

## Saint-Je Derrida

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Question: 'What animal would you be if you could be an animal?'

Answer: 'You already are an animal'.<sup>1</sup>

In the interview with Derek Attridge on 'This Strange Institution Called Literature' Derrida muses over the 'narcissistic' moment of his adolescent desire to write and seek a place from which the history of the frontier between philosophy and literature could be thought anew. 'Autobiography' is suggested as the 'least adequate' term for the attempt to remember this obscure yet compulsive desire or 'dream of keeping a trace of all the voices which were traversing me – or were *almost doing so*', 'the unique event whose trace one would like to keep alive', and his ongoing obsession 'to save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens – or *fails to happen*'. Confessing to a penchant for a certain practice of fiction, 'the intrusion of an effective simulacrum or of disorder into philosophical writing' (rather than reading novels or the telling and invention of stories), Derrida then points out that this 'irrepressible need [...] would refuse to show itself so long as it has not cleared a space or organized a dwelling-place suited to the animal which is still curled up in its hole half asleep'.<sup>2</sup>

It is such a configuration of the trace, simulation and autobiography that I would like to investigate and extend in relation to the Derridean reproblematicization of the animal. Rather than conjuring up the procession of those real or fictive beasts that have transited through Derrida's texts – a textual bestiary or 'zoo-auto-bio-bibliography' he himself briefly sketched in *L'Animal que donc je suis*<sup>3</sup> – our argument will follow in the footsteps or tracks of the 'animality' or even calculated *bêtise* of Derridean writing,<sup>4</sup> its mimicking or *singerie* of the sacralization of the subject who autobiographically signs

'I' (or *saint-je*), its impersonations 'as if' as opposed to 'as such', like an actor or artefactor, from the quasi-inaugural conception of the trace and operation of *différance* as a distant anticipation of Derrida's more recent systematic rethinking of the animal, through a collection of some of his animal-like signatures, to the impact such a philosophical repositioning has on the conception of mimesis, reflection and being within deconstruction as a 'critique' of onto(theo)logical specularity.

### 1. '*je le suis à la trace*'<sup>5</sup>

It is worth retracing our steps momentarily to recall that the Derridean understanding of writing has always been linked, from its inception, to that of the effacement of an animal trace, within a critique of the neutralization or forgetting by anthropologocentrism of the 'zoic' origin of the *logos* – man being classically defined as an animal endowed with speech/language (*zoon logon ekhon*).<sup>6</sup> As *L'Animal que donc je suis* summarizes, '[...]a marque, le gramme, la trace, la *différance*, concernent différenciellement tous les vivants, tous les rapports du vivant au non-vivant' (*Animal*, p. 144). Thus, even before the explicit interweavings of *trace*, *tracé* and *tracement*, across 'graphies' and tracks, in 'Différance' and more generally the complexification of the border between animality and humanity in *Margins of Philosophy*, 'Linguistics and Grammatology' had stated that the trace, 'arche-phenomenon of "memory", [...] must be thought before the opposition of [...] animality and humanity', soon after expressing an affinity with Levinas's (but also Nietzsche's, Freud's and Heidegger's) conception of the trace in his critique of ontology as 'relationship to the illeity as to the alterity of a past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence'.<sup>7</sup> Taken as the mark of *différance* as tempor(al)ization, the Derridean trace is by structural necessity constituted by erasure, or, as Gasché neatly summarizes:

for Derrida, the word designates something of which the metaphysical concepts of trace and presence are the erasure. From Derrida's analysis of Heidegger's concept of *die frühe Spur*, it follows that trace is the necessarily metaphysical concept that names an originary tracing and effacement, of which the traditional conceptual dyad of trace and presence within the metaphysical text is the trace of effacement[. . .].<sup>8</sup>

Reinscribing or re-marking the metaphysical concept, the Derridean 'trace' (arche-trace) is always already the trace of a trace<sup>9</sup> as it is affected by a structure of doubling and deferral, and its originary effacement will be repeated in the iterative drama of hierarchized differences according to a structure of delay or *Nachträglichkeit*<sup>10</sup> that makes it akin to the Freudian-Lacanian trauma as the repetition of what never was. The tropic turn within the structure of (effacement or erasure) of the trace is to be understood as the disappearance of the origin which did not even disappear (*Of Grammatology*, p. 61), and in 'This Strange Institution Called Literature' Derrida will later remember this originary nonpresence both in his description of the history of literature as 'the history of a ruin, the narrative of a memory which produces the event to be told and which will never have been present' and of his desire to write 'so as to put into play or to keep the singularity of the date (what does not return, what is not repeated, promised experience of memory as promise, experience of ruin or ashes)' (*Acts of Literature*, p. 42). According to this 'grammatologic', which is also an 'archeo-logy' covering its own tracks, the animal as living being whose primordially has been forgotten (compare with what 'primate' etymologically means and denotes), deprived of the voice valorized over writing by classical philosophy (*Of Grammatology*, p. 196), may be aligned with the arche-trace or *archi-écriture* as primarily 'zoographical', as in the following reversal of Plato's and Rousseau's distrust of writing as the painting (*zoographia*) of life (*zoe*) or of the animal or living being (*zoon*):

Writing is *like* painting, like the *zoographeme*, which is itself determined [...] within a problematic of *mimesis* [...] Here painting – zoography – betrays being and speech, words and things themselves because it freezes them. Its offshoots seem to be living things but when one questions them, they no longer respond [cf. *L'Animal que donc je suis*, especially the third section entitled 'Et si l'animal répondait?', and *infra*]. Zoography has brought death. The same goes for writing. [...]. Writing carries death. One could play on this: writing as zoography as that painting of the living which stabilizes animality, is, according to Rousseau, the writing of savages. Who are also,

as we know, only hunters: men of the *zoogreia*, of the capture of the living. Writing would indeed be the pictorial representation of the hunted beast: magical capture and murder. (*Of Grammatology*, p. 292)

Changing t(r)ack: in *L'Animal que donc je suis* Derrida defines animality, the life of the living, as 'spontanéité [...] à se marquer elle-même, à se tracer et à s'affecter de traces de soi' (p. 75), and though traditional thinking never denied the animal the power to trace or retrace its steps, the irreducible difference between the animal and man for metaphysics up to and including Lacan would remain the latter's ability to master his/her trace, not only the possibility of converting it into verbal language, for instance in a discursive structure of call and response or the autobiographical auto-affectation of who says and writes 'I (am)', but also of effacing it or protecting it from self-effacement (*Animal*, especially pp. 55–56, 76). If autobiography is 'la trace du vivant pour soi' (p. 72), and is therefore 'zootobiographical' through and through (p. 59), opening it to the traces of the wholly other (*tout autre*) undifferentiatedly named by man the 'animal' and to whom man gave its names in Genesis (pp. 82–93: 'inscrire en lui la trace de l'autre comme animal'), to what *The Post Card* had already called an auto-bio-athanato-hetero-graphy which spectrally haunts all writing,<sup>11</sup> is therefore tantamount to questioning its onto(theo)logical and anthropocentric foundations and retracing it to an anterior, (self-)effaced 'origin'. In the following excerpt the deconstructive syntax 'translates' the synthetic reduction and subjugation afforded by Hegelian *Aufhebung* (*relève*), to which the animal has been subjected throughout the history of metaphysics (*relever de*: to depend on, to come under the jurisdiction of), into the possibility of the animal's self-conscious interaction with its own traces (e.g. *relever des empreintes*: to take finger- or footprints): *cipio ergo sum*.<sup>12</sup>

L'animal que donc je suis, à la trace, et qui *relève des traces*, qui est-ce? [...] Supposez-le signant une déclaration, trace parmi d'autres, à la première personne, 'je', 'je suis'. Cette trace serait déjà le gage ou l'engagement, la promesse d'un discours de la méthode autobiographique. (*Animal*, p. 83; emphasis mine)

This autobiographical subject of *L'Animal que donc je suis* who says 'I am (following)' (*je suis*) to the trace ('*je suis à la trace*'), as one says 'to the letter', redeploys the logic of obsequence first seen in *Glas*, written in the wake of Derrida's dead father, then in the lecture on Nietzsche's 'Otobiographies', or what happens when one says *je suis (le mort)*: I am (following) a dead parent, for instance during the procession at a funeral or *obsequy*, in their footsteps, also by inheritance, as it pertains to an 'elementary kinship structure'.<sup>13</sup> The development in 'Otobiographies' follows from a passage about the origin of the subject's life in between 'life death' (*la vie la mort*) and identity, and introduces a famous quotation from 'Why I Am So Wise' at the beginning of *Ecce Homo*: 'I am [...] already dead as my father [...], while as my mother, I am still living and becoming old', glossed as follows:

Inasmuch as *I am and follow after* [je suis] my father, I am [*je suis*] the dead man and I am death. Inasmuch as *I am and follow after* my mother, I am life that perseveres, I am the living and the living feminine. I am my father, my mother, and me, and me who is my father my mother and me, my son and me, death and life, the dead man and the living feminine, and so on.<sup>14</sup>

Widening the gyres of human kinship (generations and genders) from the elementary to the utmost generalizable proximity in being and living with (Heidegger's *Mitsein* and *Mitleben*), *L'Animal que donc je suis* shifts the focus of the questioning from the perseverance to the persecution of life, from *je suis* – man inheriting from coming after somebody – to *je poursuis* (pp. 17, 82, 112) – the animal being disinherited of something, even sacrificed (especially p. 127); from *je suis après* to *je suis auprès* (p. 27), from the earlier Nietzschean trace and incipit of *Ecce Homo* to *Ecce Animot*.

*Ecce animot*, voilà l'annonce dont je suis comme la trace, au titre de l'animal autobiographique, en réponse *aventuree*, fabuleuse ou chimérique à la question 'Mais moi, qui suis-je?' (*Animal*, p. 74; emphasis mine)<sup>15</sup>

I am (after) the trace of the animal, the trace of the trace as originary effacement<sup>16</sup> and erased by metaphysics, in response to the ontological question, just as a signature inaugurates a call to which a countersignature of (oneself as) the other must respond. It is not surprising therefore that Derrida should confess that ‘it is impossible to follow my trace’,<sup>17</sup> which Cixous’s *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* will gloss as follows: ‘lui-même ne se suit pas, il perd sa trace, sa trace ne le suit pas’.<sup>18</sup> We shall now gather samples of Derrida’s (counter)signatures or textual responses, and decipher the ‘animality’ of these traces as an attempt to (pretend to) reinscribe and recover a (self-)effaced, radically altered other trace.

## 2. Signs-J: signature scenes

la confusion des signatures n’ayant de prix qu’à faire venir  
[ . . . ] le tout autre<sup>19</sup>.

The seminal essay ‘Signature Event Context’ famously ends with Derrida drawing the reader’s attention in writing to his citational counterfeiting of the signature which was inscribed on the missive of his oral communication, addressed to the Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française, thus proving by one last twist the iterability and reproducibility of the trace *in absentia* as the trace of a trace, countersigning it away as the last written mark of the essay (*Margins*, p. 330). In *Signéponge* Derrida will distinguish between three modalities of the signature, the last of which, general signature or ‘the signature of the signature’, resembles the dramatized replication of the act of signing in writing at the end of ‘Signature Event Context’ as it is

le pli de la mise en abyme quand, à l’instar de la signature au sens courant, l’écriture se désigne, décrit et inscrit elle-même comme *acte* [ . . . ], se signe avant la fin en donnant à lire: je me réfère à moi-même, ceci est *de* l’écriture, *je* suis écriture, ceci est *de* l’écriture [ . . . ] (*Signéponge*, p. 48)

Such an acknowledgement of counterfeiting in the act of countersigning, the contraband of the signature already developed in *Glas* and recalled in *Signéponge* (p. 54; p. 103: ‘la signature d’elle-même

en contrebande'), ends up uncannily resembling a counterbluff or *feinte de feinte*, of the kind that Lacan denies the animal '*in general*' (*Animal*, p. 111 and p. 165ff.) and Derrida claims it is capable of, while wishing to dispute the possibility of establishing a clear demarcation between feigning and feigning to feign, just as the inscription and the effacement of a trace cannot be separated by an indivisible line (*Animal*, p. 185). In the meantime Derrida's texts had explored what turns the proper name of a signature into a thing or a *rebus*, for example Genet into a flower (broom) or a Spanish horse (jennet) in *Glas*, and Ponge into a zoophyte (sponge) in *Signéponge* (cf. also the swallow's and wasp's signatures, pp. 106, 108).

At the end of the seventh and last missile/missive of 'No Apocalypse, Not Now', a commissioned essay addressing the aporetic issue of a 'nuclear criticism' which could testify to and after a 'remainderless cataclysm', Derrida takes on a more Biblical note and signs the essay away on the mention of John of Patmos, the disputed author of the Apocalypse to be sent (Greek *apostellein*, hence *apostolos*: messenger, envoy) to the seven churches, possibly identical to John the apostle, and brother to James, i. e. Jacques in French.<sup>20</sup> In the scene of 'revelation', of being naked in front of the animal's gaze – what binds the *apocalypse* to truth as *aletheia*, or un-veiling – Derrida will more explicitly write: '*je suis l'apoclaypse même*' (*Animal*, p. 30). Some four years before the nuclear essay, the iterations of *j'accepte* in the 'Envois' section of *The Post Card* had already allusively displayed this mock signature of a Jacques sept,<sup>21</sup> 'parodying God, with a whole theory of I ams',<sup>22</sup> whose first and family names are both made up of seven *letters* (rather than missives), sent in apostolic succession to recipients unknown ('all of you') on multiple postcards, and now mock-countersigning the Book of Revelation 'in the name of ...'

The one who feigns, mimes and counterfeits signatures 'at the end' and evokes God's essence as the first and the last ('No Apocalypse, Not Now', 31) also calls himself *le dernier des Juifs*, i.e. the last *and* the least of the Jews. 'Officially' launched in a text miming autobiographical confession while beating about (*circum*) the bush of circumcision ('Circumfession', 36), though originally from a 1976 notebook ('The Book of Elijah') in which Derrida wrote '*je joue sans jouer*', this mock-serious, double-ended formula can be read as a belated unpacking of 'more and less Jewish than the Jew' in the essay on Edmond Jabès in

*Writing and Difference*, in a context developing the Jew's split identity and 'essential' noncoincidence with himself.<sup>23</sup> The more he dissimulates or feigns not to be what he is (the less he appears to be), the more he is: 'feintvrai marrane'.<sup>24</sup> Blurring his signatory traces across texts, the *saint Juif* usuriously and usurpingly converts into an animal *feint Juif* (feigned, counterfeited Jew; secret and sacred), as in the following *mimi*-cking passage of Cixous's 'Ce Corps étranjuif' where he becomes another *genet* of sorts:

C'est ainsi sur *l'encolure* d'un rêve qu'il se marrane. Juiffeint.  
Le rêve: se croire l'enfant d'un peuple nici niça le temps  
d'un rêve. Nicatholique nijuif mijuif mimême miindien  
micheval.<sup>25</sup>

'Mimême': not only half-same but also perhaps the question of mimesis or even mimicry (Greek *mimeme*: something imitated), as in the sensitive plants (*plantes mimeuses*) 'mimicking' animal life, like the mimosa, which Derrida takes as a distant model for his miming of Francis Ponge's ('sponging' of his) signature (*Signéponge*, pp. 12, 110; also p. 15: 'je feins de mimer' and especially pp. 60–61 for Francisponge). The question of (self-)reflexivity and mimesis, which has traditionally been the hunting ground of philosophy, has now been overturned into that of mimetic distancing, even mimicry, and simulacrum,<sup>26</sup> from 'as is' to 'as if (not)'. Not unlike this animal plant or zoophyte, which serves as an analogy to the sign's relationship to the signatory's name (cf. *Signéponge*, p. 82: 'la structure spongieuse du signe épongerait le nom propre [...] dont il voudrait signer'; 'Le signe éponge la signature'), Derrida's absorptive writing, of which *Signéponge* could be a paradigm, *ex-pressly* sponges (off) the signatories of texts it traverses, as if it were a sponge.

Commenting on period 23 of 'Circumfession', Cixous writes, with a tacit reference to 'L'Animal que donc je suis', first heard as a lecture in July 1997, before recalling Derrida's 'autobiography of the lure' in 'A Silkworm of One's Own'<sup>27</sup> where 'he filmed himself as a silkworm':

That's the key: this *like* or *as if*. I am *as if* I were another. He is as if, like (as if he were) another. True, we are all substitutes, but he is a substitute truly like no-one. He writes

books that are *like* books [*comme des livres*]. *As if* delivered [*comme délivrés*]. Such substitutingness haunts him, to be conscious of this as-if-being is to suffer, but it is also the condition of wisdom [...]. Whereupon the child *that* I am, the animal that, the remains that [...], the Jew that I am, enjoys the privileges of idiomatic homonymy: the child *that I am* (*that I follow*), if I am it (if I follow it), it is that I am in the place from which I observe it [*je suis au lieu depuis lequel je me l'observe*], I can only follow it if I am not it. I am not the one that I am (that I follow) [*je ne suis pas celui que je suis*] (*Portrait*, p. 53; last two French insertions mine. Compare with the French *Portrait*, p. 52 for the repetitions of '... *que je suis*')

To be a *sage* ('wisdom') is to be conscious of the generalizable substitutability of 'I am (following)' (*je suis*) and 'I am as if I were another' (cf. 'Circumfession', 10: 'me the sole replacement') in a sort of chiasmic mirror-stage effect (this is me, I am this: *ça-je*) that alters not only subjects but also place 'itself' (*au lieu*. in the place, but also suggestive of *au lieu de*. in place of), so that God's 'I am that I am' (Exodus 3:14) is inverted into absolute dissimilitude and dissemblance. In *L'Animal que donc je suis*, Derrida will call for a radicalization of Lacan's place of the Other beyond the dual, imaginary or specular relationship to a fellow living being that excludes the animal from alterity, the animal *other*, the other *as animal* (*Animal*, pp. 180–1). 'As if I were wholly other', for example an animal, say a monkey (*singe*), as I am looking at it 'from my place', soon blurs into 'I am (following) a monkey' (*je suis un singe*). Objecting to Lacan's denial of the animal's ability to erase its own traces (but also to the simplistic zoology of his conception of animal 'reflection' in what would be a rudimentary mirror stage; *Animal*, p. 87 and third section, *passim*<sup>28</sup>), Derrida notes that, in being able to erase being and going beyond the question ('what is...?'), and therefore the response, '[c]e quasi-animal n'aurait plus à se rapporter à l'être *comme tel*' (*Animal*, p. 63). Against an essential 'as such' (*comme tel*) of the traditional onto(theo)logy of an autobiography but also, as we shall see, (self-)portraiture, Derrida's *comme si* is (after) the trace (of the trace), takes after it, imitating its (self-)reflection in a parodic *singerie*<sup>29</sup> or parrotry (*Animal*, p. 79).<sup>30</sup>

Replacing being and place (I am (following) in place of), the substitutable subject is everyone and no one, everywhere and nowhere, including before and after. Derrida Jacques, whose other, secret name was Elie (Elijah; 'Circumfession', 16, 17, quoting from the Book of Elijah), signi(fyi)ng election, '[c]omme si j'étais l' élu secret de ce qu'ils appellent les animaux' (*Animal*, p. 91), already (*déjà*) and behind (*derrière*), in the sum of his autozootoheterobiographical fictions, especially: 'his brother Elie, i.e. me, already' ('Circumfession', 25) but also the rewriting of the logic of obsequence in *Glas* as the Augustinian *cogito* of 'already I am dead' ('Circumfession', 25; cf. also n. 11 *supra*); 'reste [d'Est(h)er – one of his mother's other names] que je suis ici' ('Circumfession', 10; cf. also period 3 and Cixous, *Portrait*, pp. 51–54); 'Derrière le rideau' (*Glas*, p. 68bi; cf. also *The Post Card*, p. 78), i.e. always already *déjà derrière* (*Glas*, *passim*), etc. As he wittily summarized in 'Limited Inc a b c', his reply to Searle's heavy-handed critique of 'Signature Event Context' or, for short, 'Sec':

I have, in other texts, devised countless games, playing with 'my name', with the letters and syllables *Ja*, *Der*, *Da*. Is my name still 'proper', or my signature, when, in proximity to 'There. J.D.' (pronounced, in French, approximately *Der. J.D.*), in proximity to 'Wo? Da.' in German, to 'Her. J.D.' in Danish, they begin to function as integral or fragmented entities [*corps*], or as whole segments of common nouns or even of things?<sup>31</sup>

Jacques Derrida's signatures<sup>32</sup> disseminate themselves in simulacra of divine revelations of a 'first and l(e)ast' or of an 'exodic' *je (ne) suis (pas) celui que je suis*, of halves of traces occupying all the positions, like an animal throwing his hunters off his scent, blurring his tracks.

### 3. From Saint-Je to *Singe*: Mimesis head to head with mimicry

Holy monkey!

Taking after the Confessions of Saint Augustine or SA – weeping the death of his mother, whereas Derrida's 'Circumfession' was written before the expected death of his own<sup>33</sup> – the fifty-nine neo-Augustine

periods of the then 59-year-old former resident at rue Saint-Augustin in Algiers had already set up the scene for exploring the convergence between autobiography and sacrality in the philosophical writing of a *SA-je*, beyond the theatrical use of quasi-divine formulas noted above. A similar saintliness of place and even first name had presided over the first meeting between Cixous and Derrida, '[a]t the foot of the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, at the corner of the Rue St. Jacques', as Cixous implicitly recalls in her *Portrait* (p. 4), whose French title also phonically suggests the *singe* in *Saint Juif*.<sup>34</sup> Derrida will return to this association in *L'Animal que donc je suis*, while building on his former reflections on sacredness and the auto-immune in 'Faith and Knowledge':<sup>35</sup>

L'autobiographie, l'écriture de soi du vivant, la trace du vivant pour soi, l'être pour soi, l'auto-affection ou l'auto-infection comme mémoire ou archive du vivant serait un mouvement immunitaire (donc un mouvement de salut, de sauvetage et de salvation du sauf, du saint, de l'immun, de l'indemne, de la nudité virginale et intacte) mais un mouvement immunitaire toujours menacé de devenir auto-immunitaire, comme tout *autos*, toute ipséité, tout mouvement automatique, automobile, autonome, auto-référentiel. Rien ne risque d'être aussi *empoisonnant* qu'une autobiographie, *empoisonnant* pour soi, d'abord, auto-infectieux pour le présumé signataire ainsi auto-affecté. (*Animal*, pp. 72–73; emphases mine)

At once poison ('*empoisonnant*') and cure, or the *pharmakon* which *Of Grammatology* (p. 292, just before the passage quoted *supra*), then more sustainedly 'Plato's Pharmacy', had long ago identified writing as, autobiography, the self-writing of the living, keeps (away from) itself apotropaically according to the self-deconstructing 'logic' of the *sauf* (safe and sound; except, save), which transforms the immune into the auto-immune, at once inscribing and effacing its own trace in a 'sacred' or even *sacrificial* act of auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphy, i.e. both blessed and cursed (*sacer*).<sup>36</sup> At the heart of this process of self-contamination would be the animal, or, in Cixous's *Portrait*, itself a late simulation of the Joycean counterfeiting of the sacred figure of the

artist, the pivotal relay between a *saint-je* and a *singe*, from the self-reflexivity of He who says 'I am that I am' into Derrida's own playful *simulacra*,<sup>37</sup> and what he, referring to his former self as an adolescent, described as a 'profil de l'artefacteur en *jeune singe*'.<sup>38</sup>

In 'White Mythology', within a discussion of mimesis as what is proper to man and not to the animal for Aristotle's *Poetics*, Derrida introduces a distinction between mimesis and mimicry or *singerie*.

the animal, deprived of *logos*, of *phonè sèmantikè*, of *stoikheion*, etc., also would be incapable of mimesis. *Mimèsis* thus determined belongs to *logos*, and is not animalistic aping [*singerie*], or gesticular mimicry [*mimique*]. (*Margins*, p. 237, French insertions mine; cf. also p. 249, and *Animal*, pp. 79, 99)

Like a silent mime, the animal would be capable only of aping (*singer*) rather than signifying. A similar reversal is at work in Derrida's 'Tête-à-tête',<sup>39</sup> musing on Camilla Adami's giant portraits of apes, on which Ginette Michaud focuses her critical gaze in the last section of an essay devoted to the Thing-in-Painting in Nancy, Cixous and Derrida, entitled 'Derrida devant les *Primati*: penser la chose au-delà de la *mimèsis* simiesque'. Derrida's tête-à-tête with the primates invitingly calls for a parallel with Levinas's face to face with the other who can only be a human, and brings out the dissymetry between the animal as object seen by man, and not as subject endowed with a gaze (cf. also *Animal*, p. 116), and the human gaze, as well as the issue of anthropo-morphic or -centric concern – both being understood in the French *ça me regarde*. (In *L'Animal que donc je suis*, Derrida had reproached Levinas for not granting the animal a face (*visage*, *Animal*, pp. 148 ff. Compare with Derrida calling the apes "figures" non figurales: 'TT', p. 7), for treating them as 'des figures sans visage' ('TT', p. 9), and confessed his embarrassment at being looked at face to face by an animal (p. 90), or here, in what the French language calls an *exposition*, at being exposed 'naked' in front of Camelia Adami's giant apes in a novel scene of Revelation ('TT', p. 6) stripping the philosopher of the mastery of the gaze.) The scene of the philosopher looking at the primates is reversed into that of his seeing himself being seen, as the philosophical 'mirror

stage' of mimesis, reflection, and therefore signification, is broken (cf. 'TT', p. 11):

Chaque 'singe' vous regarde, unique, tout seul, mortel, depuis sa place singulière [...], il ne singe rien, il vous signifie, dans son idiome absolu, il vous singifie [...]  
(“TT”, p. 14)

Michaud comments:

Pas de miroir, c'est-à-dire plus de singerie mimétique, plus de mimétisme simiesque (laquelle réfléchit l'autre, dans sa réflexivité vertigineuse?), plus d'imitation ou de faire semblant: le singe ne singe pas l'homme, il faut repenser toutes les limites et les conséquences de la réversibilité entre 'singes' et 'signes', entre 'signifier' et 'singifier'<sup>40</sup>

If, according to Roman Jakobson's famous formula, expressed at the First Congress of Semiotics in Bologna (1974), '*tout signe est un renvoi*' (i.e. *aliquid pro aliquo*: one thing for another), here, in this tête-à-tête, *le singe ne renvoie rien*. Not even an identity when, towards the end of the essay, in a sequence of neither-nor's which brings to mind Cixous's animal description of Derrida quoted before, Derrida imagines him saying without saying (cf. 'vous apostrophant sans se taire mais sans rien dire'), against Heidegger's famous judgment that he is *weltarm* (cf. also *Animal*, especially fourth section):

je suis, point, j'existe, avant tout et après tout, ni libre ni captif, ou l'un et l'autre [...]. Je ne suis ni une bête ni personne, je suis quelqu'un mais personne: ni une personne, ni un sujet, ni le sujet d'un portrait' ("TT", pp. 14–15)

Worse, the lack of specularity of those portraits of apes may even silently suggest: 'je te renvoie à toi-même' ("TT", p. 7)... as a *jeune/vieux singe* thus captured in what becomes a self-portrait and prone to '*songerie*' (also *singerie* + *songe*: dream – cf. "TT", pp. 5–6, and p. 11: 'corps de l'artiste en vieux singe', recalling the 'profil de l'artefacteur en *jeune singe*' seen above).

The 'animal' *is*, prior to any necessity to respond in order to show he can answer the question 'what is / are you an animal?', and Derrida's use of 'mimétisme (simiesque)' at once exposes man's traditional debunking of human mimesis into animal mimicking since Aristotle (see above) and reinscribes the latter as the more generalizable model of 'representation' for the living being (*zoe*, *zoon*), not unlike the *primacy* of the arche-trace against phonologocentrism. Here again the animal comes before and after, which can be compared with an evocation of the Levinasian face to face, in which man occupies both positions of anteriority and posteriority:

le visage de l'homme n'est et ne dit 'je suis' [...] que *devant* l'autre et *après* l'autre, mais c'est toujours l'autre homme et celui-ci vient avant un animal [whereas Kant's *Anthropology* had already conceded the anteriority of the animal; p. 134] qui ne le regarde jamais [...] (*Animal*, pp. 149–50; emphases mine)

'Les animaux me regardent', also says Derrida (*Animal*, p. 58; cf. also in *Signéponge*, p. 25: 'Sa signature aussi me regarde'), but their gaze and concern, their gaze-as-concern, does not have a place in Levinas's ethics of the face to face, and their 'ça te regarde' (which also plays on the felicitous initials of *Camilla Adami*), has nothing in common with the 'ça me regarde' traditionally assigned to the inscription of eyes within a painting. Ultimately 'ce qui te regarde ne te [me] regarde pas' ('TT', p. 7 [p. 8]) in the *entêtement* of a work which 'a le *front* de faire *face* dans le *tête-à-tête*' ('TT', p. 12; emphases mine) and, having dispensed with the mirror of specularity and speculation, leaves us head to head with the *tout autre* ('TT', p. 12).

Taking issue with Descartes' 'methods' for distinguishing between the authentic and the mimetic simulacrum of the automaton (the animal-machine), Derrida highlights an excerpt from the *Discourse* focusing on the animal seen as a theoretic spectacle, 'le spectacle pour un sujet spéculaire qui réfléchit son essence et [...] ne veut pas trouver à se réfléchir dans une image de l'animal qu'il regarde mais qui ne le regarde pas' (*Animal*, p. 117). Interestingly, the dissociation of specularity mirrors in reverse the famous 'parable' of the sardine tin in Lacan's theory of the gaze in *Seminar XI*, the separation between the

eye and the gaze, *voir* (but also *se voir regarder*) and *être regardé*, in connection with animal mimicry, which Derrida also quotes further on:

si ça a un sens que Petit-Jean me dise que la boîte ne me voit pas, c'est parce que [...] elle me regarde. Elle me regarde au niveau du point lumineux, où tout ce qui est me regarde (*Animal*, p. 182)<sup>41</sup>

As we glimpsed above, *je suis (après)* also becomes the question of *je suis d'après*, i.e. not only being but taking after somebody, in an act of (self-)portraiture which would no longer wish to signify according to the fixed human laws of mimesis but rather would acknowledge the forever shifting, impregnable alterity of the animal 'subject', of the animal in the subject (cf. *Animal*, p. 112, opposing a cinematic, a cynegetic, the cinematography of a persecution to the immobile representation of a self-portrait) but also thwarting the human logic of filiation and obsequence ('TT', p. 11). 'Singifying' mimeticism in order to send it back its own (self-)reflection, to send it back to reflection... If deconstruction reflects (on) anything, it does so by *speculating* (on) the superficial act of (self-)reflection itself, as it probes into the conditions for (self-)reflexivity to 'take place', like the tain of the mirror, enabling reflection, which Gasché had used as the title of his brilliant analysis.

**In the end ...**

'La bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure'  
(Gustave Flaubert)

The concept of the '(other) as such', which founds the *logos*, is what the animal would ultimately be lacking for Heidegger, Lacan and Levinas (*Animal*, p. 194) – hence Heidegger's claim that all words should be placed under erasure for the animal deprived of the 'as such' (what Derrida calls a '*Durchstreichung* généralisée'; *Animal*, pp. 216–7). However, if *L'Animal que donc je suis* does not so much want to claim a restitution of the possibility of 'as such' the animal has been stripped of

but to call into question the tradition that takes it for granted as part of the mastery of signs by man as a *zoon logon ekhon* (*Animal*, p. 218), and for a differential analysis of the *animot* which would complicate philosophy's structuring binary opposition between the 'as such' and the 'not as such' (p. 214) – just as the power of self-effacement of the trace is opposed to its illusory mastery by a subject (p. 186) – a certain mimicking of the 'as if', Derrida's mimicked feint or feigned mimicking observed in *Signéponge* above, could be the deconstructive twist by way of a 'solution'. It could itself harbour a tropic turn not unlike the one that torments the structure of the trace and origin as the traumatic effacement of what never was, an 'as if "as if"' not so much perversely coming back to an 'as such' as a figure of the same but countersigning it away as a counterbluff. What would have taken place, then, in such a repositioning of the animal via a revalorization of mimicking over mimesis, from the *comme si* which iteratively describes the quasi-original scene of Derrida's feeling of shame while seeing himself naked in front of the animal and seeing the animal seeing him naked (p. 18), is *différance* as tempor(al)ization, of which we noted that it shares with trauma the structure of *Nachträglichkeit*. One of the two brief points which Heidegger raises about the animal in *Sein und Zeit* and which he develops in the 1929–30 seminar known as *die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik – Welt-Endlichkeit-Einsamkeit*, is 'the question of the temporalization of the animal' as the 'transcendental horizon of the question of being', of the 'essence of the animality of the animal' (*Animal*, pp. 197, 205–6, 210); Derrida's differential 'who am I (following)?' (*qui suis-je?*) and the philosophical fiction of a zootobiographical response in 'as if' countersigned by a *saint-je / singe*, have sketched out attempts to overcome its ontological *a priori* by reinscribing it within a more originary structure of traumatic displacement and self-effacement.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs* (London: Flamingo, 1996), p. 166.
- <sup>2</sup> "'This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 35, 34, 39–40.
- <sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006), pp. 59–61 (note in particular the fish in *The Truth in Painting*, playing on

the I or [German] *ich* of its Greek name, *ichthys*); hereafter referred to in the main body of the essay as *Animal*. This text was first given as a ten-hour address at the Cerisy-la-Salle *décade* on 'L'Animal autobiographique' in July 1997, and the first part published initially in *L'Animal autobiographique. Autour de Jacques Derrida*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 1999), pp. 251–303. For its English translation see 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002), 369–418.

- <sup>4</sup> I am using this term in spite of Derrida's own *caveat* against it, as he implicit opposes it (and bestiality) to animality in order to point at man's denigratory designation of what is considered to be animal, therefore infra-human (see for e.g. *Animal*, p. 93). In so doing, I wish to insist on Derrida's 'strategicomic' (Cixous's adjective) inscription of animal traces as what a 'traditional' philosopher would regard as *bêtises*.
- <sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire ...* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 89; cf. *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say ...*, trans., with additional notes, by Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrecter (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 101–2.
- <sup>6</sup> I made this point already in 'Zo(o)graphics. "Évolutions" darwiniennes de quelques fictions animales', in *L'Animal autobiographique*, p. 19. n. 1.
- <sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corrected ed., trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1967]), p. 70.
- <sup>8</sup> Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 186 (see also *passim* in the sub-sections on 'The Infrastructure as Arche-Trace' and 'The Infrastructure as Différance' [pp. 186–205]). See also his *Inventions of Différance: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), especially p. 45.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. also Derrida's interview 'Semiology and Grammatology', in *Positions*, trans. and annotated by Alan Bass (London: Continuum, 2002 [1981]), p. 24 (see pp. 7–8, 23–26, 37–41 on trace and *différance*), and Gasché, *Inventions of Différance*, pp. 44–49 (on the arche-trace).
- <sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans., with additional notes, by Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 21; hereafter *Margins* with page references in the text.
- <sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans., with an introduction and additional notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 336, 377. For Derrida the writing of the living self is by necessity always already open both to the other (the self as other, the other in the self: *hetero-*) and to death (*thanato*), which every written sign or signature is inhabited by. See for example *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr and Richard Rand

- (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 19b: 'When I sign, I am already dead'; *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 60: 'perhaps in every text there is a dead man or woman to be sought, the singular figure of death to which a text is destined and who signs'; and *Signéponge* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), p. 88: 'Signature du mort, déjà'.
- <sup>12</sup> For the history of this Derridean translation of Hegel's sublation and an instance of its deconstructive use, see Jacques Derrida, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction "relevante"?', in *Jacques Derrida*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud (Paris: L'Herne, 2004), especially pp. 573–75. It is through this self-same principle of *Aufhebung*, in the form of the famous dialectic of the master and the slave, that the Lacanian 'subject to the signifier' can master (i.e. inscribe but also erase) his own trace as well as, therefore, feign a feint (cf. *Animal*, pp. 175, 179 and 189; see *infra*).
- <sup>13</sup> Derrida, *Glas*, especially pp. 71bi, 116bi–117bi, 174bi, 255bi, 257bi, and *The Ear of the Other*, pp. 17–18. See also John P. Leavey, Jr., *Glassary* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 106–8 and 115b.
- <sup>14</sup> Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, pp. 15–16 (French insertions mine).
- <sup>15</sup> Note the distant echo of the 'Différance' essay: 'In the delineation [*trace*] *différance* everything is strategic and adventurous' (*Margins*, p. 7). Derrida's coinage, which by homophony suggests the plural *animaux* in French, records the violence of homogenization in this generic nomination, which effaces the diversity of animals in a single word (*mot*) given by man, and opens to a rereading of the referential limit of being *as such* (*Animal*, pp. 73–4).
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Derrida, *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), p. 99: 'la trace n'arrive qu'à s'effacer'.
- <sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Circumfession', in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), period 38. All references to this text will be to periods, not pages. The French original ('Circonfession'), published in a similarly titled volume (Paris: Seuil, 1991), will be occasionally quoted when the English translation cannot account for it.
- <sup>18</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en Jeune Saint Juif* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), p. 84. Cf. *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 91, which fails to account for the implicit *double-entendre* of 'suir' and, here as elsewhere (especially p. 76, where the French *trace* is infelicitously translated as 'scar' in English; cf. the French *Portrait*, p. 71), shies away from the literal translation 'trace'.
- <sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Signéponge*, p. 44.

- <sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)', trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, *Diacritics* 14.2 (1984), 31. We will hazard a daring rapprochement with the figure of the marrano whom Derrida playfully (?) identifies with, from 'Circumfession' onwards, in several texts of the 1990s (*Aporias*, *Archive Fever*, 'Faith and Knowledge', 'Marx & Sons', etc.), usually as a strategic signature effect towards the end or in a context related to finitude. See my 'Jacques Derrida in Secret(s)', *Secrets, Mysteries, Silences*, ed. Ruth Evans, Terence Hughes and Georges Letissier (Nantes: Publications CERCICRINI, 2005), especially pp. 119–22.
- <sup>21</sup> Derrida, *The Post Card, passim*; cf. Translator's Introduction, p. xiv.
- <sup>22</sup> Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, p. 85.
- <sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans., intr. and additional notes by Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 2001 ed.), p. 92. It will be more fully glossed in, for example, Elisabeth Weber, *Questions au judaïsme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996), p. 78, before finally reappearing at the opening of the fourth and last, improvised section of *L'Animal que donc je suis*, p. 193. It is also to this problematic statement that Gideon Ofrat dedicates the first section of *The Jewish Derrida*, trans. Peretz Kidron (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001), pp. 9–14. I have already developed this 'overbid' or peculiar usury of the last and least of the Jews, 'le plus que = moins et autre que' (Derrida, 'Abraham, l'autre', in *Questions au judaïsme*, p. 25; see also pp. 22, 24) – compare with *Portrait*, p. 4: 'I at least am not a Jew, either it's better or better it's worse, we shall see' – in 'Portrait of H. C. as J. D. and Back', *NLH* 37.1: 'Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage', ed. Eric Prenowitz (2006), especially 78–79.
- <sup>24</sup> Cixous, 'Ce Corps étranjuiif', in *Questions au judaïsme*, p. 62.
- <sup>25</sup> Cixous, 'Ce Corps étranjuiif', p. 63 (emphases mine); cf. also p. 82: 'midieumianimal blessé'.
- <sup>26</sup> Let us recall the apprehension of the trace also as 'not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself [...]' in the 'Différance' essay (*Margins*, p. 24).
- <sup>27</sup> In Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoff Bennington, with drawings by Ernest Pignon-Ernest (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 90.
- <sup>28</sup> This has been translated by David Wills as 'And Say the Animal Responded?', in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 121–46.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf. for example 'As if I were Dead: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Applying: to Derrida*, ed. John Brannigan *et al.* (London: Macmillan 1997), pp. 212–26.

- I have analyzed this 'obsessive' *als ob* in 'Between Barthes, Blanchot, and Mallarmé: Skia(Photo)-Graphies of Derrida', in *The French Connections of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Julian Wolfreys, John Brannigan and Ruth Robbins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), especially p. 183ff.
- <sup>30</sup> For an analysis of mimetic writing as (parodic) parrotry, in conjunction with Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, see my 'Zo(o)graphies', in *L'Animal autobiographique*, especially pp. 42–45.
- <sup>31</sup> Trans. Samuel Weber, in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 33.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. *Signéponge*, p. 47, for the limit between the autography of a proper name and signature, and p. 87: 'Écrire son nom n'est pas encore signer' (cf. also p. 89). See also Gregory L. Ulmer, 'Sounding the Unconscious', in *Glossary*, especially sections on Otobiography and Signature, pp. 57–72, and *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 128–36. For a fuller answer to the question 'Qu'y a-t-il derrière Derrida?', see Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Borborygmes', in *L'Animal autobiographique*, especially, pp. 163ff. Derrida's animal autobiography, or a 'Derridean autobiography', would thus be opposed to the traditional conception of autobiography as an apophantic 'je me présente tel que je suis' (*Animal*, p. 125), theological in essence ('Circumfession', 9: 'I present myself to God or you, the presentation of what is or what I am'), which presupposes the power of deictic self-presentation and self-designation – in spite of the impossibility of self-presenting of the quasi-originary trace – but also response (the 'here I am') and responsibility, denied to the animal (pp. 132, 154), and as an attempt to erase the trace of the other in oneself, i. e. as almost a mere autography.
- <sup>33</sup> Written in the wake of his father's death, *Glas* had explored another SA, Hegel's *Savoir Absolu* destabilized by its French homophone for the unconscious (*ça*), as is implicitly recalled in 'Circumfession', 10.
- <sup>34</sup> In a private conversation, Hélène Cixous informed me that she had originally suggested capturing the phonic ring of the French title with 'monk' and 'monkey' in English.
- <sup>35</sup> Trans. Samuel Weber, in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 1–78.
- <sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1993), pp. 61–171.
- <sup>37</sup> From Latin *simulare*: to make like, imitate, counterfeit; the *OED* defines 'simulacrum' as 'a material image, made as a representation of some deity, person, or thing'. In *L'Animal que donc je suis*, Derrida similarly reads the snake's address

- in Paul Valéry's 'Ébauche d'un serpent' as the deceitful mimicking of the divine enunciative formula (p. 97). In 'Semiology and Grammatology' Derrida had designated undecidables or quasi-transcendentals, such as *pharmakon*, supplement, gram, hymen, margin, etc., as 'unities of simulacrum' (*Positions*, p. 40).
- <sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida and Safaa Fathy, *Tourner les mots. Au bord d'un film* (Paris: Galilée/Arte Editions, 2000), p. 112 (emphasis mine), to which the photo of Derrida impersonating Tarzan in the trees (no. 13) refers. This section, devoted to the letter J, also mentions his real first name, Jackie, imitating actors' names.
- <sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Tête-à-tête', in *Camilla Adami* (Milan: Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, 2001), pp. 5–15; hereafter as 'TT' with page references in the text.
- <sup>40</sup> Ginette Michaud, 'Che cos'è la pittura? Trois manières de toucher la Chose: Nancy, Cixous, Derrida', *Études françaises* 42.2 (2006), 132. In 'Zo(o)graphies' I had already anticipated the possibility of aligning *mimêsis* in writing with a parodic and blasphematory *singerie* (p. 24, and cf. p. 26 on 'mimique simiesque').
- <sup>41</sup> Quoting from Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 89.