

LETTING HABITS DIE: DERRIDA, RAVAISSON AND THE STRUCTURE OF LIFE

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This essay will provide a comparative analysis of themes at work in both Jacques Derrida and Félix Ravaisson. By putting these thinkers in dialogue will I believe offers valuable insights into questions of deconstruction and vitalism. I will examine Derrida's remarks on Ravaisson in On Touching: Jean Luc Nancy, and use his thoughts as a way of explaining the similarities and differences between Derrida and Ravaisson and thus of Derrida's proximity to and distance from the vitalist tradition. I will also be able to demonstrate the conceptual requirements and conditions for thinking how deconstruction operates, casting light on the ways in which deconstruction offers the conceptual resources to think a general theory of bodies and identities.

Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit.
— Samuel Beckett, Proust

Deconstruction provides, I will argue, a consistent theory of the necessary conditions for the organization of any identity or being. Ravaisson's theory of habit, as articulated in *Of Habit*, will provide a useful foil for demonstrating the central conceptual distinctions necessary for thinking a philosophically rigorous theory of deconstruction. Comparing Jacques Derrida and Felix Ravaisson is invaluable as it allows us to grasp a number of important concepts for understanding deconstruction's contribution to the question of life. More precisely, investigating the question of habit, structure, time, repetition and change in Ravaisson, allows us to see the extent to which these are utilized and transgressed in Derrida. This approach also allows us to explicate the degree vitalism or spiritualism may be present in Derrida's thought. This is important as most contemporary debates on the question of life and matter, as well as the biopolitical tends to be primarily based in the Bergsonian-Deleuzian, as well a Foucauldian constellation. Derrida, I claim, offers many original insights to understanding the limits and possibilities of understanding the question of life, one that emerges from the ground up, in

the relation between organisms, structures and identities. The importance of staging a confrontation between Derrida and Ravaissou is to assert that Ravaissou's vitalistic monism needs to be rigorously enhanced, with a thinking of life that requires an originary relation to death, time, technicity and alterity. My claim is that to think the life of any entity for deconstruction implies a gathering together of life in singularity and localization, and at one and the same time an exposure to alterity. In the last analysis, an important consequence of my argument is that a deconstructive vitalism is impossible from the start, needing the corrective of deconstruction to be logically feasible.

1. Derrida, Ravaissou and the Habit of Life

How does Derrida respond to the question of life? Spiritualism and vitalism are valuable concepts for helping position his work in response to some recent trends in contemporary European Philosophy. The "philosophies of life" from the beginning of the century have recently gained purchase over current intellectual configurations. This is evident in work revitalizing Henri Bergson, in the proliferation of Deleuze scholarship, in the vitalist politics of Michel Hardt and Tony Negri, and in Michel Foucault's reflections on bio-power. Thematically, this intellectual constellation revolves around Spinozistic, Bergsonian and Nietzschean reflections on scientific spiritualisms. The "philosophies of life" are defined by the affirmative, the inventive and the creative; increasingly, they are becoming by-words for generosity, liberation, openness and freedom. This can be seen, for example, in the spirit of Bergson's own *élan vital*. Life is valorized by these philosophies as holding a redemptive capacity, and when embraced, banishes all forms of negation, death and destruction. This alerts us to the initial problem of placing Derrida within this constellation. For Derrida, the opposition of life and death is a false opposition. Much of Derrida's work has in one way or another signified an attempt to theorize how and why life and death are entangled.

It would however be difficult to argue Derrida is utterly inimical to the vitalist tradition. As has been argued extensively by a variety of scholars, most recently Leonard Lawlor, Derrida he claims radicalizes key moments in Husserlian phenomenology to achieve an "ultra-

transcendental" concept of life.¹ However, the concept of life, and its philosophical lineage in the vitalist tradition, is something Derrida does not take up in and of itself, but only ever in terms of complications and distancing. Derrida's thought can at least on face value be seen as beginning of strong negation of Vitalism. Life cannot be localized to any entity, localized species or biological organism. Life is, for Derrida, always irreducibly open to a necessary contingency and, hence, no individuated form of life in particular can be purely life and thus never only life as such. It is Derrida's comments on Ravaisson that will help us to isolate the philosophical reasons for this disengagement from vitalism, and which will help us understand the positive theorization of deconstruction in terms of the entanglement of notions of life and death. For this reason it is necessary to begin with a general exposition of Ravaisson's key concepts of space, time, habit, and ontology in general in order to establish how they might pertain to Derrida.

Ravaisson's *De L'Habitude* offers a wonderfully dynamic and succinct theory that condenses a number of themes from the history of philosophy into a radical theory of generalized habit. Interlacing themes from Aristotle, Leibniz, De Biran and Schelling, he creates a vitalist and radically metaphysical account of habit.² What defines habit for Ravaisson is that a habit occurs at the intersection of both activity and passivity. For Ravaisson, "...everywhere, in every circumstance, continuity or repetition – that is, duration – weakens passivity and excites activity." (OH, 49) Without change there is no habit; or, stated more positively, a habit cannot be formed that is incapable of

¹ Leonard Lawlor, "Life: An Essay on the Overcoming of Metaphysics," in *Columbia Companion to Twentieth-Century Philosophies*, (ed.) Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 517–30. There are a number of scholars who have investigated Derrida's radicalization of phenomenology, among the most significant are Rudolph Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), Joanna Hodge, *Derrida on Time* (London: Routledge, 2007), Leonard Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), Paolo Marrati, *Genesis and Trace, Derrida Reading Husserl and Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

² Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, "Editors' Introduction," in Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit* (London: Continuum, 2008), 1–5. Hereafter *Of Habit* referred to parenthetically in the text as OH. Also, for an excellent account of Ravaisson's place in the history of French philosophy in the 1800s, see Mark Sinclair, "Ravaisson and the Force of Habit," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2011): 65–85.

change from its inception. In biological terms, the formation of habit occurs along a continuum from plant to animal to conscious human life, from the inorganic realm to the organic. However, as Ravaissou states in the opening remarks of his essay, he is not just concerned with specific habits. Habit is not simply or solely an acquired habit, such as smoking or leaving the toilet seat up. Habit exists because it is the consequence of a change. For Ravaissou, "...what we especially intend by the word 'habit,' which is the subject of this study, is not simply acquired habit, but habit that is contracted, owing to a change, with respect to every change that gave birth to it." (OH, 25) There are two points that we can take from this general definition. Firstly, habit names the relative unity of a body in the face of the content of its successive phases. Secondly, this alerts us to what Ravaissou takes to be the essential mutual implication of change and permanence in the constitution of habit. This provides a general definition of habit, where habit is not absolute: habits are only ever a relative unity. For Ravaissou, habit is therefore not everlasting or eternal.³ Habits come and go, and thus they only have a temporary unity. Indeed, for Ravaissou, 'habit is a change which remains the same.' (OH, 25) The permanence attributed to habit is relative to the change to which the body undergoing habit formation is exposed.

Ravaissou's examples are instructive in showing how he understands habit, and also in explaining how difference and sameness are metaphysical requisites for the creation of habit. Ravaissou speaks of the difference in sensations between a connoisseur and a binge drinker. The sensations of the binge drinker are wholly devoted to consuming alcohol in whatever form it comes, and are thus wholly devoted to the experience of indiscriminate and successive impressions. Hence, there is no repetition of the sensation of any particular beverage; there is only the taste of indiscriminate impressions. The connoisseur, on the other hand, is the one who actively discriminates between impressions, thereby introducing a repetition of change or sameness into the consumption of alcoholic drinks. The repetition of change dims the experience of innumerable sensations or impressions, allowing the connoisseur to habituate herself to the nuances of different alcoholic beverages.

Ravaissou considers habit in the widest possible sense. Habit is relevant to the most momentary impressions of desire, to the habits of a lifetime, to the habituality of a cell in one's body stabilizing its own identity. Indeed, for Ravaissou, habit is "all the way up and all the way down," from the lowest organism to the principle of life

³ Mark Sinclair and Clare Carlisle, "Editors' Commentary," in OH, 79.

itself. Put speculatively, a being is the coalescence of innumerable habits entering into relations. More abstractly, this corresponds to how Ravaisson understands the conditions of space and time. Space is characterized by its ability to remain and is thus passive; on the other hand, time is characterized by its ability to change and remains active. We should not think about these concepts in simple empirical terms, but rather in loosely Kantian terms.⁴ Space and time are prerequisite conditions for a body to accrue habituation; they are bodies' essential conditions of possibility. Whether a habit takes place in this or that space, or in this or that time, is irrelevant: what is important is that habit *is* time and space. Habit is not this particular spatial content or that particular temporal quality, but an absolute prerequisite for the relative ordering of a body in general. Thus, for any being to exist, it must therefore be unambiguously characterized by sameness *and* difference, since space characterizes the relative stability of a being and time characterizes the ability to transform and change.⁵

Across the continuum of nature, from the most high to the lowest, if there is a being, then it must be a being which has a relatively intransigent unity through time. This coalescence is necessary for the production of any bodily life. However, habit cannot constitute bodies in relation to just any individuated habit formation. For Ravaisson, it follows that the creation of life most actively takes place in the organic realm. The inorganic realm is therefore the realm of "death." It is not a realm of life because there is no change with respect to the sameness of any unity. The inorganic is nothing other than a homogeneous whole without differentiation. There is no individuating dynamic which could subject an organic entity to both change and duration, and thus there can be no creation of life. In the inorganic realm, external changes become less effective and new formations cannot retain a disposition towards equilibrium. Conversely, the more a living being is alive, the more it repeats changes, and by extension the more impact it has on its identity and development. This is not the case for, say, a stone, which is not as active as an organic being with motility.

For every identity, the law of habit applies. Ravaisson provides a succinct description of this in the context of being affected by passions and actions:

⁴ Sinclair and Carlisle, OH, 81.

⁵ See *ibid.* on how Ravaisson is steeped in the Leibnizian world of adaptive inertial bodies.

The continuity or the repetition of passions weakens it; the continuity or repetition of actions exalts and strengthens it. Prolonged or repeated sensation diminishes gradually and eventually fades away. Prolonged or repeated movement becomes gradually easier, quicker and more assured. Perception, which is linked to movement, similarly becomes clearer, swifter, and more certain. (OH, 49)

The most attractive feature of considering habit in terms of activity and passivity is that habit need not be absolute. For Ravaisson, certainly all of nature lies along one vital continuum, but localized habits are relatively finite. Localized bodies require an adaptive ability, and are thus founded on a localized suitability within an environment. Each living being draws support and sustenance in direct proportion to its environment or context of involvement. Living bodies *are* by virtue of both their stability and their capacity to adapt. This is framed precisely within the terms of the classical concept of individuation. What makes a living being the living being that it *is* — which is to say what makes it distinct — is the very relational process to which a living body is susceptible with respect to the external world, whilst simultaneously remaining relatively distinct within itself. Ravaisson remains, in the last analysis, a quintessential vitalist. An account of habit must be founded on an absolute demarcation of the organic and inorganic. As he states unambiguously, “habit is not possible within the inorganic realm.” (OH, 27) Thus, he rules out any mechanistic or materialistic account of habit *tout court*. This is not to say that that matter does not affect organisms; only that it is not primary. Matter is inert and therefore dead, and exists in an absolutely homogenous inorganic space. Such is the world of Newtonian absolute time and space and its laws; life therefore must transcend this for Ravaisson. Habit, for him, allows passage between the inanimate and animate, between the ideal and the material, and between living beings and matter. The negotiation between materialistic and unmaterialistic thought here comes to the fore. Both organic life and inorganic matter are mutually transformed through their engagement with each other, with habit being the animation of inert matter. The basic point is that habit, for Ravaisson, allows the opening of matter to the activity of life, along with the imposition of identity on life by the structure of the material world. As we will see, Derrida argues that this point is important but over-encumbered in the direction of life, ultimately arguing that habit is distinguished from basic matter in Ravaisson’s thought. Life and spirit, Derrida argues, hold an undeserved hierarchy and pre-eminence for Ravaisson.

Philosophically, what is at stake in Ravaisson's dichotomy between the organic and the inorganic is the old Aristotelian distinction between accidental and essential change. If an object undergoes essential change it therefore no longer exists — as can be seen, for example, when a house burns down. Accidental change entails that change is not of an essential nature, to such a degree that only parts of the house would change, *i.e.* a new coat of paint or a cracked kitchen tile. What Ravaisson has achieved, building on this, is to place both the accidental and the essential on the same continuum. Both are now *essential* for understanding the process of habit formation. Habit is both an acquired and a dynamic way of being for an object. A habit is thus a “general and permanent way of being, the state of an existence considered either as the unity of its elements or as the succession of its different phases.” (OH, 27) Ravaisson is quite decisive about this: “Nothing, then, is capable of habit that is not capable of change; but everything capable of change is not by that fact alone capable of habit.” (OH, 25) Habit is essentially a change that retains a relative durability. Ravaisson's general ontology is stated in an exceptionally clear manner in the opening pages of *Of Habit*. Habit is the process of remaining the same while at one and the same time retaining difference. A relative unity is what Ravaisson calls a state or a disposition. This disposition is defined by Ravaisson as the co-implication of space and time or change and permanence:

The universal law, the fundamental character of a being, is the tendency to persist in its way of being. The conditions under which being is represented to us in the world are Space and Time. Space is the condition and the most apparent and elementary form of stability, of permanence; time is the universal condition of change. The simplest change, and the most general, is also that which is relative to space itself, namely movement. (OH, 27)

If there is no space and time then habit can neither begin nor unravel. Space is that aspect of a habit that allows it to remain the same; time is the aspect which allows it minimally to change. A habit becomes a state or a disposition towards or in another sense it is an inclination *to*. This is what Ravaisson calls the extended mobile, which precisely characterizes the general character of *body*. In this way, Ravaisson resists empirical accounts of habit: for him, it is not empirical impressions which are key to the creation of habits, but a repetition of changes which coalesces into a temporal unity. Indeed for Ravaisson, the resolution of sameness and otherness is absolutely essential to the formation of any habit.

2. Hetero-Affection, Technicity and the Death of Life

Themes such as difference and repetition, sameness and change, time and space, are the nexus of Derrida's many reflections across his career. The manner in which Derrida deploys them with regard questions of life and death requires a radical rethinking of the tradition of *life* philosophy. Life philosophy is self-generating, whereby life can only generate life. Derrida thinks to understand life it must be a species of non-life or alterity. The opposition of life and death, and indeed the organic and the mechanical are false dichotomies. What separates Derrida most obviously from vitalism, however, is that for Derrida Vitalism can only ever remain a species of auto-affection. Auto-affection is the process whereby an identity self-generates itself. It implies that identity is homogenous and self-same.

Derrida works out this notion in a variety of contexts, most famously in his analysis of the interior monologue and meaning in *Voice and Phenomenon*.⁶ Basically, there cannot be auto-affection *tout court*, there can only be hetero-affection. Put another way, there is contaminated auto-affection, which is an impossibility, as such, since auto-affection cannot sustain or generate life beyond itself. The vitalist position, as we see exemplified in Ravaisson, is one that is a type of auto-affection, since any contact with the inorganic is grounded in prior force or spirit. There is therefore in the vitalist tradition, a misrecognition of hetero-affection that avoids the question of death whereby the alterity of anything that lives is exposed to its own dissolution. Derrida asks, "Is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death through deferment, repetition, reserve?"⁷ For Derrida, the bounds of any identity are never a question of pure life or pure death but an intermingling of both.

For Derrida, then, what Ravaisson calls habit, at least on a superficial level, is associated with regularity, practices, and repetitive forms of unified activity. To be fair, Ravaisson radicalizes the notion of habit. With regard to deconstruction, however, this is not enough, and the differences between Derrida and Ravaisson are most palpable in Ravaisson's brutal dichotomy between the organic and the

⁶ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, (tr.) Alan Bass (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), 79.

⁷ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, (tr.) Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001), 254.

inorganic.⁸ Much of Derrida's work is committed to undermining the dichotomy of organic and inorganic, especially if the inorganic is on the side of brute necessity. There is, as we will see, no absolute demarcation between life and death for Derrida. For him, the philosophical task is to achieve a negotiation of the relation between the organic and the inorganic. Traditionally the organic and inorganic are in tension, with the organic associated with life and all that is spontaneous, creative and new, and the inorganic being a facet of death and all that is mechanical, inert and repetitive. After all, the basic vitalist opposition is between living organisms that are organized spiritually and remain radically distinct from inorganic things. Lawlor points out precisely the importance for Derrida of the relation between the inorganic and organic for questions of life and death, showing that while these two concepts appear antinomical, their interrelation requires a description of the mechanical production of life, or a blending of the spontaneous and the mechanical. The stakes of negotiating this division introduce a radically new conceptual truth, the negotiation of which, I will claim *is* deconstruction.⁹ Derrida's critique of Ravaillon reveals the central principles necessary to think any deconstruction.

When Derrida speaks of deathly concepts such as phantasm, haunting, and the spectral, he is merely describing the cycle of how organic matter emerges from inorganic matter and returns to inorganic matter.¹⁰ These are the limits of what Derrida calls survival, what comes to life returns to death. Thus a key feature of Derrida's critique concerns the co-implication of life and death in what he calls "originary technicity." Derrida uses this term to demonstrate that the opposition of life and death, the natural and the cultural, and the biological and inorganic are not adequate since, in some sense, life is always already mechanized or technical. The attempt to separate these terms leads to the most limited forms of monistic auto-affectation or self-relation. This is the worst type of thought, for Derrida, since thinking must demand alterity and relation. The effort to conjoin the technical, on the other hand, requires us to rethink a

⁸ Ravaillon is sometimes ambiguous on the absolute separation of the inorganic from the organic; for example, he suggests that crystals are part of the same "continuous progression of the successive powers of the one and the same principle." (OH, 67) However, it is clear that such continuity is at least minimally considered lesser in the inorganic realm.

⁹ Leonard Lawlor, *This is not Sufficient: An Essay on Derrida and Animality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 117.

¹⁰ The most obvious name for this is evolution, but this requires a different study.

number of things we inherit from the vitalist tradition, and this is what Derrida's analysis aims to achieve. Deconstruction, then, is an attempt to discern the extent any being cannot merely be the process of a recalcitrant will or force, desperately animating the continuation of existence. Instead, life requires a degree of mechanical and automatic repetition that delimits and localizes existing things. Derrida's critique of Ravaisson entails an entity that survives or persists, repeats itself, but does so in exposure to a world of space, events, matter.

A cursory review of Derrida's oeuvre confirms the separation of the organic and the inorganic criticized in numerous contexts. We see inorganic technicity in the role of writing in his earliest work, in the co-implication of life and death in *différance*, in the tension between the quantitative and the qualitative in *Rogues*, in iterability, in the customary automaticity of the phallus in *Faith and Knowledge*, and in the originary technicity that is demonstrated in *Without Alibi*. Even habit itself always requires an inorganic supplement for Derrida. In works such as *Psyche*, *The Politics of Friendship*, *The Gift of Death*, and his various writings on hospitality, we see Derrida disrupt the habitual regularity of a community by insisting on the process of negotiation with radical alterity. Habit features fleetingly in all these texts. Derrida usually categorizes it as that which ties thought to the regulated, the ordinary and the mundane, and which resists the *arrivant*, and the wholly other; habit thus remains restricted to the quotidian.¹¹ But, for our purposes, the general point stands: habit cannot be vitalistic purely in itself because it must be exposed to a form of alterity to count as habit at all.

Catherine Malabou, in the preface to the English translation of *Of Habit*, provides a helpful starting point regarding Derrida's relation to Ravaisson's vitalism. This lens begins to be elucidated by the essential dichotomy between mechanism and freedom. (OH, vii) This dichotomy grounds the separation of the organic and the inorganic, and this is precisely what Derrida subverts. As Malabou notes, the most prominent instance of this collapse is evident in *On Touching*, in which Derrida firmly describes the opposition between habit as ontology and as mechanized routine as being two species of the same metaphysical auto-affection. For Derrida, both traditions subscribe to the metaphysics of presence. (OH, xii) Malabou makes some telling

¹¹ Jack Reynolds, "Derrida and Deleuze on time, the future, and politics," *Borderlands: E-Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2004): [http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no1_2004/reynolds_time.htm], accessed Sept 26, 2011.

points chastising Derrida for delimiting some of the more “deconstructive” aspects of Ravaisson’s thought. She suggests that Derrida undermines the language of contamination and parasitical in Ravaisson, and that Ravaisson’s notion of habit should ultimately be understood in the same sense that Derrida understands the *pharmakon* as both poison and cure, whereby a habit is exposed to an external change that defines it. (OH, ix–xx) Malabou is correct to say that habits can be at once both good and bad. We can have an illness or an addiction, we can acquire a taste for certain foods, and we can even build resistance to the introduction of toxins to our systems. However, Malabou’s assertion only goes so far in allowing us to think deconstruction. Thinking deconstruction demands that it is done speculatively since it presents the formal coordinates for any identity or body *being there*. Deconstruction and *différance* name the temporal and spatial formal conditions in which any being can exist. This must be applied to habit as much as to any other identity. Derrida’s deconstruction comprises the emergence of any being, including habit itself; Malabou is therefore correct in saying that Ravaisson offers a general ontology of habit, but habit is just one being among many, for Derrida, as susceptible to deconstruction as anything else. To conceive of deconstruction in these terms is to conceive of it as always at work, happening, irrespective of the being or entity which is at hand. If this is the case then we cannot take any one object, be it biological, physical or chemical, and apply that to the entire meta-physical realm of Being.

Malabou locates Derrida’s scepticism towards monism in the auto-affection of the subject. Derrida, however, has a broader target, namely to undermine the onto-theological immanence of spiritualism and vitalistic creationism. In *On Touching*, he situates Ravaisson in the tradition of Maine de Biran, a tradition that creates a transcendental “personalism,” and one that endorses a hierarchical complexity of beings.¹² In essence, one moves from the world of dead necessity and physical objects to plants, animals, to human consciousness, and so on to God. All these innumerable spheres are part of a monistic continuum from death to life and back again.

For Derrida, another more serious point emerges from these reflections. There remains a singular problem with Ravaisson’s conception of habit. The emergence of a habit must be grounded on a continuum in which all individuated beings exist on a single plane of

¹² See Jacques Derrida, *On Touching: Jean Luc Nancy*, (tr.) Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 154–55. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as OT.

immanence. Why? Because in Aristotelian terms, all bodies are substances, and a class of *entelechia*, which to say all bodies are developmental stages of one total and vital substance geared towards a unitary end. So, while habit can be local and finite, it still derives its existence from one dynamic substance, or creative spirit in vitalistic terms. All beings that exist on the continuum of nature are onto-theological in the sense that Derrida understands the theological nature of any metaphysical ontology—a genesis that can only be understood in terms of a trans-ontological being, a being that can only experience itself in an ever proliferating variety of contexts, or as a being that nourishes itself without remainder or loss, and in all its mutations remains utterly proximate to itself. Derrida astutely identifies how movement and transformation are not wholly relative to specific or singular beings for Ravaisson, but are rather the effect of, and dependent upon, a prior spiritual continuum. Human consciousness is a particular and exemplary instantiation of this dynamic continuum. For example, for Ravaisson, human consciousness exemplifies the best instance of human freedom between the realm of homogeneous necessity and the realm of the divine spirit immanent to nature. Such psychic unity remains a species of ideal auto-affective subjectivity. Specifically, within the realm of consciousness, all difference, change, and spontaneity are grounded in the illusion of a “self.” One might argue in defence of Ravaisson that consciousness and personal identity are in fact constituted by difference, all along the spiritual continuum of desire. Space, time dispersion and habit all correspond, however, to a single movement. If there is a continuum then localized instances of habit must be connected to others. The auto-affection of subjectivity that Derrida mentions above submits to the most traditional form of idealism, where the realm of nature is isomorphic to consciousness. This is the creative force of spiritual vitalism. Consciousness transcends and exceeds local forces and bodily motor activity since it participates in a prior force. Transcendental personalism individuates itself out of a prior spiritualistic force. Consciousness itself is therefore a particular manifestation of a prior homogenous unity. Consciousness “envelops” the activity of perception and sensation.

Derrida shows how the specific example of motor activity becomes enveloped by a broader spiritualistic force which generates consciousness:

The ones that matter to us here have to do with motor activity, effort, and touching. If movement presupposes a power exceeding resistance and can be measured by the consciousness of the effort that thus envelops activity and passivity. Effort situates the locus

of equilibrium between “action and passion,” as between “perception and sensation.” (OT, 155)

Derrida’s remarks on Ravaisson here correspond to his overall project in *On Touching*. The sense of touch is what links all metaphysical oppositions, driving all totalizing efforts in philosophy. It is a very simple point. All beings have to touch each other for any being to be grounded in a prior presence. This is the touch which Derrida is trying to deconstruct. It is touch in the pejorative sense. It is the touch which is virtual and spiritual, miraculously animating all organic life from the simple to the complex. It is the touch that can be at all places at once, the touch that is indivisible by necessity, literally overflowing any individual bodily affects. In essence, singular events must be habituated to “touch” along a metaphysical continuum. For Derrida:

Now, as effort cannot be dissociated from touch, touch at the same time fulfils it and covers the entire field of experience, every interval and every degree between passivity and activity. Touch [*tact*], the eminent sense of effort, is also the name of all the senses: “Effort is fulfilled in touch [*tact*]. Touch [*tact*] extends from the extremity of passion to the extremity of action. In its development it comprises all their intermediate degrees, and, at every degree, it bears out their law of reciprocity.” (OT, 155)

Ravaisson’s ontology crystallizes Derrida’s suspicion towards forms of spiritual vitalism, or more precisely, “biological continuisms,” which throughout the philosophical tradition are conceived as “postulated indivisibility.” (OT, 155) This is the hidden indivisible presence of Ravaisson’s metaphysics.¹³ Derrida is thus not just deconstructing touch just in relation to subjectivity. If Derrida is doing anything in *On Touching*, he is demonstrating that all touch is essentially divided, cut and spaced, and temporalized. In a strong sense, this undermines much of what Ravaisson does, since there cannot be an absolute continuity between the most complex and the simplest beings.

Indeed, the five “tangents” of the hand around which the text of *On Touching* is organized is designed to disrupt the continuity of touch.¹⁴ They attempt an intervention. In sum, they present a meta-

¹³ See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (tr.) Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 165–66.

¹⁴ For a very thorough account of the stylistic structure of *On Touching*, see Geoffrey Bennington, “Handshake,” *Derrida Today*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2008): 167–84.

reflection, a performative presentation of how touch is never indivisible, of how touch is always subject to *différance* and can thus never sustain only itself. All touch is not auto-affection: it is hetero-affection, and therefore it is irreducibly mediated.¹⁵ Derrida consolidates his analysis by arguing that Ravaisson's ontology is, as such, a metaphysics of touch. Derrida sympathetically cites Jean Luc Nancy here, commending Nancy's break from hapto-centric metaphysics, providing a discourse about touch that is not spiritual and indivisible and "...is not intuitionistic, continuistic, homogeneous, or indivisible." (OT, 156) Nancy disrupts spiritual vitalism through "...sharing, parting, partitioning, and discontinuity, interruption, caesura — in a word, syncope." (OT, 156) All of these conceptual tropes represent limitation, finitude and disruption. Moreover, these concepts are more specifically related to the notion of disrupting the tradition of "my body." Deconstruction in its most radical expression must be concerned with a general theory of bodies external to instances of self-expression. There must be limits, therefore, which compromise the movement of touched bodies. Touch cannot be just unstructured, spontaneous creativity.

In terms of touch, then, what is most important for Derrida is that the *différance* of touch is subject from the outset to an originary technics, one that is irreducible to both nature and spirit, and one which, following Nancy, must be considered within the remit of the local, the modal and the fractal. (OT, 156) Ravaisson's vitalistic commitment to a dynamic monism notifies us of another central problem which Derrida holds with *Of Habit*, one that is also typical of many vitalist thinkers. Vitalism negatively defines the human being as that which is resistant to the mechanical. Now, this is complicated by thinkers like Bergson and his recognition of the intransigence of space, but ultimately, for the vitalist, the existence of any being is dependent on a prior creative force which animates inert or dead matter. This is also the case for Ravaisson where vital and spiritual movement and transformation are overvalued as forms of a generative and creative unity. They amount to a "top-down" or "creationist" understanding of ontological individuation. Habit is a power that

¹⁵ As Lawlor puts it: "In Derrida, mediation contaminates the immediate, but contamination is still mediation. Thus contamination promises the unity even though it cannot, by necessity, ever keep its promise.... The 'discontinuity' in Derrida's thought consists in a shift in his conception of fundamental experience — that is, in his conception of what he called in *Voice and Phenomenon* 'the ultra-transcendental concept of life.'" Len Lawlor, *The Implications of Immanence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 10.

stretches all the way down to the most small and all the way up to divine immanence.

While Ravaisson is committed to explaining the importance of habit for the individuation of being, one of his primary aims is to render apparent the unity and continuity underlying any limits and distinctions of individuated bodies. This undermines Derrida's commitment to limits, the syncope and finitude. Ravaisson's "metaphysics of touch" undermines the very possibility of existents becoming localized since they must rely on an ideal form of Being effectively doing the creative work for them. Although, for Ravaisson, organic beings are certainly limited and oriented towards functions and purposes, "nature makes continuity concrete, as the plenitude of reality." (OH, 77) For Ravaisson, there is a singular power which animates all. So while local habituations such as consciousness, motor activity, and perception are in some sense infinitely divisible, they all take their energy and dynamism from a prior and inexhaustible unity of nature. (OH, 75) Ravaisson's ontology is based on unified but qualitative differences of degree of one and the same monistic substance: "[b]etween the ultimate depths of nature and the highest point of reflective freedom, there are an infinite number of degrees measuring the development of and the same power, as one rises through them, extension — the condition of knowledge — increases with the distinction and the interval of the opposites." (OH, 76) The notion of touch must be re-coordinated in order to resist Ravaisson's magical and miraculous prime touching that generates all bodies.

Derrida sets out to refigure the concept of touch within the logic of hetero-affection. Deconstructive touching is thus wholly resistant to the idea of a miraculous "biological continuism" between all and any extremities; the metaphysics of touch is impossible *tout court* since auto-affection is impossible. There can thus be no singular sense of touch.¹⁶ As a consequence of this, touch must always be subject to spacing (or an *écart*). (OT, 156) Touch is only ever the effect of spatial and temporal tracing. Touch is *différance*, and is therefore spatialized and temporalized. Indeed, this is why Derrida complains about Ravaisson's suggestion that the "interval" fills up. (OT, 156) The interval refers to the limits of body, large or small. For Derrida, the Ravaissonian impulse entails a vital force that is a well of fecundity overflowing any limits, differences or demarcations, undermining the relative integrity of a body. There is no real ground

¹⁶ As the title of section 6 of Part 1 of *On Touching* denotes.

for spacing or interval, since by definition all bodies are transcended by the fecund and overflowing hierarchy of creative spirit.¹⁷

In essence, the fundamental philosophical problem surrounding the question of limits and monism is: How does one resolve the paradox of divisibility and indivisibility? For Derrida, Ravaisson's most prized concept of habit is, by necessity, always already inhabited by the *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon* is an ambiguous term denoting both poison and remedy. The term is metonymic, denoting salvation, sacrifice, curse, and blessedness. What attracts Derrida to this concept is the logic which underpins it. The *pharmakon* is precisely hetero-affective, since the limit of an identity always implies a mutual implication with what is external to it. Habit must therefore negate the organic to allow a transition to life, but this in turn is exposed to the limits which the material world imposes upon it. An optimum level of habituality is always haunted by an irretrievable other, the life of a habit can only be structured in concert with the inorganic matter it emerges from. Since there can be no radical separation of the two, this means there can be only relatively localized limits which disrupt biological indivisibility:

I ask whether there is any pure auto-affection of the touching or the touched, and therefore any pure, immediate experience of the purely proper body, the body proper that is living, purely living. Or if, on the contrary, this experience is not, at the very least, already *haunted*, perhaps even *constitutively* haunted, by some hetero affection related to spacing and then to visible spatiality – where an intruder may come through, a host, wished or unwished for, a spare and auxiliary other, or a parasite to be rejected, a *pharmakon* that already having at its disposal a dwelling in this place inhabits one's heart of hearts [*tout for intérieur*] as a ghost. (OT, 179–80)

In rather disparaging terms, Derrida suggests that Ravaisson's top-down spiritual model of limitless creation is no more than a "magic trick," brought into being by a "miraculous" grace, where divisibility by dint of some ontological "confusion," or sleight of hand, is nullified, allowing a moment when "the divisible becomes indivisible." The metaphysics of life therefore remains coextensive with the metaphysics of touch. (OT, 156) This amounts to a dynamic

¹⁷ Derrida remained sceptical of the attempt to implant a hierarchy of life throughout his career. In a sense, the hierarchy of a vital force animating varying degrees of lesser life remains utterly "classical: matter, life spirit." (OT, 168)

monism, albeit a monism nonetheless, against which Derrida exhorts us to be vigilant. This is a monism in which all extremities of Being touch each other. Ravaissou says as much: "Continuity implies the indivisible middle term, where, across the entire milieu, at whatever distance from either of the extremities, the extremities touch one another, and contraries merge." (OH, 75) In such an ontology, there is no beginning or end, only the differential intensities of a single but unitary substance.

For Ravaissou, as Derrida observes, biological life aspires to spirit; it tends towards the life of the spirit. From the origin to the end in a diversity of creative fecundity, life "precedes, traverses, and overflows the humanity of the human without ceasing to *inspire* or *aspire* to it, and therefore to finalize it." (OT, 157) To argue in this register is to argue within the Aristotelian register of final cause, wherein the *telos* is the motivating end or desire which causes an object to assume its own individuated form. For Derrida, this repeats the metaphysics of presence, wherein we can have no sense of touch or relationality that does not infinitely spread out beyond itself. All singular bodies, all entities that are wholly other, only exist by virtue of some quasi-divine creative force. Endorsing this creative force can only lead to problematic conclusions for Derrida; it means that Ravaissou's creative force is an immanent God, one that is intimate to our being.¹⁸ Nature itself is, as Ravaissou puts it, a prevenient grace. What we are, the habits which constitute us are no more than instantiations of a dynamic and creative force operating throughout the cosmos. If deconstruction is to be thought of as an event, one that is singular and yet open to incessant differentiation and transformation, then it is incumbent on deconstructive thinking to assert that it offers a more consistent account of the formation of beings and objects.

3. Localization, Originary Technicity and the Emergent Structure of Life

Deconstruction must be thought of in terms of a minimal form of mechanical "structuration," or a structuration that repeats in a

¹⁸ In Ravaissou's own words, "Habit is not an external necessity of constraint, but a necessity of attraction and desire. It is, indeed, a *law of the limbs*, which follows on from the freedom of spirit.... 'Nature is prevenient grace' [Fénelon]. It is God within us, God hidden solely by being so far within us in this intimate source of ourselves, to whose depths we do not descend." (OH, 55)

novelized way. The concept of “originary technicity” brings to fulfilment the importance of plurality and hetero-affection, and only serves to underline the radical divergence of Derrida and vitalism. Following Derrida’s commentary on Ravaisson in *On Touching*, deconstruction must reject spiritualistic trans-personalism in favour of singularity, alterity and finitude as the irreducible coordinates of thought. This, however, needs to be fleshed out in terms of the understanding of event and machine. The calculability, repetition and structure of technicity is the minimal structural defence that allows any entity to spontaneously emerge. Such an event must be locally individuated and simultaneously violable.¹⁹ The insertion of death in life by inscription, *technē*, writing and trace is decisive with regard to the question of life. There can be no pure life, or life that is only life itself. Life cannot be a hierarchical bestowal of life without already being infected by alterity. It is the misunderstanding of such a hetero-affection of life that Derrida has combated from beginning to end. Life cannot be separated from inscription and technicity since the purely biological needs to draw support from all manner of inscriptions including technology, convention, and history. In his bellwether article, “Différance,” the concept of life and humanism cannot be radically split but mutually complicated. Différance is explicitly not *physis*, or life, but an instance of life whereby “all the others of *physis* — *tekhnē*, *nomos*, *thesis*, society, freedom, history, mind, etc. — a *physis* differed and deferred, or as *physis* differing and deferring.”²⁰ As mentioned, in his *Dissemination*, Derrida stresses *technē* as central to his critique of Platonic repetition (*mimesis*). In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” the *pharmakon* is a constitutive violence, one that destabilizes the organizational force of any living identity. As Derrida puts it: “It would be better to assert that the written traces no longer even belong to the order of the *physis*, since they are not alive.... They do violence to the natural, autonomous organization of the *mnēmōnē*, in which *physis* and *psychē* are opposed.”²¹ No organiza-

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida and Richard Beardsworth, “Nietzsche and the Machine,” in *Negotiations: interventions and interviews, 1971–2001*, (ed.) Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 215.

²⁰ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, (tr.) Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 17. Again in the same text in “White Mythology” Derrida suggests that “This derivative opposition (of *physis* to *technē*, or *physis* to *nomos*) is at work everywhere.” (*Ibid.*, 220) For a good account and summary of these issues see Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), 162–80.

²¹ Derrida, *Dissemination*, (tr.) Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 105.

tional structure can autonomously generate itself since this can only take place heteronymously. Originary technicity is the promissory minimal structure required to ensure iteration and relation of any life form. The vitalist impetus, on the other hand, is to ensure the opposite. This is why Derrida's criticizes Ravaissan's vitalistic account habit, since it is also a species of *pharmakon*, where habits generate their own relations. On a deconstructive account, habit can only truly originate via a memory of the past divided by the contingency of the future. Habits do not structurally gather and congeal as potently as Ravaissan would suggest since every habit is susceptible to contamination by innumerable hosts from convention, to law, to freedom and technology. Habit would thus require prosthesis of its own. Habit cannot only be itself since this would mean it would dictate and passively resist anything it came in contact with. Instead, habit requires originary technicity to compensate for an absence; with regard habit originary technicity is the minimal structure required for the iteration of a habit.

Originary technicity completes the habituality of bodies by inserting an automatic, necessary, and deathly apparatus at the core of any vital spontaneity. Originary technicity delimits biological habituality. For deconstruction, the importance of originary technicity is that it allows us to think precisely the formal conditions for the existence of singular but relational identities. If we turn to Derrida's long essay "Typewriter Ribbon," technicity is revealed as the minimal "structure" of necessity in beings. In this essay, Derrida makes occasional interventions on behalf of the machine. He is not interested in separating nature from technology, and neither is he claiming that thought should be governed by mechanical necessity, nor by the vital resistance of life to mechanization. Instead, Derrida puts it thus:

Intentionality forecloses the machine itself. If, then, some machinality (repetition, caculability, *inorganic* matter of the body) intervenes in a performative event, it is always as an accidental, extrinsic, and parasitical element, in truth a pathological, mutilating, or even mortal element. Here again, to think *both* the machine *and* the performative event together remains a monstrosity to come, an *impossible* event. Therefore the only possible event. But it would be an event that, this time, would no longer happen without the machine. Rather, it would happen by the machine.²²

²² Derrida, *Without Alibi*, (tr.) Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 74.

And later:

Surviving it, being destined to this sur-vival, to this excess over present life the *oeuvre* as trace implies from the outset the structure of this sur-vival, that is, what *cuts* the *oeuvre* off from the operation. This *cut* assures it a sort of archival independence or autonomy that is quasi-machinelike (not machinelike but *quasi-machinelike*), a power of repetition, repeatability, iterability, serial and prosthetic substitution of self for self.²³

Taken together, these quotes show us that to think deconstruction as an event requires thinking both the machine and the natural at once. For Derrida, the most monstrous thing of all is the formal repetition of death as alterity. The machine can never be present to itself. All bodies present themselves as negated, and they have an iterable and substitutable structure, as defined by Derrida in the above quotation. Many of Derrida's later essays and interviews are committed to this type of originary technicity. Best summed up in Richard Beardsworth's by now seminal interview "Nietzsche and the Machine," we see Derrida unambiguously committing to understand in deconstruction as a form of reflection on the complication of life and death in nature and artifice. Deconstructive difference requires mechanic repetition to renew itself. As Derrida puts it to Beardsworth:

In response to your two questions, I would first focus on what Heidegger says about the concept of life, since any living being, in fact, undoes the opposition between *physis* and *techné*. As a self-relation, as activity and reactivity, as differential force, and repetition, life is always already inhabited by technicization. The relation between *physis* and *technics* is not an opposition; from the very first there is instrumentalization [*dès l'origine il y a de l'instrumentalisation*]. The term instrument is inappropriate in the context of originary technicity. Whatever, a prosthetic strategy of repetition inhabits the very moment of life: life is a process of self-replacement, the handing-down of life is a *mechaniké*, a form of *technics*. Not only, then, is *technics* not in opposition to life, it also haunts it from the very beginning.²⁴

²³ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida and Richard Beardsworth, "Nietzsche and the Machine," in *Negotiations: interventions and interviews, 1971–2001*, (ed.) Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 215.

Nature, or any form of vital spirit, is contaminated by a *techne* of bodies to its core.²⁵ Derrida argues this in order to undermine the binary separation of nature and the machine. Originary technicity commits to the logic of supplementarity, iterability, and archewriting; these are concepts which are all committed to the effort to collapse the binary opposition between the technical and the non-technical. In the formation of bodies, technical structuration is always already a decisive moment in the freedom of nature. The presence of any being is a form of techno-creativity, a logic in which the ruthless machine gives bodies a minimal and, metaphorically speaking, skeletal form. Death is the repetition of *techne*; death allows all identities to be other than themselves, thereby allowing them to exist. All habits are thus essentially a letting-die of themselves in an effort to repeat numerically: to give birth to new creations. Deconstruction defines the conditions of the constitution of any body. Such a constitution always already presupposes a relational movement: there can be no body, irrespective of its size, magnitude, or its place in a hierarchy, that can be thought of as a pure body that grounds all others. The extension of the habitual body to beings in general is then an over-determination on Ravaisson's part. This motivates the question as to how we can think about bodies emerging into being. The constitution of any "proper" or "pure" body for deconstruction must be relational *tout court*. This is because any passage outside a body is only related to its contextual environment. This stands in opposition to Ravaisson, in whose thought all beings which exist are related along a continuum. For us, this means more decisively that any relational force takes place through alterity, spacing, absence and death. The relation between any bodies must participate in the realm of the inanimate, the dead, and the brute affectivity of materiality.

In terms of the comparison between Ravaisson and Derrida, we can now see that deconstruction always remains prior to habit with where being is effectively de-habitualized. In this register, habit cannot be considered as an abstract logic of being itself, because in it, there can be no absolute being from which all other beings are derived. We can thus begin to see how some proximity arises between Derrida's deconstruction and Ravaisson's analysis of time and space. There are two distinct points at play here. Firstly, this proxim-

²⁵ For one of the most thoughtful reviews of Derrida's legacy to the philosophical understanding of technology, see Arthur Bradley and Louis Armand, "Thinking Technicity," in *Technicity*, (ed.) Louis Armand and Arthur Bradley (Prague: Charles University Press, 2007), 7–15.

ity is evident in Ravaisson's amalgamation of time and space in the contraction of habit. Secondly, it can be seen in Ravaisson's account of the adaptability of individuated beings in relation to their environment. The first issue goes right to heart of the question of difference and sameness; the second isolates Derrida's commitment to singularity.²⁶ Bodies are singular and novel, as well as having the capacity to be iterable. What can we learn, then, from the defining contrasts between Ravaisson and Derrida? Using Derrida as a springboard, we can see that Ravaisson's conception of habit is one that is about the formal conditions for any body's being (*l'état d'une existence*) as much as it pertains to the empirical content of that being. Indeed, Ravaisson's main aim is not to describe particular acquired habits, but to posit the very ontological emergence of habit itself.

Both permanence and change are essential to Ravaisson's abstract form of being. If there is a being that exists, then by necessity its conditions are of permanence and change, irrespective of the empirical content of particular acquired habits. Ravaisson thus subscribes to a type of transcendental ontology.²⁷ For him, temporalization and spatialization are mutually entwined. Space is that abstract structuring of an entity which allows permanence: it allows beings to remain, whereas time forces beings to change. Any being therefore exists in a fragile state of existence, or manner of existence, strictly grounded on a spatial subsistence which *remains* for a potential change. Carlisle and Sinclair describe this best: "habit involves a relationship to both the past and the future, since it subsists beyond the change which brought it about," and thus it "remains for a possible change. This 'remaining' for a future change takes the form of anticipating (*prévenir*)...."²⁸ In addition, the other important consequence of this "remaining" is that habit operates in relation to a principle of localization. This is a disposition oriented towards relative changes, meaning that habit cannot change into just anything because it demands a relative consistency in relation to the actuality of changes. This is an absolute necessity for allowing any being to cohere in the face of perpetual transformation. Therefore, only certain bodies can have disposition in proportion to relative

²⁶ See Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, (tr.) Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 73.

²⁷ In a Kantian vein Ravaisson is quite happy to outline the conditions of human consciousness, but in a proto-phenomenological way he is also happy to outline what conditions need to be in place for habit to adapt to an environment.

²⁸ Carlisle and Sinclair, OH, 80.

changes. What is relevant for our analysis is Ravaisson's commitment to a principle of minimal consistency: any habit is singular, but it need not at least in itself be absolute. Habit is a relative change existing within specific environmental conditions.

Ravaisson's analysis corresponds up to a point with Martin Hägglund's development of deconstruction as a form of radical atheism. Hägglund's interpretation of Derrida as a radical atheist rests on a commitment to taking Derrida at his word, and removing from deconstructive thought all vestiges of eternity and onto-theology. This requires for Hägglund a commitment to a re-writing of Hegelian negative dialectics and a commitment to understanding identities logically as a dialectic of infinite finitudes. For Hägglund, Derrida subverts totalization by arguing that "bad infinity" is "time" as such. Totality is refuted from its inception for Derrida since there is a perpetual disruption of negative infinity. Différance is defined as both spatial and temporal displacement; différance is the temporal deferring and the spatial differing of all identities. For Hägglund, "Totality is not an unreachable idea but self-refuting as such, since everything is subjected to temporal alteration that prevents it from ever being in itself. Alterity is thus irreducible because of the negative infinity of finitude, which undermines any possible totality from the outset."²⁹ Following Derrida in *Margins of Philosophy*, Hägglund maintains that time is spacing.³⁰ In a similar way, space holds a retaining structure that combines with time, which has an altering capacity. Hägglund, however, extends the conceptual field for thinking deconstruction as the formal conditions of any event without exception. Deconstruction names, in Hägglund's terms, the "minimal support" that allows a being to remain despite temporal alteration.³¹ This has three consequences. Firstly, an event must submit to what Derrida calls the "trace structure," which is to say that for any being to exist, it must remain dependent on the constitution of time, and time logically delimits totality. Secondly, this also requires that there must be a minimal spatial structure that retains a past for a future and provides a minimal identity.³² The trace is thus characterized by the ability to remain relative to what is relatively enduring. Thirdly,

²⁹ Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 92–93.

³⁰ See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 42–43.

³¹ Hägglund, "Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux," *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, (ed.) L. Bryant, G. Harman and N. Srincek (Melbourne: re. press, 2011), 119.

³² This analysis does not subscribe to what Heidegger called the vulgar concept of time, wherein there is only disconnected succession.

the logic of trace would require some principle of localization or singularization.

The logic of a singular event gives a skeletal contour to the structure of an event. The formal conditions of localization require by definition that a being remains relatively localized. Any existent must remain tied to localized events while remaining dependent on some form of substance drawn from the immediate environment.³³ For Derrida, there must be some substantial materiality that presents the limits of a body existing, since its organization relies on a minimal form of structural integrity. This minimal form is an absolute necessity for a body to exist, since it provides a nominal structure which impedes a being from turning into just anything.

This explains why deconstruction is always a question of singularity as well as a dependent and radical alterity. The being of any body, of any singular object, must be characterized as a violable milieu. It must be relatively contingent, not absolute. If there was an absolute relation between all beings then we would be on the same terms as Ravaisson's monism. For Derrida, if there was such an absolute relation then there could thus be no apposite localization, since any singular individuated being would not be individuated by definition, existing only as condition of the continuum of the prior absolute. Correlatively, singularity is also the effect of a trace and there is no absolute individuation. If there is only localization then there would be no relation between objects within a locale. Consequently, deconstruction implies that a body exists minimally within itself, while remaining susceptible to relations within its immediate environment. For deconstruction, no event or body can exist without drawing some formal existential provisions from whatever existents are within its material and immediate environment.

Here we can ultimately see the clear difference between Derrida and Ravaisson. For Ravaisson, habit draws sustenance from anywhere, in effect: from any degree along the continuum of nature. Deconstruction insists that things cannot draw on an infinite amount of substantial material, but only a relatively local amount. Therefore, the formal condition of any event, for deconstruction, is that it neces-

³³ Everything is a process of materialization as well as dematerialization. It is impossible to argue that Derrida is a materialist in the reductive sense an eliminative materialist might employ, as he would never suggest that one substance generates an explanation for all others. Hägglund has recently made some inroads into thinking about how a materialist conceptualization of deconstruction is possible which requires thinking deconstruction as a logical necessity; one in which all existents require a "material support." See Hägglund, "Radical Atheist Materialism," 114–29.

sitates a proportionality of bodies with regard to their immediate environment. Thus, the existence of a body is based on a minimal unity drawing proportional sustenance from the dimensionality, action and spatiality of its relation to relatively local bodies. All bodies that exist are individuated in relation to their environment. They cannot relate to all other beings in the cosmos at the same time. Deconstruction thus offers an explanation of the singularity and the relative “form” of a body. The deconstructive body is a contingent body which is adaptive to the optimum and congenial conditions in which it involves itself.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, while Ravaisson presents nature as a vitalistic continuum, Derrida challenges this in a number of contexts including subjectivity, perception, and the metaphysical temptation to derive all things from prior indivisible principles. As I have shown in this article, for Ravaisson, the dimensions of things could be divided between that which is active and that which is passive. Passivity exists insofar as things are dependent on their relation to bodies within their immediate environment, and active exists insofar as they are self-generated. As we saw in Ravaisson’s analysis of habit, is a biological one which has a wide-ranging application, but it is one which cannot found thought from its inception. Deconstruction, as I have shown, is required to ground the prior formation of habit. Habit, to be habit, must conform to *différance* as temporalization and spacing, even if Ravaisson goes some way towards explaining time and space in his theory of habit. The spacing and temporalization of deconstruction are prior requisites for a body to accrue habituation: they are bodies’ conditions of possibility. In a similar but qualified way, Derrida characterizes space as the relative stability of a being, while time characterizes the ability to transform and move. There is no distinction between the formal yet fragile structures of living beings and those of everything else. For this simple reason, Derrida can never be considered a vitalist. All existents are formed through both structure and contingency, and thus through life *and* death. The central function of death and necessity shows why Derrida places such an emphasis on “originary technicity.” There must be some informational structure or process at play which provides a minimal prosthesis or localized form of enclosure to bodies, even if they are at one and the same time susceptible to contamination and alterity.

Habit is, as Ravaisson argues, a second nature. This definition implies a form of unconscious automaticity. Deconstruction cannot

subscribe wholeheartedly to such automaticity as automaticity is limited to the organic. For Ravaisson, nature certainly engages in self-alteration. However, every alteration or modification is but a degree of change of nature itself. Habit thus cannot transcend nature, and as an activity habit remains wholly immanent to nature. Derrida cannot embrace the natural immanence such an argument presupposes, in which all bodies are on the scale of a totalized, albeit dynamic, plane of nature. Ravaisson's problem is that he relies on the isomorphy of habit and Being. Derrida never fully abjures the thought that right at the heart of nature there is some level of technicity. Nature always requires some repetitive, technical, and repetitive self-altering ability; bodies cannot remain separate from some minimally technical or quasi-mechanical structure. Derrida's philosophical achievement is to begin an extended theory of the differential organization of bodies. He recognizes, in contradiction to the metaphysical creationism of vitalist spirituality, that life does not generate beings on its own. Life as much as anything else is vulnerable and fragile; it is dependent on quasi-mechanical impetuses that require the inorganic to adjust itself in order to procreate itself. Hence at the core of any organic life is death, and at the core of inorganic death is life. The ability of a body to relate or to interact relies ultimately on the ability of an object to change its basic formal structure as well as its altering content. What Derrida does abjure, however, is the modern impetus in which system is defined by totalization within the domain of ontology but such totalization is always impossible. Thus, if deconstruction is to begin to offer a general theory of bodies, it must begin to argue for the singular way its composite material elements are related, interconnected or organized. This is why it must be remembered that Derrida always retains a guarded fidelity towards system and organization. There is always an injunction to coherence, gathering, and form while at the same time dissolution, decomposition, and de-structuring. Deconstruction, as originary technics, provides the general requirements for any and all bodies emerging. When Derrida does bear a fidelity to systematicity, it is one founded on the repetition of an irreducible alterity of bodies.