a distinction between the originary first order observation from *within* the system, and what Niklas Luhmann calls second order observation (1995).¹⁴ Second order observation denotes a position from which one is able to observe observations and therefore view the immune system as being structurally coupled to other autopoietic unities. At each stage of observation however, a new founding distinction is made between system and environment and an increasingly complex environment is coupled to the *operation* of the observation and its autopoietic closure, so that, in Maturana and Varela's words, "we can see a unity in *different* domains depending on the distinctions we make" (1987, 135). We can see a unity of components, their internal states and structural changes or we can "consider a unity that also interacts with its environment and describes its history of interactions with it" (135). It is from the position of the observer 'outside' of these domains that these unities and differences are correlated and from where one is able to narrate the co-implication of all bodily processes to produce a 'knowledge' of the body's functions.

It is then, in this logic, my position as *conscious* observer that sees the arthritic joints that limit my mobility, and the pleurisy that catches my breath, as impacting on the operation of my organic (not to mention social) life. It is from this position that I am able to name these symptoms as resulting from *systemic* lupus erythematosus where my immune system has been disturbed in its operation, perturbed *somehow* by its environment to become hyperactive,

¹⁴ This ocular metaphor of observation and blind spots is repeated throughout the language of systems theory, and despite the various semantic confusions this could give rise to, I will continue to use this here for the sake of clarity. But one need only look to the nature of the discourse and the famous early example of biological autopoiesis in colour vision (Maturana and Varela 1980, xiv-xvi) to recall that such seeing does not equate to knowledge and power in the traditional reading of this ocular metaphor.

effecting and risking the functioning of my whole bodily system.¹⁵ Yet, in being able to observe the distinction between the immune system and its environment, I am able to maintain its function through altering its *material structure* by virtue of the immunosuppressant drug as a bioengineered antibody. Such a drug, as a technical product, is ‘other’ to the ‘proper’ materiality of my organic structure, but in terms of function the immune system itself cannot observe it as being anything other than ‘self.’ It would only be if the ‘side-effects’ of such a drug effected the operation of autopoiesis that its ostensible ‘otherness’ would become problematic to the immune system ‘itself.’ If this perturbation was sufficient to impact on ‘operational duties’ a further treatment, as adaptation or complexification would be required. But if, with the incorporation of this drug, my bodily discomfort *is* alleviated, it also alleviates another discomfort: the usual *defensive* rhetorics of immunology can be narrated differently, that is without the metaphors of combat that have contributed to the tremulous anxiety of this illness. The ‘self’ is no longer represented as a stable self and the ‘other’ as a threatening attacker, there is no automatic menace in this relation.¹⁶ Instead, the operation of body-as-self can be *comfortably* maintained as a more complex system employing the productions of science to pacify the pain and suffering of my body.

This narrative, of course, is not mine alone. It has been produced via many systems of thought and the operations of individual bodies – both institutionally and personally – which must, in this logic, each maintain their own autopoietic function. Such inter-relation is produced by what is described in systems theory as a “third order structural coupling” or “social life” which employs communication, and by extension, meaning and language to maintain its autopoiesis. For Maturana and Varela, whenever interactions become recurrent

¹⁵ See chapter one (53-55) for my previous discussion of the impossibility of determining, for certain, the environmental conditions (from within or without the organism) that effect the immune response. We have seen how these perturbations can be considered as physical traumas or psychological ones, or unseen and even unseeable causes.

¹⁶ I refer here again to Ed Cohen’s book *A Body Worth Defending* (2009), which has developed a genealogical account of the social, political and medical narratives of immunity that details the contingent historical influences that give rise to the bio-scientific understanding of immunity as defensive. According to Cohen, such a qualification is not inevitable and can be deconstructed via this genealogy.

between individual autopoietic unities or organisms, these relations perform a function that “generate[s] a particular internal phenomenology, namely, one in which *the individual ontogenies of all the participating organisms occur fundamentally as a part of the network of co-ontogenies that they bring about in constituting third order unities*” (1987, 193 emph. Maturana and Varela’s). A network of co-ontogenies, as a social system, sustains the relations between its internal individual ontogenies by employing communication to protect these individuals (as the structural basis of its autopoietic function), that is, it protects its own self-referential systemic function.

Such communications, in the case of my narrative, could be exchanged as chemicals in the blood, molecular data or DNA analysis, the history of symptomatology and family case studies, new research data, or drug results. Each observer within this maelstrom of information is able to produce, from their own closed perspective, a reading of these communications as signs, permitting the production of various discourses that can narrate ‘immunology’ via, for example, the analogy to war, as self-not-self discrimination, as well as as an autopoietic system. This production of difference within intersecting domains is made possible because the meaning, language, and communicability produced by my sick ill-functioning body, does not reside *in* the body as such, but is structurally coupled to it, feeding back information to sustain, or not, various unities of meaning, science, social groupings, and bodies.¹⁷ Indeed, ‘my self’ as an observing self, is structurally coupled to ‘my’ phenomenological body *and* the co-ontogenies of, for example, the medical professional, the prescribing body, and, significantly, the animal-as-organism that provides the biological substrate to produce and test the animal/human hybrid antibody that is the immuno-

¹⁷ The status of social autopoiesis (which I will return to in section three of this chapter when I address Niklas Luhmann’s social systems theory) is contested ground for Maturana and Varela. According to Maturana, as we see in the introduction to *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, social autopoiesis is possible (1987, xxiv-xxx). However, Varela rejects the application of the autopoietic model beyond the bound living cellular system. John Protevi suggests that this is not for cognitive reasons, but because this would result in social bodies that are mutually blind, obsessed with physical boundaries, and fratricidal (Protevi 2009, 95). I however, will be following Wolfe’s development of the autopoietic model as one that enacts an ‘openness from closure,’ and where the mutual blindness of autopoietic systems provides a ‘gap’ in knowledge constitutive to the ethical moment rather than an obsession with physical boundaries (Wolfe 1998).

suppressant drug. This animal provides the accumulation of data necessary to effect the healthy recovery of the operation of a *human* test subject too ‘valuable’ to risk in this manner. This is a structural coupling that returns me, from the perspective of the sickbed, to an uncomfortable relation to my body, not now a bodily discomfort, but an ethical one, which questions the humanistic perspective that permits the continued maintenance of a human autopoietic phylogeny via the objectification of an animal other; that is, permitting a suffering of a non-human living being for the sake of *human* health.

The production of the chimeric monoclonal antibody to be tested on my body under the pharmaceutical name infliximab, has, throughout its development, involved various procedures of animal experimentation: the fusion of myeloma cells (cancer of the bone marrow) with a mouse’s spleen to produce tumours in its gut which secrete – most painfully – the desired antibodies (Institute for Laboratory Animal Research 1999); the injection of infliximab into rabbits eyes (Theodossiadis 2009); disc incision and spinal nerve displacement, and the causing and monitoring of hyperalgesia (Murata 2005). Such procedures are just some of those to have been noted and written up in the scientific literature. However, when it comes to testing the effectiveness and the safety of these monoclonal antibodies, there is, according to John VandeBerg, and Stuart Zola, only one suitable test subject – the chimpanzee, or the great ape in general (2005). The great apes, with their similarity to human biological structures, present the only model system in which to test these drug treatments. It is this similarity that both permits the maintenance of the divide between ape and human –“You are like me? Great! You can stand in for me then in this risky task” – and muddies the ground of this divide –“If you are like me, then by what right do I imprison, torture and kill you?”¹⁸ The Great Ape Project, lead by Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri, takes the latter view and endeavours to extend to all great apes the right to life, to freedom from torture and from incarceration (Cavalieri and Singer 1993). If the ape is other, but not so other that its body cannot be structurally coupled to mine, and that it cannot claim the logic of

¹⁸ See Haraway’s *Primate Visions* (1989) for a thorough reading of the confusions, ambiguities, and natural and cultural constructions that surround the human/ape divide as narrated in primatology.

Rights – reserved, as yet, for the human – how can I account for this relation, for the “becoming-with” this *somebody* I subjugate?

If the right to life and freedom were extended to the great apes, there would be no possibility of repairing my systemic failure with this – or any other – drug treatment.¹⁹ It might therefore be tempting to ignore the confusions of these animal figures as they appear and to deny the narratives they tell. For these nonhuman animals are, after all, as Adams reminds us, obscured through the mechanisms of science, its terminology, industry, and unclear public engagement, which make them easy to ignore. Must one make a human of the animal through the conferral of rights, laws and norms for it to be heard? For Cary Wolfe, while the conferral of rights to the great apes might be necessary, timely, and pragmatic, it also means that “the model of rights being invoked here for extension to those who are (symptomatically) ‘most like us’ only ends up reinforcing the very humanism that seems to be a problem in the first place. [...] We end up ethically recognising them not because of their wonder and uniqueness, not because of their difference, but because they are inferior versions of ourselves” (2003, 192). The ‘real’ animal remains absent still. This absence speaks volumes. It makes me uncomfortable.

Linguistic Domains and Animal Others

What may be the ethics of opening the structure of my body to this animal I observe as other but that has become a part of my very function? This openness remains possible only via a closure of a limit that renders the this animal sacrificable. What may be the nature of the distinction made between a laboratory animal and a human patient that permits the suffering of one to alleviate that of the other? One exemplary, and traditional answer lies in their accepted inhabitation of linguistic domains where one unity, the human individual, becomes a subject of a *linguistic* autopoietic system that produces

¹⁹ It is for this reason that AAAS (the American Association for the Advancement of Science) – whose stated mission is to “Enhance communication among scientists, engineers, and the public” and “Promote the responsible use of science in public policy” (AAAS 2011) – opposes the Great Ape Protection Act of 2009 (AAAS 2009).

consciousness and subjectivity, and the other, the laboratory animal, becomes an *object* of such a system while remaining closed to it. If the animal were able to *speak* and say “that hurts,” “stop,” or “I don’t want to die,” would it remain ethically possible to subject such a being to testing, incarceration, and medical procedures of an horrific nature? Perhaps autopoiesis with its non-intersecting (closed operational and observational) realms of communication, meaning and language allow for this distinction. Yet, as I will go on to demonstrate, autopoiesis also allows one to deconstruct this divide and render fluid the transcendental dualism between human and animal by addressing the structural *openness* of the limit between these positions, indicating the permanent *biological* and conceptual possibility of crossing the divide. By rendering this limit uncertain might the systems theory of Maturana and Varela enable a questioning of the representation of animal suffering as a lesser suffering, or a lesser violence?

It is this deconstructability of linguistic domains that Cary Wolfe pursues in *Animal Rites* (2003). Wolfe here narrates the ‘beginnings’ of language through the systems theory of Maturana and Varela and Gregory Bateson re-presenting the open-closure of autopoiesis as an openness *from* closure. I will briefly relate this narrative in order to then indicate a compatibility between Derrida and systems theory that might help to defer the terror, as well as the pain, of a deconstructive and bodily autoimmunity, and deconstruct the use of language or linguistic domains to separate and objectify the animal other. In addition, this work can further indicate a means of thinking the relations between an ill body that ‘presents itself’ to an observing self. However, in conclusion it will be necessary to return to the inevitability of the paradox of alterity that might in some ways trouble this account.

Wolfe’s stated interest in this work is to “disarticulate language and species” and to “put some meat on the bones of Derrida’s rather general observations on the subjection of both human and animal to the force of the trace” (2003, 80). Wolfe is therefore linking Derrida’s “trace beyond the human” to the “sophisticated contemporary notions of *communication* as an essentially ahuman dynamic” (81)

as it is thought in second order systems theory. The value of this work lies in its suggestion of a possible means of linking this trace structure to the ‘meat and the bones’ of a contingent biological materiality, but we will have to return, in what follows to Wolfe’s theorization of the trace as comparable to the open/closure of communication as an autopoietic system in order to elaborate on the similarities *and* the differences of this relation. For now we can however, within the structure I have already presented, indicate how the “disarticulation” or deconstruction of language and species may indicate the fictive nature of the limit between a laboratory animal and a human patient that would be one means of ignoring the suffering of the former on behalf of the latter.

Following Wolfe, who is in turn following Maturana and Varela and Gregory Bateson, I shall now provide a brief synopsis of their theoretical framing of the relation between, humans, animals and language. This theoretical frame presents the difference between an animal and a human relation to language as a difference of degree and not of kind. Systems theory is therefore able to divide and multiply this limit, maintaining both difference and continuity of the ‘trace’ of language in a variety material substrates: For Maturana and Varela the basic physiological structure that an animal must possess to enable the emergence of “third order structural couplings” and “linguistic domains” is sufficient cephalisation, that is a certain concentration and density of neural tissue (Wolfe 2003, 81). A biological autopoietic system, through its open relation in regards to its structure, is able to increase its neural tissue while maintaining its autonomous operation, and with this increased cephalic mass this system increases its plasticity and its capacity to learn. Learning and ‘experience’ are then products of structural changes in an organism triggered by the environment. When animals with sufficient cephalisation and plasticity interact with one another in a recurrent fashion their individual ontogenies produce, in relation to other ontogenies in their environment, a “*new phenomenological domain*”, “*third order structural couplings*” or “social life for sort” (Maturana and Varela qtd. in Wolfe 2003, 82, *emph. in original*). It is this development of the capacity for a certain “social life” that necessitates the deployment of communication in order

to maintain the autopoietic operational closure of this emergent phenomenological domain (83).

Communication for Maturana and Varela, however, is not yet language. To illustrate this Wolfe provides the example of the insect whose limited plasticity prevents any significant variation within individual ontogenies participating in any social system, such forms of life are therefore able to communicate via very minimal and direct, chemical signals (trophallaxis). It is only when there is a greater level of ontogenic variation in the social animal, as brought about by an increased density of neural tissue, and when this needs to be made productive for the maintenance of the social system, that the individual must learn specific communicative behaviours that *depend on*, rather than just tolerate, an individualised ontogeny. These behaviours produce a “linguistic domain,” which “constitute the basis for language, but are not yet identical with it” (Maturana and Varela qtd. in Wolfe 2003, 83). Human language is but one example of a linguistic domain that distinguishes itself, according to Maturana and Varela, via its ability to make a linguistic distinction of a linguistic distinction, to refer actions to other actions, which refer to the linguistic domain itself. But this “metalinguistic” domain, which is employed by the human species to manage its autopoietic operation, while at once separating the human from the animal, does not present an indivisible limit. There are, Wolfe tells us, animals – such as the great apes – which are able to communicate recursively about a linguistic domain itself; and further, for many animals who possess sufficient cephalisation and interact with the necessary environment stimuli, “language is a permanent biologic possibility in the natural drift of living beings” (84). From the perspective of language, communication, meaning, or the trace – which function themselves as ‘systems’ – there is no differentiation between species in regards to their operation, the distinction is not ontological but phenomenological.²⁰ Providing the structural basis exists, linguistic domains and *language* ‘itself’ can emerge. The differences between linguistic domains do not, therefore, represent a difference in kind but one of degree.

²⁰ In regard to the systematic and autopoietic unity of language and particularly meaning, see Wolfe’s ‘Meaning as Event-Machine, or Systems Theory and ‘the Reconstruction of Deconstruction’ (2009).

One final point to follow here, before drawing some implications from this, would be to recall that with the advent of a specifically human verbal communication, other forms of biologic communication are not transcended. An animal *or* a human could, for example, communicate via chemical signals – pheromones or scents, body language, the involuntary responses of fright: trembling, sweating, vascular constriction, blushing. In fact, as Wolfe reminds us, it often proves difficult, if not impossible, to communicate effectively when such signals are absent – as with the example of email and its dry digital message devoid of analogue signals (86). However, the continuum of the biological possibility of language does not become a biological continuism as a positivist calculation, for the autopoietic operational closure of each system, of language ‘itself,’ can only refer to *itself* in an abyssal and paradoxical relation. For example, such a crossing of species-limits by communicative linguistic domains can also be seen in the example Wolfe offers of Gregory Bateson’s analysis of “play” among mammals. For Bateson, when a wolf play-fights, it performs a metacommunicative act that signals “this is play,” as “the playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite” (Bateson qtd. in Wolfe 2003, 84). Instead what the bite refers to, paradoxically, is something that does not exist, namely the real bite, and this real bite, which does not exist, in Wolfe’s words: “itself signifies a *relationship* – in this case dominance or subordination – whose “referent” if you will, is itself the autopoiesis of the pack structure that determines those relationships” (85). The circularity of this relation of “play” to the autopoietic unity of the social system that initiates it, traces a paradox of operational closure where the signifier refers back to itself, and a confusion ensues as to whether such behaviours communicate “this is play” or rather “is this play?” This metacommunicative linguistic domain is repeated, according to Bateson, in human acts and relations such as gambling and risk taking (85). Are these actions “play” or a pretence at play? A production, a staging, a fiction, or a ‘reality’? Are they responses, or reactions? Each autopoietic system remains within this self-referential, abyssal and paradoxical structure, so that this closure coupled with a certain evolutionary

biological continuity prevents such a continuism becoming calculative and positivist.

The heteroreference of a communicability has perhaps emerged that refers me both to an evolutionary past that is shared with nonhuman animals, and to the discursive rhetorics of a bodily response that remain now in play. Diachronically, a shared evolutionary past inhabits my complex autopoietic bodyhood: as a 'memory' of a nourishing chemical exchange between cells (trophallaxis); as a recollection of the gills formed during my foetal development – which an ocean-dwelling animal still possesses; in the 'playful' exhilaration, fear, and power-games of my initiation into a childhood gang. But also synchronically in the 'goose bumps' that rise when I catch the eyes of a fox in the street, or the pounding of my blood when a dog's hackles rise and its fangs are bared – or the tears that prickle at the sight of the vet's injection that makes my cat cry. Can an embarrassment and a red face be overcome with explanations, excuses and wise words of the scientifically and economically informed, or has a certain communication already taken place?

As I am touched by these species through a certain communicability, this communication does not simply represent the animal other to me, it refers also, as Bateson and Wolfe suggest, to an absent referent – the 'real' animal who is not present as such. These communications refer to a relationship that refers back to the autopoiesis of a shared social structure, abyssally. This abyssal structure seems to me to have much in common with Haraway's exploration of the "world-making vitality" produced when one plays – or works – with other species to produce recursive otherness knotted into never fully bounded individuals (2008, 22; 34; 311 n.27). The vitality or "joy" that Haraway is at pains to acknowledge in the relations of use between animals and their (human) others, is presented to off-set the ubiquity of the logic of suffering used in regards to 'the animal.' But joy is not the word that names my relations here. The discomfiting world I share with the chimp, the mouse and the rabbit, speaks not of joy or vitality, but does, perhaps, urgently gesture towards its necessity.

Following this logic it is perhaps possible to view human language not as a sovereign form of communication that provides a more faithful representation of reality, but as a form of communication that can be deconstructed by the ‘trace’ of the other, firstly by virtue of it remaining coupled to the materiality of its structural components of an evolutionary history that remains at work; and secondly, by the ability to shift one’s observational position and create a new distinction that sees this linguistic domain being eroded by its others, including the animal other. What this performs then is not a dismantling of the limits between the humans and other animals but an effect of, what Derrida calls in “The Animal that Therefore I am (more to follow)” (2002d) “limitrophe,” as that which “feeds *the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it [...] to multiply its figures, to complicate, thicken, delinearize, fold, and divide the line precisely by making it increase and multiply” (397-398 emph. Derrida’s). Autopoiesis, in its closure and its openness, produces and re-produces difference in an iteration that turns upon the *trope* of a self-referentiality to incorporate this difference into its very function. The *strophe* of this chorus of ‘voices’ feeds the threshold as a *trophic* nourishment by the (animal) other. And yet, one should not forget that such limits also risk, in Kelly Oliver’s formulation, becoming a *trophy*, where “we can kill animals for the sake of conquest and mount our trophies on the wall, dissect them and write about it in journals” (Oliver 2009, 3).

I now turn to address the nature of this risk of turning the animal away from the domain of the human – human language, human suffering, and human knowledge – in order to become but a trophy for the ‘victories’ of science. The laboratory animal seems to maintain and defend these limits of exclusion, but does the re-presentation of the biological and sociological sciences of life in terms of systems theory assist us sufficiently in troubling this discomfiting exclusion? I shall need to turn too to Derrida in order to address the ethical question of the suffering of the animal. By reading and inscribing these two systems of thought, one scientific and one philosophical, in and through one another we may come closer to thinking the terror of the autoimmune as it revolves around the promise, both defending *and* destroying its limits. For might

there not be, as Derrida suggests, a “revolution in the revolution” of all these turns? (Derrida 2009, 279)

4.

Second Fiction: Deconstructive Fictions

Suffering in Silence

From the perspective of the sickbed, where my own suffering has been alleviated by the opening of the body to the animal other, I have been made once again uncomfortable and anxious by the perception of a necessary suffering that has been afflicted in my name. I am uncomfortable firstly because I can perceive the suffering of the animal, the animal which is not even a specific animal who looks me in the eye, but a category of animal as the ‘lab animal,’ the one deemed, along with the ‘edible animals,’ to be sacrificable, to be killed and not murdered. I perceive this suffering of the laboratory animal – who has been caged and removed from my sight – via my exchanges with animals in general: the domesticated animal, the work animal, the farmed animal and the edible animal, as well as via a discourse of animal rights, pharmaceuticals and experimentation. But what each of these relations have effected is an affective relation where an animal, *in each case*, communicates its ability to suffer and its relation to its own death. But, secondly, I am uncomfortable because the sacrifice of the life of the laboratory animal, sacrifices too its death. The death that belongs to the animal is not named and mourned *as a death*, but merely as a means of maintaining the life of a certain humanity.

In my role as guinea pig – where I *follow* the animal into the laboratory – a difference is highlighted between the human guinea pig and the nonhuman animal to which I compare myself. While for us both our suffering is noted, recorded and written up in journals, for the laboratory animal suffering is ‘alleviated’ by a putting to death, a silencing of a discomfort through the ending of a life. My suffering and I are forced to live on as my death is continually

mourned in advance, while the lab animal's death is here seemingly absented from this work of mourning.

This difference that experimental science enacts in its attitude to death perpetuates the Heideggerian distinction between animal and man (as *Dasein*) that permits nonhuman animals to perish, but not to die. For Heidegger, the animal can have no relation to death *as such*, while *Dasein* in his "being-towards-death" understands the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general (Heidegger qtd. in Lawlor 2007, 55). Yet, for Derrida, as we saw in Chapter One, the *possible* impossible of death is also the possible as impossible (Derrida 1993a). Man, *with* the animal, cannot experience the impossible experience of death that would overcome all possibility. Therefore, if human life can be mourned, if it can leave its trace in life, the nonhuman animal's death also leaves its mark, even as it is silenced.

If this animal could speak would its sacrifice be tenable? That is, if this particular animal were able to present itself via a language that would represent a consciousness and therefore a relation to its own death, could this death then be sacrificed in this manner, that is in the name of a certain humanity?²¹ The animal does not speak, but it also does not suffer in silence. What does the body of the animal mean to say when it trembles, when the dog's hackles rise, when its fangs are bared, its breath rasps and its voice whines? What does *my* body mean to say as it trembles, or as tears come to my eyes? What can it mean but that it suffers, that is, that it is affected by passivity and subjected to the trace of the other. To present the suffering of an animal as a lesser violence than a human suffering, because, for instance, it may not have the capacity to speak, construct a self, or imagine and plan for the future, would be, in Cary Wolfe's words, "to believe that the question of an 'objective' or 'correct' interpretation of heterophenomenological worlds is essentially unproblematic" and "that there is

²¹ This question opens onto the question of all the other 'others' that may be sacrificed in the modern biopolitical context. That is those who do possess speech and the category of the species humanity, but who do not have access to healthcare and the drugs that permit the survival of a certain, 'privileged,' humanity. This is a question I shall return to in Chapter Three in reference to Agamben and Foucault's analysis of sovereign power and the formation of biopolitics, but for now my focus shall remain on the animal other.

such a thing as non(self)deconstructible observation” (2002, 89). To perform a deconstruction of this observation, and with it, the objectification of the animal other, one could look to the contingency of the observer whose observation is constituted by a domain of language – but a domain which is not foundational because it results from biological processes which are not specifically linguistic at all; or, one could look to the contingency of the specific context of an observation – where, for example, when a mouse is named as a domestic pet, its death is not sacrificed, while, when that same species is named a laboratory animal, its death becomes sacrificable. This would, one might think, present an insurmountable contradiction to the ‘objective,’ ‘rational’ observer were it not possible to ignore this contradiction by assuming an alternative perspective. So that in this latter case, the traces, or communications of the animal are not erased as such, but they are, perhaps, ignored – they are not followed. It is this shifting of perspectives of observation that gives rise to opposing, or even, in Derrida’s characterisation, *warring* sides, for there is, according to Derrida in “The Animal that Therefore I am,” “a war [...] being waged between, on the one hand, those who violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion, and, on the other hand, those who appeal for an irrefutable testimony to this pity” (2002d, 397).

Derrida’s philosophical presentation of this problematic of the animal can be thought with and alongside the systems theoretical perspective outlined above. But Derrida, rather than asking if the animal can speak – or trying even to ‘make the animal speak,’ that is, to give it the *ability* or the *power* of reason, thought or speech – suggests, following Jeremy Bentham, that one should ask, “can they suffer?” (2002d, 396). Suffering, for Derrida, marks a *passivity* rather than a power, and this passivity is that which enables one, as ‘One,’ as a ‘unity’ to be affected by the trace of the other – or in systems theory’s terms, by the *communication* of the other, materially, biologically, psychically or linguistically.²² By the trace, and by ‘communication’ then (in the specifically

²² Lynn Turner argues in her essay ‘When Species Kiss: some recent correspondence between animots’ (2010), that the shift Derrida makes from a discussion of the *privation* of the ability to speak to the discussion of an *ability* to suffer does not simply replace the question “can they speak” but troubles the notion of the sovereign power of the human. By reversing the

systems theoretical sense), what is meant here is the openness of the ‘one’ to the mark in general, to the *grammè*, *différance* iterability etc.. It is this *ability* to suffer the ‘violence’ of the inscription of the trace that the human, according to Derrida, shares with the nonhuman animal. This passivity is then a certain compassion, a suffering *with* the nonhuman animal via the ‘fiction’ of unity. For, as Derrida makes clear in *Archive Fever* (1996):

As soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. *L’Un se garde de l’autre*. The One guards against/keeps some of the other. It protects *itself* from the other, but, in the movement of this jealous violence, it comprises in itself, thus guarding it, the self-otherness or self-difference (the difference from within oneself) which makes it One. The “One differing, deferring from itself.” The One as the Other. At once, at the same time, but in a time that is out of joint, the One forgets to remember itself to itself, it keeps and erases the archive of injustice that it is. Of this violence that it does. *L’Un se fait violence*. (Derrida 1996, 78)

For Derrida then, as for autopoiesis, a unity is open to the inscription of the other, and indeed is constituted, and maintained, by its “violent” trace. It is this passivity, in regards to the other (as a “perturbing” environment), that links all ‘systems’ which profess a certain unity. According to Derrida then in “Eating Well”:

What I am proposing here should allow us to take into account scientific knowledge about the complexity of “animal languages,” genetic coding, all forms of marking within which so-called human

philosophical refrain of privation and lack that is consistently employed to name an insurmountable gap between human and animal, Derrida focuses on the *ability* of both human and nonhuman animals to suffer through their openness to the trace (73). According to Haraway however, suffering is defined as an *incapability* and it is the question of ‘play’ which is, for her, able to open the question of the animal to the notion of capability. Haraway therefore asks not, “can animals suffer?” but “can animals play?” (2008, 22). And while, Haraway argues, *both* open to mortality and finitude, play indicates the possibility of mutual response without the rhetoric of pity.

language, as original as it may be, does not allow us to “cut” once and for all where we would like to cut. (1991b, 116-17)

The systems theoretical narrative I have just related performs, within the frame of science itself, a deconstruction of this ‘scientific taxonomic knowledge’ of ‘animal languages’ that cuts the animal off from the human. In a comparable manner Derrida repeats this deconstruction of what he calls ‘logocentrism’ but he supplements the terms of the separation, following René Descartes, as a distinction between the animal who can but *react* to the other, and the human who can *respond*, which opens to the question of suffering and an ethics of responsibility (2009).²³ By briefly iterating the argument now in these Derridean terms it will perhaps be possible to consider an ethics of the animal/human relation in comparison to systems theory that might help to think the problematics of immunity, autoimmunity, illness and suffering that are being discussed here, to address not only the communicability of logocentrism but also the bodily and the material.

Suffering Responsibility

In his seminar series *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), Derrida deconstructs the separation between the animal and the human that is presented by Lacan who is following the Cartesian demarcation between reaction and response (2002 [1953]).²⁴ According to Lacan, animal communication is a reaction that is distinguished from ‘language’ (as a human attribute) by its code remaining fixed in its relation to the reality of its signifier.²⁵ What this means for Lacan, is that the animal is incapable of responding to the other, to its question, except as an effect of the human symbolic order of language, a human order that is metalinguistic, referring only to itself in a closed relation – thus recalling perhaps

²³ See Descartes *Treatise on Man* ([1664] 1984–91, Vol 1, 99-108).

²⁴ Derrida’s seminar series *La Bête et Le Souverain* was first presented in Paris in 2001-2003, the session in question here was first published in English as the essay “Say the Animal Responded” in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (2008c), the translated seminars appearing the following year in 2009.

²⁵ In Lacan’s psychoanalytic model, this fixity of animal communication results in it remaining within the imaginary rather than the symbolic order.

the autopoietic closure of human language discussed above. But, for Derrida, what Lacan attributes to signs that “take their value from their relationship among themselves,” and not simply from “fixed correlation of these signs to reality,” must be granted to any code, whether animal or human (Derrida, quoting Lacan 2009, 118). For Derrida then, as for systems theory, *each* ‘linguistic domain,’ animal, human or otherwise, remains self-referential and closed to the other. We have already seen that the clear divide between the human linguistic order (whose signs for Lacan, “take their value from their relationship among themselves”) and the animal order, becomes unclear in the example of the metacommunication of “play” discussed by Bateson. Here, the language of play does not rest on a certain fixed communication of playful behaviours, but institutes an uncertainty as to the specific referent of the action, so that one must question, “Is this play?” This, for system theory and for Derrida, is the case within the animal, as well as the human linguistic, realm.

For Derrida, this uncertainty regarding the real referent is irreducible and forms the basis for any ethical relation, and this is because every code must remain closed to the other as radically other, that is “*wholly other*” (*tout autre*). For as soon as the other is *recognised* as other it is no longer an other *as such*. As I have just indicated in the above quotation from *Archive Fever* (1996), while the One as any unity of language, organism, self, etc. is constituted and “shot through” by the other, it also guards against it: “*L’Un se garde de l’autre*. The One guards against/keeps some of the other” (78). This dual relation to the other presents the deconstructive equivalent of the autopoietic operational closure, and structural openness. The other *as such*, as *wholly other*, is always masked and guarded against by the self-referentiality of language. Like the absent wolf, it can only appear via the fabulations of language (or communication), it is the trace of these fabulations in ‘language’ that ‘represent’ the other in their inscription, contamination and supplementation of the ‘unity’ of any One. What this distinction between the other and the wholly other enacts for Derrida is an ethical relation that lies in the radical unrecognizability and unknowability of the other in itself. To know or recognise the other is then to be open to the other (‘structurally’ in systems theoretical terms), but to also

always to be bound to the unconditionality of a relation to this other as ‘essentially’ unknowable. For Derrida, as for autopoiesis, a unity, is always both open and closed, paradoxically. And this is why for Derrida, “*tout autre est tout autre*” – every other is *every* other, and every other is *wholly* other (1995b, 84).

Derrida may then agree with Carol Adams that there is a radical distancing between the human, social and cultural representations of nonhuman others. But, unlike Adams, Derrida seems to suggest that there is no real referent who can be returned to presence and responded to ethically in an unmediated manner. Cultural, communicative, traces, whether biological, material or linguistic are, for Derrida, the *only* possible relations with these nonhuman others to whom one must respond. Yet, these traces which mediate a relation to the animal that remains *wholly* other, are not equal. Such narratives can produce *dishonest* fictions which separate human and non-human animals. It is these dishonest fictions, which deny the suffering of animals, which both Adams and Derrida would wish to deconstruct.

To return to the terms of reaction and response that Derrida is deconstructing in Lacan. For Derrida, knowledge, would make response – as an autonomous free decision to responsibly respond to the other – a reaction. To respond to something that is given in advance as knowledge would become the deployment of a programme and thus enact no *responsible* response. Therefore, response, as responsibility, can only mean for Derrida the necessity of *passively* receiving the trace of the other in the ‘unity’ of the self, that is, being open to suffering the effects of the other, a suffering that we must share with the animal, in *its* ‘open closure’ to the other. As we have seen in Chapter One, Derrida requires this passivity in order to allow for the possibility of an openness to the future and the *promise* of the new, of life and living, of survival. In this case then a response and responsibility is opened to the reactions of ‘the animal’ and ‘the human.’

The ‘power’ that Lacan attributes to the human ability to respond (a ‘power’ that is, however, born of the originary *defect* of language that subjects it to the signifier) is a power to erase its own tracks – or traces – to feign a feint or

pretend to pretend. Immediately, for Derrida, such a power would become questionable for “in the name of what knowledge or what testimony [... can one] calmly declare that *the animal in general* is incapable of feigning feint” (2009, 128)? For all “knowledge” and all “testimony” would remain incapable of knowing the animal other as such. Is the wolf’s ‘playful’ bite a feint, a feigned feint or a real bite? How could this be determined but via an anthropocentric *representation* of the ‘as if,’ the fiction and the fable? According to Derrida, to lay down a track, as a trace, a testimony, or knowledge would be *always* to necessarily, and at the same time, erase that track as it is passively open to the contamination of the other. It is not the powerful sovereign, autonomous deciding subject of the signifier who is capable of covering its tracks, it is the trace *itself* which does so. For, from the perspective of the trace, there is nothing radically *outside* its own function to destroy it; and “in this respect, man has no more sovereign *power* to efface his traces than the so called ‘animal’” (131). This results then in an aporia where the ‘sovereign’ possessor of language can only confirm this power, that is, the inscription of its languaging in the moment of decision, whilst also at the same time subverting it. By re-staging suffering as an ability and a power to be affected, Derrida opens all categories of difference, the human, the animal, the vegetal etc. to a shared experience.

Derrida’s deconstruction here of the apparent indivisibility of the divide between the human and nonhuman animal helps to clarify the nature of my uncomfortable relation to the subjection of the animal other in regards to my illness. If nonhuman animals share my passivity, my suffering, they also share my relation to death, to the impossible ‘experience’ of a death which is wholly other; for this relation is not conducted via the structure of consciousness – or even then the unconscious – but via a radical ‘nonconscious’ passivity in relation to the mark of the other. To maintain an ethical relation to the animal other in Derridean terms, that is, to be open to the trace of this other, it would be necessary to sacrifice the sacrificing of the death of this animal, for this death must always leave a trace, one that cannot – or should not – be ignored. For Derrida, the suffering of an animal is therefore irreducible, as he remarks in no uncertain terms:

No one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness [...] the response to the question “Can they suffer?” leaves no room for doubt. [...] No doubt either, then, of there being within us the possibility of giving vent to a surge of compassion. (2002d, 397)

And yet, even with this possibility of compassion, and this indubitable suffering, the suffering of certain animal life, as the life and the suffering of the laboratory animal, is still permitted in the name of the sustenance of humanity, human knowledge, science, bio-science, biomedical sciences and the life of the human subject. For, as Derrida continues, this *doubtless* suffering *can* be nonetheless “misunderstood, repressed, or denied, held at bay” (28). In terms of *my* suffering of my illness, the sacrifice of the laboratory animal’s death must be ignored if the drugs are to be administered and the threat of my own death is to be alleviated and comfort from *my* physiological suffering to be found. This contradiction between personal survival and ethical openness to the suffering and death of the other is given a poignant voice in the personal narrative of the animal rights campaigner Simon Chaitowitz, who, on being diagnosed with terminal breast cancer, is asked to justify her use of drugs which have been produced only via the suffering of the animal: “If you wonder how I can justify taking the drugs, the truth is that like all living beings (‘lab animals’ included) I desperately want to live.” (2009). In order to submit her own life to an opening to the future as survival, even she (as one who “appeal[s] for an irrefutable testimony to this pity [for the animal]”) must ignore and close herself to its suffering. And because Chaitowitz remains stronger in her sovereign power than the animal, even while dying, it is her, her sovereignty and her body that takes precedence over the animal.

I too might want to attempt to justify the suffering of animals in my name and in the name of human science and progress, for in my ‘sovereign’ decision to accept the drugs and the suffering this inflicts, I have assumed there to be a lesser violence in the violence against the animal other. A violence which might seem

not to be on the scale of a human sufferance that can articulate so poignantly its pain and despair. With this loud, pervasive and persuasive voice, the beastly sovereignty of a human desire to live on attempts always to convince me. But most persuasive is the ferocious pain in my skin, bones and joints, my chest and my heart, the force of which has compelled me to acknowledge the suffering of the nonhuman animal who shares this world with me. But, despite this acknowledgement, I just want it to stop.

The Wolf Huffs and Puffs

It is at this point that we can see the convergences I have been drawing above between autopoiesis and deconstruction begin to diverge. Both systems theory's thinking of autopoietic unities and Derrida's deconstruction employ the paradox of self-referentiality *and* openness, to maintain survival *and* to deconstruct fixed, transcendental relations between, in our example, the animal and the human realms. Both are 'closed' within the 'traces' of language, so that in Cary Wolfe's words, for both the biologists Maturana and Varela and the philosopher Derrida: "There is nothing outside the text' indeed – except, of course, everything" (2003, 94). However, autopoiesis, with its emphasis on its own *self-creation*, narrates a directionality as a movement from maintenance as operational closure to an open and creative evolution that depends on it. As the bioscientists Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan have argued, when life is thought of as autopoietic, maintenance, as self-maintenance, comes *before* reproduction and creative evolution (2000, 19). An autopoietic system adapts to the unknowable and unrecognisable complexity of its environment by reducing that complexity – what is not reducible to it will remain radically unknowable for that unity itself – but, in order to maintain this cohesion the autopoietic unity must *ignore* its relation to the unknowable and unrecognisable other, it must ignore its founding paradox. In this effort then an autopoietic system *forces*, as it were, a relation to the environment in order to *reconstruct* its function, which has been deconstructed by its paradoxical relation to its others. What this forcing, as the creative maintenance of the 'self' enacts then, is the fact that the 'reason of the strongest will always win out,' a situation that Derrida also describes in *The*

Beast and the Sovereign (2009, *passim*). However, for Derrida, because the force of any sovereign act in maintaining itself is *also always* erasing itself at the same time, this force, this act of power, is also always “bête,” ‘stupid,’ beastly, and *insecure* (2009, 164-186). The logic of autopoiesis permits it to ignore this insecurity, and therefore the *ethics* that Derrida insists remains always open in the relation between the self-referentiality of all traces and the wholly other that maintains these in relation to the unknown and unknowable other – as, for example, death, or the future to come (*à venir*). It is this open relation to the wholly other that permits Derrida to *at the same time* maintain the promise, which is the chance of perfectibility and justice, *and* the risk, threat and terror of the worst through the *deconstruction* of the system’s function.

For Derrida, a deconstruction of the structural components of a system, such as autopoiesis enacts through its non-representational and creative relation to these structures, would not do justice to the deconstructability of the system *as* system, that is the deconstruction of its very operation: “The walls are destroyed, but the architectural model is not deconstructed” (2009, 282). For autopoietic theory, there can be no revolution in the revolution of turns, tropes and *trophes* that it can produce. This is only possible via the *impossible* relation to the wholly other that autopoiesis must ignore in order to survive. It is in this sense that Cary Wolfe argues that the analyses of deconstruction and systems theory move in opposite directions:

Derrida’s from the inside out, as it were, from the originary problem of the self-reproduction of *logos* to the contingency of the trace, and Maturana and Varela’s from the outside in, from the originary problem of the overwhelming contingency and complexity of the environment to the autopoiesis of self-referential organisation that, by reducing complexity, makes observation possible. (2003, 92-93)

It is to this divergence that Wolfe gives the last word in his analysis of deconstruction and second order systems theory’s ability to disarticulate language and species:

It would be tempting, I suppose, to find in Derrida's "trace beyond the human" the opening of a radicalized concept of language to a kind of biologization, [...] to "*the problem of the living*." Similarly, it is tempting to find in the biology of Maturana and Varela a kind of linguisticizing of biology, in their attention to the epistemological problem that language is "our starting point, our cognitive instrument, and our sticking point". But here one last word from systems theory is in order; for what makes such a "convergence" possible [...] is, paradoxically, not attempting to step outside the limits of different disciplines and language games, but rather pushing them internally to their self-deconstructive conclusions. (93, emph. Wolfe's)

For Wolfe, following Luhmann, "it is precisely *by* working vertically in different disciplines that Derrida and Maturana and Varela can complement one another" (93) and thus arrive through an "equifinal" process at the same result that dissolves traditional ontological metaphysics, one via deconstructing and the other via *reconstructing*. But rather than giving the last and final word to systems theory and the maintenance of the separation of these disciplines, I want to continue the conversation by inhabiting the paradox of the convergences *and* divergences of these two disciplines by returning to the Derridean, and bioscientific, term autoimmunity. It is, according to the wolfish-Wolfe, this refusal to step outside the limits of these disciplines and language games that allows us to think of systems theory as, in Niklas Luhmann's words, the "reconstruction of deconstruction" (2002, 101). But I would argue that it is precisely possible to inscribe the reconstruction of deconstruction, or systems theory 'itself' right within the deconstructive movement. This possibility can be seen most clearly when we employ the language of autoimmunity. It is this "reconstruction" that can comfort the insecurity that can become endemic to deconstruction as well as increasingly terrifying for the sick subject who suffers biologically, psychically and suicidally through a certain 'autoimmunity.' It is the reconstruction of my body through scientific 'knowledge' that permits the continuation of my own life, a reconstruction achieved through the creative

communications between bodies, languages and traces, materially, technically and linguistically, which are creatively and not statically maintained through a systems theoretical perspective. But this reconstructive comfort is not foreign to the deconstructive act, it is, rather, inscribed right within it.

Thinking in terms of the maintenance of one's operation, one is able to shift, suppress and ignore the threat of the necessary relation one has to the unforeseeable, unrecognisable other which could threaten this cohesion. What is enacted here is a comfort that gives one strength, etymologically, a *con-fort*, a force of strength, as perhaps a forced strength, through the reason of the strongest. But, perhaps, this comfort might also be a *com-fort*, a strengthening *together*, which opens a relation to the other that gives rise to a *com-passion*, a shared passivity, passion and suffering. As my illness in its bodily discomfort is strengthened by its shared relation to nonhuman animal others in the laboratory, the compassion that is generated here opens me too to a *community* of fellows, where the fellowship of the human is opened to the animal and implicated in a shared duty, a debt and gift of the *munus*. Both deconstruction and systems theory describe the possibility of such an opening to the animal other. But autopoiesis then proceeds to 'immunize' itself from this communal *munus*, from this shared suffering. That is, it immunizes *itself* from its own self-deconstruction and the paradoxes that lie there. I shall now pursue a reading of this process of immunization, and indicate how this speaks to the potential of *autoimmunity* to think together the promise and the risk of the paradoxical relation of reconstruction and deconstruction, in order to immunize, ethically, *only the paradox* and thus to defend *risk* as the only ethical source of comfort in a Derridean sense.

5.

Third Fiction: Immune Fictions

At the site of my decision to comfort the trembling weaknesses of my body, at this site of the doctor's surgery a decision is made that cites immediately the sacrifice of an animal other, one who is to be ingested to quell my agitation. This citation

reveals to sight the violence of the decision. But what the meeting does not permit to be seen is the outcome of this act. It did not let me see then that the sacrifice of the animal for the sake of my comfort would not effect its desired results, it did not reveal to my own eyes the thousands of deaths that were enacted in the process of this failure, it did not let me foresee the return of an illness, some years later, with a ferocious vigour that returns me to my sickbed and the internal contradictions of my body. I had, at that time, put my faith in the appearance of a lesser violence: the sacrifice of the animal for the security of my own healthy survival, that would put to an end the immediacy of my discomfort. But now I, again, foresee only worse.

The decision to admit the immunosuppressant trial drug, was, as we have seen, a paradoxical autoimmune decision that contained risk on both sides, death and life on both sides, cure and vulnerability on both sides, it was – as is always the case for the decision that passively receives the trace of the other – an undecidable decision. And yet, this decision was made and it was based on the hope of a lesser violence. From the systems theoretical perspective such a lesser violence, which permits the sacrifice of the animal other in the name of the human, would be named as being an event that, though violent in its perturbation of the systemic function, does not effect the *operation* and the autopoietic unity of that system. For Maturana and Varela then the deconstruction of the limit between the human and the animal communicative realms (or systems) that autopoiesis enacts, does not necessitate any ‘ethical’ relation (in the Derridean sense) to the other that perturbs it. The autopoietic system can and must be capable of ‘ignoring’ the relation to the suffering of the animal, or the paradoxical of alterity in general that could paralyse its function. The lesser violence here then will always be the violence that avoids such a relation to the violent paradox at the foundation of the self-referentiality of the system itself.

Niklas Luhmann, in *Social Systems* (1995 [1984]), has extended the scope of Maturana and Varela’s biological account of autopoiesis to a general field of

enquiry that includes psychic and social systems.²⁶ It is within this field that Luhmann expands the logic of immunity in regards to systems theory. If we follow Derrida and Luhmann's reciprocal uses of this logic it may be possible to clarify the manner in which Derrida's focus on the paradoxes – or aporias in Derridean terminology – of the autoimmune, necessitates a *reliance* on immunity as represented by Luhmann's autopoietic structures.

Both Derrida and Luhmann recognise the paradox of the decision, but while Derrida uses this paradox to deconstruct the logic of a sacred secure, whole immune self, Luhmann shows how systems theory immunizes itself from Derrida's deconstructive reading (1986, 1995). For Derrida, the paradox of the open-closure of any unity, results in there being no stable system that might not be contaminated by the outside, that is, that might not be radically deconstructed in the totalising movement of the worst violence, of the *wholly* other. The insecurity of this paradox is paramount and condemns life to the possibility of an exponential experience of anxiety, vulnerability, complexity *as well as* creativity. Luhmann, however, shows how systems theory employs the very contradictions with which Derrida deconstructs 'systems,' in order to immunize systems against this violence: according to Luhmann these contradictions act as the alarm signals of an immune system, signalling the need for the system to adapt its structure in order to maintain its function and permit its creative evolution (1995, 369-377). This process would then have no ethical basis, the system seeks only to survive – as Simon Chaitowitz seeks only to survive. This, according to Luhmann, is a *description* of what happens and is not a *prescription* (1995, 83), just as Derrida claims, deconstruction is that which happens, and not a method (1985, 3), both authors here then avoid the language of a conventional moral and ethical decision that has the power to decide one way or another.

For Luhmann the paradox of self-referentiality as the foundation of any system – where self is inscribed tautologically on both sides of the division between system and environment – is read as a threat, for it permits the possible closure,

²⁶ The autopoiesis of an organism is spatially secured by form, maintaining 'life.' In social systems what is secured is the connective capacity of actions (Luhmann 1995, 372). I would follow Derrida here and inscribe each of these within the 'logic' of the trace.

paralysis and then deconstruction, of the system itself. However, Luhmann suggests that such a paradox of undecidability between self and other can be rendered harmless and freed from the paralysis of the paradoxical by the emergence of another autopoietic system. A social system employing meaning as communication, or a psychic system employing meaning as consciousness, can observe and maintain the inter-dependence and distinction of self and other, making them signify in the operation of a more complex social system.²⁷

In terms then of the paradox of immunity – as autoimmunity – where vulnerability and self-destruction exist on both sides, and where one faces the undecidable decision as to whether to administer the life-saving *and* life-threatening drugs, Luhmann would focus, not on the abyssal logic of the decision's deconstructability, but on the fact that, due to the complexity of the environment forcing the system to select, the decision nonetheless gets made. The decision, once made, displaces the paradox by employing the discourse of scientific meaning production. The biosciences then, as a 'social system,' maintains both the autopoiesis of the living body (by securing its disturbed operation and rendering the dysfunctional body functional) and dispels the paradox of alterity by presenting the autoimmune body and the technology of the drug as interdependent constructs within another system of bio-logics. When observed from outside, by the scientist for example, the contradiction no longer paralyzes but rather confirms the system of knowledge that produces scientific facticity. Whilst the autoimmune contradiction is not removed, in being rendered invisible by scientific discourse it is, perhaps, as Gunther Teubner has argued, no longer threatened by its deconstructive paradox (2001).

However, the paradox of alterity is not dispelled, rather, it is merely shifted and must reappear in the new autopoietic social system that protects it. The scientific system of a bio-logics is necessarily founded on its own paradoxical structures of thought that are themselves deconstructable. It is therefore the constant requirement of social systems to shift and render harmless the contradictions that

²⁷ This dialectical move has much in common with Hegelian reasoning, but for Luhmann this dialectic is rendered contingent, unpredictable, and non-teleological (Luhmann 1995, 373).

threaten their continued autopoietic survival. It is in this sense that Luhmann describes such contradictions as the “alarm signal” of a social systems’ immune system, allowing for an immune response that defends their continued creative emergence. For, in Gunther Teubner’s words, in his essay “Economics of Gift — Positivity of Justice” (2001), which addresses the distinctions between Derrida and Luhmann:

Paradoxes not only threaten the structures of social systems [...], against which they must defend, separate and protect themselves; more importantly, paradoxes provoke [systems] into the relentless production of new rules and routines. The actual deconstructive obsession is not with defensive, conservative systems maintaining their original structures but with their insatiable impulse for the invention of new differences. The birth of autopoiesis from the spirit of deconstruction? (Teubner 2001, 39)

However, if we recast this immune logic in terms of deconstructive *autoimmunity*, the constant invisibilisation of the paradox marks an exclusion that ignores a relation to the other that must, for Derrida, remain undecidable in order to be responsible. To ignore the paradox is to deny the vulnerability and risk that exist on both sides of the decision, but *it does not remove the risk*. The paradox of vulnerability, which has been ignored in the medicalisation of the autoimmune disease, reappears, in our example, with the incarceration, experimentation and death of the animal other; or again at the level of a biopolitical management of populations where the decision of who may, or may not, have access to pharmaceutical products in order to lessen their vulnerability to disease increases the vulnerability of other populations by necessarily excluding them from treatment. To protect life by ignoring this risk to life would surely be autoimmune and, as such, open onto the possibility of the destruction of the new, larger system itself.²⁸

²⁸ It should be noted that for social systems autopoiesis does not seek the continued self-creative production of ‘life,’ but the continued connective capacity of actions, therefore it is not threatened by this contradiction in terms of lives lost, but in terms of how this increase in

If we consider Luhmann's statement that systems theory is the "reconstruction of deconstruction" and Teubner's statement that systems' "operational and observational closure against each other produce new anti-deconstructive immunity," (2001, 38) then we can perhaps view the process of deconstructive autoimmunity, which is at work in the movement of survival for Derrida, to be risking *itself*, as it protects itself. Autoimmunity risks the *maintenance* of structures, as much as it risks their *deconstruction*. We are perhaps presented here with the 'autoimmunity of autoimmunity.' If we think of autoimmunity as a deconstructive term that opens all structures – via diagnosing their foundational paradoxes – to survival, or *sur-vivance* (whilst also highlighting the terror, fear and risk of this move) then, the risk that the *autoimmune* must face is the failure of the paradox to deconstruct in the face of society's ability to de-paradoxify. To take seriously the ethical stakes of Derrida's undecidability, is to acknowledge that in the autoimmune decision one must be open to every other, therefore, to the possibility of reconstruction as much as to deconstruction.

For Derrida, at every moment there remains an undecidability between the narratives of maintenance and deconstruction. Autopoiesis as a self-creative maintenance can immunize itself against a paradoxical paralysis of its organisational cohesion, but this moment is equally able to be said to deconstruct as reconstruct its order, a deconstruction that would introduce the radically new – for better or worse. Whether said to be deconstructed or reconstructed there is novelty and change as well as threat and risk. But as my reconstruction fails, that is, as my living autopoietic body faces its own radical alterity I feel only fear, and not hope. In Haraway's words "mortality [is] made vivid in the experience of pain and systemic breakdown" (2008, 31). Will then the vivid sensibility of pain always over-ride and intercept my sensitivity to the other who remains absent? Or might the this experience of mortality and systemic breakdown in fact open me continually to a shared experience when species, in their very different worlds, meet?

vulnerability threatens its own actions/functioning, by, for example, limiting its economic survival – if however, this were a biopolitical system we were discussing, this distinction holds.

The introduction of autoimmunity into Derrida's lexicon therefore makes it clearer, perhaps, that it is always a possibility for deconstruction to *seemingly* 'paralyse' itself, especially when it is at work in a specific social, historical or political context where autopoietic systems may attempt to render themselves immune to their deconstructive paradoxes. In Teubner's reading, Derridean deconstruction, unlike systems theory, is unable to address the specific historical, social conditions of possibility that are consistently able to de-paradoxify the deconstructive paradox. For Teubner, despite Derrida's consistent reminder that the decision is "pragmatically determined" in "strictly *defined* situations" (Derrida 1988, 119), his writing is famously (or infamously), Teubner claims, lacking in historical and sociological analyses (Teubner 2001, 35).

Indeed one would not find in Derrida's extensive writings a commentary on the particular fears, paradoxes and decisions involved in the biological or bioscientific relation of an individual to their body, or to the animal body, which I am pursuing here. Despite Derrida's repeated calls to address the singularity of 'the animal', and indeed all forms of life, he consistently refuses to *perform* the sort of detailed commentary that such singularity seems to call to – the details of all the narratives of bio-logics, social complexities, personal narratives etc. (Derrida 2002d, 2004).²⁹ Or this is a criticism that Donna Haraway voices in *When Species Meet* (2008) where she addresses Derrida's famous meeting with his cat in the bathroom one morning, a cat Derrida professes clearly to be "a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. It isn't the figure of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literatures and fables" (Derrida 2002d, 374). But for Haraway it is a pity, it is a shame, that Derrida chooses to focus on the shame that this meeting induces, in his naked encounter, and the deconstruction of a

²⁹ In 'The Animal that Therefore I am,' and 'Violence Against Animals' for example, Derrida laments both the violent attribution of the generic singular term "the animal" to the myriad forms of life this appellation names, and the technicized mass killing of "the animal" that he goes so far as naming genocidal (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 394-5; Derrida 2002d). But he does not detail the narratives and the scientific or social frames that give these terms value in contemporary discourse, he doesn't produce a commentary of these effects, but rather seeks to deconstruct them, for Teubner, this renders the power of systems theory's *reconstruction* more powerful than Derrida's *deconstruction*.

philosophical tradition that ensues from this, rather than addressing the mindful, embodied encounter with *his* cat, from whom he could learn:

Actually to respond to the cat's response to his presence would have required his joining that flawed but rich philosophical canon to the *risky* project of asking what this cat on this morning cared about, what these bodily postures and visual entanglements might mean and might invite, as well as reading what people who study cats have to say and delving into the developing knowledges of both cat-cat and cat-human behavioral semiotics when species meet. (2008, 22, *emph. mine*)

For Derrida to have performed such an analysis that engages with the bodily, visual, and behavioural semiotics of the species cat and the species human, would indeed have been, as Haraway acknowledges, a risky project for him to undertake. For, by engaging with these specifics Derrida would risk ignoring the foundational paradox of the systems of, for example, the behavioural sciences. In doing so he could risk facilitating the reconstruction of various systems of thought, which, in the specific moment of the decision, observation or act, immunize themselves from the deconstructive tendency that Derrida is attempting to bring to the fore in his essay. This does not mean however that his encounter with his cat that morning, and every other morning, does not also speak to the knowledges of cat-cat and cat-human behavioural semiotics that Haraway finds to be so important to address. But that Derrida himself would *prefer not to* perform this reading in the hope, perhaps, of retaining a clearer relation to what he has consistently outlined as the ethical openness to the wholly other. Derrida could be seen to be avoiding any unnecessary freezing of the deconstructive movement by its reciprocal reconstructive actions.³⁰ In

³⁰ For Turner, "since Haraway's priority is to write from the point 'where species meet' as a place conflicted with naturalcultural, colonial, political narratives that incorporate the philosophical, rather than [...starting] from a domain constitutively philosophical, she sometimes cuts short the range of Derrida's remarks" (2010, 68). I would agree, but add also that this is done in order to 'reconstruct' as it were, new possibilities of 'becoming with' companion species, Derrida, it seems to me would be unwilling to undertake such a reconstructive project for the reasons I outline above.

characterizing Derrida as ‘preferring not to’ here, I am suggesting that he, like Bartleby the Scrivener, is avoiding a certain duty – or *munus* – of the social (which includes nonhuman animals) that Haraway finds to be an essential component to the meeting of species.³¹ While Derrida could be seen to be immunizing himself here from this *munus* in Haraway’s thinking, this ‘I would prefer not to’ for Derrida in fact “takes on the responsibility of a response without response. It evokes the future without either predicting or promising; it utters nothing fixed, determinable, positive, or negative” (1995, 75). And thus, Derrida can be seen here to be attempting to leave this moment with his cat as *open* as possible to the future to come, rather than to be *closing* its analysis to the always possible reconstructive specifics of behavioural semiotics.

The difference in the two approaches of Haraway, and Derrida can be clarified if we take into account Haraway’s position in regards to autopoiesis. In *When Species Meet*, Haraway comments on the function of autopoiesis in the biological sciences. For her, the language of unity, self-reference, and self-creation or maintenance, which autopoiesis puts in play, remains too closed to be able to describe the myriad ways of becoming-with other species, in science, medicine or any meeting of species (317 n.46). Cary Wolfe, however, has shown us that this closure is always an open closure, and is in fact an openness *from* closure. Haraway acknowledges Wolfe’s work in this area, and notes its closeness to her own insistence on an otherness knotted into never fully bounded or self-referential entities (32; 317 n.46).³² Yet, Haraway *prefers not to* retain the term autopoiesis as, for her, the term cannot be bent enough away from the concept of individual self-maintenance. I argue however that this closure presented by autopoiesis’ *fictive* self-referentiality, is important to retain here for it announces the very risk and of a rhetorical paralysis that is inherent to the autoimmune deconstructive moment (and which could help to account for Derrida’s cursory

³¹ See Derrida’s *The Gift of Death* for his brief reading of Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1984) in regards to the secret of Abraham’s sacrificial act (Derrida 1995b).

³² Haraway uses the trope of there being “turtles all the way down” (in reference to a world resting on an elephant, resting on a turtle, resting on turtles all the way down (2008, 313 n.41)) to indicate the infinite regress without solid foundation of animal and human worldings. She suggest that “the self-referential unit cheats on the turtle’s pile” a cheat – or an ignorance that remains, I would argue, a perpetual risk, as any new foundation is laid.

treatment of his cat that morning). While Haraway performs her opening of the divide between humans and other animals with a rhetoric of play and joy – which, for her, marks the *ability* of nonhuman animals as opposed to suffering and pity that marks the *incapability* of the animal (311); Derrida’s own opening, which, as we have seen, renders suffering as a common *ability*, refers this playful joy on to the always present possibility of pity and shame, pain and death.³³ Derrida would always want to ask with Bateson “is this play?”. Derrida makes it apparent that the division between joy and suffering is never secure. The joy that Haraway finds in her relationships with other species, would always risk, for Derrida, reconstructing logical programmes that facilitate a maintenance that ignores the possibility of suffering. It is for this reason, I would argue, that the logic of autopoiesis has important work to do in acknowledging the presence of the risk one faces when one plays – and works – with other species.

However, Derrida’s immunizing action against Haraway’s call to share this *munus* is, of course, autoimmune. By sometimes seeming to distance himself from the specifics of a social or historical moment Derrida is both protecting his ethical project, and risking its relevance to a social, political and historical moment. At least this is an argument presented by Richard Beardsworth in his book *Derrida and the Political* (1996). Beardsworth, in this account, is concerned with the effects of the technical on the human in regards to the manner in which technology accelerates the human and refuses the experience of the “aporia of time,” which, in Beardsworth’s Derridean analysis, allows for the promise of the political and communal “we to come.” For Beardsworth, Derrida’s work in the face of a technological acceleration begins to appear

too formal, freezing Derrida’s deconstructions of the tradition [of the human and the nonhuman] into a finite, but open set of ‘quasi-

³³ Haraway, of course, accepts with Derrida that the logic of sacrifice is unavoidable (2008 77-80). She suggests that rather than the command “Thou shalt not kill” should be the command “Thou shalt not make killable” (80). In taking this commandment into the laboratory Haraway seeks to perform a different, non-objectifying relation to the animal other that takes responsibility for the killing that occurs there. My point would be, however, following Derrida, that the choice to “not make killable” is as undecidable as the choice to kill. Both retain a risk of reverting in their moment of being enacted to an objectifying, destructive and irresponsible action.

transcendental' logics which turn the relation between the human and the technical into a 'logic' of supplementarity without history (the technical determinations of temporalization). (1996, 154)

These three criticisms of Derrida: Teubner's diagnosis of a lack of sociological analysis, Haraway's disappointment at the disregard of the embodied relation to the animal and Beardsworth's location of a deconstruction frozen by its disregard for technical historicity, can be recast not as a 'failure' on deconstruction's part, but rather as a philosophical refusal. Cary Wolfe, makes this point in *Animal Rites*, where he argues, against Beardsworth, that Derrida does address technicity in his later work only not in regards to the *accelerations* of technicity as non-human other, but through the *slowness* of an animal other, and this in order to avoid privileging a human relation to the technical (2009, 241). Similarly, Derrida himself in *The Beast and the Sovereign* suggests that he is not concerned with the historical, temporal and sociological modalities of a biopolitical discourse but rather with the fictions and fables of a neglected zooanthropology (2009, 65). For Derrida, it seems that the analysis of such fables, does more to deconstruct the ossified limits between the human and the animal than a frontal attack on any one of a number of specific historical, social and political situations would (2009, 332 ff). Yet, there is a risk on both sides of Derrida's decision here: to put his faith in a 'preferring not to' of a 'response without response' and risking ignoring the singularity of his meeting with his cat in all its complexity, ignoring the technicized freezing of time and historicity in the (bio)political moment; or responding to these calls and risking the reconstruction of systems of knowledge as they must engage with narratives of science, politics and history and sociology. It is an undecidable decision, for better or worse.

However, Derrida's statement concerning Bartleby, that, in fact "[h]e will not decide *not to*, he has to decide *to*, but he would prefer not to" (1995b, 75 emph. Derrida's) is equally applicable to Derrida's decisions here. For, of course, like Luhmann's focus on the fact that despite the undecidability of the paradoxical foundations of a system, the decision nonetheless gets made, for Derrida too, the decision gets made, but this is a decision not taken by any deciding I, but which

is ‘forced,’ as it were, by the trace of the other. What this undecidability means, for Derrida, is that the outcome of this decision cannot be known in advance and thus the decision to put one’s faith in the mechanisms, supplementations and indeterminability of a deconstructive openness to the future to come, could always institute the opposite. The paradoxes of the autoimmune moment could always, despite anyone’s best intentions, become productive for the *maintenance* of various limits and their violent divides.

Let us see an example of what happens when Derrida *does* address a specific socio-political context (for, of course, Derrida enacts many such analyses, whether or not these meet the terms desired by sociologists, biologists or politicians). When addressing the autoimmune character of the socio-political defensiveness of post-September 11 American policy Derrida comments on the decision to be made between the religious fundamentalism of the “bin Laden effect,” and “something like democracy”:

What appears to me unacceptable in the “strategy” [...] of the “bin Laden effect” [...] is, above all, the fact that such actions and such discourse *open onto no future and, in my view, have no future*. [...] That is why, in this unleashing of violence without name, if I had to take one of the two sides and choose in a binary situation, well, I would. (2003, 113 emph. Derrida's)

The decision that Derrida takes here is, in some ways, a strange one. Here I am following the line of thought presented by Samir Haddad in his essay “A Genealogy of Violence” (2008), where he suggests that Derrida, in claiming that fundamentalism has no future, or is structurally closed to the future, and that something like democracy in being open to the future and to perfectibility is preferable, seems to imply that by choosing democracy it is possible to choose a lesser violence.³⁴ And yet, as I have attempted to show here, Derrida

³⁴ This is a point made also by WJT Mitchell in his essay “Picturing terror: Derrida's autoimmunity” (2007). However, this reading of Derrida’s decision here would depend on whether one reads this statement – “that such actions and such discourse *open onto no future and, in my view, have no future*” – as Derrida suggesting that these discourses open onto no future to

consistently makes clear throughout his work that it is impossible to choose in favour of a lesser violence, for, in the radical openness of the decision, violence and perfectibility must exist on both sides, undecidably. Derrida is at pains to express throughout the interview just cited, that the perfectibility of democracy can, and must, be capable of autoimmunely inverting into totalitarianism, fundamentalism or fascism, and, in Haddad's words: "If the seemingly best can lead to the worst, why cannot the worst invert into something better? By what right could we claim this latter possibility as impossible?" (2008, 141). The best and the worst are on *both* sides, undecidably, this is the paradox, the aporia, and the responsibility of the decision that opens onto the possibility of justice. Haddad is not suggesting here that one should choose in favour of totalitarianism in the hope that it will produce a better future, but, he suggests, for Derrida to close one future to the possibility of perfectibility is to necessarily both protect and destroy the basis of a Derridean ethics.

My point here is that, once more, what Haddad presents as a 'failure' on Derrida's part to enact his deconstructive ethics marks the inevitability of deconstructive decisions risking 'autoimmunizing' themselves when they address a specific context and a necessary decision. Derrida's decision to name Islamic fundamentalism as opening onto "no future" *creates and maintains* a divide between two systems of thought, it names one as seemingly better than the other. It 'ignores,' for a time, the paradoxes of undecidability in order to autoimmunely assuage the fear and terror of a political, social – or in my case medical – autoimmunity via an impossible process of calculation. But while both alternative futures here *must* open onto an undecidable future "to come" in Derrida's logic, the decision itself, in deciding between them, *appears* to close one future and maintain another. The decision must always narrate a relation to the future, but this narrative remains a fictive projection. While Derrida could be seen to be closing one future in favour of another 'better' future both of these futures remain fictive, as a promise that *narrates* them as 'better' or 'worse.'

come. While he does not say so in so many words the implication in this statement of its non-opening is that this is what Derrida denies the discourse. One could, perhaps, argue that Derrida is suggesting that it is the discourse that denies this opening and not his decision, yet this is not the sense given here: with his "*in my view*" it appears to be Derrida's closure that is stated.

The difference that Derrida locates between the two narratives of the “bin Laden effect” and “something like democracy” is that one future presents a “dishonest fiction,” which constructs a closed future – of the certainty of the One, the One God, and the one right path to follow – and the other constructs a more open and perfectible future which refuses to ignore the uncertainty and the riskiness of its projections. Every decision must risk its effects producing, or maintaining an undesirable outcome, but it can either acknowledge or ignore this risk. For Derrida, it *is* better to choose in favour of an open future, whether this produces better or worse *effects* is however undecidable.

The ‘paralysis’ of deconstruction, which is risked in autoimmunity, is not a paralysis as such but a *seeming* deferral of the deconstructive moment that can reconstruct systems of ‘knowledge’ which can be creative, mobile, and reactive as systems theory shows. What it is that Derrida ‘immunizes’ by insisting on attempting to dwell within the paradox (or aporia) is not any particular system of thought, action, philosophy or biology, it *is the very paradox itself*: a paradox that is the foundation of life in autopoietic and deconstructive terms and that ‘lives on’ in all movements of the trace as life, communication, thought, *and* even materiality.³⁵ For Derrida, it is *this* ‘architectural structure’ of the aporia (that has no structure as such) which cannot be destroyed – though its ‘walls’ can come down. For, as I addressed in Chapter One, even in the final moment of an ultimate destruction – as a total and remainderless destruction of the trace – the paradox of self-referentiality remains, for this totalization, this unification in destruction would have no other to define its totality – it would ‘be’ nothing. The immunity of the paradox is autoimmune.

To return, in the light of this, to my disagreement with Wolfe regarding the divergences of systems theory and deconstruction I re-present this quotation:

It would be tempting, I suppose, to find in Derrida’s “trace beyond the human” the opening of a radicalized concept of language to a kind of

³⁵ I return to the manner in which Derrida (auto)immunizes this paradox in Chapter Three in regards to his rather difficult formulation that “infinite *différance* is finite” (206-209).

biologization, [...] to “*the problem of the living.*” Similarly, it is tempting to find in the biology of Maturana and Varela a kind of linguisticizing of biology, in their attention to the epistemological problem that language is “our starting point, our cognitive instrument, and our sticking point”. But here one last word from systems theory is in order; for what makes such a “convergence” possible [...] is, paradoxically, not attempting to step outside the limits of different disciplines and language games, but rather pushing them internally to their self-deconstructive conclusions. (93, *emph. Wolfe’s*)

Wolfe is here, as I have stated, being somewhat wolfish – he is right, of course, but right where he is wrong. The convergence of Derrida and systems theory *is* produced by their separation and internal deconstruction of their limits. Yet this separation ‘*is*’ their convergence, their divergence is originary to the moment of convergence. That is, within the moment of distinction between language as trace and as biology the two are already undecidable. So I *am* tempted to find in Derrida’s “‘trace beyond the human’ the opening of a radicalized concept of language to a kind of biologization.” I am tempted to ignore their separation, a temptation encouraged by Derrida’s use of autoimmunity in his later work, both in terms of its biomedical origins and its clarification of the inherent defensiveness of the deconstructive paradox. A defensiveness that must *reconstruct* the relations between bio-logics and deconstruction as well as *deconstruct* the paralyses that they can *both* produce.

By ‘immunizing autoimmunity,’ and ‘autoimmunizing immunity,’ that is, by maintaining the paradox, Derrida is, therefore, always right *and* always wrong. He is wolfish, a beast and a sovereign, a master and a slave to the “*bêtise*” of the reason of the strongest.³⁶ But rather than this producing here a dead end, as an endless revolution, what Derrida allows us to see (precisely by obscuring it) is

³⁶ See the Fifth Session of Derrida’s *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009) for an extended analysis of the word *bêtise*, its untranslatability and deconstructive function. *Bêtise* functions as another deconstructive term which marks the undecidability of every sovereign decision, of the beast *and* the sovereign, it marks a certain ‘stupidity’ in every act of knowledge, that protects and destroys autoimmunely the fictional divides between human and nonhuman animals (136-164).

what might be at stake in the autoimmune moment. What is at stake in the attempts to immunize and seek comfort from the autoimmune condition is a loss of responsibility to the other on both sides of the reconstructive or deconstructive moment. While attending to the *maintenance* of living systems, by shifting and obscuring the founding paradoxes of this system I would risk maintaining always the reason of the strongest – my own sovereign ability to survive without regard to the other that this process might subjugate. Yet by refusing to maintain such systems, by deconstructing the security of every decision to act in favour of a better future, I would risk ignoring the specific, and situated, biological, semiotic, sociological, political and affective relation to the other in all its complexity. By opening systems theory to a deconstructive future the risks and the uncertainty of a the narrative of a sovereign right to rule can be always recalled; and by opening deconstruction to the reconstructive logic of systems theory, the necessity of *maintaining* a relation to the scientific, embodied, historical narratives of human-animal relations, or self-other relations in general is preserved. This opening maintains the risk on both sides, for better or worse.



Can the opening of my human body to the shared suffering of OncoMouse™, or the apes, rabbits and *all* the others precipitate the construction of another narrative that seek to maintain my life? This remains a possibility. Yet, what also remains is the logic of the reason of the strongest that continues to sacrifice others for its own sake. Perhaps the disruption of this logic will always remain to come. For the power of *every* decision – which enacts each time a certain sovereign power – must always risk the other. According to Haraway, the knowledge of the suffering of an animal other cannot always obviate the necessity of killing, and a calculative, though insufficient, decision must always be made:

I don't duck the decision to kill animals for the best reasons that persuade me or duck what it takes to formulate those best reasons. I am just saying that does not end the question; it opens it up. Maybe that's all nonhumanism means. But in that little "all" lies

permanent refusal of innocence and self-satisfaction with one's reasons and the invitation to speculate, imagine, feel, build something better. This is the sf worlding that has always lured me. It is a real worlding. (2008, 92)

Haraway's sf worldings of speculative fiction and speculative fact, attempt to re-write the narratives of science and its relation to the animal in a manner that seeks to highlight the capability, joy, and playfulness of the human-animal relation. The lure of such narratives is strong. Yet, the significance of Derrida's formulation of the 'animal question' – and my link to the logic of autopoiesis within this questioning – lies in acknowledging the fact that, even in the face of "the permanent refusal of innocence and self-satisfaction," the question that is opened *can* be closed – or seemingly so – with horrific results. This too remains a possibility. While Haraway uses the logic of "sf worlding" to imagine and produce other, better, ways to meet species, to play, and work with them productively and responsibly in the lab and otherwise; I would want to recall with Derrida that this defensive strategy risks obscuring as well as opening the question. Speculative fictions and speculative facts could always be luring us unseen into a worse world.

Should I, in light of these narratives, refuse the use of the pharmacological product that might save my life, due to the discomfort I feel at the effects it has on the laboratory animal? For me, the decision was taken out of my hands: the drugs did not work, and I have therefore been lead to follow different, but no less risky paths to treat my dis-ease, as explored in Chapter One. Instead of enacting a decision to continue my drug treatment, I decide to narrate the discomfort of this autoimmune relation to the animal, to suggest that there are no easy answers here, not in terms of how one might calculate the value of life, nor in terms of opening this narrative to a better future. However, the irrefutability of the suffering of the laboratory animal, presents a narrative of division, sacrifice and death that seems to me to be untenable, that seems to close the animal within a narrative of the very worst violence. And I retain the hope that there remains in

the promise of the future to come, a time when such sacrifices may not be so easily enacted.

5.

Fourth Fiction: Science Fiction

Lying with the Animals

But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear will always be playing

Milne *The House at Pooh Corner* 1962, 178

In “Post-Meateating” (2009) Carol Adams cites, as an example of the substitution of the real animal referent by a cultural referent, the case of the original five stuffed animals of Christopher Milne who inspired the children’s stories about Winnie the Pooh. Adams tells how, in 1998, a British Member of Parliament visited the New York Library where Winnie the Pooh, Tigger, Eeyore, Owl and Kanga resided. Deciding that these ‘animals’ were unhappy there – that they were incarcerated in their glass case, and homesick – this MP insisted that they be returned to Britain. Rallying calls of “Free the Pooh Five” were sounded in the British press. Adams argues that, while everyone knew that no toy animal could be unhappy, homesick or incarcerated, the ‘sympathy’ evoked in the media story damages “real animals” in several ways:

By substituting a cultural referent for the absent referent it displaces any sympathy we might have for the real suffering of real animals. Secondly, its humor undercuts our (meagre) store of concern for animals. [And f]inally, consumers of the images and stories may consider that they have had an animal encounter when they encountered solely cultural beings. (2009, 48)

A.A Milne's stories of Winnie the Pooh provide a comforting reference to a childhood innocence where a small boy learns to play with his 'animals.' For Adams, this comfort creates a cultural referent that shifts, obscures and ignores the 'real' animal, its real suffering, real incarceration, and the decisions that are made in order to maintain industrial systems of meat production and experimentation. Yet, this comforting and distracting narrative also refers on. To conclude this chapter I will introduce two characters from Geoff Ryman's science fiction novel *The Child Garden* (2011), two characters who we will come to meet again in the following chapter. This speculative science fiction indicates how a cultural referent can not only obscure the real suffering of animal others, closing the questioning of human relations to 'real' animal others, but also open this question by, as Haraway suggests refusing any "innocence and self-satisfaction [...] to speculate, imagine, feel, build something better." But it also indicates that the attempt to build something better, can always reproduce and reconfirm, different divides to re-construct the sacrificial moment in all its destructiveness.

In the speculative future of *The Child Garden* two species meet. The 'human' woman Milena, meets the 'bear' Rolfa, and they fall in love. The 'animal' Rolfa and the 'human' Milena can enact this romantic relationship because, in this future, the traditional divides between human and animal have been thoroughly deconstructed by science. Bears have been genetically engineered to now share many human attributes: Rolfa has language, she can talk with Milena; Rolfa has a face, she can respond to Milena; she manifest's unconscious desires and traumas, she can dream with Milena; she can pretend to pretend and lie with Milena.³⁷ The animal other in this world is not subject to experimentation, not eaten or incarcerated, this is a better future for the animal. The two lovers, the bear and the human, play together: "Do you think," Rolfa asks, "that you could possibly call me Pooh? [...] You could call me Pooh. And I could call you Christopher Robin" (2011, 54). So the human Milena plays the role of Christopher Robin, and Rolfa, plays the role of the "silly old bear" Pooh. What

³⁷ These attributes are all those that have at some point in the philosophical tradition, from Descartes to Lévinas, been denied to the animal other. See Derrida's thorough deconstruction of this tradition in *The Animal that Therefore I am* (2008a).

Christopher Robin's favourite thing in the whole world is, Milne tells us in *The House on Pooh Corner*, is doing *nothing* (1963, 171). Christopher Robin, and Milena both are in love with childhood, they love theatre and stories and escaping from the real world to do – nothing; nothing in particular, just playing with their 'toys,' ignoring the repercussions in the real world. Yet, in the poignant final story of Winnie the Pooh, we realise that Christopher Robin must grow up. He can no longer do nothing and happily play with his animal others, school, and work and decisions of what to be and how to act call to him to respond. Christopher Robin must leave his playmate behind in his enchanted forest (Milne 1963, 161-178).

Milena too must respond to such calls of the 'real' world. In Milena's human world, violent divisions still exist. Despite the shared attributes of humans and nonhumans political narratives of what remains proper to humanity reconstruct new means of differentiating between species that renders their relationship untenable. Without being able to expand on the intricate details of these divisions here (though I will return to them in the following chapter), it is enough to say that in order to respond to the demands of her human society, and in order save her lover from a violent removal from her 'properly' human world, Milena is forced to decide between losing her lover or engineering her animal body to become *more* 'human.' Milena decides in favour of the seemingly lesser violence of the latter course of action. In drawing Rolfa into the human community legally, politically and personally Milena *sacrifices* her otherness. As in the narrative of animal rights, the absorption of 'the animal' into a human legal system, only maintains the sovereignty of the human over the nonhuman animal, and denies the differences that still remain between the two. Milena's decision to maintain her relationship only succeeds in destroying it: the bioengineering of Rolfa's body, produces a new Rolfa, a Rolfa who cannot love Milena and who Milena cannot love.

What Milena is left with is a memory, a memory of her innocent time prior to her fall into a new more violent future full of paradoxical and undecidable and autoimmune decisions. Milena comforts herself with the memory of Rolfa by

citing, repetitiously, Milne's own comforting end to the Winnie the Pooh stories and Christopher Robin's own loss of a childhood innocence: "*at the top of the Forest, a little boy and his bear will always be playing*" (2011, 94 emph. Ryman's). But this memory now also includes the (unconscious) knowledge that the playful act and indeed the appeal to this play as a means of comforting against the violences of the 'real' world, risk reducing the animal other to a mere 'toy,' an object used as a means of securing a personal comfort, a healthy life, or a joyful loving relationship. The always possible reconstruction of a narrative of sovereign power over the other is a constant risk to be faced even once one acknowledges the shared relation and abilities of every other to suffer with you. In the enchanted forest where "a little boy and *his* bear will always be playing" there also lurks a wolf hidden behind the trees, a wolf, with teeth that bite and claws that ravage, and who can always appear unexpectedly and unseen to put an end to childhood innocence.



The cultural referents of Milne's and Ryman's animal others do not simply obscure and deny the 'real' suffering of 'real' animals, but they can also render this violence visible and enable one to speculate and imagine a relation to the animal other that would be new and possibly less violent. However, the constant return of the spectral and threatening wolf in all of these narratives reminds us too that however we narrate the relation to the other, we risk closing the question into a system of thought that necessarily maintains divisions, for better *or* worse. What seems to be comforting in Derrida's autoimmune narrative is that the autoimmunity of narratives themselves means that no system, however violent or seemingly necessary is enduring. The only narrative that endures for Derrida is the impossibility of enduring these violences. Only the autoimmune paradox remains.

In the following chapter I will return to the speculative world of *The Child Garden*. There, I question whether the (bio)political logic that produces the logic of sovereignty rendering Milena and Rolfa's love impossible must itself endure,

or whether this narrative can be deconstructed to produce an affirmative biopolitical relation between all forms of life, animal, human, or otherwise.

Chapter Three

Affirmative Biopolitics, Vital Autoimmunity

1.

Introducing Biopolitics

In a 2006 interview the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito addresses himself to the “systemic perspective” of a contemporary politics of the “war on terror” and its Derrida’s characterisation of this as (auto)immune (Campbell and Esposito, 53-4). Within this perspective he locates two opposing immunitary structures: Islamic fundamentalism, which protects its religious, ethnic and cultural purity from contamination by Western secularism; and a, broadly speaking, Western exclusion of the rest of the world from sharing its surplus of goods. Esposito proceeds to characterise the autoimmunity that Derrida discusses in this post-September 11 context as:

the entire world [...] shaken by a convulsion that has the characteristics of the most devastating autoimmune disease: the excess of defense and the exclusion of those elements that are alien to the organism turn against the organism itself with potentially lethal effects. (53)

In regard to the character of this destructive and self-destructive process Esposito professes himself to be in “complete agreement” with Derrida. But where Derrida, according to Esposito, presents a “tragic characterisation” of this problematic by invariably collapsing immunity into autoimmunity, it is Esposito’s stated project to think a positive reversal of immunity into community. According to Esposito, Derrida’s employment of the immune paradigm ignores the historical and contemporary biopolitical context of autoimmunity, that is, immunity as a political protection of life with a distinctly

Modern character. It also ignores, he states, the fact that “life, be it single or common, would die without an immunitary apparatus” (53). In his triptych of philosophical works *Communitas* (2010), *Immunitas* (2002), and *Bíos* (2008), it is Esposito’s project to address the communal, immunitary and biopolitical character of life in order to argue for the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics.¹ He attempts therefore to ‘reverse’ or ‘turn inside out’ the immune paradigm in order to render it impossible to privilege one form of life above another.

It should be clear from my argument so far that I would question Esposito’s presentation of a Derridean autoimmunity as wholly tragic, self-destructive and lethal. It appears that Esposito has not taken into account the reversal Derrida himself undertakes from an autoimmune closure to an autoimmune opening, a breach that, in a deconstructive fashion, opens immunity to the community, for better *or* worse, for it is both open *and* closed. However, Esposito, in his search for an affirmative relation between politics, power and life, presents a thesis, which, unlike the largely protective and immunitary logic of Freudian psychoanalysis or systems theory examined in the previous two chapters, does not attempt to repress, suppress or ignore the paradoxical character of the ‘dead zone,’ which we have repeatedly found to infect the ‘purity’ of life ‘itself.’ Instead, Esposito seeks to *affirm* this void at the heart of life. Esposito’s detailed exploration of the immune paradigm in regards to its biopolitical character, therefore provides an alternative position from which to question the necessity of the return to a discourse of terror that accompanies the Derridean treatment of the logic of immunity and its collapse into autoimmunity. Might Esposito’s thesis present a reading of illness, disease, power and life, which does not return one to the shattering, and terrifying relation to the radically other, but rather to an affirmative relation to the same? Or might autoimmunity – given Esposito’s misrepresentation of the deconstructive inflection Derrida gives this term – still haunt his project?

¹ The English translation of *Immunitas* is due for publication in late 2011 (Esposito forthcoming 2011).

In order to explore these questions this chapter will move away from the distinctly personal tone of the preceding chapters to undertake a detailed reading of Esposito's final instalment of his trilogy: *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (2008); as well as, more broadly, the biopolitical theoretical context in which his work is situated. This will allow me to enact an implicit deconstruction of the individual, personal, and 'proper' body to which I have so far been wedded in the thesis. In moving from 'me' to 'we' the question of whom this we might be is also in question. Is it a 'we' that is physically, psychologically, and biologically Western, a 'we' with a certain political history that includes within its enigmatic past the biopolitics of the Holocaust, September 11, as well as certain medical practices and attitudes to 'our' body? Is it, perhaps, a more expansive sense of 'we' that extends the problematics of the autoimmune to 'life itself'? Or is it, perhaps, still (just) me? The autobiographical persona, who has been opened by the internal contradictions of her body to the terror of an autoimmune acceleration, is opened now also to the functioning of a political context that, it is argued, strips this individual bare. This political context has been theorized in contemporary thought as a politics of life – or biopolitics. While exploring the valence of autoimmunity in this context via a reading of Esposito's immune paradigm, I will also undertake to implicate Giorgio Agamben's biopolitics, and his theorization of the 'state of exception,' within this immune structure by addressing the historical and metaphysical shifts regarding the political protection of 'life itself.'²

In order to undertake such a reading it will be necessary, initially, to freeze, ignore or secure the deconstructive motor that has propelled the previous chapters, for it is in biopolitics that we encounter a series of arguments that ultimately seek precisely to permanently 'immunize' themselves against such a Derridean reading. The deconstructive turn returns, however, as I begin to trace

² Agamben's most sustained engagement with biopolitics is found in his *Homo Sacer* series, which currently consists of five books in three volumes, with a forth volume projected for completion in the near future (2000, 1998, 2005, 2011; English Translation Forthcoming 2011). This final volume, Agamben suggests, in an interview, will address the question of forms-of-life (Raulff and Agamben 2004), a question which is essential also to Esposito's affirmation in *Bios* of 'life itself' as a always already a politicised form-of-life. Agamben also addresses questions of the biopolitical in *The Open* (2004), 'Absolute Immanence' (1999), *The Coming Community* (1993), and elsewhere.

the consequences of Esposito's argument. Reading Derrida's seminar *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), as well as his politically orientated writings on autoimmunity, as a deconstruction of this biopolitical discourse, I will question whether Esposito sufficiently addresses the complex problematics that contemporary politics of life manifest.

Both Esposito and Agamben begin their discussions of biopolitics with reference to the late work of Michel Foucault. It is in Foucault's lecture series collected in *Society Must be Defended* (2003) and in the final chapter of *A History of Sexuality* (1998) that the contemporary biopolitical discourse is articulated. As a means of introduction to the biopolitical terms of this chapter, I will provide a brief account of Foucault's intervention in this field. This will situate Esposito's argument and provide a frame in which to take account of the autoimmunity of biopolitics in both its negative and positive valence.

For Foucault, biopolitics is a technology of power, a biopower that draws 'life' and the 'living being' directly into political strategies that then seeks to control and modify them. According to Foucault, such technologies of biopower appear in the eighteenth century and act, not as a means of modifying any given individual – an individual-as-body – but as mechanisms that act on general phenomena of life at the level of species or population. Within biopolitics:

[t]he mortality rate has to be modified or lowered; life expectancy has to be increased; the birth rate has to be stimulated. And most important of all, regulatory mechanisms must be established to establish an equilibrium, maintain an average, establish a sort of homeostasis, and compensate for variations within this general population and its aleatory field [...] so as to optimize a state of life. (2003, 246)

In naming biopolitics as a technology of biopower that acts on populations and not the individual, Foucault makes an important distinction between the disciplinary power of sovereignty and the biopolitical power of governance:

“[biopower] is continuous, scientific, and it is the power to make live. Sovereignty took life and let live. And now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast, consists in making live and letting die” (247). In the context then of my autoimmune disease situated within a western biopolitical context, biopower, in Foucault’s terms, would concern itself not with any direct act upon *my* body by means of a sovereign decision to immunize or not *my* life. But rather, biopolitics acts upon the populace as a whole, employing statistical information to deploy a care that immunizes the life of the population, maintaining a maximum level of survival and productivity. This precipitates effects such as ‘postcode lotteries’ where the localised allocation of resources, rather than individual cases, determines the limits of health and illness, life and death.³ Biopolitics, therefore, speaks of a shift in the conception of the subject so that it is no longer constituted by some core nature, soul or sin but by individual and varied choices dominated by the desire to avoid bodily pain (Foucault 1997, 271-272). So too, sovereign power – as well as the law that it institutes – is no longer seen as transcendent to life, but as immanent to a network of autonomous forces where the power to take life is disseminated to systems of governance to include doctors, ethics committees, the police, as well as individual subjects themselves.

With the aim of maintaining equilibrium, biopolitics is described by Foucault as a means of removing or regularising the aleatory and unpredictable elements of individual events by rendering them meaningful and productive at a collective, meta-level. Resonances can, perhaps, be heard here with the mechanisms addressed in the previous chapter with regard to Luhmann’s systems theory. What differs here, however, is the manner in which the system is politicised as a means of controlling ‘life itself.’ The distinction Foucault makes between sovereign power and biopolitical power also resonates with the implicit concern in the previous chapter regarding the possible return, at every level, of the ‘sovereign’ decision as the ‘reason of the strongest.’ Does biopolitics overtake and then subsume the mechanisms of sovereign power (which produces death

³ In regards to postcode lotteries see the Rightcare *NHS Atlas of Variation in Healthcare*, which reports on this phenomena of governance (Rightcare 2010).

and leaves life as a remainder), in favour of a life that comes centre stage? Or is the sovereign merely waiting in the wings, perpetually wielding a right over life? In regards to this question Esposito finds Foucault to equivocate between the two possibilities: biopower as the deployment of a certain sovereign power, or sovereignty as the deployment of biopower. To illustrate this equivocation Esposito quotes Foucault's two historical examples of biopower – in the atomic and biotechnological eras – both of which pertain to the discussions of this thesis, and so bear repeating here. Foucault states:

the power that is being exercised in this atomic power is exercised in such a way that it is capable of suppressing life itself. And therefore, to suppress itself insofar as it is the power that guarantees life. Either it is sovereign and uses the atomic bomb, and therefore cannot be power, biopower, or the power to guarantee life, as it has been ever since the nineteenth century. Or, at the opposite extreme, you no longer have a sovereign right that is in excess of biopower, but a biopower that is in excess of sovereign right. This excess of biopower appears when it becomes technologically and politically possible for man not only to manage life but to make it proliferate, to create living matter, to build the monster, and ultimately, to build viruses that cannot be controlled and that are universally destructive. This formidable extension of biopower, unlike what I was just saying about atomic power, will put it beyond all human sovereignty. (Foucault 2003, 253-4)

Do we then view the biopolitics of a nuclear age (which is, we must recall, still ongoing) from the perspective of the power of life as having overcome the risk of remainderless destruction, or as a survival that continues to face this threat of the arrival of this most sovereign of forces? Does sovereign force still haunt the biopolitical, or has the proliferation of life now rendered death immanent to its own vital processes? Foucault appears here, and elsewhere, to oscillate between

these two possibilities.⁴ I will return in this chapter to this question of the viral excess of life (and also to Foucault's presentation of sovereignty as an essentially human attribute) but first, I will briefly position Esposito and Agamben's response to Foucault's equivocation between sovereignty and biopolitics in order to contextualise the terms of this chapter.

For Esposito, Foucault's analysis that biopolitics since the eighteenth century performs an *affirmation* of life, that is, a power *of* life and not *over* life, needs to account for the continual return of the sovereign right over life, evidenced by the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. *How* and *why*, Esposito asks, is the power of life used against life (2008, 39)? For Esposito, the answer to this question lies not in attempting to oppose sovereignty and biopolitics as Foucault does (leading to his ambiguous oscillation), but in locating, *between* the two, a mechanism that submits life to the power of death. It will be Esposito's task to articulate and then render inoperative this mechanism. Agamben too refuses Foucault's separation of biopolitics and sovereignty in a reading that focuses the full force of biopolitics on the sovereign and juridical power to institute a state of exception. For Agamben, in his *Homo Sacer* series, the sovereign exception – where power is premised on the inclusive exclusion of the 'merely living' (life without form as *zoē*) from political life (life with form as *bíos*) – produces 'bare life,' a life stripped of all form, and thus rendered killable. Biopolitics, according to Agamben, becomes subsumed within the sovereign right to take life, extended in the contemporary moment without limit, and becomes therefore incapable of affirming life, only of negating it (2005, 57). At the horizon of Agamben's thought, (to be addressed in the forthcoming final volume of his *Homo Sacer* series) is, therefore, also the question of overturning the deadly mechanisms of the biopolitical.

For both Esposito and Agamben, the inter-implication of sovereignty and biopolitics coalesces and strengthens around the particular mechanisms of the Nazi biopolitical regime. However, as Timothy Campbell has argued, in

⁴ In Foucault's account of Nazi biopolitical state, we see once again the ambiguity between the disciplinary and governmental powers (Foucault 2003, 259 ff).

Agamben the rubric of the sovereign exception reduces the historical specificity of Nazism in a kind of metaphysical flattening of terms, whereas, Esposito locates in Nazism an important and specific coalescence of sovereignty, biopolitics, biology and the medical (2006, 13). According to Esposito, in order to account for both the sovereign and biopolitical power of the Nazi era (an era that accelerates and proliferates the thanatopolitics of modernity) one requires an interpretative key, one that he finds to be located in the paradigm of immunization. Immunization unites, in a hybrid fashion, the political, juridical, biological and conceptual terrain of modernity and in particular of Nazi Germany. Only by taking account of immunity, and reversing (or “turning inside-out”) its negative logic will it be possible, according to Esposito, to think a power and a politics of life and not over life. Not an immunization of Aryan life versus Jewish life, human life versus animal life, animal versus vegetal, but an immunization of ‘life itself’ where *all* life is rendered political so that the category of *bíos* is no longer opposed to that of *zoē*.

This chapter will explore the key features of Esposito’s immune paradigm in order to think the relation between the specific biological, historical and political character of modernity, as well as linking these conditions to the more ‘metaphysical’ relation between power, politics and the exception. I will argue that it is by way of certain narrative constructions that immunity comes to denote a destructive inclusion and exclusion, which produces not only death rather than life, but also autoimmune self-destruction. By comparing Esposito’s reversal of immunity, which turns to a neo-vitalist discourse and a discussion of community, with Derrida’s ‘autoimmune turn’ and his deconstruction of various fables of sovereignty in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, it will be possible to consider the pertinence of thinking an affirmative biopolitics in the face of the ‘terrible’ logic of immune destruction and autoimmune self-destruction.

Rather than simply addressing this analysis to a purely historical or ‘genealogical’ perspective, however, I will turn once again to the future, to the imaginary, fictitious and fabulous future of Geoff Ryman’s 1989 science fiction novel *The Child Garden* (2011). This is a novel that will articulate the themes of

the chapter: the biopower of viral life, the logic of the exception, sovereignty, community and illness. The story, therefore, provides a means to represent the mechanisms of immunity, autoimmunity, power and politics in a biopolitical context. But also, in its fictive imaginative scope, it provides a useful means of illustrating the ‘liberation’ from such power as an affirmation of life itself, towards which Esposito gestures but struggles to articulate in any concrete way. I will employ this fantastical tale not in order to suggest, by comparison to Esposito’s deployment of the Nazi exemplar, that the biopolitical or thanatopolitical events of the last century are in any way fictive, but rather to indicate how, as Derrida suggests: “[d]eath and suffering, which are not fabular, are yet carried off and inscribed in the affabulatory score” (2009, 36). Beyond the merely illustrative, how might this tale of a future biopolitical state ‘instruct’ in that it is presented here in the guise of a fable? How might it also *perform* this affabulatory score – as a joyful overcoming of the immune paradigm, or its terrifying autoimmune finitude? Esposito employs concepts (such as immunity, sovereignty, life) in a manner that suggests they can act *on* social discourse. But in what way might these concepts traverse discourses (the juridical, historical, biological), via the lexical complexities of terms such as life (*zoē* or *bíos*), immunity, *munus*, and *autos*, which themselves can be seen to *produce* these concepts through the ‘fictive’ institution of divides, exceptions, exclusions and inclusions?⁵

Can Esposito’s attempt to overcome the equivocation between life and sovereign right (as affirmation versus negation), open the immunized individual, or state, to a form of community that is not premised on suffering or sufferance (as was explored in Chapter two), but rather on a shared living where all life is subsumed within *bíos*? Or is this equivocation, perhaps, but another symptom of the force of autoimmune undecidability between life and power – whether human, animal, vegetal, viral, or technological? Is Derrida’s own equivocation between autoimmune terror as closure and death and autoimmune life as survival,

⁵ In regard to Esposito’s use of a conceptual frame that blunts the disciplinary, or “enunciatory” distinctions between discourses of philosophy, history, medicine and literature, see Laurent DuBreuil’s essay “Leaving Politics: *Bíos Zoē*, Life” collected in the special issue on Esposito’s philosophy in *Diacritics* (Dubreuil 2006).

rendered inoperative; or does it perhaps name an infinite and inescapable operation?

2.

Living in a Viral Culture

[The] excess of biopower appears when it becomes technologically and politically possible for man not only to manage life but to make it proliferate, to create living matter, to build the monster, and ultimately, to build viruses that cannot be controlled and that are universally destructive. This formidable extension of biopower [...] will put it beyond all human sovereignty.

Foucault *Society Must be Defended*, 253-4

Before the Revolution, in a world of the very rich and the very poor, something terrible had happened. Through some alteration of genes in DNA viruses, there were new strains of cancer that spread with the ease and speed of the common cold. [...] A final cure for cancer became a matter of shrieking urgency.

Ryman *The Child Garden*, 321

In *The Child Garden* something terrible had happened before the Revolution. An event, and a terror, precede and precipitate a Revolution. A terror that is not (yet) a Reign of Terror, not the remorseless revolution of sovereign bloodshed as in, for example, the Terror of the French Revolution; but rather a terrible, microscopic, infinitesimal act as the mutation of a gene in viral DNA. This act acts as the back-story to Geoff Ryman's science fiction novel, which finds in this infinitesimal slippage the germ that sets in motion its post-Revolutionary biopolitical narrative. What is it that renders this viral mutation so terrible in the narrative of *The Child Garden*? It is terrible, no doubt, in the deadly effect of the mutation that transforms the disease of cancer into a new, virulent, pandemic

form, threatening an apocalyptic scenario, a globalised death. But, perhaps, what is also terrible is the sudden exposing of the errancy of life, that is, the appearance of a life that strays from the ‘proper’ path of its normalised function. Life’s autopoietic enclosure is perturbed by the transversal movement of a viral agent. Neither alive nor dead, the virus functions not as a whole – that is as an autopoietic organism – but as a parasite.⁶ Latching its DNA onto the replicating function of another organism the virus intersects the divides between the mechanical and the natural, the living and the dead, communication and noise, replication and novelty. The virus repeats and inscribes a terrible uncertainty into life. Yet, despite this indeterminacy, the figure of the virus is not without force, it is not without a certain power, a power that performs and transforms, unseen and unforeseen, before the law (natural or legal), a certain revolutionary violence.

It is perhaps this very indeterminacy of the figure of the virus that renders it such a productive trope for science fiction. Producing narratives teeming with terrific plots, the very word conjures notions of poison, infection, and disease, as well as replication, mutation, and generation.⁷ In this chapter I will address this productivity of the viral trope in the story of *The Child Garden* as I proceed to explore and analyse the biopolitics of immunity and autoimmunity. For, in the novel, the trope of the viral undergoes many revolutions of meaning and effect: from a poison, to an immunization, to a mutable and affirmative politicised life, the virus – as Foucault has indicated – represents an important trope for the mechanisms of biopower. A biopower presented here in tandem with the immune paradigm as both a power of life and a power over life.

⁶ As Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan argue, a virus is not autopoietic, and therefore in their definition where autopoiesis is life, it is not alive, it is a mere programme (Margulis and Sagan 2000, 18). However, in intersecting and supplementing the cell (the most basic autopoietic life form) it ‘lives-on’ within life, within the autopoiesis of a communal relation, when thought socio-politically in the manner described in Chapter two.

⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary presents the etymological root of the word virus as inscribing the following meanings: “poisonous secretion, venom, virulent or malignant quality (of disposition or speech), acrid juice or element in something (as affecting its taste or smell), secretion having medicinal or magical property, animal semen, in post-classical Latin also human semen” (OED 2008). In addition then to the poison, the virus speaks also of the medicinal, and the virile (in the generative effects of semen). See also Cohen (2003) on the trope of the virus in science fiction.

Derrida too finds the trope of the viral to link to his own deconstructive thought. For him the viral links biology, society, history and technicity in its disruptive force:

If we follow the intersection between AIDS and the computer virus as we now know it, we have the means to comprehend, not only from a theoretical point of view but also from the sociohistorical point of view, what amounts to a disruption of absolutely everything on the planet, including police agencies, commerce, the army, questions of strategy [...] It is as if all that I have been suggesting for the past twenty-five years is prescribed by the idea of *destinerrance* [...] the supplement, the *pharmakon*, all the undecidables – it's the same thing. (Derrida, qtd. in Pearson 2011, vi)⁸

The deconstructive force of the viral – as supplement, as *pharmakon*, as undecidable – which Derrida names here will be implicitly tracing its path within the discussion of biopolitics that follows. But this force erases itself in these narratives; it will become my task to open these to a reading that engages with the trace of this viral force.

In the novel, the terrible thing that happened before the Revolution was an unexpected inscription of a genetic sequence during the replication of a virus. A viral transmissibility attached itself to the fearsome replication-machine of the cancer cell. Cancer, a life that simply grows, becomes complicated in communal life and qualified as the *deadly* growth of an excessive, mechanistic and virulent tumour. As cancer became as contagious as the common cold, the biopolitical state moved to protect the populace as its own life-blood. The need for a cure

⁸ AIDS and its association with the metaphorical use of the viral trope in Ryman's novel can be read as a central theme. Writing in the late 1980s Ryman is clearly referencing the terrors that this viral disease caused and continues to cause in the world today. I am unable to address the intricacies of these biopolitical references here, this particular reading of the novel remains to come.

became the sole concern of the scientific and political communities. The communal effort paid its dividends as it became both technologically and politically possible to manage this unexpected turn in life's living process. Using the viral form against itself, science manufactured a monster: it took a virus – a virus that had once made it sick – and fashioned an immunological cure. Scientists used the virus to coat cancer cells in sugars: “Candy,” the new pharmaceutical product, attached to proto-oncogenes locking them within a protective wall of sugar, preventing their mutation and proliferation, preventing the onset of cancer.

But in the “world of the every rich and the very poor” economic power was sovereign. As the rich rushed to purchase the cure, the urgency of the emergency over-rode scientific protocols and safety trials and the cure itself went viral. Cancer was eradicated. But this defensive counter-attack, as the effort to maintain human life, had unforeseen effects. The immunization, as the eradication of cancer – the holy grail of bio-scientific endeavour – presented a cure as a poison, a *pharmakon*: the Candy-as-virus, in immobilising cancerous cells, unexpectedly immobilised too the ability of human cells to grow old. The body's life-span was cut in half, the human population ran out of time. In *The Child Garden* people die in or around their 35th year. After that there had been a Revolution.

Has a viral biopower here exceeded then the ability of human sovereignty to manage life – as Foucault suggests is the horizon of the biopolitical? Does this story indicate a locale in which humanity can no longer claim control over the decision of who will live and who will die? No, this remains to come; for the terror that this opening to the void of the living instils is also a bodily fear, a fear that can, and does – as it did for Hobbes – precipitate the (re)inscription of a protective sovereign power. As one sovereign fails and falls (capitalism's domain of the very rich and the very poor) it is not sovereignty itself that has been destroyed, for another turns round to inhabit the central and immobile sovereign position: a totalitarian government of Consensus is born to take control over life.

The question of the relations between terror, revolution and the immunitary mechanism lies at the heart of this chapter and indeed the thesis as a whole. But, if here the concern is to follow Esposito's thought towards an affirmation of the biopolitical, we must first consider, with him, how to interrupt the terrifying revolutionary spiral of the immune paradigm, that is, perhaps, how to affirm the terror of its autoimmune horizon.

3.

A Spoon Full of Sugar Esposito's Immunitary Key

For Roberto Esposito, the paradigm of immunity presents the key that accounts for the reappearance of a sovereign power *over* life within a biopolitical power that seeks only to affirm a power *of* life. It is this key, Esposito claims, which eluded Foucault, causing him to leave the contradictions of biopower unresolved (2008, 45). Sovereignty, for Esposito, is one among many immunitary mechanisms that affirm the productivity of life only by instituting its lethal negative, that is, it is a mechanism that introduces – in the same manner as biomedical immunization – “a fragment of the same pathogen from which it wants to protect itself, by blocking and contradicting natural development” (2008, 46). While the appropriation of the negative as the motor of the living (rather than as an unwanted side effect) has been most extensively explored by Hegel, for Esposito, the pertinence of the immunitary paradigm lies in its ability to present life, not as the dialectical life of reality and thought, but as the biological living of the body (47).⁹ Coupling biomedical immunity as resistance to disease, with immunity's political-juridical valence as exemption from communal duty, Esposito finds in immunity the paradigm that combines, in an inclusive exclusion, the classical distinction between *zoē* as natural animal life and *bíos* as politically qualified life, and thus he names immunity as the exemplary biopolitical mechanism.

⁹ See Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1979).

In addition to Esposito's project of articulating an affirmative biopolitics he also aims to locate immunity within a fundamentally modern paradigm with its attending problematics of thinking the one and the many, the singular and the plural, the immune and the communal. In conflating biopolitics with an immunity defined as the *negative* conservation of an individual's *bodily* life, Esposito distinguishes modern immunitary biopolitics from other forms of life's immunitary politicization that can be traced back to the foundation of the *polis* (52-4).¹⁰ The root of Esposito's biopolitics is to be found in the immunitary mechanisms first elaborated by Thomas Hobbes. In Hobbesian logic, individual bodily life is preserved only via its opening to the communal. This logic institutes, for Esposito, a paradigm that infects the whole history of modern innovation. We have already seen, for example, how in Freud the constrictions of society immunize the excesses of the psyche, or how, for Luhmann, conflict and contradiction negatively reactivate the immune response of societal systems; these examples speak to the naturalisation of the negative as the motor of the living. It is only in modernity, Esposito claims, that biology, law, politics and protection coincide in an immunitary affirmation of a negation of the negative, and therefore, it is the mechanisms of modern immunization that must be elaborated and overturned if one is to pursue an affirmative politics of life.

With regard to a Derridean reading of autoimmunity, this immunity could, perhaps, already be described as *autoimmune*. Yet in Esposito's reading of immunity the autoimmune opening or reversal into the affirmative does not yet appear. Instead, we are given to think the modern immune paradigm as always *suppressing* the affirmative, so that a negation fills the horizon of its thought. Esposito positions his own intervention in the immunological narrative with regard to the relation between immunity and community:

¹⁰ In focusing his reading of biopolitics on the mechanisms of modernity Esposito follows Foucault and Agamben's reading of the modern character of biopolitics. For Esposito, however, the difference between modern and pre-modern biopolitics is to be found in its immunitary character that negates a negation. Derrida, deconstructs the specifically modern character of biopolitics in Foucault and in Agamben particularly (2009, 305-334), as I shall address later in the chapter.

Tracing it back to its etymological roots, *immunitas* is revealed as the negative or lacking [*privativa*] form of *communitas*. If *communitas* is that relation, which in binding its members to an obligation of reciprocal donation jeopardizes individual identity, *immunitas* is the condition of dispensation from such an obligation and therefore the defense against the expropriating features of *communitas*. *Dispensatio* is precisely that which relieves the *pensum* of a weighty obligation, just as it frees the exemption [*l'esonero*] of that onus, which from its origin is traceable to the semantics of a reciprocal *munus*. (Esposito 2008, 50)

If immunity safeguards the individual from the onus of a shared *munus* it does so only through the introduction of its own negative, that is, through the immunization of various communal institutions (such as the sovereign contract), which marks the process of modernization. As we will come to see in what follows, it will be Esposito's task to elaborate the reversal of the immune paradigm into a radicalised form of *communitas*, where the sharing of the *munus* – as onus, duty or gift – is ultimately the sharing not of a property, but of a lack, a debt (2010, 4-8). This lack is a gift that one must give, which one cannot not give, but it is only given and not received – for it is the giving of “no-thing.”¹¹ Therefore, in Esposito's thesis, to ‘properly’ accept the *munus* requires that one undermines one's own identity with oneself in favour of a relation to an excessive *communitas* (147). It is this *communitas* that will open life and the living to a continuum of *bíos* where *zoē* can never be excluded. Finding at the heart of the community a void that speaks of a perpetual risk to the individual, Esposito seeks not to immunize the individual or the community from this risk, but to affirm it and therefore to affirm life itself. The ‘dead zone’ and the ‘blind

¹¹ There are distinct Lacanian and Hegelian undertones to this formulation. However, in Esposito's other book in this series *Communitas*, it is Bataille who becomes the ‘hero’ of his affirmative conception of community (2011, 112-134). Esposito finds in Bataille's notion of communal sacrifice something which cannot be sacrificed, and this would be the affirmation of the no-thing – or the gift of the no-thing. Another path to follow here in the discussion of immunity and autoimmunity would be the one signalled by Esposito's Bataillan gesture and Derrida's own reading of Bataille in “From a Restricted to a General Economy” (2001). There is, unfortunately, not the space to follow this path here. However, I shall return to the issues of infinite/finite gifting, which this formulation gives rise to later in this chapter.

spot' return here then, not to be negated, replaced, ignored, or repressed, but to be affirmed.

In order to negotiate a path through Esposito's immunitary key – and therefore its relationship to autoimmunity in both its biological and deconstructive sense – I will begin by tracing the three modern immunitary mechanisms of sovereignty, property and liberty through the narrative of *The Child Garden*. This narrative will repeat and re-inscribe Esposito's modern paradigm, both strengthening and disrupting the logic he finds there. Throughout the chapter, this fictive frame will produce a point of comparison to Esposito's thesis; it will indicate the pervasiveness of the immune logic within (bio)political thought beyond the philosophical and political context of modernity that Esposito addresses, and it will illustrate a case where this logic is reversed into a communal opening. But beyond the merely illustrative, this narrative will provide and perform a space within which to open the discussion of the biopolitical, and a position from which to question whether Esposito, in fact, remains trapped within the very logic he is deconstructing. In pursuing an affirmative biopolitics, I will question whether Esposito responds to the immune question in a fully 'responsible' manner.

Sovereignty

In a community of viruses human life is rendered nasty, selfish, and short, individuals live in a context of continual fear and danger.¹² This pre-Revolutionary world of *The Child Garden* recalls something of the Hobbesian 'state of nature' where people are guided only by self-interest (Hobbes 1839-45). In Hobbes' sixteenth century political philosophy, the 'natural state of man' is figured as the individual's possession of an acquisitive desire for everything – a freedom to accumulate, incorporate, and acquire all that life has to give. Yet, this nature condemns man to a state of generalised conflict and fear: in being

¹² This formulation recalls Hobbes's famous quotation from *Leviathan* that the "natural state of mankind" is marked by "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes 1839-45, Chapter XIII).

able to acquire what he will, to take that which he would like to take – including another’s life – man’s own life is perpetually under threat:

And therefore, as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be), of living out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live. (Hobbes qtd. in Esposito, 2008, 58)

In order to safely live out their time, individuals, for Hobbes, must come together in consensus and exchange their individual rights for a form of communal protection maintained by the sovereign. Replacing a failed ‘natural’ immunity (reason as individual rights) with an induced ‘artificial’ immunity (sovereignty as communal rights) the modern individual secures his, or her, very life. What sovereignty injects into the individual is an inclusive exclusion of the communal relation. It is in this move, which negatively affirms both life and the community, where Esposito locates the root of modern mechanisms of a biopolitical immunity.

In *The Child Garden* this logic of sovereign immunization is repeated – though differently. Rather than a ‘state of nature,’ what the people of *The Child Garden* overthrew in its Revolutionary move was a neo-liberal capitalist system of “the very rich and the very poor.” In response to the biopolitical government’s failure to contain the excesses of the viral contagion, sovereign power was re-instituted, and radically strengthened. The Revolution instituted a new, more direct, more legitimate, and therefore, more powerful form of sovereign governance:

Everyone was Read at ten years old, by the Party. It was part of their democratic rights. Because of advances in medicine, representative democracy had been replaced by something more direct. People were Read and models were made of their personalities. These models joined the government to be consulted. The government was called the Consensus. It was a product of late period socialism. (Ryman 2011, 2)

We are given to imagine here a social contract that is designed to protect the individual by literalising the function of government as consensus. ‘Uploaded’ to the flesh of an organic living ‘computing system,’ the individual is replicated, divided, and incorporated, as a subject *of*, and subject *to* the new ‘sovereign’ will of the Consensus. At the same time as each subject continues to live its everyday life, an imprint of its will, personality, and decision-making capabilities are separated and gathered as a form of *communal* sovereign power.¹³ As Esposito suggests, such subjects would therefore be “subjects of sovereignty to the extent to which they have voluntarily instituted it through a free contract. But they are subjects to sovereignty because, once it has been instituted, they cannot resist it for precisely the same reason: otherwise they would be resisting themselves” (2008, 59-60). This negative form of political protection – which protects the individual from communal excess only through the institution of a form of the communal itself – places individuals in contradiction with themselves. In this future world, the excess a biopolitical power *of* life (the virus’s errant life) is immunized by the return of a sovereign power *over* life (the Consensus). The mechanisms of Esposito’s modern immunitary biopolitics prove still to be in play, only perhaps now worse.

According to Esposito, this immunity is biopolitical because what is initially at stake is the living materiality of the body. For Hobbes it is the body that is threatened in murderous, brutish, state of nature; for *The Child Garden* it is threatened by the cancer pandemic; yet, for neither is life reduced solely to its biological layer. Beyond the mere maintenance of zoological life as *zoē*, what is

¹³ What I am naming as sovereign here is, of course, distinct from the figure of the sovereign understood by Hobbes as a indivisible singular power of One held above all others. However, this logic of indivisible sovereignty still holds in this instance, in that the sovereign Consensus is radically separated from the lives of the people, and this government of the many forms a totalising singularity of powerful consensual decision-making that admits no other voice or vote; including whilst excluding the very individuals it represents. This process renders the everyday living of the Consensus’ citizens, as its counterparts, outside, before, or below the law. They are to be seen, therefore, as simple biological units concerned to maintain a life free of pain and suffering, a life in the name of which they have traded-in their political power and their legal rights. Subjected *to* the law, whilst deciding it, inclusively excluded these citizens are thoroughly biopolitical.

protected is also is the good life, as a happy life – *bíos*.¹⁴ Because people die in their 35th year, because the viral cure-as-poison obliterated their life-span, in the child garden there is not enough time. This is a world full of children who no longer possess a future in which to become fully adult. Traumatized by the appearance of an errant viral life that has disrupted the homeostasis of life's productive cohesion, traumatized by the autoimmune effects of the viral cure, humanity attempts to institute a certain mastery.¹⁵ So the Consensus ups the ante in its risky game of survival: employing, once again, biotechnological knowledge as the security of human reason, the Consensus cultivates children like flowers in gardens that act as laboratories. They are given viruses to educate them:

From three weeks old they could speak and do basic arithmetic.
By ten, they had been made adults, forced like flowers to bloom
early. [...] There was no time. (Ryman 2011, 4)

Yet, this life is a happy life, for in this post-Revolutionary society “Belief is a disease.” Acceptable forms of behaviour can be caught or state administered: “viruses made people cheerful and helpful and honest. Their manners were impeccable, their conversation well informed, their work speedy and accurate. They believed the same things” (1). Importing retroviruses into the brain, or DNA into nerve endings the state, as Consensus, here literally scripts the bodies of its citizens, importing information – as a static archive of Literature, Theory and History – as well as norms of behaviour. The nanny-state thus acts as a sinister Mary Poppins assuring its citizens that “a spoonful of sugar will help the medicine go down.” Candy, it says, will make the viruses immune to mutation; the viruses, it promises, will safeguard the History that humans no longer have the time to learn, it will protect the know-how that humans no longer have time to experience, it will secure the living of a happy and contented life. The sovereign power of the consensus is multiplied, disseminated and assured through its mechanized viral agents *and* its mechanized sovereign populace in a

¹⁴ As Esposito notes, for Hobbes, it is not simply a bare material or biological life which is secured by the institution of the social contract but happiness (Esposito 2008, 59).

¹⁵ This move repeats and intensifies at the political level the logic of the death drive explored in Chapter one.

fetishizing effort to retain, protect and valorise what is most proper to humanity: its Knowledge and Reason, its Art and its History – its life. It is as easy as taking candy from a baby.

Immunizing the individual from an unknown communal excess though instituting a safe, known, and acceptable form of communal relation, the sovereign evacuates what is, for Esposito, the very meaning of *communitas* and the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics. The sovereign Consensus in *The Child Garden* allows for the living of a ‘happy’ life only by politically desocialising the populace and creating an artificial vacuum of negative relation around the individual. By fabricating norms through the fixed cultural unit of an ossified viral inscription, the Consensus presents a hyperbolic version of the immunizing effect. Filling in the void of the shared *munus* with both the body of the individual and with the body of the state, immunity closes the productivity of the gift that gives the unknown, the unexpected and the novel to life. The birth of novelty is prohibited, while the repetitive, authorized birth of the same is encouraged and coerced. Immunity therefore produces its own violence, a violence that it cannot mediate, for it has become necessary that this violence be maintained, and continually reinscribed, in order to produce the antibodies that protect it from the even worse violences of the communal relation that could, they fear, destroy them all.¹⁶

However, here we see the power of the One consensual voice is disseminated through the power of the viruses – a tool and a property of human knowledge that performs a certain force of its own living trace. Might these viruses possess a certain sovereign force of their own? As the life of the body, knowledge, literature, and art become fully biologized, what forces might be unleashed?

¹⁶ As we will come to see in what follows this inscription of violence within the foundation and maintenance of the social contract is akin to the violence that Derrida names in his essay “Force of Law” (1992b). In this essay the very question of conservation and novelty, law and justice, opens onto to aporia of the undecidability of the nature of this violence as conservative and destructive, as negative and affirmative, *immunitas* and *communitas*, immune and autoimmune.

Property

Milena, the protagonist of *The Child Garden*, gives voice to an experience of the violence of this new inscription of modern sovereign immunity. As the narrative opens we find Milena paralysed by fear, tortured by the terror of contracting a virus that would obliterate her *own* individuality. Viruses had killed her father and had almost killed her. Having a ‘natural’ immunity to viral-life Milena is protected from the expropriating power of the sovereign’s re-inscription. She knows she is immune because she suffers from “Bad Grammar,” she desires the love of another woman. Homosexuality, a “semiological product of late capitalism. So the Party said,” has been ‘cured’ by the inscription of a viral normativity – of that which is deemed proper to this humanity. But Milena has not been Read. She is not a part of the Consensus, and thus possesses no sovereign immunity – only an over-active, over-the-top immune response that can only be described as autoimmune – as an autoimmune disease. Milena is sick. Disabled in a world where life lives-on through the communal languaging of a viral inscription, where a shared knowledge, history and culture conserve a communal relation to the ‘proper’ of human life: Milena is alone. ‘Allergic’ to the foreign presence of the invading viruses she is ‘doomed always to fight to stay herself’ (2).

The second immunitary mechanism that Esposito argues marks the negative declension of modern biopolitics is that of property. Following John Locke’s thesis that property confers a certain protection on the individual, Esposito suggests that life requires possessions to live, and firstly it requires its own substance in which to inhere so that the materiality of the body is the location of the first property. But for Esposito, property intensifies the immunitary logic, for while the sovereign transcends the individual, “proprietary immunization adheres to them – or better, remains within the confines of their body” (Esposito 2008, 63). Property installs sovereign power *within* individual bodies, a proper power that is then legally secured by the juridical power of the representative sovereign. Milena *has* a body, it is her own, it maintains her life, and it is her life, yet, it threatens it at the same time. Milena’s treacherous body negatively

immunizes her life by subtracting her from the common. But in being without the legal and political immunity of the sovereign order, Milena's property is constantly threatened. She lives in fear.

Milena presents us then with a figure of resistance to the new politically and biologically hostile environment. Her excessive immunization of what is properly her own – her body, a body which it at once her self – rejects the appropriating power of sovereignty. But *The Child Garden* will once again mark a shift in this immunitary logic, one that dislocates and disrupts whilst also instituting the proprietary claim: Ryman presents Milena, not as one attempting to secure her own life or her body as such, but – prior even to the formation of her own subjectivity – as attempting to protect her very relation to the world. Narrating Milena's early infancy, Ryman situates the child in a paradisiacal communal relationship to the world around her:

It was as if Milena and the world had crept out of hiding together. The sun had come out from behind a cloud; colour was sprung from the heart of everything. [...] Light, like time, moved in two directions at once, an exchange between all things. [...] The trees, the grass, the wooden gate, they were oriented towards Milena because she looked at them. They seemed to come closer to her. The lime tree leaned with all its weight towards Milena, towards the field. The world glowed in silence. (Ryman 2011, 158)

For the infant Milena, the silence of this world-as-paradise suffused with light, is disrupted by words. Words darkened the world. Throughout *The Child Garden*, Ryman employs the figure of the virus as a fluid analogy between writing, power and selves.¹⁷ The viruses produce words: “‘*Lipy*,’ [the virus] said, naming the tree [in Milena's native Czech language]. Everything seemed to darken, as if the sun had gone behind a cloud. “‘*Tilia platyphyllos*,’ it said, pushing the tree into a framework of science” (158). But as the infant Milena learns to speak, she also

¹⁷ The comparison of the virus and writing, or language has also been made by William S. Burroughs, for whom ‘The word is now a virus’ (Burroughs et al. 1999). For a further analysis of the trope of the viral in *The Child Garden* see Jesse Cohn (2001).

experiences the power behind the meaning of certain words, and one word in particular: ‘No.’ So that when her perfect, whole, newborn life is invaded by the Consensus’ viral inoculation and she is seared by fever, she is in possession of a certain power:

The aliens tried to speak. They tried to speak inside Milena. The words were muffled, like voices heard through a womb. Milena could feel voices stir, like larvae. Words had been deposited in her head like grubs. They began to seethe.

It was the world that was threatened, and Milena wanted to save it.

Ne! thought the infant. She resisted. *Ne, ne!* [...] *Ne* was the word of rejection. *Ne* was the word of independence, of freedom. (Ryman 2011, 153)

This account of Milena’s infancy recalls Giorgio Agamben’s argument concerning the experience of language and its relation to a metaphysics of presence (which prefigures his later work on (bio)politics and ethics) (1993). For Agamben, the contemporary age represents a loss of the experience of language as such, where language is merely undergone, splitting the subject of experience from the knowledge it entails and producing a nihilism whereby language can only refer to death as a radical negativity (1991). The Consensus’ viruses produce such a split – by precisely attempting to avoid it (to avoid the void). It is in the experience of infancy that Agamben locates the possibility of a “pure taking place of language,” where one exists in language without being called there by any absence, negativity, or death (1991, 26). However, in this allegory Ryman marks the experience of language as one that necessitates a response to the call of negativity and death and therefore the birth of Milena’s immunity: Milena’s body recognises itself as proper to itself, distinguishing itself from the ‘other’ as artificial and alien. So, in order to protect her ‘proper,’ communal relation to the world with its shared ‘silent’ *munus* – a property that now belongs not to Milena as such but to her ‘pre-individual’ singularity in relation to the world – and in order to protect against an invading *pernicious* form of language that would re-write her very DNA, she was required to understand, possess, and

write back with the word ‘no.’ This is a biological resistance that is *at once* political, as although “[t]o Milena, it felt as if she were saving the world, and not herself” (158)) this *double* negative negates the negation and constructs her body as properly her own, in contradistinction to the communal body of the Consensus, and of ‘the world.’

Later Milena herself compares the viruses to writing. As she grows up she must interact with other children in full possession of the human archive of philosophical texts. These children, of around seven years old, sit and discuss the theme of writing in Plato and Derrida.¹⁸ Taking as read the meaning of these texts the children-as-archives regurgitate the official indoctrinated line: Plato saw writing as “an artificial knowledge that people could lay claim to without really having experienced or learnt anything,” while Derrida “resolved the contradiction” of how Plato could bear to write while hating it so much, by naming writing a “*Pharmakolikon*” a poison that “could also cure” (178-9).¹⁹ In the Consensus’ inexact representation of Derrida, writing *becomes* a cure – it will resolve the contradictions it faces. However, for Milena – who *has* read the texts, but imperfectly, without the aid of her own artificial knowledge – this dogmatic meaning goes astray, and – in a somewhat more Derridean fashion – she reads the texts anew. For her, *viruses* are writing, and they are not a cure but a means of survival, and thus an *immunization* of the negative within life that can only ever *obscure* and not resolve the contradiction:

‘I’ll tell you why Plato wrote when he hated writing [...] He wrote because he knew he had lost. He had lost, and everyone was writing, and so he had to write. But he still hated it.’

¹⁸ The reference here is, of course, to Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy” (2004 (1981)) and his deconstruction of the privileging of speech over writing he finds in Plato and in the history of metaphysics.

¹⁹ This received knowledge impregnated into the minds of the children of this future word does a clear violence to Derrida’s deconstruction. In reading the *pharmakon* as a resolution of the contradiction the consensual community of *The Child Garden* legitimates the implicit use of immunity as the injection of a necessary evil. It does not, however, negotiate the problematics of the autoimmunity of this very act (which is the theme of this chapter) and in doing so permits its own viral form of writing to constrict and dismiss the ‘destinerrance’ and dissemination that Derrida finds in this *pharmakon*. I will return to this discussion in my reading of Derrida’s ‘biopolitical’ autoimmunity that follows.

Like I hate the viruses but I need them, now, here, to keep up.
(179)

Milena's ability to immunize herself from the loss of her 'natural' communal pre-individual world has disabled her in the new biopolitical situation where viral knowledge, as an ossified form of writing, has become proper to humanity. In order to save her life, both biologically and politically, she 'decides,' for better or worse, to take an immunosuppressant drug, to lower her over-active autoimmune defences and to admit the viruses. The artificial prosthesis is appropriated, but only by expropriating Milena's sense of self: after one final massive dose of viruses (that threatens her life in an allergic reaction) she emerged with "an encyclopaedic knowledge and several useful calculating facilities," but now every act, every moral attitude she possessed drew with it the thought: "Was that because of the virus? Was it a part of herself? She could not be sure" (1). Life, in the child garden, has been transformed into a machine-like repetition of the same. For, as Esposito claims: "Ordered to produce an increment in the subject, the proprietary logic inaugurates a path of inevitable desubjectification [...] destined to drain it of its vital element" (2008, 69).

Despite this forced capitulation however, Milena will remain for us a figure of resistance, for in being sick with viruses when she came of political age, she was never Read by the Consensus, her 'Bad Grammar' was never diagnosed and treated, she is not normalised and continues to allergically reject viral inscription. Along with all the others immune to the viruses (animal and plant life for example), which therefore lie outside of the new definition of the Human species, Milena is an outlaw, neither within nor fully outside of the (viral) law. Milena has lost something in her immunitary act of appropriation, she has lost her Edenic community that marks the continuum of life prior to its division into *zoē* and *bíos*, but she has gained too, she has gained *her* self and *her* body, which now require maintenance if she is not to lose it all. Milena lives in fear of discovery, and in fear of the precious personal life, which is now her *own*, being put to death.

Again, two senses of the communal have been marked here: one, a community in immunity, and the other a community as a shared exchange between all forms of life (vegetal, animal, or otherwise) ‘prior’ to any immune self. These two communities echo Esposito’s thesis. Can Milena and Esposito escape the negative logic of the immune paradigm and affirm a return, or a reversal, to *communitas*? Before addressing this question, however, I will continue to follow Esposito’s exposition, and firstly, the third element of immune declension of modern biopolitics – liberty.

Liberty

Milena “knew nothing of locks. Her culture did not need them” (11). People in *The Child Garden* are free to go wherever they like, no one ever stole; they are free to have, and to make use of, whatever they would like. Only they don’t like, they don’t want to take what was not their own:

Milena tested herself. Once she tried to steal an apple from a market stall. It was run, as so many things were, in those days, by a child. When Milena’s hand touched the apple’s dappled skin, she had thought of what it cost the boy to grow the apples and haul them to market and how he had to do all of this in his spare time. She could not do it, she could not make herself steal. (1)

Why? Milena asks. “Was that because of the virus? Was it a part of herself? She could not be sure” (1). Milena, this latter-day Eve, does not eat of the fruit, her experiment yields not knowledge but uncertainty; subject to the uncertain sovereignty – of a deity replaced by technological know-how with the Consensus – this Eve’s free will is questioned. In this post-Revolutionary world, freedom is figured as a freedom *from* the undermining of life, freedom *from* the degradation of individuality, but only by means of the security of the viral programming, and thus, by a form of coercion.

For Esposito, although the meaning of the term liberty speaks of an opening without reserve to the mutability of events, in regards to the progressive hold on life conditioned by the immune paradigm this meaning is obscured. Citing the etymology of the term liberty through both the root *leuth* (Greek *eleutheria* and Latin *libertas*) and the Sanskrit *frya* (English freedom and German *Freiheit*), Esposito highlights its sense of opening and increase, which is also “a flowering [...] in the typically vegetative meaning of the expression” (2008, 70). This liberatory flowering connects semantically also to the affirmative connotations of love (*Leiben, life* – and *libido*) and friendship (friend, *Freund*) (70). Throughout his narrative, Ryman employs a consistent reference to the floral, the garden, and to love. Milena’s very protection of her infantile Edenic garden speaks to this desire for, and return to, the liberty of an earlier state, a state that precedes the manufactured gardens where children are “forced like flowers to bloom too early” where the children are “not flowers of love. They are flowers of work, to be put to work” (2011, 4). If liberty’s originary semantics refers us to the opening of a vegetal life to the increase and growth of ‘life itself,’ then the protection of liberty in the immune paradigm can be seen only as the negative reversal of this affirmation. In modernity, to be free is reconfigured as an individual subject’s freedom from interference; but, while in *The Child Garden* individuals are democratically free to decide and to act in a consensual government, their fear, and their collective trauma, *necessitates* a sovereign protection, which, first and foremost, frees them from the threat of death – and then subsequently from the threat to their own property. By creating divides between human, vegetal, and animal life, in the negative logic of the immune paradigm, freedom is reversed into necessity.

Esposito continues to read the intensification of biopolitical immunity in the modern era within the security apparatuses of liberalism, citing Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon as a crucial moment of modern immunitary politics where, in the disciplinary model, liberty becomes security and coercion by anticipating and blocking contingency (74). Subsequently drawing Foucault’s own interpretation of liberalism’s biopolitical character into this immune paradigm, Esposito argues that once liberal governance is required to secure

liberty in a productive fashion for *all* of society, it must continually threaten limitations, coercions and obligations that destroy what it wants to create (74).²⁰ For Esposito, this aporia is not only the result of a logical contradiction at the heart of liberty, but is intimately concerned with the emergence of life. It is the very culture of the modern protection of the individual that “produces something that moves beyond it in terms of vital complex process” (75). Having incorporated its communal opposite into itself, the modern individual validates a security that is not according to Hannah Arendt, “the individual’s security against ‘violent death,’ as in Hobbes (where the condition of all liberty is freedom from fear), but a security which should permit an undisturbed development of the life process of society as a whole” (Arendt qtd in Esposito 2008, 75).

Having secured (some) individuals’ fear, the role of the biopolitical state then becomes one of securing its own ‘proper’ life and *not* the freedom of its individuals.²¹ Individual life becomes integrated within the life of the species and made distinct through a series of internal breaks into zones of different worth. This logic therefore appears to be diverging from the disciplinary power of the sovereign towards the biopolitical register of governmentality that Foucault diagnoses as beginning in the eighteenth century. However, in liberal institutions freedom becomes a freedom to *oppress* in the name of life itself. If individuals have become mere units of life’s replication they are free and yet servile; they are singular and yet plural, so that society is held together by a democratic commonality that alienates each individual in regards to others. It is this alienation, Esposito argues, which in the logic of modern politics, pushes biopolitics closer to its thanatopolitical opposite. For, the ‘domesticated herd’ is now constantly ready to “recognise its willing shepherd,” to surrender to *any* master in their fear of not knowing how to properly protect their own interests (76).

²⁰ See Foucault’s *Birth of Biopolitics* for his discussion of liberalism (2008).

²¹ The state can only secure the fear of some and not all, for, as we have seen with Milena, there is always a remainder – the democratic ‘consensus’ is always, as Derrida argues in *Rogues*, autoimmune.

We have come full circle. Having already seen how in *The Child Garden* a liberal biopolitical pre-Revolutionary state succumbs to the will of such a master (the Consensus) through the fear of not knowing how to protect themselves (against a new viral threat). And having seen how the institution of a ‘totalitarian’ form of governance (as consensus) then repeats and intensifies the immunitary logic instituted in modernity, we get a sense of what Esposito sees as the pernicious logic of immunity and the reasons why it proves itself to be so difficult to escape. It is in the biopolitics of the twentieth century that Esposito will find this intensification to exacerbate towards a *deadly* autoimmune reaction that threatens not only the individual, but the species as a whole.

However, as we head towards a reading of this *deadly* autoimmunity, we must not lose sight of the character of Milena’s ‘resistance’ to this immunitary logic – a resistance that, as a response, also recalls the status of a certain deconstructive autoimmunity and the form of ‘ir-responsibility’ that this produces. Liberty is a defence used by the state but also against the state. Milena’s resistance to the expropriation of her freedom (to steal the apple) can, in a sense, be viewed as the acceleration of her appropriation of the immunitary paradigm, so that her freedom is seen as *her own* possession in distinction to the shared property of the communal viral knowledge. However, if, as Esposito states, “he who puts liberty to the test can do nothing other than what he has done – his de-liberation [*deliberazione*] has the literal sense of a renouncing indeterminate liberty and of enclosing liberty in the bonds of its own predetermination” (73), if this is the case then Milena’s putting of liberty to the test begins to disrupt the immunitary double negation. For in remaining uncertain as to whether or not she could have done otherwise than what she has done, the lack of clarity – or the undecidability – of Milena’s decision (autonomous free-will or viral coercion?) signals a continuation of the opening to the mutability of communal life and, therefore, a certain response that complicates the immunitary logic. This is a response, then, that also precedes the sovereign decision. It is a response that precedes even

Milena's pre-individual immunizing "ne, ne," as a certain "yes, yes" in the face of whatever, or whoever may come.²²

4.

Autoimmunity I: Thanatopolitics

Negating Negation

Having now introduced Esposito's immune paradigm, and having found this logic to be repeated, strengthened and altered in *The Child Garden's* own fantastical narrative of 'totalitarian' rule, it will now be necessary to remark on the effects of this logic beyond the largely speculative terrain of this novel. For, what Esposito diagnoses in his genealogy are real, singular, historical, and devastating effects. Following Foucault and Agamben, Esposito proceeds to analyse the biopolitics of the Nazi regime. Unlike these authors however, Esposito finds in Nazism the apotheosis of the modern immunitary paradigm and its deadly reversal into autoimmunity. It is the particular logic that is installed here – and that disastrously continues to live on after the fall of the regime – which, for Esposito, requires diagnosis and treatment.

In Esposito's reading of Nazi biopolitics it is the immune paradigm that accounts for the contradictions of power, life, and death, which Foucault struggled to situate in his own biopolitical description of Nazism; and it is also the immune paradigm into which Esposito implicitly folds Agamben's reading of the state of exception and the logic of the camp.²³ However, before addressing the main points of Esposito's persuasive thesis, I want to both voice an initial reservation

²² My use of this double affirmation prefigures the particular use of the "yes, yes" in Derrida's thought, one which is closely aligned to his 'ethics' of the 'to come' (see for example Derrida's "Number of Yes" (2008)). I will be employing Milena's immunizing "ne, ne" and Derrida's "yes, yes" throughout the chapter that follows in order to draw out the particular character of the affirmation to be found in Derrida's autoimmunity.

²³ As I indicated in my introduction to this Chapter (156) Foucault struggles to locate Nazism within the logic of his biopolitical paradigm (as a power *of* life), which he so clearly separates from the logic of sovereign power *over* life. Oscillating between sovereignty and biopolitics Nazism for Foucault becomes both a continuation of classic disciplinary power, *and* a continuation of the new biopolitical power that Foucault sees as being born in the eighteenth century, thus con-fusing the two (Foucault 2005, 258-63). Esposito's treatment of Agamben will be explored more fully in what is to follow.

concerning his strategy, and to account for what could be seen as my somewhat reserved treatment of this complex subject at this point. Despite Esposito's care to name the singularity of the Nazi regime and its horrific effects, his diagnosis of the dangers of modern immunity reads as a commentary and an abstraction that finds a causality and an almost teleological necessity of the resulting autoimmune thanatopolitics – for Nazism, *and* for contemporary politics (though differently). Although it is precisely this seeming necessity that Esposito will attempt to deconstruct, this 'deconstruction' appears, in this case, to come after and outside rather than within the structural logic it names; risking, therefore, a removal of the historical specificity of the Nazi extermination camps and, perhaps, some of the particular responses and responsibility we may have towards it.²⁴ I want therefore to signal here an initial reservation of a space – one that recalls the character of Milena's 'resistance' to the immune logic – that might allow for another form of response to the terrors of the holocaust and its autoimmunities.

Nonetheless, Esposito's analysis of Nazi biopolitics is persuasive, and therefore, in order to examine both the value and the limitations of his thesis I will provide a brief account of his exposition. Presenting a detailed analysis of the anthropological, medical, and political texts that both inform and constitute the regime, Esposito draws out its immunitary structures. He uncovers how the concept of immunity has now condensed and intensified: the modern political metaphor – as the institution of a negative form of *communitas* to protect against an affirmative but excessive *communitas* – joins with its full contemporary biomedical (and thus scientifically authorised) understanding.²⁵ As the naturalising innovations of contemporary bioscience combine with political

²⁴ Esposito acknowledges the risk he takes in regards to relating the Nazi immunitary logic to contemporary biopolitics that might remove its historical specificity, but he suggests that this is a risk he is willing to take, and suggests that it is unavoidable in any analysis of Nazism (2006, 55). I would agree that this risk is unavoidable. Yet I would suggest that more circumspect or vigilant approach might be called for here, one that attends to the risks of *reconstructing* a rhetoric in the contemporary era that troubles Esposito's project. For Esposito's commentary, his facts and figures risks ignoring the very real threat of the maintenance of divides *despite* ones very best intentions.

²⁵ In this regard see Ed Cohen's description, in *A Body Worth Defending*, of the hybrid nature of immunity. For Cohen, the hybrid functions to obscure contradictions, binding and blinding one to the co-implications of society and nature (2009, 14).

thought, the understanding of life and politics become almost fully biologized, so that, in a continuation of the immunitary logic, the security of biological life was to be achieved only via the institution of its opposite, i.e. death. The full thanatopolitical force of biopolitics had been unleashed. In Hitler's own words: "The discovery of the Jewish virus is one of the greatest revolutions of this world. The battle that we fight every day is equal to those fought in the last century by Pasteur and Koch" (Hitler qtd in Esposito 2008, 117). The revolution of power turns again within the logic of immunization. But now the metaphor has been literalised: no longer *resembling* parasites, bacteria or viruses, people *became* them, and thus came to be 'justified' as the object of extermination. This project of extermination was not enacted by one powerful sovereign, but, directly or indirectly, by 'sovereign' individuals themselves (117).

Esposito tells of how the 'biological' underpinnings of Nazism construct a perspective on life informed by evolutionary theory that opens human life to a continuum that includes plants and animals (129). However, here this continuum – as we saw in the previous Chapter – is found not to be so open. For, while in Nazi ideology the non-human animal is protected from cruelty and experimentation (due to its sharing the heredity of an evolutionary past with the human), the 'animal-human' was not.²⁶ For, according to Esposito:

rather than "bestializing" man, as is commonly thought, [Nazism] "anthropologized" the animal, enlarging the definition of *anthropos* to the point where it also comprised animals of inferior species. He who was the object of persecution and extreme violence wasn't simply an animal (which indeed was respected and protected as such by one of the most advanced pieces of legislation of the entire world), but was an *animal-man*: man in the animal and the animal in man. (130)

²⁶ Hitler famously dabbled with vegetarianism and veganism during his life (Doyle 2005, 76), and, as Esposito notes, in 1933 there was a Nazi decree that no animal should be subjected to any type of cruelty, including medical testing (2008, 130). Cary Wolfe, however, suggests that Esposito over-states this point, citing Peter Singer's attestation to the medical procedures the Nazis conducted on apes – and other animals (Wolfe 2011).

The Nazis' biological continuism, which stretches from the vegetal to the human, is riven with internal demarcations: a humanity-as-animal, a virus-as-humanity. Designations extended to a vast number of social categories: alcoholics, homosexuals, prostitutes, the obese etc. (119).²⁷ These hybrid forms of life, in being found *within* the privileged, evolved site of the Aryan race, threatened a creeping contagious contamination of its supposed purity. The cause of these 'degenerate' natures is named as the result of the artificial and humanitarian disruption of natural selection that protected the weak from death. This degeneration, as a negative form of *genos* or race, necessitates, in Nazi immunitary logic, a secondary artificial intervention as a positive eu-genics, which attempts to return life to its 'natural' path via a process of 'racial hygiene' that seeks to *annihilate* the negative through geno-cide. This logic, for Esposito, is nothing but the double negative that protects against death only via the thanatopolitical defence of the immunitary *dispositif* that produces death (127).

The mechanisms that make this thanatopolitics possible, in Esposito's reading, are to be found in the (again three) immunitary constructions enacted by the Nazi state: the norm, the double enclosure of the body and the anticipatory suppression of birth (three mechanism we have already seen enacted in Ryman's narrative). Firstly, the racial (Aryan) norm is presented in Nazism as a biological and, therefore, natural category that gives rise to a juridical norm, or rule. What this naturalisation of the norm obscures is the precise exchange between the biological and the juridical in a move that renders political decisions biological in that they to appear to be validated by a *natural* legal precedent. Myth, therefore, becomes reality, through a force of law. It is this construction of a racial norm that enables the division of life into different domains of worth:

²⁷ Esposito's analysis of the role of nonhuman animals in its biopolitical regime clearly opens again onto the animal question addressed in the previous chapter. Another line to follow in this context would be to pursue the ways in which the animal is included and excluded from the political, the biopolitical and the juridical orders, by thinking, for example how the abattoirs and farms of industrial meat production might relate, as Derrida suggests they do, to the genocidal camps of the Nazi regime (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004). This very question is to be addressed by Cary Wolfe in his forthcoming book *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*.

To say that the degenerate is abnormal means pushing him towards a zone of indistinction that isn't completely included in the category of the human. Or perhaps better, it means enlarging the latter category to include its own negation: the non-man in man and therefore the man-animal [*uomo-bestia*] [... performing] the function of the excluding inclusion. [...] Degeneration is the animal element that reemerges in man in the form of an existence that isn't properly animal or human, but exactly their point of intersection: the contradictory copresence between two genera, two times, two organisms that are incapable of producing a unity of the person and consequently for the same reason incapable of forming a juridical subjectivity. (119)

It is here, where the question of the contradictory exclusive inclusion of life within the *polis* is addressed, that we can see Esposito's implicit dialogue with Giorgio Agamben emerge. For Agamben, the defining feature of biopolitics, and Nazi biopolitics in particular, is the separation of life into two distinct categories: “*zoē*, which [for Aristotle] expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods) and *bíos*, which indicated the form or way of life proper to an individual or group” (Agamben 1998, 1).²⁸ Modern biopolitical states, for Agamben, reduce or strip away the communal, political form of life as *bíos*, to produce ‘bare life,’ a life that is merely living and thus killable. However, this is not a living that is simply *zoē* – for *zoē* would be excluded from the *polis* and its ‘way of life’ – but it marks an inclusive exclusion that produces the *political* category of the *homo sacer* as one who can be killed but not sacrificed. This is, therefore, a political category that excludes it from the particular authorized political life that the sovereign institutes and protects.²⁹ Agamben therefore, following Carl Schmitt, names the sovereign exception as

²⁸ I will reserve for later a discussion as to whether or not these terms, which Agamben sources from Aristotle, hold to this rigid interpretation. For now I want to focus on the comparison between Agamben and Esposito's use of the biopolitical exclusive inclusion and its relation to the immune paradigm.

²⁹ Contrary to many readings of Agamben (see for example Derrida (2009, 305-334)) – and indeed contrary to many of his own confused or confusing explanations of the terms *zoē*, *bíos* (1998) – bare life is not to be thought as identical to *zoē*, but rather the process of rendering *bíos* killable. It is, for Agamben, the *baring* of *bíos* that produces ‘zoopolitics’ (2005-87-88).

the primary mechanism into which biopolitics is always already inscribed. The sovereign exception becomes for Agamben, the central, weighty, metaphysical problem to be both questioned and challenged, for in modernity and still in what is called post-modernity “the state of exception has become the rule” (Agamben 2005, 57). It is this biopolitical logic of exception that Agamben links to the inclusive exclusion of language within the individual subject I indicated previously. It is Agamben’s project to locate a space and a temporality that cannot permit such an inclusive exclusion founded on death and absence. It is again within the experience of a “pure taking place of language” that Agamben seeks the liberation of the subject from an experience of language and politics as negativity (1991, 16-26).

For Esposito too, it is the norm – the rule – which is ‘sovereign,’ but for him, it is the logic of the immune mechanism that best names the contradictions of the inclusive exclusion of categories of life within the biopolitical state. The immune paradigm is that which permits many different, specific and locally applied mechanisms to control, limit and negatively secure life. Combining within its logic both sovereignty, the norm (biological or juridical), liberty, property and others, immunization authorizes the annihilation of life deemed to fall outside of whatever form of life is currently to be protected. Therefore, according to Esposito’s thesis, rather than thinking the contradictions of the state of exception, it is through diagnosing the specific mechanisms employed by the immune paradigm that will furnish us with the tools necessary to resist and overthrow the production of a bare, non-juridical, killable life. These tools also relate to the question of language for Esposito, but rather than seeking a ‘pure language’ without negativity as in Agamben, Esposito will seek to employ language as a tool to write a new semantics which affirms the negative and its communal virtues.

By including within its law the concept of a biological, racial norm that exceeds it, the Nazi regime inoculates the norm against all non-normative, and therefore non-juridical lives, and permits them to be killed (killing being the only ‘proper’

response once the norm is fully biologized).³⁰ Following from this procedure, Esposito finds the inclusive exclusion of life in the Nazi regime to also be inscribed via the immunizing procedure of a double enclosure: the enclosure within the individual body, rendered genetically and biologically whole (without the Cartesian mind-body division); and the enclosure within the ‘body’ of the racial norm, which has, according to Esposito, been raised to the point of a spiritualization to become a ‘biologized soul’ (142). This double enclosure renders those excluded without a ‘soul,’ they become merely flesh that exists without (a proper, spiritualised) life. And finally, due to the fact that the exclusion of the degenerate from the body politic is a condition of birth, it is birth that must, in an anticipatory move, be suppressed in order to secure a re-birth of the German people that will be free from contamination. It is this pre-emptory inoculation with death, in order to prevent death, which, for Esposito, leads to the final solution and genocide (Esposito 2008, 136).



But where, in Esposito’s analysis of Nazi thanatopolitics, do we find the concept of autoimmunity? Although his reference to autoimmunity in this context is fleeting, it nonetheless seems to become the necessary consequence of the negative affirmation (the negation of the negation in order to affirm) in general. For if death is secured against by inoculating the biopolitical body with death ‘itself’ then the only way for the state’s life to be ultimately secure is for it to die. This biopolitical autoimmunity is signalled, for Esposito, by Hitler’s telegram sent from his bunker just prior to his suicide, where he “ordered the destruction of the conditions of subsistence for the German people who had proven themselves too weak. Here the limit point of the Nazi antinomy becomes suddenly clear: the life of some and finally the life of the one, is sanctioned only by the death of everyone” (116). The immunitary mechanism has strengthened to the point of attacking that which it seeks to secure.

³⁰ This killing refers also, of course, to the non-criminal putting to death of the other that Derrida locates in act of killing animal others (Derrida 1991b, 112), and which, we recall he names genocidal (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 394-5).

Again, as I elaborated in Chapter One (81-86) it is the homeopathic character of immunity which leads to this totalising autoimmune act: an insidious death is replaced with a heroic death. However, here, this homeopathic treatment does not *dilute* the poison but rather incrementally increases its strength to a heroic, superhuman level in order to overcome a perceived weakness *in* life – which ultimately becomes the weakness *of* life as such. For Esposito then, autoimmunity is destructive. Immunity's negative affirmation can have only this end in its sights, for the affirmation too is destroyed when there remains no one left to mourn the 'hero.' Only of course there is someone left. The end of Nazism did not, for Esposito, signal the end of biopolitics, but in fact the exportation of its specific (auto)immunitary logic to the *entire globe*. Where today an intimate connection to life – with regard to health care regimes, ethnicity, migratory flows and the production of those deprived of juridical identity – is still in play (146):

It is as if at the end of what still saw itself as the last and most complete of the philosophies of history, life, which is to say the struggle for its protection/negation, had become global politics' only horizon of sense. [...] beginning with September 11, 2001, the immunitary machine demands an outbreak of effective violence on the part of all contenders. The idea – and the practice – of preventive war constitutes the most acute point of this autoimmunitary turn of contemporary biopolitics, in the sense that here, in the self-confuting figure of a war fought precisely to avoid war, the negative of the immunitary procedure doubles back on itself until it covers the entire frame. (147)

Esposito therefore implies that the globalisation of the Nazi's immunitary logic threatens this 'heroic' end that ends life in the name of life itself. Here we find Esposito's analysis to link with Derrida's most extensive elaboration of the political autoimmunity addressed with regard to September 11 in "Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides" (2003). So that, as I indicated previously, Esposito declares himself to be in "complete agreement" with Derrida's diagnosis of the

self-destructive immunitary character of contemporary politics. This agreement is, however, not quite so complete as Esposito suggests, for he does not account for the deconstructive valence of this term as it appears in Derrida's work. He does not account for Derrida's 'dilution,' as it were, of the homeopathic treatment that, as I suggested in Chapter one, institutes a death into life that deconstructs its full totalising force (81-86). That is, it does not account for the affirmative valence of autoimmunity. For Esposito, we find ourselves in a globalised context where the negative "covers the entire frame," where defence and attack result in an "absolute identification," and where the future itself becomes replete with a deadly autoimmunity. Therefore, the conditions are set, according to Esposito, to reverse the full force of this negative affirmation into an 'affirmative negation' that will open the immune logic to the void of the communal gift. But does the double negation always necessarily destroy the affirmation, that is, the affirmation of life in its relation to the 'void of *communitas*'? In Nazism (and for Milena) it does not (entirely), and in contemporary biopolitics it has not (yet). For life and the living has not been totally destroyed, life still posits itself, affirms itself and marks itself as it lives on. Although a reversal of this double negative to affirm the risky void, may in fact be urgent and welcome in order to reduce the production of non-juridical killable life, it appears that Esposito is discrediting the possibility that such a reversal might always already be in play, *before* his decision to institute it. I will now question in what sense Esposito's affirmative biopolitics might therefore resemble and/or differ from Derrida's 'affirmative autoimmunity' and its opening to the future 'to come,' to ask whether the fear and the terror I have found there could, in fact, be finally affirmed.

5.

Affirming Negation

In order to address Esposito's response to the immune paradigm and to respond to this in turn, I will return to the science fictional writings of Geoff Ryman. That literature might provide an appropriate space from which to respond to these narratives of immunitary biopolitics is indicated by Ryman himself:

Literature for me . . . tries to heal the harm done by stories. (How much harm? Most of the atrocities of history have been created by stories, e.g., the Jews killed Jesus.) I follow Sartre that the freedom the author claims for herself must be shared with the reader. So that would mean that literature is stories that put themselves at the disposal of readers who want to heal themselves. Their healing power lies in their honesty, the freshness of their vision, the new and unexpected things they show, the increase in power and responsibility the [sic] give the reader. (Ryman qtd. in Pearson 2011, I)

For Ryman, literature therefore permits a form of story-telling that is able to cure the harm done by stories themselves. It is the new and unexpected things that these stories show that he says enables this healing process. Therefore, a pernicious form of story-telling – one that produces norms, static acceptance of hegemonic attitudes and atrocities, socially, politically and scientifically – is homeopathically treated with a story-telling that increases rather than diminishes the responsibility of the reader. Such literature, therefore, employs a certain immunization that affirms the new and unexpected. Ryman's science fiction provides a site that refers the reader to the world of pharmaceutical companies (and their often shoddy protocols), to genetic engineering, capitalist power, and the extraordinary lengths people will go to protect their lives – all of which are 'real' enough; but, in offering too the unexpected, the new, imaginary element – a cancer cure that kills old age, the bioengineering of life, literature, and morals – this fiction might confer on the reader a certain possibility, or responsibility, to think the immunity otherwise.

However, we have already begun to see how, in *The Child Garden* – where people are 'Read,' and have 'Bad Grammar' – Ryman complicates the character of literature's healing quality. The reference to Derrida's *pharmakon* at the centre of the book (2011, 178-9), and the prevalence of immunitary figures, signals that, for Ryman, writing might always be both a cure *and* a poison. In order to affirm novelty, one must also affirm risk, threat and death. It is

precisely this affirmation that Esposito is attempting to ‘secure’ in his responsibility to the narratives of biopolitical immunity. The new, ‘fresh vision,’ which Esposito seeks is a biopolitical semantics that affirms the void of the *munus* and the errancy of life, so that no form of life can be privileged above another, so that all ‘life’ is inscribed within *bios*, and so that the negative of autoimmunity can never fill the entire frame. We can, perhaps, begin to trace such a semantics in the narrative of *The Child Garden*.

Milena is an artist, she “had grown up with a head full of theatrical visions,” she loved the theatres’ lights, and toyed “with hazy ideas of productions that consisted only of light” (2). But it is the Consensus’ stage on which she acts. Milena is an actress in a Shakespearean company, but here her creative talents, her innovative ideas, are of no use. She is a terrible actress. In the world of the Consensus there can be only one authorized performance of a play: one that ‘apes’ the Original. The viruses provide all the information needed to maintain the accuracy of first, proper and authorized production. But the audience and actors alike are bored. They have all been infected with this knowledge – of the right costumes, the right inflection, the right interpretation – they have only to ‘remember,’ and never to think (180). The Consensus’ theatre is known “affectionately or otherwise” as “the Zoo,” the actors are the “Animals,” and these Animals entertain themselves by “pretending to be the risen corpses of famous people. The Vampires of History they called themselves,” for the fashion in everything was for history, for remembering, enacting an obscene caution in order to never forget (8). This profusion of hybrid figures – humans-as-animals, animals-as-vampires, viruses-as-humans – signals the character of the immunizing divisions that the Consensus’s viral ‘linguaging’ has inflicted. The viral law, as a viral *language*, has secured life through negating the negation. According to Agamben, it is language by which ‘man’ “separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion” (1998, 8).³¹ In *The Child Garden* the

³¹ Here we can see an example of what I mentioned earlier to be the confusion of the terms “*zoe*” and “bare life” in Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*. Agamben makes it clear in *The State of Exception* that bare life is the product of the sovereign – or what he elsewhere calls the anthropological – machine and not something which pre-exists it (2005, 87-88; 2004). In this sense then should we

writing of the viral law institutes a state of exception that has become the rule: in being subjected to the norm of an ‘Original,’ ‘Pure,’ ‘True’ ‘Humanity;’ in being doubly enclosed, through ‘language’ within a biological body *and* a political body; and in the birth of new forms of life being suppressed. This world’s ‘totalitarian’ Consensus, echoes the immunitary logic of the Nazi state.³² A totalizing democratic state performs the same immunitary logic as a totalizing fascist one, for one could argue that

totalitarian risk is the risk of the coming into being of a totalitarian regime as a consequence of principled metaphysical totalization, even the principle of freedom. On this account no discrimination is made between “good” and “bad” acts of totalization since *qua* acts of totalization all entail the same risk. (Bernstein qtd. in Eaglestone 2002, 36)

For Esposito (and for this narrative) then, “the more the community is preserved intact the more the level of innovation is reduced” (2008, 105). In attempting to avoid degeneration, the community is no longer capable of growth and “it folds in on itself” (105). Esposito turns to Nietzsche to locate the beginnings of a thought that is able to push this inward-folding structure to such an excessive level that it must ultimately annihilate the negation itself and reverse itself into the affirmative (102).³³ If the force of a reaction is unstoppable, as Nietzsche claims (and for Esposito this is an immune reaction), then, according to

perhaps be reading here: man “separates and opposes himself to his own zoe and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that zoe in an inclusive exclusion” given that it is, for Agamben, the machine of language which produces the inclusive exclusion, and thus, bare life?

³² This similarity, however, clearly includes within it many differences: the biopolitics of the Consensus is not directly thanatopolitical, it does not kill its citizens definitively in regards to their bodily life, but it does kill their vitality, their difference, and their individuality, which have come to be inscribed within the biological and genetic understanding of their bodies.

³³ Esposito finds his immune paradigm, in its encompassing logic, to also go a long way to accounting for the diverse readings of Nietzsche’s work (2008, 79). Tracing through Nietzsche’s writings a tightly woven picture of biopolitical immunity (in his distinctly biological reading of politics), Esposito, finds there both a hyperimmunitary logic that tends towards the thanatopolitical and the terrors of Nazi eugenics (93-101), and the reversal of this logic into an affirmative register. It is this latter line of thought that is of interest to me here.

Esposito's reading, it can only accelerate in an excessive manner to ultimately recoil against itself and mobilize an unleashing of energy.³⁴ So that:

affirmation is not the synthetic result of a double negation, but instead the freeing of positive forces, which is produced by the self-suppression of the negation itself. As soon as the immunitary rejection, what Nietzsche calls "reaction," becomes intense enough to attack the same antibodies that provoked the rejection, the break with the old form becomes inevitable. (102)

In this attacking of the "same antibodies that provoked the rejection," we can locate, of course, the very process of autoimmunity as Derrida describes it: where the immune system "'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its 'own' immunity" (Derrida and Borradori 2003, 94). In Nietzsche and Esposito's excessive *acceleration* of the negation towards its reversal, we can also hear the echo of the insistent 'uppings of the ante,' and its attendant risk, which terrorizes and traumatizes Derrida even as it affirms survival (as *sur-vivance*). What then might distinguish Esposito's affirmative "break with the old form" from Derrida's autoimmune break? If the similarities between these two positions hold, what is it that enables Esposito to affirm the terror and the trauma that Derrida locates in its future (to come)?

To continue with Esposito's Nietzschean reading of immunity: The acceleration of immunity towards a *deadly* autoimmunity, found both in Nazism and in contemporary politics, precipitates a reversal of the biopolitical definitions of health and of illness, normal and abnormal, degenerate and the generative; for, in order for life to survive, immunity is forced into its opposite. A different conception of the cure must be thought: is this the cure as a *pharmakon*, where for Derrida, good and evil become undecidably co-implicated? Not quite. For Esposito's Nietzsche, it is the degenerate who, in regards to biopolitics, affirms the *pharmakon*:

³⁴ This logic is connected then to the circularity of Nietzsche's 'eternal return' for Esposito (2008, 102).

saving [the community] from such decline are individuals who, free from the syndrome of self-preservation, are more inclined to experiment, although for the same reason they are biologically weaker. Disposed as they are to increasing the good that they possess (as well as their own vital substance), sooner or later they are bound not only to risk their lives, but also to damage the entire community. It is precisely here in the clench of this extreme risk, that the point of productive conjunction between generation and innovation is produced. (105).

Extreme risk is to be affirmed, then, due to its productive generation. ‘Free’ individuals open to the Nietzschean *Übermensch* – translated by Esposito as “after-man” – so that the degenerate is a ‘man’ who enters into a different relationship with ‘his’ own species.³⁵ Opening not to another humanity, but to the other *of* and the other *from* humanity is, for Esposito, the opening to the “nothing,” the *donum*, or donation, of the communal *munus* (107). *Communitas* is the exteriority that Esposito affirms as the riskiness of generation *and* degeneration.

In regards to the immunitary ‘state of exception’ within which the community of *The Child Garden* lives, we can perhaps find here following Esposito’s argument, two different ways of being outside the law (law as referring also to the norm, rule, language or virus). One can be outside in regards to the *inclusive* exclusion that immunizes the populous, protecting it from the negative, the bad, the poison, and risk – and thus protecting and separating it from its vital life (*zoē*). Or, one can be outside the law in regards to *exclusive* inclusion, as an immunization becomes so excessive that it begins to destroy the very logic of the good and the bad. What once was once good (immunity) becomes bad and destroys itself, and the bad – the poison, the risk – is affirmed.

³⁵ Nietzsche’s figure of the *Übermensch* is to be found in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (2008). For Nietzsche the *Übermensch* presents something like the goal of humanity (19) – in Esposito’s reading however, it comes more to refer to the *posthuman* (2008, 109).

If, however, we read Milena's story in the light of this logic, we can complicate the smoothness of the path that Esposito lays out towards his affirmative biopolitics. It is Milena who is 'degenerate' in the eyes of the Consensus, it is she who is excluded *within* the consensus to such a degree that her 'autoimmunity' pushes her towards the innovative in order to survive, but rather than affirming the new, as radically new, she only re-inscribes anew the hegemonic power structures of the Consensus. Milena remains a symbol of both the hope *and* the harm of healing.

Despite the prohibition on lesbianism in the Consensus, Milena still finds someone to love: the 'Bear' Rolfa. Rolfa is a woman genetically engineered to mine metal in the Antarctic, but she is also an 'animal.' Yet, in living outside the Consensus, like Milena, she is neither human nor animal. Like Milena she is biologically immune to the viruses, like Milena she is a lesbian, and like Milena she is an artist: Rolfa is a singer and a composer, she translates works of literature into operas. There is much here that could be said about this relationship between the 'human' Milena and the 'animal' Rolfa (some points of which I have explored in the previous chapter), however, here it is enough to say that this relationship ends badly in the excessive, hostile conditions of the viral hegemony.³⁶ But it is Milena's love for Rolfa (a love that recalls its etymological links with liberty) that frees Milena from "the syndrome of self preservation." No longer concerned purely with protecting herself from the feared viruses, in homage to, and mourning for, her lost love Milena is concerned instead to bring novelty into the world. She decides to inscribe life anew with a new music. With unfailing perseverance she succeeds in staging Rolfa's opera (Dante's *Divine Comedy*) as a holographic performance conducted in the skies of the world. A production consisting only of light.

³⁶ I could, for example, explore the question of what it is that permits me to name Rolfa an 'animal' given that in this novel she shares many of the traditional attributes of the 'human.' One answer to this question could be that it is Rolfa's position as a sacrificable other in the eyes of the Consensus (and therefore in the end in Milena's eyes too) that maintains the appellation 'animal.' It is, after all, the 'category' of 'animal' that, as we saw in Chapter two, permits lives to be sacrificed in an often unquestioned manner.

However, as Wendy Pearson has noted in her introduction to the novel, this act of translation, which brings the literary texts to the world's biggest stage, indicates manner in which translation itself acts as a *pharmakon* (2011, vi). The act of translation inevitably alters meaning, in always being what Derrida has called a "forced translation" (2009, 343). And although the two artists, Rolfa and Milena both act as translators, Milena's translation proves to be the more violent, more 'sovereign' or 'hegemonic': she ignores Rolfa's note on top of her manuscript: "For an audience of viruses" (2011, 94). Rolfa had, it seemed, wanted her musical notation on these literary texts to speak directly to the viruses, to disrupt, perhaps, the idea of a single authorized interpretation during the very act of reading. Instead Milena's innovation, where "[t]he great chorus filled the shallow sky of Earth" (215), only repeated and confirmed the hegemonic attitudes of the Consensus. No one could escape this theatrical vision, no one could escape the sound of Milena's performance. All are obliged to watch the opera, like this, to watch it like this, *now*.³⁷ In being required to work from within the framework of the Consensus' power relations, Milena here only confirms their power *over* life that is now her own.

6.

Bios

A Change in Climate

The question for Esposito becomes, therefore, one of deconstructing the very biopolitical framework of immunity's power over life, so that the deconstructive potential of the *pharmakon* will be unable to be reabsorbed into its logic. By penetrating and turning inside-out the three immunitary biopolitical mechanisms of norm, double enclosure, and the suppression of birth – which give rise to the totalitarian horrors of Nazism and Consensus – Esposito suggests we can find the tools necessary for uncovering a truly affirmative immunitary biopolitics.

³⁷ Further, in order to produce the performance Milena is required to become a member of "the Party," and she is honoured as "the People's Artist" (294-297). She is forced, in order to innovate, to become ever closer to the ruling Party that she resists.

For Esposito, the most complete normative model is not one decided by a force of law by reversing *nomos* into *bios* and back again, but it is “what already prefigures the movement of its own deconstruction in favor of another that follows from it” (188). Esposito’s new immanent norm is the result of the ‘birth’ of ‘a life,’³⁸ a birth that is not enclosed within an origin to produce an equivalence with nation or race, but a birth of novelty in *every* beginning and thus every repetition: “a beginning that repeats itself an infinite number of times, unravelling lines which are always different” (171). Following Gilbert Simondon, Esposito argues that this birthing of the norm, is rooted in the pre-individual biological level so that

we can say that the subject, be it a subject of knowledge, will, or action as modern philosophy commonly understands it, is never separated from the living roots from which it originates in the form of a splitting between the somatic and psychic levels in which the first is never decided [*resolve*] in favor of the second. (180)

This thought results in an understanding of life as a fluid transition between the human, animal and the vegetal, so that it is the crossing of thresholds that give birth to the somatic and the psychic and not nature or essence. In regard to value or worth, none are favoured, and thus, following Spinoza, Esposito is able to name “the norm the principle of unlimited equivalence for every single form of life” (186). The individual is to be thought as bound only to its biological matrix with its continual re-birth so that it is never enclosed, or blocked, within a closed system, whether of the individual or political body (188). Instead of the Hobbesian logic of bodies, and leviathans that incorporate the individual, Esposito expands a concept of flesh as incarnation. Deconstructing the spiritual residue of the term found in Merleau-Ponty, Esposito produces a flesh freed of

³⁸ With his reference to “a life” Esposito is drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s use of the term in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a life* (2001), where ‘a life’ is immanence as such, and produces absolute singularities of life beyond the sphere of the individual or personal for it is generic *and* unique – like a life of a newborn, or of one about to die. Agamben too refers to this essay by Deleuze and also seeks to find there a response to the exceptions of the biopolitical (1999) – but as I mentioned previously it is Esposito’s task to relate this singular life to the affirmation of the communal *munus* while for Agamben the aim is to locate this life in the self-referentiality of language as its pure taking place.

self-referentiality, where, in Merleau-Ponty's words "my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is perceived), and moreover [...] this flesh of my body is shared by the world" (qtd. in Esposito, 169). What this logic protects is not a form of life, but life *itself*.

In *The Child Garden* such a deconstruction of normality is figured to occur on a revolutionary level. It occurs not as the result of a decision by any individual, but (again) by way of a chance transformation in the repetition of a virus. Quite unexpectedly, people began to become sick – that is, sick in the eyes of the Consensus.³⁹ The sickness was contagious: "The viruses transferred information between species. People thought they were birds, or cats," they "began to bark or meow. Someone had tried to fly, leaping off the Hungerford Bridge" (2011, 239). The viruses create new ways of being: humans infected with an empathy virus, which stimulated sympathetic imagination, became "bees":

The new 2B strain created an almost unbearable oneness with anything that was alive – or had been alive. The Bees could Read the living. They could Read whatever reaction patterns that were in the remains of living things, in the soil, in the stone, in the air. [...] The Bees would scream as people ate. They could not bear to wear most clothing, the strands of cotton or spider web or silkworm threads. [...] the Bees loved the viruses, too. (239-240)

The Bees love life, they love all life equally, but the power of life overwhelms them, it infects them continually as the world speaks to them, and as it continually re-writes their DNA. They live in groups in order to protect themselves from life's force – a new communal way of life is born. There is birth: they become hive, become plant, become a world of flesh. The deconstruction of normality becomes here a deconstruction as normality, as

³⁹ In fact this sickness is not so unexpected – Milena foresees it. The new plays Milena begins to direct require her actors to learn new lines, new words, everyday. But they weren't used to working hard and so a black market in illicit viruses was born to help – an empathic virus was most popular, it helped the actors read one another. But these viruses weren't coated in Candy – they were contagious. But only Milena feared them – others are programmed to think of viruses only as a good, a social good (124-5).

Esposito puts it: “Normal man is normative man, the being capable of establishing new, even organic forms” (191).

This ‘sickness’ is only a sickness in regards to the theory of degeneration as modification of what is the Consensus’ properly original norm. But as Milena notes: “There’s nothing wrong with the Bees. They’re perfectly healthy. They just see the world in a different way” (249-50). In Esposito’s new semantics, the negative of disease and death has been shifted away from being the degeneration of the norm and reversed so that disease becomes the incapacity of modifying the norm, disease is “a hold that crushed the norm on itself, forcing it into an infinite repetition,” that is, disease is *immunity* (190). But of course, with this sudden disruptive force, political turmoil ensues: there is fear and rejection, the infected are burnt in great chimneys, and ash rains down (242). Though Milena see it differently: “That’s what we are becoming,” she says. “The Bees are our future. [...] We’re growing new shoots in so many directions at once, the Consensus will never be able to hold us. [...] We’re a new forest growing out of the old. We’re pushing it back” (330).

In Esposito’s thesis, the new affirmative norm will work to balance homeostatically this vitalism’s biopolitical function, for “the juridical order as a whole is the product of this plurality of norms and provisional result of their mutual equilibrium” (187). The political level comes therefore to inscribe and reaffirm at a meta-level the pre-individual immanent norm. The horizon of the politics of *The Child Garden* has this same biopolitical end in its sights: the Bees seem destined to construct a new pervasive democracy of consensus, that is, a consensus that functions like that of bees themselves in what is called the politics of the hive, an “anonymous consensus of the colony’s workers.” (University of North Carolina at Charlotte 2007, n.p.).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Recent research into the politics of bee colonies has suggested that they organise not via a hierarchical structure with the queen bee presiding over the many, but via a form of consensus, communicated through movement and vibration (University of North Carolina at Charlotte 2007). This research was undertaken and published by an undergraduate student, a fact that also performs this disruption of the presumption of hierarchical order in the sciences too.

In Esposito's formulation, and in *The Child Garden* too, we are given to think the coming of a life in which no one is privileged above others, where there is no greater or lesser evil, and thus, where all life comes to be inscribed within *bios* so that "every life is a form of life and every form refers to life" (194). What each form of life shares here is immunity from the *negative* immunity of modernity that negates the shared *munus* and the novelty and risks that it brings, it is an immunity of life itself, an immunity that affirms the negativity of the void. Given the fact that this life will therefore cover the entire globe, this logic, were it followed, would produce a truly affirmative biopolitics. But of course, this new biopolitics will depend on whether or not this line *is* followed. Esposito ends his book with this qualification:

This is neither the content nor the final sense of biopolitics, but it is a minimum its presupposition [sic]. Whether its meaning will again be disowned in a politics of death or affirmed in a politics of life will depend on the mode in which contemporary thought will follow its traces. (194)

What traces have been left for us to follow in this re-writing of the narrative of biopolitical immunity and autoimmunity? How might they be followed? Esposito provides no answers to this question. It is a question I will now turn to address in the remainder of the chapter. Perhaps, as Timothy Campbell suggests, the appearance of *Bios* is itself a significant step in beginning to confront the task of imagining the form such a vitalised politics might take (2006, 18). Perhaps too the 'healing' character of literature can begin to deconstruct the presumption of a necessarily immunizing politics. *The Child Garden* is a book and a story that speaks of, and to, a new writing that continually (and in many more ways than I have been able to address here) affirms the loss of self, will, property, and immunity, and the terrors and hope that reside there. Yet, might these books come merely to populate the shelves of dusty archives, consigned to a repetition without the effect Esposito desires – or pulped as 'pulp fiction'? *The Child Garden* has in 2011 been re-released as an online ebook, without Digital Rights

Management – so without immunity,⁴¹ freeing it for consumption in a wholly different manner, and suggesting that this might not be its fate. But what ‘viruses’ might it be subjected to in this World Wide Web? What new forms of inscription, piracy, revisions or losses might it and its new semantics undergo?

7.

Autoimmunity II: Traces

What are the traces to be followed here? What are the traces concerning the immunity and autoimmunity of biopolitical thought that have been written, and written themselves, in this chapter? If I were to return to traces that I myself have left, there is an absence to be marked. An absence of any significant mention of the name Derrida and of the particular reading of the autoimmune this thesis has been following through this name. I have delayed the naming of this thought – though perhaps not its effects – in order to locate a particular history, a particular narrative of the biopolitical, one that appears consistently capable of incorporating both politics and life within its fiction of security, the security of bodies and the security of distinctions themselves; but a history that also posits the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics.

Yet, if I turn back on myself, and back to myself, I can mark a violence in this somewhat sovereign decision to put off this encounter: I have also been lead to repeat and reinscribe the differentiations that produce the fiction: *zoē bíos*, life death, animal human, sovereign and non-sovereign, law and its outside. In returning to, and frontally attacking, the fiction of immunity, Esposito and I have both continually threatened to reinstitute its logic.⁴² Yet, in deferring the naming of a deconstructive autoimmunity, it has not been erased without trace. For we

⁴¹ “Digital rights management (DRM) is a term for access control technologies that are used by hardware manufacturers, publishers, copyright holders and individuals to limit the use of digital content and devices. The term is used to describe any technology that inhibits uses of digital content that is not desired or intended by the content provider” (Wikipedia 2011a). In light this citation, we could think also of how such ‘democratic’ ‘consensus’ driven forums as Wikipedia might represent Ryman’s book. Today the encyclopaedia presents the text as a story of salvation and redemption (Wikipedia 2011b), but could this narrow reading be revised?

⁴² Derrida warns against such a frontal attack of sovereignty and the norms of life it institutes for precisely this reason (2009, 76).

can perhaps already mark a trace that has been erasing itself in the texts we have been following: a sovereignty that appears always already divided (as ‘consensus,’ as individual, as virus, as woman); the decision that is always already undecidable (Milena’s test, the choices between life and death, freedom and coercion); the event of genocide that is always already unrepresentable (the holocaust, the bees); the affirmation that was always already there (Milena’s preindividual “yes, yes” prior to her question, prior to her “*ne, ne*”). Something has been ignored in this narrative of an excessive autoimmunity reversed so as to destroy itself – to destroy the negative of immunity itself.

What has been ignored is, perhaps, a certain deconstructive force that proceeds, combines and exceeds Esposito’s analysis of immunity. I will begin now to trace the erasure of this force explicitly so as to mark the both the value and the limitations of Esposito’s affirmation. But firstly, in order to draw Derrida’s thought into a discussion of biopolitics it is important to remark upon his distrust of the term. In *Rogues* (2005), and in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), the question of politics and of life comes centre stage for Derrida. Yet, here the term ‘biopolitics’ is rarely employed, and where it is, it is explicitly rejected. In *Rogues* Derrida refers to his distrust of the discourse’s central distinction between *zoē* and *bíos*, but the discussion of why this may be is left “for another time” (24). This “other time” however, reveals itself as having already occurred. With the publication of his 2001-2002 seminar *The Beast and the Sovereign*, we find him to have already addressed and uncovered a central instability in these terms in a (somewhat vicious) attack on Agamben’s biopolitical discourse (313-334). What is it that renders the distinction between these two terms for ‘life’ so insecure for Derrida? To return to our own terms here, it is autoimmunity itself that can be seen to do so.⁴³ In Derrida’s use of autoimmunity the problem

⁴³ Derrida does not employ the trope of autoimmunity explicitly in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, this is reserved for his discussions of democracy in *Rogues*. However, the manner in which he deconstructs the concepts sovereignty, law, ‘the’ animal, and ‘the’ human in the seminar pertain to the reading of (auto)immunity established by Esposito. Therefore, I will use the concept of immunity in a manner that refers also to the immunity of sovereignty, law, and force, and I will use Derrida’s autoimmunity to mark the deconstruction of these. In *The Beast and the Sovereign* Derrida does not use the term autoimmunity for his concern is a specific deconstruction of the relations between the beast and the sovereign, he therefore re-traces a deconstructive force within

appears both simpler and infinitely more complex than in Esposito. If, immunity is, as Esposito suggests, an introduction of “a fragment of the same pathogen from which [something] wants to protect itself” (2008, 46), then immunity becomes almost the definition of the act of defining, of marking, in that any mark once made must exclude and thus include this exclusion *within* its definition. If the inclusive exclusion is co-originary with the mark in general – with the *sovereign* inscription of the mark – then the process of differentiation must always react *against* that which both confirms and denies it. It must then be, according to Derrida’s thinking, *autoimmune*. What this performs, for Derrida, is an unassailable deconstruction of the very distinction between *zoē* and *bíos* that Agamben and Esposito both inscribe and attempt to resolve; and this deconstruction *is already underway* in the very naming of the terms.

For Agamben, however, the similarities that pertain between deconstruction and the inclusive exclusion of the sovereign exception can only equate its contradictory logic with the logic, and the temporality, of the camp (1998, 25).⁴⁴ Deconstruction can, for him, produce only ‘bare life’ in its being neither *bíos* nor *zoē*, confirming that the state of exception has become the rule. It is this flattening of deconstruction’s contradictions into a generalised destructive *rule* that, perhaps, accounts for the vehemence of Derrida’s rejection of Agamben’s biopolitics in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (305-334). Both Derrida and Esposito’s projects seek to question and complicate this generalisation of the norm. For both of these thinkers, deconstruction’s ubiquitous character does not produce a rule that *necessarily* subjects a bared life to (a murderless) killing, instead it produces specific, situated cases of immunity inscribed by a ‘sovereign’ force which is each time different. There is not *one* immune paradigm, but different diverse and antagonistic forms of immunity.

the term *bêtise* that refers to these discourses. Yet, for us, it is immunity that remains the central problematic to be deconstructed.

⁴⁴ Deconstruction becomes, for Agamben, “the linguistic ‘state of exception’” that can refer the mark, of language or the trace, only to death as the other of life. See also *Remnants of Auschwitz* (2000, 129-130; 146-148) where Agamben also appears to link deconstruction’s im-possibles to the temporality of the camp.

If in Derrida's reading, the deconstruction of terms is always already underway, then we might ask: how does one enter into a zone of indifferenciation (of bare life), in modernity, in biopolitics, if the differentiation has *never* been secure? (The conflation of biopolitics with modernity is Derrida's target in his criticism of Agamben and Foucault in *The Beast and the Sovereign*.) The answer to this question might be that modernity produces what Derrida calls a "dishonest fiction" that denies the insecurity of its terms. Esposito, in distinction to Agamben and Foucault, acknowledges that immunity (and biopolitics in general) precede the modern era: immunity is "on a typological level [...] far more ancient and long-lasting than the modern epoch" (2008, 54, 53-55). What he sees as occurring in modernity is the construction and maintenance of a specific form of immunity that attempts to negate a negation that must remain implicit in every inscription of immunity. This fictitious immunity produces a security that defines and maintains life in a manner that produces 'whole,' 'individual,' 'sovereign' *alienated* subjects. The narratives of biology construct an immunized body, and the narratives of law construct an immunized state that combine to produce a naturalised biopolitics. A dishonest fiction then in Derrida's terms. It is this *specific* immunity, and not immunity in general, which Esposito classes as the threat that leads to an autoimmune destruction, and therefore it is this specific immunity that requires deconstructing in the name of an affirmative immunity that protects via the risky void of the *munus*. For Derrida too, it is always a particular situated immunitary fiction that requires deconstruction and for him too "it would always be in the name of one [sovereignty, immunity, decision] that one attacks another" (2009, 76),⁴⁵ but it remains to be seen if it is what could be properly called an affirmative immunity in whose name Derrida deconstructs the immunizing structure of modern biopolitics.

In distinction to Esposito, Derrida refuses the term biopolitics, which, after all contains within its very name the central distinction between *zoē* and *bíos* on

⁴⁵ This argument is repeated by Derrida in regards to sovereignty (and thus implicitly immunity also): "we should deconstruct, both theoretically and practically, a *certain* political ontotheology of sovereignty without calling into question a certain thinking of liberty in the name of which we put this deconstruction to work" (2009, 301, *emph. Derrida's*).

which the biopolitical discourse rests. Instead, he calls for a more nuanced relation to life and to politics. In *Rogues* this is a life that is enigmatic: “the old word *vie* perhaps remains the enigma of the political around which we endlessly turn” (2005, 4). In *The Beast and the Sovereign* it is “[t]he zooanthropological, rather than the bio-political, [which] is [his] problematic horizon” (2009, 65) – thus naming a *specific* deconstruction of the relations between ‘the’ animal, *anthropos* and *logos*, and their ‘fabulous’ articulations, before any division of life into *zoē* and *bíos*. The fact that Esposito consistently employs these terms, both with regard to his articulation of the problematic, and with regard to his aim to inscribe all life within *bíos*, gestures towards the differences that can be found in the two strategies of deconstruction. Esposito, significantly, does not argue, as Derrida does, that the central terms of immunity are always already in an autoimmune relation to one another, and are thus always already unstable. We have seen Esposito to take great care over the conditions and the mechanisms that construct the pernicious form of immunity he attempts to reverse, particularly in regard to the Nazi regime. However – and this problem pertains to the discussion at the end of the previous chapter – in repeating, analysing and commenting on the specifics here Esposito (and I) would, for Derrida, risk reconfirming the very mechanisms we are attempting to disrupt. We risk, somewhat sovereignly, naming, classifying and attributing value to an event that must remain in Derrida’s eyes, *radically* singular, and thus un-nameable, and unclassifiable as *paradigmatically* immunitary. It is to avoid this powerful inscription that Derrida consistently disrupts and interrupts the discourse, calling for a “prudent, patient, laborious deconstruction” of terms rather than a ‘revolutionary’ reversal (2009, 301).

Where Derrida has refused the biopolitics and its attendant distinctions of terms, I have consistently employed them throughout this chapter as I followed Esposito’s traces. I have done so both in order to survey the force of this fiction and its perceived effects, and to implicitly question its foundations. But I have also done so in an attempt to discover there the possibility of an affirmation that will sooth the trauma of an autoimmune life. I will turn now to address this

affirmation of life itself, as Esposito presents it, to question whether or not it can escape the promise of an autoimmune threat that Derrida names.

Affirmation

The norm that is produced as a fiction of the sovereign decision is deconstructed by Derrida and Esposito in a similar fashion. For Derrida, sovereignty, like the exception, like the decision, “*makes the law in excepting itself from the law*, by suspending the norm and the right that it imposes, by its own force, at the very moment that it marks that suspense in the act of positing law or right” (2009, 49, *emph. Derrida’s*). The institution of law, for Derrida, is exceptional, and is thus *itself* neither legal nor juridical.⁴⁶ And therefore, as he explains in *Rogues*: “[a]n always perilous transaction must thus invent, each time, in a singular situation, its own law and norm, that is, a maxim that welcomes each time the event to come” (2005, 150-51). A “welcome” then that *affirms* the arrival of whatever, or whoever, may come. For Esposito too, as we have seen, the norm is to be thought as “what already prefigures the movement of its own deconstruction in favor of another that follows from it” (2008, 188), both biologically *and* juridically. So that “a unique process crosses the entire of life without providing a continuous solution” (194). What it is that Esposito suggests this deconstruction welcomes – or affirms – is the shared relation to the *munus* as the void, the no-thing, which must always also affirm the extreme risk of *whatever* or *whoever* might arrive. Is Esposito’s *munus*, therefore, Derrida’s to come?

For both Derrida and Esposito, this affirmation must precede the sovereign decision. In Derrida’s formulation it precedes the question, and it precedes the response. This *yes*, is always a “yes, yes” for Derrida. The response that says *yes* is preceded by an *archi-original yes* that does not describe or state anything, it is prior to language, it opens to the event but is not itself an event, it is not

⁴⁶ See Derrida’s essay “Force of Law” for a further detailed discussion of this paradox. Also, see Derrida’s reading of Kafka’s parable in his “Before the Law” (1992a) and Agamben’s response to, or disagreement with, this reading which appears in *Homo Sacer* (1998, 49-58). Once again the disagreement between the two appears to concern whether or not one can ‘escape’ the transcendental metaphysics of language that produces the state of exception, (auto)immunity and the camp. On this debate see (Attell 2009; Wortham 2007).

present as such but it engages and translates its nonpresence into a ‘present’ *yes* in the act of utterance (1989, 129-134; 2008a, 239).

Let us suppose a first *yes*, the archi-originary *yes* that engages and acquiesces before all else. On the one hand it is originarily, in its very structure, a response. It is *first second*, coming after a demand, a question, or another *yes*. On the other hand, as an engagement or a promise, it must *at least* and in advance be tied to a confirmation in another [*prochain*] *yes*. *Yes* to the other [*au prochain*], that is, to the other *yes* that is already there but nonetheless remains to come. (Derrida 2008a, 239)

Each *yes*, even the ‘present’ *yes*, for Derrida, must always open onto another *yes* as its affirmation is opened again to the arrival of what or who comes. So far, therefore, we seem, to find Derrida and Esposito to agree that immunity will and must always open itself in an *affirmation* that differs and defers the transcendental norm of life ‘itself.’ Have we, therefore, found here the possibility of naming a means to think an affirmative biopolitics as Esposito suggests? Perhaps not, for in Esposito’s formulation of this opening, as life *continually* opens itself in a *différential* relation to itself and its others, this opening appears to produce an *infinitude* of affirmation.

If, for Esposito, every form of life is opened to the shared *munus* that is affirmed in its immanent production of norms, as a *différance* that “repeats itself an infinite number of times, unravelling lines which are always different” (2008, 171), then even the coming of the *worst* event – a remainderless destruction – would bare the trace of this affirmation. If an affirmation is that which asserts, supports, agrees and confirms, then this confirmation would support, hold up, differ and defer even the absoluteness of this arrival.

If we return for a moment to the narrative of *The Child Garden*, we can see the repercussions of this infinitude of immanent norms played out. As I indicated in the preceding section, the horizon of this biopolitical world becomes a life, as

‘bee,’ which is rendered equal and equivalent in its shared difference, as *différance*, as norm. Each form of life, whether human, virus, plant or animal, is accorded the same value in affirmation: “All of it, the Earth, the clouds, the light, the many Milenas, the future and the past, the net of Bees, the net of nerves, all held in a system of reciprocity” (2011, 373). But, in a somewhat ambiguous ending, this *com-munitas* stretched out to infinity comes to look a lot like death. In the closing pages of the novel Milena is dying (she is dying of cancer – her degeneracy produced in the end the cure for the cure for cancer). Milena, who is part ‘bee’ sees in death the world as an infinity of light: “Light flowed in and out of all things [...] There was no pain and no hunger, no desire and no anger, no becoming only fulfilment only a delicious sense of imminent release” (382). This is how the bees see the world. Milena wants to join the bees. She wants to die:

Milena died.

She settled into the silence and was divided. All her separate selves were freed: the infant and the child, the orphan in the Child Garden, the actress and the director, the wife and the People’s Artist, Milena the Angel, Milena the oncogene, [...] and the Milena who remembered Rolfa.

They rose up like the white pages of a written speech thrown to the winds. The pages blew like leaves, were scattered to their individual and eternal Nows. The Nows were no longer linked by time or by a self. They went beyond time, to where the whole truth can be told. It takes forever to tell the truth [...]. (386)

The Milena that loved Rolfa, joins her in the Now that they shared, she is waiting there in that enchanted place, doing “nothing,” playing with her Christopher Robin, forever. The ‘truth’ of a life that is infinitely different, that is as ‘a life’ absolutely singular and impersonal, and in that absolutely generic, appears here to be equivalent to death. Although this may not be what Esposito means to say with his immanentizing of the norm, but it appear to be its logical repercussion. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida appears to imply the same:

It is precisely the property of the power of differance to modify life less and less as it spreads out more and more. If it should grow *infinite* – and its essence excludes this a priori – life itself would be made into an impassive, intangible, and eternal presence: infinite differance, God or death. (1976, 131 emph. Derrida's)

The “essence” of *différance* excludes the this eventuality because, as Derrida remarks in *Speech and Phenomena*, “infinite differance is finite” (1973, 102). It is this rather difficult formulation that would indicate the im-possibility of an affirmative biopolitics in the sense Esposito calls for. As Geoffrey Bennington implies in his reading of this phrase, the question here is one of emphasis (2008).⁴⁷ It is not that finite *différance* is *infinite*, as Esposito’s argument would appear to suggest. It is not that each singular, exceptional, *différential* norm eternally reproduces itself differently, this would render *différance* an impassive totality that ends up closing it to the arrival of the other other, that is, it would *negate* the arrival of *whatever/whoever* may come other to this. It would fill the void of the *munus* with a necessity, with a necessary affirmation that negates its void. This is the violence that the infinite denies: that the affirmation is always already a negation. In attempting to protect, or immunize, life against closure, Esposito only succeeds to autoimmunely close it. In the perverseness of this aporetic logic Derrida retains the openness of the relation to the to come only by retaining something that cannot be affirmed, but which therefore, *cannot come* – a radical finitude, absolute, unconditional immunity, or the worst.⁴⁸ But what sort of finitude would this be if it could not ‘be’ as such? This would be a matter of thinking the double bind of an absolute unconditional immunity that is autoimmune.

⁴⁷ In this essay Bennington is reading Jean-Luc Nancy’s mis-quotation of Derrida’s “infinite differance is finite” as “finite differance is infinite” and indicating how this disrupts the aporia that Derrida attempt always to return to, I want to show that Esposito produces the same effective closure of the affirmation precisely by protecting it.

⁴⁸ This is also however, the best, and the ‘yes’ as a transcendental ‘yes’ that gives the affirmative: “*it is necessary* – yes – to maintain the ontological-transcendental exigency in order to uncover the dimensions of a *yes* that is neither empirical nor ontic, which does not fall within science, an ontology or regional phenomenology, or finally any predictive discourse” (2008, 239)

For as soon as reason does not close itself to the event that comes, the event of what or who comes, assuming it is not irrational to think that the worst can always happen, and well beyond what Kant thinks under the name “radical evil,” then only the infinite possibility of the worst and of perjury can grant the possibility of the Good, of veracity and of sworn faith. This possibility remains infinite but as the very possibility of an autoimmune finitude. (2005 153)

Rendering finite *différance* infinite makes, in Bennington’s words, “Derrida’s slogan turn toward the infinite, whereas Derrida seems to have it always turn or fold back to the finite” (2008, 181). Derrida does not prefer the infinite to the finite, he would prefer not to, but in preferring the finite infinite he favours neither. For if infinite *différance* is finite “It can therefore no longer be conceived within the opposition of finiteness and infinity, absence and presence, negation and affirmation” (1973, 102). This illogical logic is irreducible, it is immune in its autoimmunity: “If ever this double bind, this implacable contradiction, were lifted (i.e. in my view never, by definition it’s impossible, and I wonder how anyone could even wish for it), well it would be ... paradise.” It would be Milena’s infinite paradisiacal death, a death that “would be at once that of absolute felicity and of inescapable catastrophe” (302).

To return to Derrida’s double affirmation: the ‘yes, yes’ must then include a ‘perhaps,’ a conditionality, for the irreducibility of the affirmation of that which comes also affirms the possible-impossible coming of the *no* – a *no* that is therefore also a yes so that the *finite* no (which would be infinite) remains to come.⁴⁹ It is for this reason that Milena’s pre-individual immunizing “*ne, ne,*” is

⁴⁹ The perhaps is for Derrida what names the im-possible assurance of the yes: “this experience of the “perhaps” would be that of the possible *and* the impossible *at the same time*, of the possible *as* impossible. If only what is already possible arrives, what can be thus anticipated and expected, it does not make an event. An event is only possible when it comes from the impossible. It arrives *as* the coming of the impossible, where a “perhaps” deprives us of all assurance and leaves the future to the future. This “perhaps” is necessarily allied to a “yes”: yes, yes to whatever (whoever) arrives [*ce qui vient*]. This “yes” would be common to the affirmation and the response; it would even come before any question. A *peut-être* like “perhaps” [...] is perhaps that which, exposed to an event like the “yes,” that is, to the experience of what

already a ‘yes, yes;’ for the other, the virus or the world, has already come and she has already responded, in a reaction, to negate it. The negation says *yes* to the other, it receives and acquiesces to it, and it says *yes* to the coming of an other even as, in language, politics or biology it says no. Each and every form of life (and, for Derrida, even beyond the living to the non-living (1991b, 106)), must share this relation to the ‘to come’ or to the ‘*munus*.’ In this sense then, we find Derrida’s deconstruction to be *already* affirmative, and already autoimmune. Esposito’s ‘reversal’ of the negative into the affirmative is seen as already impossibly underway, but the stability of this reversal, is constantly under threat. So that, for Derrida, the revolution Esposito calls for is a call to another “dishonest fiction.” In *The Beast and the Sovereign* Derrida suggest that it is *bêtise* that gives not affirmation but ‘positivity’ (and *Bêtise* being but another trace of the ‘perhaps,’ the undecidable, the inability to judge of a certain stupidity or autoimmunity is also a trace that reminds us too of the absent beast in this biopolitical discussion). *Bêtise* gives not affirmation but ‘positivity’ –

for there is without doubt a *bêtise* of the question, as there is of affirmation, as there is of negation: *bêtise* that is nothing, that has no essence we were saying, even transcendently, but that can traverse and threaten – by reassuring them precisely – the three modalities (question, affirmation, negation), but traverse-threaten-reassure them in a positive way, and *bêtise* is perhaps positivity itself, positing, to which affirmation, the “yes,” is not to be reduced: *bêtise* would rather resemble self-positing across each of these three modes (question, affirmation, negation), it would be positivism, in sum, self-positivism in general, that positivizes – and no one is immune to or sheltered from this [...]. (2009, 307)

What is positive is autoimmunity.

arrives (*happens*) and of *who* then arrives, far from interrupting the question, allows it to breathe” (2002a, 344).

Politics

What Esposito figures as the shared *munus* of community is the no-thing, the gift without obligation, as “the gift that one gives, not what one receives” (2010, 5). And yet, this *munus* does seem, in the end, to *oblige* an affirmation that precisely gives one to receive, *always*, the deconstruction of the norm. Instead, in Derrida, we find this affirmation of the “no-thing” to resound through “another naming of *khōra*” (2005, xiv).⁵⁰ *Khōra*, is a locality in general ‘before’ the world, a locality without foundation: “*Khōra* would make or give *place*; it would give rise – without ever giving anything – to what is called the coming of the event. *Khōra* receives rather than gives” (xiv). In receiving the gift rather than giving it, the *khōra* names the *weak* force of a vulnerability without power that is unconditional, and thus opens unconditionally to what or who comes. And, for Derrida:

No politics, no ethics, and no law can be, as it were, *deduced* from this thought. To be sure nothing can be *done* [*faire*] with it. And so one would have nothing to do with it. But should we then conclude that this thought leaves no trace on what is to be done – for example in the politics, the ethics, the law to come? (xv)

The trace that the *khōra* leaves for the political is, for Derrida, a call to think the event *to come*. The call of this weak force carries with it a hope – though it is itself without hope, without the teleology of a hope that would infinitely affirm it. It is the *weakness* of this most ‘sovereign’ of forces that Esposito ignores in his biopolitical traces. Rather than naming the im-possible spaces of *khōra*, autoimmunity or unconditionality as the ‘minimal presupposition’ of politics, in the closing statement of *Bíos*, Esposito names affirmation as such. However, Esposito seems nonetheless to mark this Derridean trace in the fact that he acknowledges that this ‘minimal presupposition’ can be “disowned” in contemporary thought:

⁵⁰ “*Khōra*” as we saw in Chapter One is the place without place that I there related to the ‘dead zone’ as the place that gives responsibility by giving precisely nothing. See Derrida essay “*Khōra*” in *On the Name* (1995a).

This [affirmative biopolitics] is neither the content nor the final sense of biopolitics, but it is a minimum its presupposition [sic]. Whether its meaning will again be disowned in a politics of death or affirmed in a politics of life will depend on the mode in which contemporary thought will follow its traces. (2008, 194)

But if Esposito's affirmative biopolitics can also '*affirm*' the coming of its own disownment then it must itself be autoimmune. His new biopolitics remains still *to come*. That Esposito suggests its implementation is possible as the result of a decision to follow or not its traces would present, in Derrida's thought, another dishonest fiction: that an such a revolution in politics is a choice and not a chance. Can one *decide* to enact a revolution in the political semantics of life? We have, so far, seen every decision in the narratives of (auto)immunity we have traced, to produce, at best, uncertainty, and at worst, death and immunitary stagnation. In *The Child Garden*, for example, it is not any sovereign decision – by Milena, by Rolfa, or by the Consensus – that precipitates the viral immanent deconstruction of the viral hegemony. It is the 'sovereign' force of an errant viral life that does so, so that the power to act, and to overturn is not marked by the will of any subject, but by the force of a certain *divisible* sovereignty. For Derrida, sovereignty is divisible and deconstructible, but not *destructible* (2009, 76). Sovereignty is "first of all a power, a potency," for Derrida, and this power can be represented by the "grandeur of the grandest, but also by smallness, arch-smallness, the absolute diminution of the smallest" (257). Derrida relates this sovereignty to nanotechnology (a viral nanotechnology perhaps), as

the most invisible, the lightest, the least apparent, the hardest to find out, the most easily displaceable or transportable by the body or within the human body etc., in connection with computers, transistors, biological prostheses of all sorts. (258)

While both Derrida and Esposito claim sovereignty is divisible and deconstructible, for Derrida, one cannot do without sovereignty. For any form

(of life) can represent its power whether named as Sovereign or Governmental, animal or human, technical or biological. And this force, which would pretend to the absolute, requires a slow, patient, *differentiated* deconstruction (76). One must start, Derrida claims, not from the pure concept of sovereignty (as immune, as absolute excessive power) versus a non-sovereignty (this is a fiction), but instead, one must start from the struggle *for* sovereignty as a drive to power, which transfers, translates, displaces and divides the sovereign force (290). One must start here in order to be attendant to the translations of sovereignty that occur, for example, in Milena's translations of Rolfa's texts, or the viruses reinscription beyond the visibility of the Consensus.

In distinction to this call, Esposito *employs* the sovereign excess of contemporary biopolitical thought, and its *deadly* autoimmunity, in order to attack and overthrow it. For, Esposito suggests, “[i]t is precisely here in the clench of this extreme risk, that the point of productive conjunction between generation and innovation is produced” (2008, 105). It is here that the “‘reaction,’ becomes intense enough to attack the same antibodies that provoked the rejection, [so that] the break with the old form becomes inevitable” (102). It is only here then that autoimmunity becomes affirmative for Esposito. But beyond the fact that this logic of using the excesses of sovereignty against itself seems to *necessitate* the appearance (or even the institution?) of the extreme terrors of the holocaust, and ‘the war on terror’ in order to employ their power against them in their reversal, it also appears to *transfer* the sovereign force to “contemporary thought” (194). That is, it transfers it to a certain philosophy, *theory* or concept of life, which has the *power* to decide in favour of a revolution in biopolitical thought. The excessive force of such a transfer seems to be just as capable of instituting a terrible sacrifice of life on an unimaginable scale: viral life as infinitely expandable must be just as capable of producing mass death in its passage to equilibrium – whether or not this life is divided according to genus.

We must here recall that what the sovereign viral force institutes in *The Child Garden* – and what Esposito calls to be instituted in contemporary biopolitics – is the coming of a life in which no one is privileged above others, where there is no

greater or lesser evil, so that “every life is a form of life and every form refers to life” (194). This would be a life in which all are rendered equivalent, for the difference that unites life is here always the *same* difference: the sharing of the void that affirms difference in a biological continuum. But, beyond the philosophical difficulties already named, there is a severe pragmatic difficulty to be found here. Cary Wolfe has addressed this very difficulty in a recent lecture on Esposito’s biopolitics (Wolfe 2011).⁵¹ Citing discussions in North America in the 1970s concerning the ethical quandaries of biocentrism in the “Deep Ecology” movement, Wolfe asks: if all forms of life are given equal value and if no one is favoured above the other, then should one allow anthrax and cholera microbes, for example, to pursue their vital path without hindrance (6)? In regards to the context here, should viruses be left – in that they too would be equally inscribed within *bios* – to destroy all human and animal life in a cancer pandemic? If we follow his logic, Esposito can only answer in the affirmative – otherwise he would find himself returned once again, in a suicidal rotation, to the position in which the story of immunity began: (auto)immunely reproducing an (auto)immunitary *pharmakon* to ward off a catastrophic virulent death. Esposito’s logic would require us, perhaps, to undergo a political, juridical, bio-medical revolution on a global scale – with all the risks to life that this entails – in order to, *hopefully*, institute a political consensus of ‘bees,’ which only, simply, joyfully, love and affirm life. But one couldn’t *decide* to perform this – and indeed why would we even want to? As Wolfe puts it, in Esposito’s *Bios*:

what looks like a radically differentiating move with regard to “life” and norm ends up flipping back over into the radically *dedifferentiating* position in which all forms of life are exactly the same, because all are now decomposed into the subatomic (if you like) level of “pre-individual singularities” – a principle

⁵¹ Wolfe’s research on biopolitics and the question of the animal looks at the problematics of immunity, autoimmunity in Esposito and Derrida, and is current awaiting publication as *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (Forthcoming). Wolfe generously provided me with a draft of his lecture on this work given at the New School, New York (2011) and elsewhere, to which I now refer.

which [...] is of little use in taking ethical or political decisions.
(2011, 7)

This is why a *certain* sovereignty is irreducible for Derrida: a sovereignty (which is not an absolute indivisible sovereignty) presents itself as the greatest of forces *amongst* other forces. To challenge this sovereignty one must harness a force that exceeds and combats an other: “The choice is not between sovereignty and nonsovereignty but among several forms of partings, partitions, divisions” (Derrida 2009, 76). The coming of an affirmation that is never secure, *produces* divisions as much as it disturbs them, and the decision between them is always undecidable – for better or worse. As Derrida makes clear “[t]he exception is the exception, it must remain the exception, it is not the norm even if it appears as exception only in respect to the norm.” Derrida, *against* Agamben and *against* Esposito, claims, “[a] *theory* of the exception [...] is impossible” (49).

This is also why a slow patient and differentiated deconstruction appears as the most positive political stance, for a radical reversal, in frontally combating a sovereign force that pretends to immunity and absolute power, would always risk reinstating the negativity of immunity. There is always and irreducibly a certain fear to be found in the relation to the communal void, for in the hope that the weak force of the trace of the to come there is also a terror. Autoimmunity names both this hope and this terror, it recalls the possibility of a worse, as well as, a better politics of life. Esposito only ignores this terror and its demand for relief as he fills the void of the *munus* with an affirmation. Perversely, it appears to be *fortunate* that this affirmation can turn into a negation that threatens to terrify.

8.

Cinders

The narratives of biopolitics, its fictions, and its fabulous characterisations, offer us to think the possibility of a certain affirmation, and a certain positivity, that is obscured in the grand narrative of the transcendental norm. A transcendental

norm of life – as human, as Aryan, as natural – gives the right to take life, to wield a supreme power over life, and thus writes death and destruction into its fictive score. Esposito's biophilosophy is seductive in its attack on the assumption – which we find in both Agamben and the immune paradigm in general – that the “anthropological machine” (Agamben 2004), must *necessarily* produce a remainder in life that is bared, abjected, called ‘animal,’ ‘degenerate,’ and rendered killable. Yet, while Esposito seeks to make this necessity impossible, Derrida, in perhaps a more ‘responsible’ manner reminds us that, while not necessary, the abjection of the other remains possible. The trace of the *to come* names this possibility at the same time as it calls for another politics to come. For Derrida this politics to come – which is *always* a politics of life, (*zoē and bíos*) – promises a *democracy to come* (2005). Not a democracy of consensus, which is impossible, but a power of the *demos* consisting in autoimmune subjects, decisions and states, engaging in suicidal turns around a void that promises an autoimmune finitude – which is life.

The narrative of *The Child Garden* traces a thought – perhaps even an anticipation – of a new way of living, it gives us to think novelty and exceptions to the norm, it presents and disrupts the terrors of politics that combine with the terrors of the body. As a fable, *The Child Garden* provides a lesson in the contradictions of the *pharmakon*, the complexities of writing and of living. Previously I suggested that the paradisiacal deathly end to the story was ambiguous. This ambiguity appears because the contradictions of the *pharmakon* return in this end. Even as Milena pursues her own drive towards deathly quietude, and even as she implicates the new world politics of life in this drive towards a peaceful infinity she has this thought:

There always is a Consensus. We always do what it wants us to do because we are a part of it and it is a part of us. We are embedded in it, and so we obey the logic. We are born, we have to eat, we are left alone and we have to survive in the ways that are open to us. We obey the logic of love and sex and of health and disease of ageing and infancy and death. If we escape one framework, we

move into another. If we make a new framework, we imprison our children in it. We have always fought to escape the Consensus and have always done its will. We fight and obey with one motion. (2011, 381)

In this chapter I too have fought and obeyed with one motion, tracing and re-inscribing the terms and the logic of the very thought I would like to resist. Yet, rather than this indicating an imprisonment, it traces again a promise that this thought may be thought otherwise in each and every repetition.

Life produces a remainder, but it is a remainder that is not outside the law, the norm or the *polis*, it is always, perhaps, before the law, erasing itself as it presents itself. In one more inflection of this deconstructive trace, I will end with the thought of the cinder: “*Il y a là cendre*” Derrida says. “Cinders there are” we hear (1991a, 21). There are always cinders. Cinders are that which remain without remaining from the ‘holocaust,’ from the all-burning of a sacrifice. But in this ‘untranslatable’ French, we also hear: “there are *there* cinders.” In a singular moment, in a singular place is the cinder. Each time it traces something different: a cinder, a *pharmakon*, a *bêtise*, an autoimmunity. In his oblique prose poem *Cinders* (1991a), Derrida appears to discuss the relationship between singular moments, writing, the Holocaust and deconstruction. But in doing so he adds nothing to the knowledge of the ‘event’ of the Holocaust.⁵² We learn nothing of its mechanisms, its politics, the facts and figures of its history, he does not accumulate terrible images or inscribe it in any paradigm. For Derrida, the cinder, denies the consolation of a logic, a paradigm, or a knowledge, which would *explain* the event in order to immunize against its return. Derrida’s philosophy marks instead a debt to a holocaust, as an *all* burning, a debt that is without name, a debt to the no-thing of *communitas* that receives its gifts. It is only through this debt – which is never repaid – that the unrepresentable singularity of its event presents itself. In its being unrepresentable one can only ever present it, write about it, produce commentaries, facts, figures, and

⁵² This is a point that Robert Eaglestone makes in his analysis of the Holocaust and Derrida’s response to it in *Cinders* (Eaglestone 2002, 28).

paradigms. But these are never certain, our readings of them must open again to an uncertainty that traces the cinders of its thought, the very *worst* of its thought, again, *in* the politics of life.

The narratives of biopolitics read through their autoimmunitary turns, turn us towards an ethics and a politics without a name and without a norm. This is a politics of life that ethically affirms the finitude to come of its *différential* relations to biology, law, technicity and death, and it is a politics of life that draws into it the singular instance of an individual's suffering – an individual who *must* respond to her suffering, and the suffering of others, in the ways which are open to her. My relation to the affirmation of the finitude of the autoimmune repeats again and again its singularity, whilst also repeating and marking the immunity of this affirmation and its finitude as autoimmune.

Conclusion

Enduring Finitude

Frau Milena, [...] you know how I hate letters. [...] The easy possibility of letter-writing must – seen merely theoretically – have brought into the world a terrible disintegration of souls. It is, in fact, an intercourse with ghosts, and not only with the ghost of the recipient but also with one's own ghost which develops between the lines of the letter one is writing and even more so in a series of letters where one letter corroborates the other and can refer to it as a witness. How on earth did anyone get the idea that people can communicate with one another by letter! Of a distant person one can think, and of a person who is near one can catch hold – all else goes beyond human strength. Writing letters, however, means to denude oneself before the ghosts, something for which they greedily wait. Written kisses don't reach their destination, rather they are drunk on the way by the ghosts. It is on this ample nourishment that they multiply so enormously. Humanity senses this and fights against it and in order to eliminate as far as possible the ghostly element between people and to create a natural communication, the peace of souls, it has invented the railway, the motor car, the aeroplane. But it's no longer any good, these are evidently inventions being made at the moment of crashing. The opposing side is so much calmer and stronger; after the postal service it has invented the telegraph, the telephone, the radiograph. The ghosts won't starve, but we will perish.

Franz Kafka *Letters to Milena* (1953, 229)

Kafka writes a letter to Milena. Milena is no longer present to him, she is but a ghost, she has only a spectral presence that Kafka is unable to catch hold of, and so he must write a letter to a ghost. Like Plato, Kafka writes this letter even

though he hates it, and in this writing he also writes *himself* as absent, as an absent presence where he ‘himself’ becomes ghostly, lost between the lines in the writing and sending of this letter. Kafka writes of his fear of these ghosts – which, nonetheless, he ‘himself’ produces – these are ‘greedy ghosts’ that drink his kisses and disintegrate his soul, terribly. He also writes of his fear that ‘humanity’s’ defences against these spectral others (the very technologies of returning the absent to presence) invent their own accidents threatening *again* the peace of his soul.¹ These fears of an infectious ghostly presence do not end with the writing of the letter, they refer on to future inventions: after the postal service is the telephone and the radiograph, and, writing back, we could add television, email, and media of all kinds. These fears also write (to) another absent Milena, who in the future of *The Child Garden*, is written by the fictive technologies of a viral communication; they write to the failed communications of bodily signals that produce illnesses and suffering, signals that refer on, as we have seen, beyond the loss of a ‘human’ presence, to other losses – of nonhuman animals and political certitudes. Kafka continues to write despite his fear of its ghostly effects, and repeats, once again, the fear of an autoimmune protection of presence, and its terrible effects, which threaten worse.

Derrida also writes of ghosts.² In his own enigmatic letter writing in the ‘Envois’ of *The Post Card* (1987a), Derrida asks “why are spirits always called upon in letter writing? One lets them come, one comprises them rather, and one writes for them, one lends them one’s hand, but why?” (35). Derrida writes to ‘me’ in

¹ Paul Virilio’s theories of speed, technology and the accident have similarly claimed that technological inventions are invented in the moment of their crashing (1993, 1986, 2003). For Virilio, in order to avoid precipitating a catastrophic “general accident” as technologies accelerate the production of accidents, one must make the accident visible in every moment of invention. For Virilio, it is the accident that invents the technology: “the shipwreck is indeed the ‘futuristic’ invention of the ship, the air crash the invention of the supersonic plane, and the Chernobyl meltdown, the invention of the nuclear power station” (2003, 1). This privileging of the accident in Virilio’s thought refers *every* event to the possibility of worse, and therefore writes a fear into life. It is this fear that Kafka, and Derrida too (though differently), also write into invention.

² Derrida’s reference to the ghostly, the spectral and the spiritual is frequent, the most sustained analysis can be found, however, in his reading of Hamlet in *Spectres of Marx* (1994). Also, in Ken McMullen’s film *Ghost Dance* (1983), Derrida says that “the future belongs to ghosts, and that modern image technology, cinema, telecommunications, etc., are only increasing the power of ghosts” (referenced also in Bennington and Derrida 1993, 349). He is referring here directly to the spectral nature of teletechnologies of which Kafka is so fearful.

this strange letter of his, he writes to the ‘other’ who reads: “You [*Tu*] had me read that letter to Milena where he more or less said that, something like speculating with spirits, denuding oneself before them” (35).³ Derrida is recalling here Kafka’s fearful ghosts – but a recollection that doesn’t reference Kafka (“he”) or his exact meaning (“more or less said that”). Derrida writes (to) Kafka’s ghostly presence, as he writes (to) his own absent presence in the spectral – autobiographical? – autoimmune writings that comprise his series of letters in ‘Envois.’ For Derrida, as for Kafka, the message – and the kisses – of the letter never reach their destination, they are drunk on the way by ghosts. But while Kafka mourns the *theoretical* loss of presence that occurs in the sending, Derrida marks presence ‘itself’ as the very *practice* of ghostly sending: ‘ontology’ traces itself as ‘hauntology’ for Derrida (1994, 10). In Derrida’s writing there is no presence *at first* that *then* comes to be disintegrated in its sending, one comprises the ghosts, not in opposition to presence, but *as* a presence that is never present as such – Milena never had a bodily or communicative presence of which Kafka could “catch hold,” with certainty. One, therefore, could be said to comprise and write for the ghosts because this marks the very ‘autoimmune’ protection of presence and life that *must* trace itself as other *before* there is even any decision to write or to send the letter. Letters, missives, performative utterances, or indeed any sending – material or linguistic – are, for Derrida, ‘destined’ to err from their intended, destined path, *destinerrance* Derrida calls this in another iteration of the deconstructive trace (1987a, 413-496).

Kafka fears the ghosts and so hates the letters that invent them, in his letter he *makes known* the fearful threat he sees to be inflicted on presence. Yet, as Derrida remarks: “he *says* [...] that he has a horror of letters, that they are hell, he accuses the post, the telegram, the telephone. Elsewhere he says that he burns letters and speaks of an epistolary sorcery. Yes, yes—but who will believe it?” (35 *emph. mine*). Who will *believe* what Kafka says he knows? Who will

³ I find myself, in reading and citing these passages, to be following Joseph Hillis Miller who has also remarked upon this reference of Derrida’s to Kafka’s letter (2009, 38-43). Unlike Miller, however, I address the construction of a fear, and a terror around the process of making this spectral threat *known*.

believe that letters are hell – an evil and an ill – and who will believe that he burns them? The certainty of the terribleness of the letter *and* the certainty of being able to rid oneself of the ghosts via an all burning, is rendered insecure in the sending and receiving of Kafka’s message – this comes to be, for Derrida, a matter of belief. Derrida does affirm the horror that Kafka writes of, but in the doubling of this affirmation – a “yes, yes” followed by a “but” – the uncertainty of a necessary belief is marked. For Derrida, “there are but post cards [*open* letters], it’s terrifying” (1987a, 35). Yet this terror, in itself being written and communicated through ghostly selves and ghostly others, is insecure.

This thesis writes the fear and the terror of the ghostly presence that Kafka names, not as a fear of writing and sending letters as such, but as a fear of the failure of communications in general. It is the failure of communication to secure, treat and make known the ills of life that mark the experience of bodies, psyches, societies, and politics with a suffering that demands a response. In writing of the fearful effects of an autoimmune illness this thesis writes of many efforts at rendering presence (and the fear of its absence) known: medicine has been seen to attempt to make known the functions of the body and the ‘other’ of an illness that threatens it; political discourses attempt to make known propriety boundaries and in doing so also make known a fear of an ‘improper’ or ‘degenerate’ other; and (auto)biography attempts to make all of these threats to self-presence ‘known’ while writing (to) others. Yet, these efforts at making known have been seen to mark the effects of a trauma as soon as this knowledge – of the self and the other – is ‘seen’ to be threatened by the *radically* unknown other that remains to come. Writing again, in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), of the media and political discourses of terror and terrorism, Derrida suggests that “death in general” – as a radical unknown ill, evil or otherness – marks

in the undecidability of making-known that is occupying us here,
an essential structure of the trauma [...] bearing the impossible
mourning as much of the past, the pastness of the blow struck, as
of what remains to come, and which, from bad to worse, installs

the virtuality of the worst threat at the heart of everything we can currently know, know how to do and to make known. In all cases it has to do with knowing how to cause fear, knowing how to terrorise by making known. And thus terror, on both sides of the front, is undeniably effective, real, concrete, even if this concrete effectivity overthrows the presence of the present towards a past or future of the trauma, which is never saturated with presence. So that all this knowledge, this know-how, this making known, might well go via fable, simulacrum, fantasy, or virtuality, [...] this know-how-to-make-known, this making makes knowing, and so touches nonetheless effectively, affectively, and concretely both bodies and souls. And this is the essence without essence of terror, [...] be it actual or virtual. (2009, 39)

The trauma of the disruption of presence, health, life or death, is marked by and within the processes of ‘making known.’ In suggesting that the known is never known as such, and that terror is the marking of belief, “fable, simulacrum, fantasy or virtuality,” Derrida does not alleviate the fear of not-knowing, but rather marks the possibility of terror within every act. For Derrida, “making makes knowing,” yet knowing always refers to an unknown that remains, to a finitude of knowledge, life, or health that *endures*, and has to be endured, as it marks ‘knowledge,’ ‘life,’ and ‘health’ with its impossible presence, and its terrifying, concrete, and affective trauma.

Yet, if the ghostly writing of the unknown writes terror as a fiction, a fantasy, or a fable, then these ghostly others can also be written in other ways. Such ghostly fictions have been seen in this thesis to treat the terror that marks the trauma of the unknown in many different, productive, and risky ways. In Chapter One the effects of a trauma was treated as a sign of pleasure. In Freud’s reading, the real, concrete affects of a trauma write to a pleasureable end that was always already there. This fiction of a determined end can indeed be seen to comfort the effects of a trauma, yet, only by also risking a worse trauma as the pleasure that is ‘known’ is deferred, interrupted and traumatised again and again by the return of

the repressed unforeseeability of death or/as pleasure. In Chapter Two, systems theory was seen to write the trauma of the unknowable outside as a productive immunizing motor that permits a system to continually re-write, or reconstruct itself. By shifting, ignoring and neglecting its founding paradoxes, systems are seen to maintain the 'fiction' of the 'one': one self, one unit, the strongest one, the sovereign one. Systems theory provides a means of re-presenting the absent presence of the ghosts as a productive and mobile maintenance of life, that is, as a 'happy' trauma. Yet, in necessarily ignoring the fictionality of the 'one' that it maintains, systems theory risks ignoring the sufferings of others, others that it must sacrifice in the name of its 'own' life. The 'ethics' of a deconstructive autoimmunity serves to recall that the reconstructions that maintain life can suppress the concrete and affective, though fictitious, ills and the evils of their violent acts, to potentially horrific as well as 'happy' ends.

Chapter Three writes of Esposito's attempt to render such a sacrificial structure impossible. Here the terror of the void at the heart of communal life is not repressed or suppressed but affirmed. By writing the unknown into life as an affirmative absence that gives the possibility of infinitely deferring the very worst, Esposito writes of an immunization that immunizes not one form of life, but life 'itself.' The divisions between forms of life are opened here to an infinite process of cross-contamination so that life is seen as a continuum that affirms difference without maintaining the narrative of the 'one.' Yet the infinitude of Esposito's affirmation is inflected again with a finitude that endures, for infinite difference and infinite deferral names each difference and deferral as the same, ignoring the difference that would be, in Derrida's formulation "worthy of the name" difference – the unknown that cannot be affirmed for its remains unknown. Esposito's affirmation is denuded before the ghostly presence of an absent affirmation, it is rendered fictional, for the terror and the promise of this absence marks a trauma that creates divisions and risks, again, life *and* death.

Each of these fictions have been seen to treat the effects of an ill *within* life by narrating the trauma of the arrival of the unknown other as a 'happy,' productive

necessary trauma. It is in the singular experience of my autoimmune illness that I find each of these fictions to write themselves. It is this real experience of illness, pain, and suffering that calls for a response, and each of these narratives do respond to and alleviate some of the worst forms of suffering that appear in life. In autoimmunely opening my 'self' to these fictions they have distracted and treated, ignored and secured and provided new ways of thinking about my body, my self and the world in which they live. Yet, autoimmune illness, which wears its paradoxes on its (protective) sleeve, has 'up its sleeve' a secret which is kept always in reserve. The reservation of a secret, of the unknown that endures, paradoxically makes 'known' the insecurity of each of these *methods* of maintaining a healthy, affirmative, pleasureable life. Making makes knowing, but making known cannot name any method for the secret infects the known with an undecidability that 'knows' how to cause fear, illness and trauma. A chronic autoimmune illness repeats the pain and the terror, the risk and the fear at the same time as it repeats the 'happy,' productive, affirmative and pleasurable. The undecidability of making known renders the decision of how best to respond to illness an ordeal: every protective immunization could mark better or worse effects, every immunization is an autoimmunization for better or worse. Therefore, I treat with all of these narratives, I negotiate with them while not settling on one: at times the narratives of pleasureable ends distract me, thankfully, from my pain; at times I am able to reconstruct and maintain a narrative of my self; and at times I affirm the paradoxes of an outside that open me to others in a productive contamination where my 'self' is lost. But I cannot decide to not treat each of these treatments and their effects with an autoimmune deconstruction, this treatment 'chose' me, it marks my life concretely, sometimes painfully and sometimes happily, with other demands to respond differently.

Like Kafka, I continue to write (to) ghosts, I continue to write (to) an autoimmunity that disintegrates my own *autos*, my presence and my health. I do so even though I hate many of the terrible effects this can produce – for 'myself' and for 'others.' I cannot do otherwise, for it is not 'me' that does so. The reinscription of autoimmunity secures pain and terror but it secures also the hope and the promise that these autoimmune fictions can be written anew, alleviated

and treated in unexpected ways. The experience of a paradoxical autoimmune condition has not yet taught me how to live in insecurity, this remains unknown, I endure the finitude of ‘my’ knowledge and ‘my’ life as I am written by other threats and promises – known and unknown – that ‘appear’ on the horizon. Media reports continue to write to me in my sickbed, telling of flu pandemics, famines sweeping across Africa, AIDS, new drugs and vaccines touted as wares... The ‘battle’ for life appears to be continuing in full swing, fuelling an economy of biotechnologies and pharmaceuticals, biodefence and bioweapons that refer on to ever worse effects. They know how to cause fear these autoimmune communications. Any decision to treat and alleviate this fear might always precipitate even worse effects, and yet the ordeal of this decision must be undergone. I must decide to treat my pain and suffering, and I must decide to treat the pain and suffering of others. But the ills of autoimmunity are not ‘my’ ills alone; they are the ills of every ‘one.’ Autoimmunity treats *with* these ills for better or worse.

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