

Title	What compels you to tell about yourself? : Autobiography, biography, and biopolitics
Author(s)	Nyuya, Shuichi
Citation	Philosophia OSAKA. 2013, 8, p. 63-75
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/26502">https://doi.org/10.18910/26502</a>
rights	©2013 by Shuichi NYUYA. All rights reserved.
Note	

***Osaka University Knowledge Archive : OUKA***

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

Osaka University

Shuichi NYUYA (Osaka University)

What compels you to tell about yourself?

——Autobiography, biography, and biopolitics——<sup>1</sup>

Whose voice may be heard, whose speech is legitimate,  
who can tell their own story when it also involves the  
stories of others—these are questions every writer who  
ventures out onto the thin ice of autobiography must face.  
—Alice Wexler, *Mapping Fate: A Memoir of Family,  
Risk, and Genetic Research*

\* \* \*

First, I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Sergei E. Yachin, my friend Maxim Bulanenko, and my colleagues at Far Eastern State Technical University in Vladivostok for giving me an opportunity to address and discuss my concerns. In front of you whose language and culture are different from mine, I feel both anticipation and anxiety. But this feelings are just a matter what I want to keep in mind in this essay.

So, I'd like to explain my theme, which is the autobiographical process of "giving an account of oneself." It cannot be reduced to various, so-called autobiographical elements that have formed my individual life up until now. I say this not just because I expect and assume that my theme possesses a certain kind of universality, but also because I think that explaining myself will be impossible if I do not acknowledge the structure through which I am involved with the "you" I want to address with my voice. At the center of my argument is the idea that a narrative of oneself not only involves others but also being involved with them, and, therefore, the speaker and listener—in my conception, this also applies to the relationship between autobiography and biography—do not represent a simple opposition. In this case, not only the question of how "my" autobiography treats the others (for instance, parents) who contributed greatly to "my" birth and growth, but also the question of how the others as the legitimate or illegitimate heirs to "my" life treat "myself" by writing "my" story (biography), become problematic. According to my guess, this is the point that the following statement concerns the existence of "outsideness" or a "border," terms that Prof. Sergei puts forth as decisive elements of the "personality".

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at *Das Bild der Philosophie an der Grenze der Kulturen*, Far Eastern State Technical University in Vladivostok, Russia, 27-28 May, 2011. I would like to thank the audience of the conference, in particular, Professor Sergey Yachin and my friend Maxim E. Bulanenko for their helpful comment and intellectual support.

## 1. Introduction

Up until now, autobiography has been a secondary research object for philosophers. Instead, certain thinkers' systems, logic, and doctrines are discussed as philosophical problems. A thinker's life and body (corpus) are different from the works (corpus) that materialize his or her spirit, and it has been assumed that an autobiography that describes the process of living is merely an episode in life. There is one person who opposes such a division;<sup>2</sup> however, there is little chance that the philosopher will discuss autobiography now. It seems circumstances have remained the same surrounding the meta-level question of the power and relation of meanings that socially and historically formulate the genre of autobiography.

Let me enumerate the concerns that I will touch on as follows:

- Why does a person write autobiography ?
- At whom is the writing of autobiography aimed?
- Why do we read autobiography?
- Is there a form and norm in autobiography? Is there anything upon which this genre is based?
- When did the genre of autobiography first appear?
- Is autobiography a particularly European, modern form of narrative?
- What meaning does autobiography have in the present age?
- What guarantees the truth of an autobiography? This question is related to the problem of the difference between autobiography and biography. Are autobiographies more reliable than the biographies that are written not by the person concerned but a third party?
- Which autobiographies are worth reading?
- Finally, regarding the authority of oneself as the "author" of one's life, is it natural to admit absolute autonomy to the self who is the author of an autobiography?

Because these are as vast as the problem, I must admit that it has not been easy to decide where start. Thus, I want to admit my own prejudice, even if it only applies to the proposed discussion slightly. This prejudice is that the autobiographies that I am repeatedly compelled to read are more or less written with the crisis of some lives in mind. This does not mean that

---

<sup>2</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Autobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, English edition edited by Christie McDonald; a translation by Peggy Kamuf of the French edition edited by Claude Levesque and Christie McDonald, University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

statistical data requires that most people should write an autobiography in their later years, just before their death. Edward W. Said began his life story by facing his diagnosis with a leukemia that was not curable.<sup>3</sup> Alice Wexler wrote about the days she spent fighting on behalf of those with Huntington's disease and her fear that the disease might also manifest in her. Walter Benjamin wrote about his childhood in Berlin, focusing on the fact that it was not possible to return to his motherland. Theodor W. Adorno wrote an autobiographical essay (*Minima Moralia*) just after World War II in the United States, which was a foreign country for him. Does the motive to try to "transfer" the experience of living to its writing arise from the limited situations of life themselves? This problem seems to be relevant even in the present age. This is because, in the present age, when everyone appeals for their right to explain their lives, the meaning of quality life and death for the individual has thoroughly changed, and life's traditional definition and the sense of its value are also collapsing. These conflicting phenomena especially interest me.

Will autobiography merely be historical material that relays old fact irrelevant to life today? Moreover, is autobiography only a form of privileged cultural management that does not relate to most people? Absolutely not. That is the starting point for this consideration. According to my observations, the rise of social pressure has prompted the individual to view his or her life as public information and the spread of the system of bio-politics (M. Foucault), which has led to attempts to categorize shared individual living histories under social management, reveals the main historical trend that characterizes the present age (2). Here, it seems to me that a very "literary" act of talking about personal circumstances becomes synchronized with a very "political" aspect, in which an individual life is not ended because managing its self-conclusion allows it to be generalized and to become reproducible information (3).

I certainly cannot represent a pure "I" in a narrative, as I see only the "me" reflected in the mirror. The words that seem to represent me are not belongings that only I can freely use. In addition, it is outside the reach of my power to determine how the contents that I write down will be understood. In that sense, to write an autobiography deeply concerns the political problem of succession as it relates to double "others," namely, the preceding and following persons. At the same time, this is also an educational problem. Living and enriching one's life means "learning" from others' lives. For this reason, reading an autobiography can offer more than the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity. However, can this relationship be one-sided? Can I adapt my favorite elements from a preceding person's life in reading his or her autobiography, and can a person who follows me take his or her favorite

---

<sup>3</sup> Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir*, Vintage Books, 2000.

elements from my life in same way? In what follows, I will consider an autobiography of Wexler in detail to see how asymmetric, but never one-sided, communication is being built between her and the people who preceded her and will follow her (4).

Judith Butler states that giving an account of oneself is always correlated to the address from others. For the most part, I agree with that. However, I emphasize the political implications of this correlation more heavily than Butler does. It is the mechanism of ethical and political power, which encourages anyone to narrate his or her story, and not the history of autobiography as a literary genre that I want to clarify here to the extent that I can (5).

## 2. What compels you to tell about yourself?

In *Living Autobiographically*, P. Eakin addresses the important role of narrative in the formation of personal identity. He says the following: “Our social arrangements—in the United States, at least—assume that we all have narrative identities and that we can display them on demand.”<sup>4</sup> According to him, talking about oneself in a systematic way is a practice imposed upon children from the American middle-class, particularly through the school curriculum. Such children come to establish themselves as autonomous individuals through this practice. At the same time, children acquire the linguistic model they need to make their individual existences recognizable to others. This process is not a simple one, because, in this case, being autonomous does not mean learning to express one’s personality selfishly. Rather, it means making one’s story fit in with a story that can be shared with others well enough that one can be accepted as someone with a so-called “normal” character. Various systems, such as schools, class, race, firms, or vocational groups, ask an individual to go through the process of accepting a sense of values that can then be interpret as his or her “story.” Eakin argues that questions such as “What do you do?” represent the most commonplace language that can be used to prompt someone, likely a man of the white middle-class, to express oneself. Through answering such questions, one describes the process of how one came to be who one is now, applying “principles of causality and continuity” (Ch. Linde).<sup>5</sup> Of course, deciding which story is being requested of oneself can never be simple, especially since the emphasis on a “big” story disappeared in postmodern society as has been advertised repeatedly in recent years. However, it remains possible for a story to convey normalcy in situations that require the approval of others, while the possibility of explaining a so-

---

<sup>4</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*, Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*, p. 30.

called abnormal person is excluded in advance. According to Eakin, the correlation between narrative and identity means that the social pressure on people to accept and declare their acceptance of a norm, such as with regard to a sense of ethical values, is strong in the United States.

Eakin says that this fact does not only apply to the United States, and I agree with him. The pressure to provide self-explanation can be found all over the world. The philosopher is not an exception to this trend, either. There may be no age in which self-explanation has been forced on the philosopher more than this one. However, in thinking about this situation, I can't help recalling a passage from *Minima Moralia* by Adorno, which describes the immigrant life in the United States. He says that the Jewish intellectuals who were chased from their home country by Nazis have been cut off from their bonds with their old lives in a foreign country. Furthermore, in America these intellectuals have been requested to submit papers about their character, age, and occupation, all elements of their "past." The past is enumerated as if each fact has a quantifiable value and is brought together on one sheet of paper. As a result, Adorno insists, the person loses the past. For him, it is worse to arrange the past in documents based on the present than to forget it altogether.

Adorno's dislike of the autobiography is thorough. According to him, autobiography is only a fantasy brought about through modern romanticism that views human character as something naturally bestowed upon each individual and personality as something continuously united. Such a fantasy only hides the fragility of an individual's life history. It also often involves the violent exclusion of the existence of others—whether a familiar individual, or even someone from a different linguistic norm or historical situation—whom are sure to contribute to one's living history. For Adorno, the romanticism of autobiography resembles a narcissism-oriented self-consciousness that tends to insist on infinite authority over his or her living history as an author. He does not deny the possibility of autobiography. In fact, he thought that philosophy separated from life is meaningless, and there is no other text that tells his living history as eloquently as *Minima Moralia*. But what is the "oneself" that an autobiography presents? To what degree can one be oneself? How does oneself relate to others? Is there a clear boundary? These were the problems that could not be settled easily for Adorno. The fact that "I" is opaque and impossible to treat easily, and that we have to talk about our own "I" in uncomfortable ways is, as Butler argues in reference to Adorno, "the condition under which morality itself emerges."<sup>6</sup> For Adorno, an autobiography will "succeed" when it occupies a space in which the "I" cannot express itself without some kind of embarrassment in front of the looks of others' that cannot be fully predicted from the start.

---

<sup>6</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2005, p. 8.

### 3. Transformation of autobiography

In fact, the problem of determining the degree to which social media networks spreading on a global scale can tell the living history peculiar to each person is not simple at all. Certainly, we acquire information about each other efficiently through services such as Facebook and Twitter. In addition, each person can freely record a specific life history in cyberspace without the intervention of others, such as publishers. Autobiographical information is here a tool indispensable to explaining oneself to others and to soliciting approval of one's existence. However, at the same time, it appears that the way in which each living history can be recorded has changed due to the spread of the network, which forms a synchronic space. In this case, personal context of life an individual has embraced along the passage of time is not important. The gauge used for contracting an individual will be the attributes he has "now," or the features familiar for everyone, such as appearance, physical ability, and educational background. Sperm banks on the net have filled in such information. For women as buyers, the way of life that their "husbands in the future" have built up until now isn't important. They would rather obtain information separated from personal living history that is exclusively individual and irreversible.

The narrative form of autobiography may be applicable in the context of clinical medicine as well,<sup>7</sup> but the outside forces that try to take away the authority one has over one's own living history also emerge in the life sciences to which medical treatment has a close relationship.

For instance, in the preface to his *Genome: the autobiography of a species in 23 chapters*, medical journalist Matt Ridley writes, "I began to think about the human genome as a sort of autobiography in its own right—a record, written in 'genetish', of all the vicissitudes and inventions that had characterized the history of our species and its ancestors since the very dawn of life."<sup>8</sup> Ridley is certainly not a genetic determinist. But a digital combination of four hereditary languages (adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine) no longer writes the story of a mature "spirit," which has long reflected our idealized history of attempting to escape from an animal-like natural state and become "animal rationale". According to Ridley, a human being doesn't acquire personal character, desire, and behavioral patterns through individual effort. A genetic trait inherited from the generation of the parent that preceded an individual manifests in an irregular manner determined by its interaction with the environment in which

---

<sup>7</sup> See Hilde Lindemann Nelson (Ed.), *Stories and Their Limits. Narrative Approaches to Bioethics*, Routledge, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Matt Ridley, *Genome: the autobiography of a species in 23 chapters*, Fourth Estate, London, 2000, p. 4.

a person has been placed. In trying to manage living history, including its hereditary aspects, autobiography's reach easily exceeds the scope of an individual, and even involves parents as "the preceding persons," or children and grandchildren as "the following persons." Thus, "fate" is shared by factors that exceed generations, and this argument contrasts the thoughts of Jürgen Habermas who considers human existence to be determined by one author, whose living history should not be intervened in principle by other people or natural factors.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Autobiography as a place of conflict and reconciliation with others

However, how should one think about the power and meaning of "I"? When the rights of a main character of a story are constrained, does this mean that "I" is being treated unfairly or unethically?

First, it is a simple fact that the language of autobiography is not a possession of mine. Language isn't a private invention, thus an autobiography can't be an accurate copy of each person's life. Second, autobiography remains beyond the scope of an author's own will, aims, hopes, and requests, as well as beyond his mortality. When it's speculatively formulated, to write is to part with a direct character in the vital activity of living. Derrida says that the name "Nietzsche" no longer belongs to Nietzsche himself, and Said says that history is engendered only after the immediacy of life is buried.<sup>10</sup> Thus, writing itself might involve a certain kind of mourning. Third, many autobiographies start by arranging and explaining one's relation to the parents who gave birth to and formed one's existence from the start and made choices that did not necessarily take one's own hopes into account. The death or absence of parents sometimes acts as the very turning points that urge the "I" to look back at his or her relationship with them, now memories of people who will never reappear. We can see this dramatic situation epitomized in Wexler's autobiographical book.

---

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik? Der Streit um das ethische Selbstverständnis der Gattung*, in: *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik?*, Frankfurt a.M., 2005.

<sup>10</sup> In *Beginnings*, Said writes "When Vico said that *human* [humanitas] comes from the root to *bury* [humando], he might not have realized that his humanistic philosophy contained in it the elements of its own negation. *To bury*, in Vico's sense, is to engender difference; and to engender difference, as Derrida has argued, is to *defer* presence, to temporize, to introduce absence. As we saw, Vico connects human history with language, the former having been made possible by the latter. What Vico only hints at, however, is that language effectively displaces human presence, just as history is engendered only by the burial (removal, displacement) of immediacy. This act of deferring can be understood as part of Vico's continuing attack upon Descartes, upon the centrality of the *cogito*, and upon geometric method." (Said, *Beginnings : Intention and method*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1985, p. 373.)



Leonore Wexler, Alice Wexler's mother, passed away in 1978, but ten years before that she had the medical examination that directly predicted her death. The intractable disease Wexler's mother had been diagnosed with is called Huntington chorea, and a patient's sickness emerges with age. An uncontrollable twitch of the muscles, deflation of the spirit, and a state of extreme depression tend to follow. There is no hope that can persist untarnished. A significant number of those who suffer from the disease commit suicide after falling into depression. This hereditary disease, a time bomb, is likely to be inherited by children at a rate of 50%. Leonore's three older brothers, their grandfather, and their great-grandfather all died of it. Wexler also had to face the possibility that disease would attack her. Thus, after she reached the same age at which the condition began to appear in her mother, she began to write this book. But why? She writes, "I wanted to explore the emotional meanings of being at risk."<sup>11</sup> She explains that she did this "for my mother as well as for myself."<sup>12</sup>

The rough position of a gene on the fourth chromosome related to the disease's appearance had already been identified at the time she began writing. Wexler's family (Nancy, her sister and a biologist, and Milton, her father and a psychoanalyst) played an important role in her writing project. So "Mapping Fate"—the title of her story—is not only mapping her own fate but also mapping the scientific history of the struggle against this hereditary disease in the United States. However, why does she also choose to map her mother's life? Is it because her mother was the patient most familiar to her? No, if this had been the case, the fact that her mother was raped in Mexico need not have been recorded. Her feelings toward mother are very complex. There are feelings of resentment, love, and distance caused by the fact that her mother had rarely talked about herself. Wexler's mother knew she was at risk for the disease, but didn't tell her husband (Wexler's father) before marriage. Consequently, the hardship fell upon the daughters, as the father and mother had divorced long before. Wexler has already given up on having children, because she does not want to impose the fear of a fatal disease upon a child. However, why did her own mother, who knew that she and her children would be at risk, give birth to her daughters? Alice writes, "I hated the way she [her mother] played the martyr, always sacrificing herself for others, never asserting her own wishes, always apologizing just for existing."<sup>13</sup>

After her divorce, Wexler's mother started to commute to the graduate school again despite the 25 years she had been out of school, and was attacked by four thugs in Mexico in 1963. She managed to obtain her teacher's diploma, even though she was annoyed by

---

<sup>11</sup> Alice Wexler, *Mapping Fate: A Memoir of Family, Risk, and Genetic Research*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1996, p. xvii.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Wexler, *Mapping Fate*, p. 28.

the neurosis that was a sequela of the rape. However, one year later, she received a definite sentence when her doctor gave her disease a formal name. After one more year, she attempted to commit suicide.

In *Mapping Fate*, Alice traces her mother's pain. She receives therapy to help her manage the opaque shadow of death that approaches her mother and herself. She explains the reason: "I needed to grieve for the mother who was dying and the mother who had never been, as well as for the loss of my own previous identity, before I became a person at risk."<sup>14</sup>

She continues,

My sorrow for my mother was all mixed up with sorrow for myself and for my sister, for our blighted futures, for the children we would never have. I summoned that common fantasy of daughters, of some infinitely healing conversation in which Mom would confide all her hopes and fears, her own history of this illness that had rampaged through her life, which she had known of but never told us about.<sup>15</sup>

To draw a picture of the whole life of a mother who suffered is, in effect, to recover the mother's voice, which she lost unwillingly. Wexler shares this voice, and by sharing it, she mourns and buries it. In describing mother's happiness and unhappiness impartially Wexler is able to put her feelings toward mother in order. These could not be articulated if Wexler were not able to imagine scenes of communication that take story form (i.e., the "common fantasy of daughters, of some infinitely healing conversation"). Only the story effectively brings the social, historical meaning of the emotions of people who suffer to the surface. What is essential in cases like these is to map and listen to the expressions of the emotions that fatal disease has suppressed.

If the particularly limited situation in which Wexler is left could be summarized, it would likely be formulated as follows: "I" must revive the dead and bury myself in this double situation—or because of it—, since the others who gave birth to me and brought me up no longer exist, and "I" will also disappear from this world before long. By sharing the dimension of the fiction of story, "we" who are neither purely dead nor living talk, attack each other, insist on our own sense of justice, look for points of reconciliation, and articulate complex and twisted emotions. The structure that the other encompasses the "I" and jolts one's identity, which Wexler's book vividly describes, recalls the famous beginning of Nietzsche's autobiography, *Ecce Homo*. He writes, "Das Glück meines Daseins, seine Einzigkeit vielleicht, liegt in seinem Verhältnis: Ich bin, um es in Räthselform auszudrücken, als mein Vater bereits gestorben, als meine Mutter lebe ich noch und werde alt" (KSA6,

---

<sup>14</sup> Wexler, *Mapping Fate*, p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> Wexler, *Mapping Fate*, p. 69.

S.264).<sup>16</sup> As Derrida indicates, this “Räthselform [riddle form]” contains something more than mere historical fact. It means that “I” am a living mother as well as a dead father. “I” know the feeling of both rise and descent, beginning and end. Or it might be possible to paraphrase as follows: “I” talk and generate an autobiography as one of the dead (Derrida says that *écriture*—written word—is the dead word), because “I” am also the mother who gives birth to my children (written works).

But this “genealogy of the succession”—so I want to formulate for the time being—is not simplistic. Certainly, Wexler asserts that the voice of her mother, which was kept quiet for so long a time, is also her own voice. The strong motivation she feels to write an autobiography exists there as well. However, having grown up in the fear of having the same fat thumb as her mother, Wexler reads in others the strong personality of the feminist that she wanted for herself but could not find in her mother. The anarchist Emma Goldman, active at the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly attracts her, and Wexler finds in Goldman a mimetic-object and feels compelled to imitate aspects of the anarchist’s biography. She explains,

Now that Mom was really gone, I began to work seriously on a biography of Emma Goldman, as if Mom’s death somehow freed me to begin this more ambitious project, or perhaps to fill the absence that was her life by inventing an/other mother to take her place. There were practical considerations too. I felt increasingly that my own time might be limited. If I were to go the way of my mother, I had better start writing now.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than the “autobiographic” structure of projecting the other (the mother, in this case) onto the authors’ own *écriture*, here, a “biographic” structure of projecting oneself into the *écriture* of the other is seen. (Wexler’s autobiography also functions as biographies of patients pressured to remain silent and buried by society as mad people.) Here, the urgent need to “transfer” oneself onto another reflects the will to survive.

### 5. Autobiography, biography, and biopolitics

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler refers to Adorno, Levinas, Kafka, and others—being addressed by them or recognizing that her “I” is addressed by them—and says that without being addressed by others, a general condition necessary for the “I” to appear, giving an account of oneself or telling a story about oneself becomes impossible. Such others include

<sup>16</sup> KSA; *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Hg. von G. Colli und M. Montinari, Berlin/New York, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Wexler, *Mapping fate*, p. 166.

not only specific, near relatives and additional people, but also their languages. Sometimes being addressed by others requires explaining a contradiction in one's mind. In such cases, this explanation may involve conflict. It can become fragmented, leave the scars of violence, and make a story sound problematic. However, for Butler, it appears that one is always being addressed in one way or another. Even if the person or entity that addresses one does not turn out who he/she is or what it is after all, one must still make oneself accountable by repeating each conversation in relation to this pre-conscious object. Even immediately before one's my death, "I" will address what will survive following my own biological extinction. According to Butler, the scene of address exceeds all possibilities of teleological communication that can be forgotten at the exact moment of its accomplishment. The range of address is infinite.

The scene of address orchestrates the voices that express "our" desires for living on by being recapitulated and refracted through transference. Therefore, "The voice is ghostly, impossible, disembodied, and yet it persists, living on."<sup>18</sup> Like the Odradek of Kafka that Adorno discusses in a letter to Benjamin, this voice abolishes the boundary between the inorganic and the organic in order to live on (*überleben*). Furthermore, Butler explains that one must listen to it to survive and learn methods for responding to it. However, to which extent does this voice articulate itself clearly, and to which extent do we have the right or the power to respond to it? Indeed, Butler appears to be ambivalent about this point. If one responds to the voice with a conviction that it is obviously "my" own voice, and its love is addressed only to myself and only the "I" can learn from and inherit it, thus making it difficult to evade the violence of narcissism. Such a person cannot doubt the consistency of his or her story and immediately turns others into mirrors of him or herself. Such love sometimes turns not only others but also itself into a mass-produced commodity by mirroring others in a way that becomes as monotonous as a collective representation.

Here, I recall Derrida's voice and respond to it. He says that we do not forget the name of Nietzsche, who radically defied the terrible, violent device of the narrative form of Christianity that forces one to confess one's "sinful" life and explain one's autobiography in front of God. However, he may have also greatly contributed to causing another kind of doctrine to survive. Is it he who established the company named of "Nietzsche," in which everyone can claim to be a stockholder?" *Ich selber bin noch nicht an der Zeit, Einige werden posthum geborden.—Irgend wann wird man Institutionen nöthig haben ,in denen man lebt und lehrt, wie ich leben und lehren verstehe...*" (KSA6, S.298). To be Nietzsche's reader is nothing other than to enter a political event signed by the name "Nietzsche." Therefore, did Nazism, as a Nietzsche's worst pupil who imitated his doctrine about power and

---

<sup>18</sup> Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, p. 60.

leader (“führer”) in a perverted manner, derive an enormous political effect from the desire toward the teaching and order of the “Behold, the man (ecce homo)”, which Nietzsche had transferred far into the future?

It is possible that no one can live on in a radically interrupted condition in which no one can accept another’s address. When the “I” will disappear before long, I must become what I am not now. Therefore, who can disregard one’s wish to be addressed by anyone, no matter who, or to see oneself reflected by anything, no matter which form it takes? This wish is however, also connected to the desire that, in the future, an heir who will capture “my” voice correctly will appear. The voice that Derrida left behind before dying accounts for these problems of education and succession, an endless flood of reproduction and uniformalization of philosophical texts through technology and mass media.<sup>19</sup> Facing the fact that a copied record of life (biography) is pieced together, reorganized, and arranged in a network as amorphous information, Derrida confirms that an author’s right to autonomy can not extend to the content of the text, and that the author can neither choose readers, nor prevent their misunderstanding. The times have changed. The style of university education that professors who embody many philosophical authorities, such as Plato, Kant, or Hegel, initiate their teachings by treating many students as silent accepters (auditors) of their voice is now out of date. On the other hand, epigones who scatter biographies of Derrida, claiming him as a great master of “Deconstruction,” are being produced in quantities. Derrida has referred to his *écriture*, who wander all over the world expropriating his own trace as “that uneducable specter who will have never learned how to live.”<sup>20</sup> And surprisingly, he seems to want to live as that “specter.”<sup>21</sup> Escaping from being part of an education system that compels others to be a just “ear,” and enjoying an infinite amount of freedom not just from being educated by others, he seems to evade the political effects of the “genealogy of succession” skillfully. However, he has not completely succeeded, because he still wants readers to respond to his own *écriture* appropriately. Here, responding means not just taking information. To understand text is to understand its “properly *logical necessity*”<sup>22</sup> so that an author can expect that readers “will be reborn differently.”<sup>23</sup> However, is it simply the most radical educational

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Melville House, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> In *Learning to Live Finally*, Derrida responds to Birnbaum, his interviewer, as follows: “So, to finally answer your question, no, I never *learned-to-live*. In fact not at all! Learning to live should mean learning to die, leaning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality (that is, without salvation, resurrection, or redemption—neither for oneself nor for the other). That’s been the old philosophical injunction since Plato: to philosophize is to learn to die. I believe in this truth without being able to resign myself to it. And less and less so.” (Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 24.)

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

form to order that the inevitability of rebirth be accepted; in other words, that the transfer that includes one's "death" should be performed? When Derrida assumes the existence of his few "very good readers" who have not yet appeared,<sup>24</sup> this may not be unrelated to the political effect *écriture* represents either. (But I don't intend to deny the value of this effect).

In short, what I want to say through this essay is that we should be more sensitive to our own motives when approaching autobiography and biography, forms that seems to be rooted in our original desire to live on. We should ascertain by which kinds of others I am involved with one's story, and, conversely, which kind of readers "I" wish to include in the field of my autonomy. When we acknowledge our mortality, this desire might be sublimated to "love," and it may be possible to build an asymmetric relationship that does not ask others for compensation. Such love should not be denied ethically, but we should not always respond to and accept it. As I discussed earlier, this love may reflect the love of oneself (narcissism). In that case, in the process of clever self-justification, the love others present will repeatedly compel one to tell the story of one's self-denial (a form of death) and rebirth.

©2013 by Shuichi NYUYA. All rights reserved.

---

<sup>24</sup> Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 34.