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Nietzsche and *Autobiographical Philosophy*

The Topic of *Ecce Homo*

On 13 November 1888, Nietzsche wrote to his close friend Franz Overbeck¹ about *Ecce Homo*: ‘an absolutely important book, gives some psychological and even biographical details about me and my writings; people will at last *see* me. The tone of the work, one of gay detachment fraught with a sense of destiny, as is everything I write’ (1996: 324). *Ecce Homo*, an attempt at an autobiography, was conceived and written at the very end of Nietzsche’s career and just before his mental collapse, but not published until 1908, eight years after his death. It is a text which can be read as challenging both the autobiographical and the philosophical expectations of the reader, as it manifests an unprecedented merging of the ‘psychological’ and the ‘biographical’ with the ‘philosophical’, a merging of the ‘me’ with ‘my writings’, only to disclose as clearly as possible the ‘me’ of Nietzsche. Perhaps this is what Aaron Ridley implies when he calls the book ‘a strange sort of autobiography’ (Ridley in Nietzsche 2007a: viii), disturbing and undermining the very genre (autobiography) to which it is supposed to belong, a transgression which is documented and elaborated on by Douglas G. Wright in

his essay 'The subject of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*' (2006). In this section I will, therefore, attempt to account for this strangeness and propose a reading of *Ecce Homo* as a special kind of text, which inaugurates a new philosophical genre, *autobiographical philosophy*, which no longer considers the life of the philosopher independently from his thought and philosophical production, but rather as two indistinguishable domains. With this claim I do not wish to diminish the importance of earlier philosophers who have merged life and thought in their writings, such as the Cynics (fifth–third centuries BC), the Stoics in general (third century BC–second century AD) and one of the last Stoic philosophers in particular, Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* (circa 170–175 AD), or Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Confessions* (1769). I will aim, however, to show that Nietzsche pushes autobiographical writing to its limits, especially by challenging the boundaries of *bios*, *logos* and writing in ways different from philosophers committed to *Lebensphilosophie* (life philosophy) such as, for example, Wilhelm Dilthey.

If one turns to Philippe Lejeune, one of the most important recent theorists of autobiography,² one finds that *Ecce Homo*, on the one hand, sits comfortably within his revised³ definition of the autobiographical genre, while, on the other hand, it challenges it. According to Lejeune, an autobiography is a '[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality' (1989: 4). Looking for 'stricter criteria' (3) for the autobiographical genre, and true to his taste for dissection, which other theorists of autobiography such as Georges Gusdorf and James Olney criticize sharply (Olney 1980: 18), Lejeune breaks up this definition further so that four distinct aspects or criteria be identified: (a) the form of language (narrative/prose); (b) the topic (individual life/story of personality); (c) the situation of the author (author and narrator being the same); and (d), by extension, the position of the narrator (narrator and principal character being identical/retrospective point of view of the narrative). At first sight, *Ecce Homo* could be said to fit well within Lejeune's test diagram as a 'classical, autodiegetic autobiography' (7), since Nietzsche causes no obvious confusion through grammatical distortions or inconsistencies, such as the mixing of personal pronouns ('I' and 'he'). Despite this conventional

use of the 'I', however, the more Lejeune develops his definition by emphasizing the necessity of identity, the more *Ecce Homo* is found to resist it. As far as identity is concerned, Lejeune points out, 'there is neither transition nor latitude. An identity is, or is not. It is impossible to speak of degrees[...]. In order for there to be autobiography (and personal literature in general), the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical' (5). Despite the fact that Lejeune uses the term 'identity' in the sense of an identification or 'identicalness' between author, narrator and protagonist—an affirmation of this identity is what he calls 'the autobiographical pact' (14)—it still raises the question about the identity or identities that Nietzsche attributes to himself which go beyond Lejeune's logic of no transition, latitude or degrees: '*My hypothesis: The subject as multiplicity*' (Nietzsche 1968b: 270). Moreover, the following sentences from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo* respectively further problematize the concepts of the narrating subject and the narrated object, author and reader: 'No one tells me anything new, and so I tell myself to myself' (2008: 157); 'And so I will tell myself the story of my life' (2007a: 74): one tells *me*, I tell *myself* to *myself*, I, *myself*, *my life*. The topic of this 'strange' autobiography becomes thus essential to explore in order to verify whether it is indeed, complying to Lejeune's criterion, the individual life and the story of Nietzsche's personality.

It is true, of course, that in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche does write about a father and a mother, about a sister, about a Cosima Wagner and a Lou Salomé, about his education and his career, about the places and the people (artists, philologists, politicians and philosophers) that in one way or another marked the course of his life. On top of that, an abundance of thoughts, opinions and feelings are disclosed and recorded. And then there is a list of the books he has written. There is no doubt that all these pieces of information—which is the usual repertoire of an autobiographical text—are included in *Ecce Homo*. However, if one really wants to be accurate, which means being faithful to Nietzsche's evaluation of and attitude towards this information, one should be more sensitive not to the chronological order in which these events take place in Nietzsche's life, or to the way a conventional biographer or autobiographer would treat them, but to the degree of intensity and

importance that Nietzsche himself gives to all of these empirical givens of his life: 'Between the 15th of October and the 4th of November I brought to completion an extremely *difficult* task, that is to say, talking about myself, my books, my opinions, and partly, to the extent that this was necessary, *my own life*'. It is essential that one pay attention to the *order* of the words Nietzsche uses in this letter to Naumann of 6 November 1888: I will talk about myself, which means my books, then my opinions, which are in my books, and, finally, partly my life as much as it is necessary to illuminate myself, which is my books, et cetera. If, therefore, our task is to identify the topic of *Ecce Homo*, it is the same, circular reading of this letter extract that I also propose here. *Ecce Homo* should thus be read as revolving around Nietzsche's philosophy, main and recurring ideas and an analysis of his books which consists of emphases, corrections and clarifications. Skilfully, Nietzsche enriches this account with practical details about his books (writing and publishing procedure) as well as with short or longer references to the people who played an important role in his intellectual development. Whether to express his admiration as in the case of Heraclitus, Voltaire and Goethe, or his contempt as in the case of Jesus, Schopenhauer and Wagner, Nietzsche blurs the boundaries between admiration and contempt and pays respect to the people who contributed to his life and who, good or bad, served as creative and enriching encounters. This influence that Nietzsche accepts from other thinkers merges within him creatively in a way that the others become essential in what Nietzsche himself becomes.

Along with the influence that a number of people have had on him, Nietzsche acknowledges the importance of certain places he has visited, as well as of the climatic conditions of these places. Scenery or climate become worthy of the philosopher's attention, but only with regard to their contribution to his philosophical production, constituting Nietzsche's understanding of *εὖ ζῆν* (well-being; good life or good living) as a requirement of philosophy. In his attempt to say who he is, Nietzsche also writes about his education in the humanities and his career as a philologist from which his physical weakness and illness saved him, clearly making a distinction between the unchallenged and comfortable career of a philologist in contrast to the icy and hazardous nature of the

philosophical altitudes. In passing, Nietzsche mentions a father and a mother only to express his respect and affection for the former as an angel-father-figure and to reject—if rejection is ever possible—the latter as a devil-mother-figure. What this symbolic reference to the parents implies relates to Nietzsche's concept of *the subject as multiplicity*, as well as to his understanding of the weighty concepts of *necessity*, *choice* and *intuition*.

I have suggested that *Ecce Homo* is to be read not as a series of biographical facts placed chronologically one after the other, but as a collection of events and ideas working together dynamically, the importance of which is determined by Nietzsche himself and emphasized accordingly. What, then, are the implications of such a reading? In the light of this redistribution of emphasis and the diminished status of the biographical information—‘*even biographical details*’ (Nietzsche 1996: 324; emphasis added)—one could argue for a quasi-total absence of the element of *βίος* (bios: life) from *Ecce Homo*. One would have to agree with this argument if bios were to be seen as a collection of psycho-biographical sketches or other trivial empirical givens of life, not different from what Roland Barthes calls ‘biographemes’.⁴ However, bios in *Ecce Homo* acquires a new identity and, as such, it is present.

The Identity of Nietzsche's *Bios*

Christie McDonald pertinently identifies an immense interest of post-structuralist⁵ debates in ‘the relationship of an empirical, individual life to the structure of the written text’ (1988: ix). Expressions of this interest can be traced, for example, in the work of post-structuralist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida for whom ‘thought and philosophy cannot be dissociated or abstracted from its place of enunciation’ (Thomassen 2005: 1), and Simon Critchley who is ‘highly dubious as to whether the spirit of philosophy can be separated from the body⁶ of the philosopher’ (2008: xxxiii). At the same time, one needs to accept that the distinction between the triviality of bios and the traditionally valued activities of *λόγος* (logos: reason and language) is dissolved, a dissolution that Nietzsche, and specifically *Ecce Homo*, can be said to have initiated. In other words, bios should be seen as always already inscribed

within logos because '[p]ure spirit is a pure lie' (Nietzsche 2007d: 8). Nietzsche becomes more than relevant in this context, as someone who contributed greatly to the shift from *ἐαυτός* or *αὐτός* (autos: self) as pure logos to autos as bios already inscribed into logos, which encompasses the body as the habitat of spirit and becomes the synonym for life.

This shift, which predominantly comes with Nietzsche, also proved of importance in the context of *autobiography studies* in which a reassessment of the three separate components of auto-bio-graphy—as well as their interrelation—allows for nuanced and philosophically more interesting discussions, which, by distancing themselves from Lejeune's rigidity, attempt to account for the increasing and very diverse production of autobiographical texts. Before the wide interest in what came to be known as *autobiography studies*, that is a theory on the genre of autobiography, admittedly initiated around the mid-twentieth century with Georges Gusdorf's essay 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' (1956), the focus was primarily on the element of bios, and in a rather superficial way, indicating nothing more than 'the course of a lifetime' (Olney 1980: 20), while the element of autos was considered as a straightforward part of the auto-bio-graphical relation; in other words, as Olney points out, 'the autos was taken to be perfectly neutral and adding it to "biography" changed nothing' (20). What the early criticism on *autobiography studies* provides, then, is a shift of the attention from bios to autos. There was more to explore about the self who did the writing and about what precisely was or could potentially be involved in this process of writing in relation to the life that was written about. The 'act of autobiography' may at the same time be considered as 'a discovery, a creation, and an imitation of the self' (19). The same acknowledgement is already made by Gusdorf in his 1956 essay, where the role of 'consciousness of self' is not only stressed but also allowed to give autobiography a status higher than the lived experience which, according to Gusdorf, is devoid of consciousness: 'autobiography is a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it' (Gusdorf in Olney 1980: 38). It is precisely by showing how autobiography attaches consciousness to experience that Gusdorf presents autobiography as a process of creation. The truth may not be a treasure which is hidden but it is, for

Gusdorf, a treasure which is made, and this product is one which aims at capturing 'a life in its totality' (38), the 'individual unity' (38) and the 'dialogue of a life with itself in search of its own absolute' (48). It is precisely the totality, the unity and the absoluteness of his life, or that transparent 'I' which is behind the work and informs the whole that Nietzsche is deconstructing in *Ecce Homo*, risking, if we follow Olney's reasoning, being reduced to insignificance (Olney 1980: 21).

What is interesting is that this revival of interest in autobiography and especially the shift of attention from bios (life) to autos (self) which was 'largely responsible for opening things up and turning them in a philosophical, psychological, and literary direction' (Olney 1980: 19), comes at a time when the post-structuralists (and especially Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault) launch an attack on the status and the authority of the author as conventionally perceived. The author is no longer the external or absolute source of meaning but is reduced to the voice, which can articulate itself fragmentarily within an already fragmented text. It is thus the text which is the agency of meaning and not the consciousness of the author. The interest in the autos, therefore, which in effect resulted in the disempowerment of the authorial self, swiftly brings about another shift of interest, coinciding with Jacques Derrida's project of *deconstruction*. This time the emphasis is put on *γραφῆ* (graphē: writing), calling for a new redistribution of weight within the space of *auto-bio-graphy*. The (autobiographical) text must not be understood as the space which accommodates the meaning that the author (as an agent) expresses about himself/herself, but rather as the space in which the author's subjectivity is constructed in the first place rendering subjectivity compliant with the laws of textuality. The structure of the text, as a system of self-proliferating and arbitrary signs, lends itself to the construction and the interpretation of the subject, which, far from being whole and uniform, is decentred, fragmented and multivocal. With its meaning being constantly deferred—just like a text's meaning—the subject is never complete but always in the process of becoming.

Decentring, fragmentation, multivocality and impersonality are concepts that eventually become familiar in one's reading of Nietzsche too. *Myself* becomes the main addressee of *my* writing in my effort to see who *I am* through the writing of *me*: 'I tell myself to myself' (Nietzsche

2008: 157), with the two processes, of the telling of the self and the becoming self being effectively entangled. 'I' is no longer considered as the all-knowing agent, the *εαυτός* (autos: self) which—through writing—reports on or expresses bios (life) from a position of total control and knowledge. On the contrary, writing is the process of putting the subject in words (signs). As Keefe and Smyth explain, 'an autobiography is the locus of the confrontation between a fragmentary self and a multivocal text' (1995: 2).⁷ A similar point is made in Rodolphe Gasché's analysis of the body in *Ecce Homo*, which 'becomes readable through a chain of metaphors' (1990: 113). These metaphors, according to Gasché, represent disconnected and heterogeneous images of the body which is never whole apart from the moments in which images qua metaphors are 'assembled coherently' (114) in the text. Gasché suggests that these fragments of the body—as elusive and singular moments—make it into the text through their being fixed 'by an operation of the pen' (116) as metaphors or 'commemorative signs of the lost actuality of that presence of a whole body' (116), a loss which could also be accounted for with the concept of the *impersonal*. The body comes together and 'is completed with a set of quite heterogeneous elements. The body is everything at once: books, men, landscapes' (121) making sense in their specificity and determinacy in relation to Nietzsche, in the same way as do a few 'biographemes' such as preferences of food, place and climate. Retrieving Nietzsche's own metaphor of the 'diamond' used for Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo* (2007a: 83), Gasché presents the idea of the shaping, the forming and the becoming of the body through continuous (cutting) work: 'So *Ecce Homo* is nothing other than the attempt to constitute a body for oneself, by writing oneself in granite words, by fixing the divine instants of a life, sparkling, like precious stones; it is nothing other than the effort to erect oneself as a monument by fixing oneself with the steely point of a pen' (Gasché 1990: 119).

Gasché's analysis points not only to the involvement of the body in the process of becoming through writing but also to the harshness, arduousness and even painfulness of this process (fixing with the steely point of a pen). Making the body subject to the potential outcomes of this uneasy process of writing (and necessarily of becoming) implies the risk of endangering the body also with madness. The challenging of the

distinction between bios and logos as both already becoming and being shaped within the text sets both in a position of vulnerability in relation to madness. It is this quality of permitting the distinction between logos and bios to be challenged which is at the core of *autobiographical philosophy*.

It has been a common conviction among Nietzsche scholars such as Hollingdale, Nehamas, White, Kaufmann, Hayman, Krell and others that in Nietzsche the life component plays a more important role in his philosophy than in the work of other philosophers. This should not mean, of course, that the only legitimate reading of Nietzsche presupposes a knowledge of his life's little details. What is of the essence, though, is that one be aware that Nietzsche's philosophy is understood when read as a manifestation of life (*his* life), which considers itself lived properly when lived to the fullest, when hearing the instinct of self-preservation and ascent, and when it is lived in consistency with the philosophy which is the graphic expression of all this. Life and philosophy are written, therefore, with an equal degree of intensity and passion for seeking and experimentation: 'To you, the bold seekers, experimenters' (Nietzsche 2008: 124).⁸

Nietzsche's own attitude, however, towards the relation between his life and his philosophy is ambiguous. On the one hand, we read fragments such as the following: 'It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of—namely, the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious auto-biography' (Nietzsche 1997: 4), clearly showing that he considers philosophy—or rather *great* philosophy—intrinsically related to its producer. On the other hand, we come across sentences such as: 'I am one thing, my writings are another' (Nietzsche 2007a: 99). Remarks such as the latter, however, come at a period when Nietzsche is deeply concerned with the image of himself as 'eccentric', 'pathological', and 'psychiatric' going public (from Nietzsche's letter to Reinhard von Seydlitz, 12 February 1888, in Kofman 1994: 54). In another letter, to Carl Fuchs on 14 December 1887, Nietzsche tries to diminish the credibility of such characterizations as well as to explain them: 'the enterprise I am engaged in has something immense and monstrous about it—and I can't blame anyone if here and there they feel a doubt arise about it, as

to whether I am still “in my right mind” (Nietzsche in Kofman 1994: 59). Nietzsche’s real problem with these comments, perhaps, was not that he felt them to be a direct attack on his person, on Herr Nietzsche, but rather that these descriptions and accusations served ‘as grounds for explaining [his] book and as a censorship of it’ (from Nietzsche’s letter to Carl Fuchs, 14 December 1887, in Kofman 1994: 59). Kofman is even of the opinion that Nietzsche might have written *Ecce Homo* in an attempt to show to himself and others that he was sane, or, in the worst case, if he could not convince on that point, at least show that his philosophy is totally independent from a life that has already been stigmatized as abnormal, degenerate and even mad. A number of Nietzsche’s remarks, however, provide evidence which challenges such an independence and suggests that Nietzsche, perhaps unknowingly, attests a relation between life and philosophy, which seems consistent with comments made as early as 1882 in *The Gay Science*: ‘Interpreting myself, I always read/Myself into my books’ (Nietzsche 1974: 49).

On 27 December 1888, Nietzsche writes to Carl Fuchs: ‘All things considered, dear friend, there is no sense any more in talking and writing *about* me; I have settled for the next eternity the question as to who I am, with the book which we are having printed now, *Ecce Homo*. People should not trouble about me hereafter, but about the things for which I exist’ (1996: 340). Nietzsche is trying hard here to make visible a distinction between himself and his texts, but he is caught up in a word game between the two sentences, which results in a very important deduction: the question about who I am is answered by this book, which is about the things for which I exist. Here one can observe the same circularity in the reading that was proposed in the case of Nietzsche’s letter to Naumann (myself, my books, my opinions, my life, et cetera), a circularity which very closely resembles what Rachel Gabara describes when she discusses the autobiographical text *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975): ‘The author of this text will be writing about the writer writing about the writer’ (2006: 3). I treat this circularity or self-reflexivity as indicative of the link that is here being suggested between Nietzsche’s life and his philosophy, also reflected in the weighty assertion that Nietzsche makes through the mouth of Zarathustra that I mentioned earlier: ‘no one tells me anything new, and so I tell myself

to myself' (Nietzsche 2008: 157). What Nietzsche tells himself is himself, with faith in a nearly complete identification between himself and the only thing which is new and worth saying, which is his philosophy. Arguments about an encroaching arrogance are beside the point here—at least for now. Nietzsche identifies himself with philosophy and vice versa with both R. J. Hollingdale and Ronald Hayman confirming this identification by drawing attention especially to the parallels between Nietzsche and Zarathustra (1965: 141 and 1980: 332).

An important example of this identification of life and philosophy in Nietzsche concerns his disillusioned love for Lou Salomé and the bitterness of betrayal by Paul Rée. The way these two relationships developed and ended was experienced by Nietzsche as a blow to his feelings of love, pride and dignity, but what is important is that this negativity had to be turned into something positive; Nietzsche had to make the best out of it. What is revealed in the following quotation from a letter to Overbeck is of considerable importance and shows how Nietzsche saw this misfortune as a 'splendid chance' to put *amor fati* into practice.⁹ In this letter at Christmas of 1882, Nietzsche, in low spirits, writes: 'I have suffered from the humiliating and tormenting memories of this summer as from a bout of madness. [...] Unless I discover the alchemical trick [or magic formula] of turning this—muck to gold, I am lost. Here I have the most splendid chance to prove that for me "all experiences are useful, all days holy and all people divine"!!!' (Nietzsche 1996: 198–199). It is a significant operation that Nietzsche puts to work here. First of all, the muck *has to* turn into gold, and this will happen through an existentially oriented formula which becomes one of his most important philosophical concepts: *amor fati* (love of fate). He leaves to the hands of philosophy the task of helping him overcome this traumatic life experience.

But to fully appreciate the identity of Nietzsche's bios, one needs to acknowledge the presence of a significant quality which infuses it: *impersonality*. It has already been said that Nietzsche plays no grammatical tricks on the reader by mixing the personal pronouns, yet there exists, unarticulated yet permeating his identity, an impersonal 'it', which the careful reader should be able to identify in passages such as the following where Nietzsche explains, for example, how his ideas are conceived only in motion: 'Sitting down [...] is a true *sin* against the Holy Spirit'

(Nietzsche 2007a: 87). In passages like this, the narrator is no longer simply Nietzsche. It is life itself or sitting itself, speaking with a certainty of tautology. Nietzsche does not feel the need to insert his name when writing so that we are clear that all of this is for him alone. *Ecce Homo* is not a manual for escaping decadence; it is rather a description of how Nietzsche tries not to be decadent: ‘What, then, is regressive in the philosopher?—That he teaches that his qualities are the necessary and sole qualities for the attainment of the “highest good”. That he orders men of all kinds *gradatim* up to his type as the highest’ (Nietzsche 1968b: 246). When asked for ‘the way’, Nietzsche declares: ‘That [...] is my taste: - not good, not bad, but *my* taste [...]. “This—it turns out—is *my* way—where is yours?” [...] *The* way after all—it does not exist!’ (2008: 156). The more intimate and personal his accounts are, the more impersonal the narrator becomes. In this light, extreme subjectivity equals absolute objectivity. One’s self should be considered a ‘reliable instrument’ for measuring what is good and what is bad in one’s circumstances, strengths and weaknesses: ‘I have had considerable experience in charting the effects of climatic and meteorological factors, *using myself as a very subtle and reliable instrument* [...]. Naumburg, Schulpforta, Thuringia in general, Leipzig, Basle—all disastrous locations *given my physiology*’ (Nietzsche 2007a: 88; emphasis added). It is in this metaphor of the instrument that Gasché also identifies the circularity I have suggested earlier, which could also be seen as a tautological event of the becoming and the writing, a tautology being acknowledged through the reading: ‘Nietzsche is himself his own book, because his writing is the writing of his body. The first reader of the book-body’ (Gasché 1990: 123).

For a more detailed assessment of the element of the impersonal which marks his identity, Nietzsche’s letter to Carl Fuchs of 14 December 1887 proves considerably important for two reasons: not only does it reveal the weight the impersonal has for Nietzsche’s perception of himself but it also stands as one of the finest examples of the mixture of the autobiographical and the philosophical, each pushing the boundaries of the other to create this third, new space that I have identified as *autobiographical philosophy*. This extract from the inspired yet sober letter, which I quote below at length, could, with minimal alterations, have appeared as an extract in *Ecce Homo* or any other of his

philosophical texts. In this letter, Nietzsche makes explicit reference to the idea of impersonality by using the term ‘depersonalization’.

You chose a *very good* moment to write me a letter. For I am, almost without willing it so, but in accordance with an inexorable necessity, right in the midst of settling my accounts with men and things and putting behind me my whole life hitherto. Almost everything that I do now is a “drawing-the-line under everything.” The vehemence of my inner pulsations has been terrifying, all through these past years; now that I must make the transition to a new and more intense form, I need, above all, a new estrangement, a still more intense *depersonalization*. So it is of the greatest importance what and who still remain to me. What age I am? I do not know—as little as I know how young I shall become. (Nietzsche 1996: 280)

The transition towards this new and more intense form of depersonalized existence requires this detachment from one’s own self; it requires a distance from which Nietzsche can see himself as another; the title of the book—*Ecce Homo* (behold the man)—probably best encapsulates this distance and the pointing finger.

The philosophical character of the letter—consisting of his thoughts about his ‘centre’ and his ‘eccentricity’, his ‘instinct’ or his ‘passion’ to choose correctly, et cetera—as is the case with many of his letters, confirms the close link that exists between Nietzsche’s philosophy and life. *Autobiographical philosophy* is precisely this new space that Nietzsche inaugurates in which bios is inscribed into logos and vice versa, the space in which life is lived as well as read as philosophy, and philosophy is read as a manifestation and expression of life.

Demarcating the Genre of *Autobiographical Philosophy*

The distinction between *autobiographical philosophy* and other philosophical theories of genres which form as a response to an interest in the relation between life and philosophy at different moments in the history of philosophy, such as *philosophical autobiography*, *philosophy of*

life and Stanley Cavell's theory on autobiography and philosophy, can certainly help to clarify important differences between these similar yet different—or even slightly different—genres. Regarding the first distinction (between *autobiographical philosophy* and *philosophical autobiography*), the fundamental difference lies in the fact that while the former is a genre of philosophy, the latter is a type of autobiography. In other words, while the former is constituted upon a very dynamic merging into the text of the philosopher's bios and logos, a merging which, according to Nietzsche, is manifested both in the text as well as in the life, *philosophical autobiography*, 'provides a particularly well-focused medium for the examination of the interplay between life and thought and the need to accept and understand the role of personal judgment in philosophizing' (Baggini 2002: 311). Baggini admits that his claim is made 'on empirical rather than logical grounds' (300), but he continues nonetheless to argue that the special thing about autobiographies written by philosophers is that 'what is revealed of their personalities sheds light on how they thought as philosophers' (300). Even though Baggini's argument may seem to imply a certain blurring between the subjective character of personal judgment and philosophical objectivity, it does not go as far as to radically suggest, as Nietzsche does in *Ecce Homo*, the insertion of bios into logos. The distinction I am pursuing here, therefore, still holds, even if one accepts that by reading a philosopher's autobiography one gets a glimpse of their philosophy, even if to do so fully, as Baggini says, one may still need to read the philosopher's philosophical works. While in *autobiographical philosophy* the focus is on the relation between philosophy and life, in *philosophical autobiography* the focus is on how philosophy is expressed within or via the autobiographical discourse. In other words, in philosophical autobiography there is no simultaneity in the processes of philosophizing and living. Instead, philosophy is only inserted—as an added component—in an otherwise already complete account of a largely independent life.

The second distinction that needs to be made is between *autobiographical philosophy* and the nineteenth-century philosophical school of thought known as *Lebensphilosophie* (life philosophy or philosophy of life),¹⁰ which was introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey in Germany. Dilthey's main (and unfinished) philosophical project, known as the

Critique of Historical Reason, should be read—as the title already suggests—as a dialogue with Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). For Dilthey, Jos de Mul remarks, ‘Kant reduced humankind to a purely intellectual subject [...]. In place of this bloodless subject, [...] Dilthey brought the living, flesh-and-blood human being to the fore—that is, a human being who is guided not only by his intellectual powers but by his will and by his feelings as well. [...] [Moreover,] whereas in his criticism Kant assumed reason to be pure and timeless, Dilthey placed the emphasis on the historical nature of reason and argued that fundamental philosophical investigation cannot be disassociated from historical investigation’ (2004: 2). One could easily observe the striking similarities between Dilthey’s and Nietzsche’s philosophical agendas in terms of their ‘cultural diagnoses’ (24), that is, their concern not only about Kantianism but also about the prominence of positivism and scientism, as well as in terms of their interest in life. Despite these similarities, however, Dilthey’s understanding of *philosophy of life* is not the same as *autobiographical philosophy*.

Dilthey does not formulate a philosophical system or genre with certain characteristics which would be classified as ‘philosophy of life’. Interestingly, what came to be known as Dilthey’s *philosophy of life* is in reality a ‘hermeneutics of life’ (Bollnow 1955) or even an ‘ontology of life’ (de Mul 2004). According to de Mul, therefore, Dilthey ‘was of the opinion that reality cannot be a priori constructed with the aid of fixed metaphysical concepts but can only be understood from concrete life experience’ (2004: 35). The distinction I am pursuing here between Dilthey’s *life philosophy* and the *autobiographical philosophy* initiated by Nietzsche is thus based on two interrelated facts. The first is that there is an element of *normativity* in Dilthey’s *life philosophy*, which is absent both from Nietzsche’s idea of philosophy as well as from what I read as *autobiographical philosophy*. The second is that Dilthey’s conception of life and of descriptive psychology, which replaces epistemology and signifies the ‘task of obtaining an “analytic knowledge of the universal characteristics of man” by means of pure description’ (Dilthey in de Mul 2004: 161), is likely to be based on a certain degree of essentialism regarding the value of human introspection, consciousness and self-reflexive thinking which he identifies as philosophical. This essentialism will also have to be seen as running counter to Nietzsche’s thought.

Dilthey identifies the onset of *life philosophy* with the change that was brought by the work of ‘the Sceptics, Epicureans, and Stoics, [...] of Cicero, Lucretius, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius’ (1969: 13), with which philosophical claims to universal validity gradually relaxed and the subject matter shifted. ‘The hierarchy of individual problems changed: the cosmological problem was subordinated to the problem of the value and purpose of life’ (13), which was to be associated with a growing interest in normativity, pedagogy and ethics. This could be observed in Dilthey’s emphasis on this new philosophy’s elements of ‘character-building’, ‘virtue’ and ‘application’. ‘In the Roman-Stoic system,’ he writes in *The Essence of Philosophy* (1954), ‘the character-building power of philosophy came to the fore. [...] Cicero sees in philosophy “the teacher of life, the discoverer of laws, the guide to every virtue,” and Seneca defines it as the theory and art of the correct conduct of life. In other words, philosophy is a way of life, not mere theory, and so the expression “wisdom” is readily applied to it’ (1969: 13). Foucault too may be seen as following this tradition as it becomes evident from his lectures at the Collège de France in 1982–1983 under the topic ‘The Government of Self and Others’: ‘The reality of philosophy is practice’, not ‘as the practice of *logos*’ but ‘as “practices,” in the plural; the practice of philosophy in its practices, its exercises’ which are directed towards ‘the subject itself’: ‘Philosophy finds its reality in the practice of philosophy understood as the set of practices through which the subject has a relationship to itself, elaborates itself, and works on itself. The reality of philosophy is this work of self on self’ (Foucault 2010a: 242). The direction philosophy is likely to take from here is indeed towards a manual of how to live a good life, something which Nietzsche was strongly opposing. Nowadays, this understanding of philosophy may also be referred to as *philosophy of life* or *philosophy for life*.¹¹

The other issue which makes Dilthey’s conception of *philosophy of life* incompatible with *autobiographical philosophy* is the fact that Dilthey proposes that meta-thought or self-reflexive thinking is in itself philosophical: ‘wherever the subject, who relates himself to this world in his activity, rises in the same way to reflection on this activity of his, the reflection is philosophical’ (Dilthey 1969: 75). Dilthey’s idea of

philosophy, therefore, is closely associated with consciousness, which in turn he considers an intrinsic—and essential—human trait: philosophy ‘is embedded in the structure of man’ (36). What Nietzsche sees as contingent to the need for social communication, Dilthey accepts as essentially human. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche argues that consciousness, or life’s ‘seeing itself in the mirror’, is conditional upon man’s need to communicate and even more primarily his need to survive: ‘*consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need for communication*; that from the start it was needed and useful only between human beings [...] and that it also developed only in proportion to the degree of this utility’ (1974: 298). And he continues even more clearly: ‘My idea is, as you can see, that consciousness does not really belong to man’s individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature’ (299). It is in the next aphorism, however, that de Mul identifies Nietzsche’s implicit criticism of Dilthey, where he challenges Dilthey’s idea that through the ‘inner world’ or the ‘facts of consciousness’ one can reach knowledge. That these facts were familiar was for Dilthey a given and an advantage, while for Nietzsche it was an illusion:

Even the most cautious among [these men of knowledge] suppose that what is familiar is at least *more easily knowable* than what is strange, and that, for example, sound method demands that we start from the ‘inner world,’ from the ‘facts of consciousness,’ because this world is *more familiar to us*. Error of errors! What is familiar is what we are used to; and what we are used to is most difficult to ‘know’—that is, to see as a problem; that is, to see as strange, as distant, as ‘outside us’. (Nietzsche 1974: 301)

On the contrary, Dilthey argues that ‘[i]n inner experience we are given this reality of consciousness, and with it the possibility of knowing more profoundly from the source the various products of the human mind as they are understood in the human studies’ (1969: 23). In direct opposition to this, Nietzsche expresses his apprehension with this acquisition of consciousness or knowledge through Dilthey’s ‘inner experience’ or what he himself calls introspection:

We psychologists of the future—we have little patience with introspection: we almost take it for a sign of degeneration when an instrument tries ‘to know itself’ [...]. First mark of the self-preservative instinct of the great psychologist: he never seeks himself, he has no eyes for himself, no interest or curiosity in himself——The great egoism of our dominating will requires that we shut our eyes to ourselves——that we must seem to be ‘impersonal,’ ‘désintéressé,’ ‘objective’!——oh, how much we are the opposite of this! (Nietzsche 1968b: 230)

In this extract from *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche not only challenges the Greek maxim γνῶθι σαυτόν (know thyself), when it implies the illusion of the subject’s total control, but also establishes once more the importance of the notion of impersonality, the necessity to see ourselves as an other.

The final ‘distinction’ which is the most difficult to make—and, in a sense, impossible in an absolute way—is between *autobiographical philosophy* as is understood and treated in this book and American philosopher Stanley Cavell’s proposal regarding these two practices or ‘exercises’: philosophy and autobiography. I confess that I discovered Cavell’s work when this book was very close to completion and I was both somewhat concerned as well as content when I realised that even if Cavell was thinking within a different context—*ordinary language philosophy*—and despite clear differences in perspective and purpose, some of the profound principles of his understanding of this relation (between philosophy and autobiography) echoed mine, or rather, mine echoed his. For this reason, and despite a few minor differences that I will outline here, I choose to present Cavell’s ideas in terms of a fortuitous intellectual companionship.

In *A Pitch of Philosophy* (1994), in which Cavell employs an autobiographical perspective himself,¹² puts forward his two ‘guiding intuitions’: (a) ‘that there is an internal connection between philosophy and autobiography, that each is a dimension of the other,’ and (b) ‘that there are events of a life that turn its dedication toward philosophy’ (1994: vii). Cavell’s second intuition—as he himself admits—points towards and triggers the question ‘What is an education for philosophy?’. In other words, which pool does the philosopher draw from? Which is

the source of the evidence he uses? How does he educate himself as a philosopher who distinguishes himself from other philosophers. This last qualifier is very important and already points towards Cavell's indebtedness to the views of the American Romantic essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), especially his advocacy of individualism and his belief that it is the most personal that has the most universal value: 'the deeper the scholar dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true' (Emerson in Cavell 1994: vii). This universalisation of the personal—the claim to speak for the human in universal terms—is precisely the ground upon which Cavell accounts for what he calls *philosophy's arrogation* and *arrogance*, namely philosophy's 'arrogant assumption of the right to speak for others' (vii–viii). It is the same arrogance that Cavell identifies in autobiography using as an example, apart from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854),¹³ Nietzsche's megalomaniac outburst in *Ecce Homo* evident in sentences such as 'I have ... given mankind the greatest gift that has ever been given it' (Nietzsche in Cavell 1994: 3). Cavell observes that despite this structural similarity between philosophy and autobiography, which lies behind Cavell's first intuition, philosophy's reaction towards the autobiographical is one of ambivalence and rejection because it (the autobiographical) is perceived as alien to philosophy's claim to speak 'with necessity and universality' (3). It is safe to assume that Cavell implies that philosophy has hitherto been based on a misunderstanding from its part akin to a forgetting about this structural similarity it shares with the autobiographical and the necessary connection between the personal and the universal. This is why he calls for and works towards what he calls a 'new philosophy': the *ordinary language philosophy*. This new philosophy, according to Cavell, escapes the constraints of this misunderstanding and, through a turn to the ordinary, the personal and the contextual, tries to reach *neutrality*. Cavell endorses this new philosophy precisely because of its emphasis on speaking in the first person and its analysis not of abstract logical formulations but of concrete uses of linguistic expressions. Despite the fact that Cavell first identifies these characteristics in the work of J. L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein, he insists that these characteristics 'are not personal', in other words, they are not specific to Austin and

Wittgenstein, but they are ‘structural features of the necessity to say what we say’ (10). Ordinary language philosophers acknowledge their philosophy’s arrogance which is an acknowledgement of philosophy’s autobiographicality.

Cavell, therefore, presents philosophers as having two fundamental choices, namely rejecting or accepting the autobiographical, a choice with weighty implications. Those who do the former deprive themselves of what would justify their authority as philosophers with the right to speak for the others: ‘Philosophers who shun the autobiographical must find another route to philosophical authority, to, let’s say, the a priori, to speaking with necessity and universality [...] and find another interpretation of its arrogance’ (8). On the other hand, in his autobiographical text *Little Did I Know* (2010) he recalls how Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s (philosophical) methods were autobiographical and how they insisted that ‘I speak philosophically for others when they recognize what I say as what they would say, recognize that their language is mine’ (Cavell 2010: 6). Cavell confesses these ideas to be heavily marked by his, and especially, his father’s experience as an immigrant in the United States, namely, of lacking the means of comprehension, expression and communication.

But what happens when one acknowledges the autobiographicality of philosophy? In *A Pitch of Philosophy* Cavell explains that ‘[n]ot to shun the autobiographical means running the risk of turning philosophically critical discourse into clinical discourse’ (8). The remarkable closeness of this idea to my understanding of *autobiographical philosophy* and its symbolic effect is unquestionable. Cavell may not articulate it explicitly, but what he describes here as the result of the insertion of the autobiographical into the philosophical is the putting of the latter in a position of vulnerability. This notion of *vulnerability*, Yi-Ping Ong pertinently suggests, is incorporated in Cavell’s ‘technique of excerpting’ which is ‘a reminder that our lives, as our utterances, come out of fragments and return to them’ (2011: 964). Moreover, vulnerability seems to be related to Cavell’s use of the concept of *losing one’s voice*, an experience to which Cavell relates: ‘for the third explicit time in my life I found myself creatively stopped, not understandably challenged and inspired, but at a dead end’ (2010: 451); later in the same passage from *Little Did I Know* he describes it as ‘the inescapable human subjection to the terror

of inexpressiveness' (452), an anxiety which is justified also because of Cavell's sense of responsibility for one to express oneself, for the philosopher to speak. This loss or 'absence' of voice, Cavell compares to the experience of being a child—when one has not yet found his voice—a comparison, however, which he traces to the periods during which his parents were not speaking to each other. During these periods of his parents' 'speechlessness' young Stanley wondered whether his parents were mad, a question which floated over him as well, who was in the middle of such—linguistic, intellectual and emotional—unintelligibility. This leads Cavell to pursue—in philosophy—this comparison between childhood and madness on the basis of the 'isolation and unintelligibility' that a child goes through while learning the world and acquiring language. This sense of isolation and unintelligibility, Cavell claims, perhaps somewhat hyperbolically, is so great that he is willing to present childhood as a 'state akin to madness' (1994: 22). Although it is clear that Cavell here is constructing a metaphor—*akin* to madness—he nonetheless seeks evidence from psychoanalysis (Melanie Klein) and poetry (Elizabeth Bishop) in order to validate his claim on literal rather than metaphorical grounds. Yet, the construct can only be metaphorical. So, is this how we are supposed to understand the 'clinical discourse' too?

The notions of vulnerability and madness seem to hold less when Cavell provides examples to illustrate it. His example of Descartes, who 'wondered whether his doubts about his existence might not class him with madmen', betrays a different, perhaps lighter or more superficial notion of what Cavell's understanding of this clinical discourse might be. How are the *Meditations* an 'autobiographical experiment' (8) or where does the (philosophically) critical meet the clinical—or risks meeting the clinical—in Descartes' text in which he exposes his doubt or his certainty about his existence and his difference from the mad? Chapter 11 will, hopefully, illuminate the doubts I am raising here.

It seems to me that one should not overlook the philosophical perspective from which Cavell's understanding of the autobiographical is filtered. His background in *ordinary language philosophy* is perhaps to account for his attention being based primarily on a linguistic level. Despite the fact that he also considers texts such as *Ecce Homo*,

in his analysis of these ideas, and especially through some of the other examples he uses, Cavell gives the impression that the insertion of the pronoun 'I' in the text would be enough to qualify the text as autobiographical. In other words, the insertion of the 'I' seems to stand as valuable evidence for the philosopher's acknowledgement of the source—the personal, the subjective, the 'anecdotal' and the 'autobiographical' source—of the authority of the claims he makes.

For Cavell, and despite his passing acknowledgement of the existence of vulnerability and the risk of exposure implied in writing philosophy autobiographically, this same practice concludes with a sense of achievement. Cavell proposes to talk about philosophy in connection with the idea of *finding one's voice* through a combination of inheriting from the past and inventing for the future with emphasis on the role of language in this perception and construction of the self. While the process of translation between the self and language seems to require a loss of the self, the self is, nonetheless, reconstructed as a more dynamic and self-assured entity which can now enjoy anew the authority and the right to speak for the community, the 'we': 'finding one's voice through an autobiographical exercise is a work of mourning for the rebirth of the self' (Saito 2009: 254), for arriving at self-knowledge. So one loses themselves in order to find themselves, to constitute themselves stronger, to find their voice as themselves. This points to an aspect of this philosophical-autobiographical writing which Cavell's readers do not fail to pick: its 'aspiration toward the therapeutic' (Cavell 1994: 4), perhaps, a Wittgensteinian inheritance itself.¹⁴ The 'therapeutic process of gaining a clear view', and consequently of achieving *perspicuity*, as Hagberg points out in his reading of Wittgenstein, 'is common to both' philosophical and autobiographical investigations (2003: 203). The possibility of perspicuity which Wittgenstein allocates also to the 'ordinary' language and expression, Cavell relates to 'the movement from being lost to finding oneself' (1996: 378).

I conclude this brief outline of Cavell's ideas about the relation between the philosophical and the autobiographical with an acknowledgement of these ideas' consonance with aspects of *autobiographical philosophy* as is treated in this book and my intention is neither to distort this consonance or worse silence it. My aim, though, is to build on

the notion of vulnerability (Chap. 6) that the insertion of the autobiographical into the philosophical necessarily secures, and to further comment on the symbolic value of *autobiographical philosophy* as a response to madness, that condition of absence of voice. Yet, while Cavell's understanding of how the autobiographical meets the philosophical is more general and less qualified, I identify the onset of the demand for this response and of *autobiographical philosophy* as being inaugurated with *Ecce Homo*.

With *Ecce Homo* and *autobiographical philosophy*, Nietzsche initiated and acted out a new way of relating to one's own existence: to live life as philosophy—but as the philosophy which in turn does justice to life rather than that which attempts to model it according to certain philosophical doctrines, virtues, principles, et cetera—and write philosophy as a real manifestation of (this) life and not as an attempt to abstract and purify empirical reality. Instead, *autobiographical philosophy* reflects the incompleteness and polymorphousness of our existence, our life and our bodies. Nietzsche's *autobiographical philosophy* is not a doctrine; it is a call for us to be faithful and say 'Yes!' not to him, but to our specificity and to life. *Autobiographical philosophy* is thus the philosophical genre which initiates the act and the signature of the philosopher's pledge. It is a commitment which comes with an acknowledgement of the necessity of putting oneself at risk as well as with a compliance to it; a pledge to what I call the putting of the self on the line. Within the sphere of *autobiographical philosophy*, one can go as far as one chooses. In Bataille terms, one knows how far one can go but, of course, what distinguishes one philosopher from another is precisely the distance that they choose to cover which translates into the extent of the risk they are prepared to take.

The Line Between Nietzsche's Life and Philosophy

Reinforcing the idea that the only reading which is philosophically legitimate is the one which reads the *bios* (of the philosopher) as being part of the (wider philosophical) system is Derrida's (technical) account

of the relation between *bios*, *logos* and *graphē*. In *Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name* (1982), Derrida describes the borderline that traverses the corpus (philosophy) and the body (life) as 'not a thin line' (1988: 5). The significance of Nietzsche here lies precisely in the fact that he challenges, in effect, the thickness of this line which is implied by Derrida. Living life philosophically and turning philosophy into the philosophy of his life, Nietzsche challenges the boundaries of the two spaces, and he gradually comes to suggest (not explicitly but implicitly) an experience of the two as one. We are therefore left to see how the 'dynamis' (Derrida's term for this borderline) is constituted and how 'not thin' it remains.

Using as a perspective the space between *logos* (reason and/or language) and *grammē* (line) or *graphē* (writing), Derrida proceeds towards the production of a discourse on *bios* which encompasses both life and death, sketching its terminological derivatives: *logical—graphical*, *biological—biographical* and *thanatological—thanatographical* (4–5). But Derrida's commitment to the ethical is quickly revealed through his understanding of the biographical not as a text alone, 'a corpus of empirical accidents', but rather as a system in which communication is possible. Through the biographical space a voice is raised but also the demand for an ear. It is the space where 'the proper name and the signature' (5) may be read or heard. The operation of this space depends on the relation or the 'borderline' between 'the system and the subject of the system', between the work and the life, between *logos* and *bios*. We have already seen that Derrida calls this borderline *dynamis* on account of its force and understands it as 'not thin'. In my view, Nietzsche challenges both the thickness of this *dynamis* suggested by Derrida, and the implied demarcation between the spaces of *logos* and *bios* that *dynamis* creates. In other words, what I propose here is a re-evaluation of the alleged visibility and thickness of the line in the case of Nietzsche, which separates 'the enclosure of the philosophemes, on the one hand, and the life of an author already identifiable behind the name, on the other' (5). The potentiality of the thickness of *dynamis* to be challenged and transformed, as is indeed what happens in the case of Nietzsche, is an essential characteristic of *autobiographical philosophy* and consequently of the extent of the risk that the philosopher is willing to take.

In one of his question to Derrida in the *Roundtable on Autobiography*, Rodolphe Gasché introduces the term ‘border’ to suggest that it is ‘the internal border of work and life’ from where texts are produced (1988: 41). Unless the border is porous, though, in which case it would allow for a relation between what it divides, it is generally accepted that it maintains a safe distance between the two parts be this mental, physical, social, political, et cetera. As an alternative to Derrida’s *dynamis* and Gasché’s *border*, then, I would like to introduce the equally pictorial two-set Venn diagram with the surfaces of the two circles indicating the two elements—work and life—in terms of space. What is most useful with this diagram is that it clearly depicts the relation of the two spaces or elements while indicating at the same time a third space that the relation itself creates. This third space needs to be understood not as fixed and static but on the contrary as flexible and changeable due to its ability to shrink or expand. It is the intersection of the two circles, the shared space, in which the ‘autobiographical-philosophical event’ in Nietzsche takes place. This is the shared space of the work that is not work alone and of life that is not life alone (see Fig. 2.1). In Nietzsche, this space, which I will call *auto-bio-logico-graphical* is large and growing larger. It is impossible to attach exact dates to the figures below, since the expansion of this third space should be understood as a dynamic process, which led to the point when—and this was even before Nietzsche’s collapse in Turin, in 1889—there were hardly two distinct spaces or realms of activity (see Fig. 2.2).

As the *auto-bio-logico-graphical* space expands or when, as Derrida states, ‘the problem of the *autos*, of the autobiographical, [is] redistributed’ (1988: 45)—an expansion which implies that the degree of assimilation between the body (life) and the corpus (work) increases—the previously distinct spaces of the body and the corpus shrink as they lose their independence, autonomy and balance, and living and writing are no longer that distinguishable.

The importance of this space is more than symbolic. It is the space from which subjectivity is constructed. Since Nietzsche tells us that there is no (unitary) self which knows or which is to be known, there cannot be any (unitary) subject to write about. Therefore, *Ecce Homo* does not—cannot—tell the story of an ‘I’. Sarah Kofman first

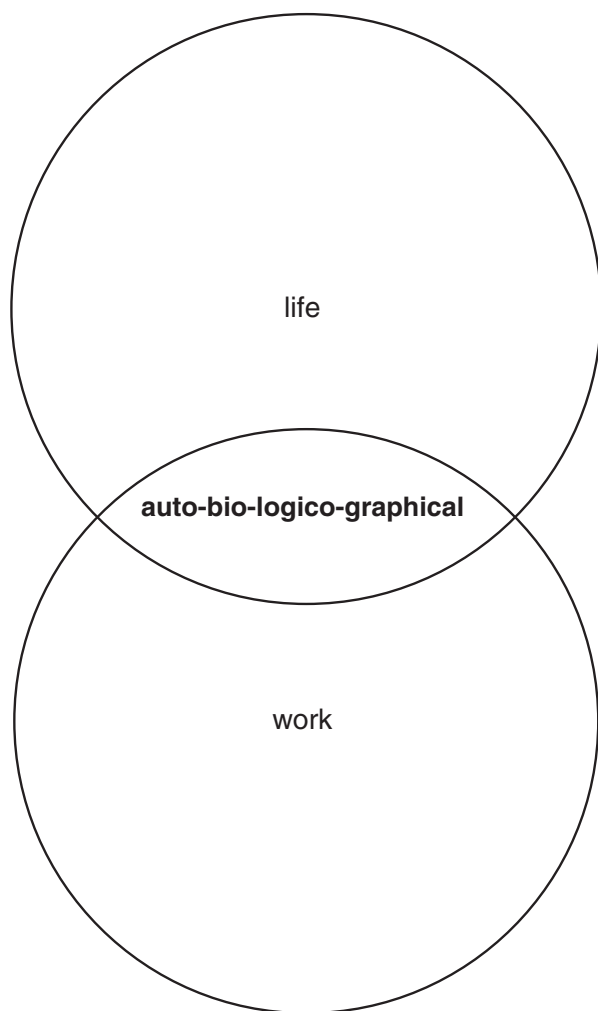


Fig. 2.1 A schematic representation of the intersection of *earlier* Nietzsche's life and work

introduces this idea only to relate it to the taking off of the masks Nietzsche has been assuming so far, also suggesting that 'only the time of the autobiography permits the "I" to accede to itself in a gesture of selective and discriminative reaffirmation' (1994: 57). It is rather the

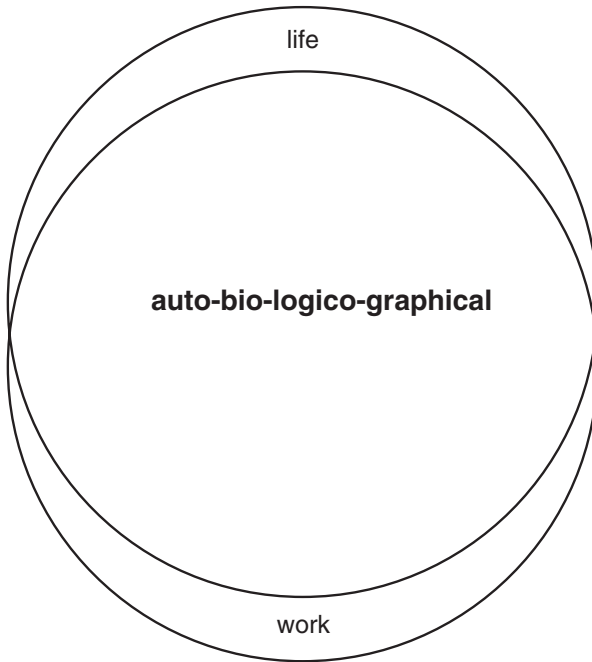


Fig. 2.2 A schematic representation of the dramatically expanded intersection of *later* Nietzsche's life and work

story itself that constructs the 'I' both as the narrating/writing subject and as the narrated/written object. Bios (life) is, therefore, writing itself. Nietzsche's *dynamis* keeps shrinking, getting thinner—in self-destruction or self-overcoming—until it dissolves, allowing philosophy to take over and determine his life. This complete dissolution of *dynamis* is the same as the maximization of the intersection of the Venn diagram, the *auto-bio-logico-graphical* space. The two circles slide one over the other, leaving very little intact from the spaces of work and life, and creating instead this prevailing overlapping third space which becomes almost the only space, the only corpus. Philosophy, in other words, is beginning to write his life, but since his life *is* philosophy and his philosophy *is* his life, it is life which is actually writing itself, upsetting the power structures of agency and agent, of subject and object, of philosopher

and philosopheme. The loss of the distinction between the two spheres of activity (philosophy and life) leads to Nietzsche assuming in life his philosophical personas, that of Dionysus and of the Crucified among others. The symptoms of such a merging of the two spheres into one also implies a breaking away from the conventions of linguistic expression into a style that could be called 'eccentric and liberated' or 'histrionic', even if language does not break down completely until the final mental collapse. This is the moment when the *auto-bio-logico-graphical* space takes over completely. The impersonal turns from a philosophical device into reality. Impersonality is *fleshed out*. Nietzsche enters into psychosis.

Notes

1. Franz Camille Overbeck (1837–1905) was a German Protestant theologian. His friendship with Nietzsche began in the early 1870s at the University of Basel where the two worked as Professors of New Testament Exegesis and Old Church History, and Classical Philology respectively. They remained close friends throughout their lives. Immediately after 7 January 1889, when Overbeck received a letter from Nietzsche, symptomatic of his mental instability, he travelled to Turin where Nietzsche was and took him to a psychiatric clinic in Basel. Overbeck continued to visit Nietzsche until his death in 1900.
2. The term 'autobiography' was first suggested as a hybrid word in 1797 by William Taylor (English scholar; 1765–1836), even if deprecatingly due to what he perceived as its pedantic character, and later, in 1809, by Robert Southey (English Romantic poet; 1774–1843) in its present sense.
3. Lejeune's definition of 'autobiography' first appears in 1971 in *L'Autobiographie en France*, while the revised one, which is used here, appears in 1989 in *On Autobiography*.
4. In his preface to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971), Roland Barthes defines the 'biographeme' as follows: 'Were I a writer, and dead, how I would love it if my life, through the pains of some friendly and detached biographer, were to reduce itself to a few details, a few preferences [tastes], a few inflections, let us say: to "biographemes"' (1977: 9).

5. Named after *Structuralism* (an intellectual movement of the early- to mid-twentieth century), which offered an interpretation of culture in terms of structures which are manifested in language, *Post-structuralism* is a school of thought which challenges the principles of Structuralism and their implications. Specifically, it sought to undermine any conceptual, theoretical or ideological system which claimed to have universal validity and offered a model of subjectivity as a work in progress devoid of fixed or predetermined meanings. Seen in this light, then, the meaning of philosophical, literary, artistic or other cultural products remains for ever open and undecided, indeed undecidable. Post-structuralism was a predominantly French phenomenon which developed in the 1960s and established itself internationally by the 1970s, and is associated with philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jean Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, and others.
6. Simon Critchley's claim raises the need for a brief terminological clarification here, namely that in the context of this book, the term 'bios' encompasses the otherwise different concepts of *body* as well as of (*empirical*) *life*.
7. See here a fuller presentation of this idea as is expressed by Keefe and Smyth: 'The emphasis on the decentred self would mean that autobiographical writing could no longer be regarded as a privileged and unproblematic site of self-expression; the unity of the text had been contested in parallel with the unity of the subject. Deconstructive and psychoanalytic criticism in particular seemed to have forced a reappraisal of the relationship between writing and the self. [...] Indeed, the study of autobiography emerges as affording the possibility of analysing the processes by which selfhood is constructed; uniquely, it becomes the site of the formation of subjectivity through writing. From this point of view, an autobiography is the locus of the confrontation between a fragmentary self and a multivocal text' (Keefe and Smyth 1995: 2).
8. In this edition of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2008), the translator, Adrian Del Caro, uses instead the words 'searchers' and 'researches', but in a footnote he explains the related meanings of searching, attempting, experimenting, researching and tempting, entailed in the words 'Suchern' and 'Versuchern' that Nietzsche uses.

9. 'My formula for human greatness is *amor fati* [love of fate]: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it—all idealism is hypocrisy towards necessity—but to *love* it...' (Nietzsche 2007a: 99).
10. After the First World War, life philosophy was viciously attacked because it was considered to have 'facilitated the success of the general biologism in the theory of culture, which culminated in National Socialist racism' (Schnädelbach 1984: 149). It is the same criticism that had already come from Georg Lukács in *The Destruction of Reason* (1962), where he presents Dilthey as 'the founder of imperialistic vitalism' (1980: 417) and Nietzsche as 'the founder of irrationalism in the imperialistic period' (309) as well as 'a direct forerunner of the Hitlerian view' (337). Again, like Schnädelbach, Lukács had argued that 'both by his historical relativism and nihilistic scepticism and by his irrationalist view of life Dilthey made possible the rise of the Fascist *Weltanschauung*' (de Mul 2004: 45).
11. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (1995); A. C. Grayling, *The Meaning of Things: Applying Philosophy to Life* (2001); Deric Bircham, *A Philosophy for Life* (2006); Robert Rowland Smith's *Breakfast With Socrates: A day with the world's greatest minds: The Philosophy of Everyday Life* (2010); Jules Evans, *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations* (2012); Trevor Curnow, *Introducing Philosophy for Everyday Life: A Practical Guide*, (2012); John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (2012).
12. According to Michael Gorra, 'the "autobiographical exercises" in Cavell's *A Pitch of Philosophy* seem a failure' because, he claims, the text would not be 'accessible and interesting to a reader who doesn't already know the permutations of its author's thought' (1995: 146). In my view, Gorra completely misses the point regarding the nature of Cavell's text. For a full account of Gorra's criticism, see his article 'The Autobiographical Turn' (1995).
13. Henry David Thoreau was an American essayist, poet, philosopher and historian. *Walden* (first published in 1854 with the title: *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*) is an account of Thoreau's views on simple living in nature.
14. See Garry Hagberg's article 'On Philosophy as Therapy: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Autobiographical Writing' (2003).

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