
'I've Never Met A Me': Identity and Philosophy in *D'Ailleurs, Derrida*

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Abstract

The tension between the absence of identity and the feeling of presence theorised in Jacques Derrida's philosophy is revealed in *D'ailleurs Derrida*, a film by Safaa Fathy (1999). Fathy's film has had limited scholarly attention, yet it makes a distinctive contribution both to understanding and questioning Derridean thought. I argue that the not-ness of identity is revealed by Fathy through the theme of 'elsewhere' (*ailleurs*) in the film and yet it allows the audience to experience the tone and cadence of Derrida's speaking voice, in counterpoint with contemporary and archival images, thus providing a sense of his philosophy in relation to his life. The film shows how forms of absence such as silence, the not-said, and even pauses are essential to his work. Ultimately the film operates by giving Derrida the location, space, and time to articulate his views on identity, the close relationship between writing and filming, the experience of being 'the Marrano's Marrano, circumcision, forgiveness and hospitality, and absence and presence. Nevertheless, Fathy's film both reflects and questions his philosophical focus on absence and spectrality through a range of cinematic techniques, including reverse shots and cross-cutting between locations.

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Introduction

The tension between the absence of identity theorised in Jacques Derrida's philosophy and the feeling of presence is displayed in

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D'ailleurs Derrida, a film by Egyptian director Safaa Fathy (1999).¹ While the film *Derrida* (2002) has been widely screened and analysed in detail (Roden (2003); Dick and Kofman (2005); Strathausen (2009); Guthrie (2011); and Sinnerbrink (2016)),² Fathy's film, which contributes both to an understanding and a questioning of Derridean concepts, has had more limited attention. (Wills, 2004, Kamuf, 2010) The not-meness of identity is revealed by Fathy and yet the film allows the audience to capture the tone and cadence of Derrida's speaking voice, in both French and English, in counterpoint with contemporary and archival images and so experience a sense of his philosophy and its affective connection with his experiences of being excluded. Derrida calls himself 'the Marrano's Marrano', referring to Jewish people in mediaeval Spain who converted to Christianity yet continued to secretly practice their religion. For Derrida, there is a secrecy and covertness to his philosophical practices that exists in his attention to the peripheries of, and blindnesses in, texts. The film shows how for Derrida forms of absence such as silence, the not-said, and even pauses are essential to his texts and philosophy. Fathy makes a film that reflects and questions his philosophical focus on absence and spectrality through a range of cinematic techniques including countershots or reverse shots and cross-cutting between locations. My paper explores how the film uses the theme of 'the elsewhere' and these techniques to trace through and encourage reflection on central philosophical concepts of Derrida's philosophy: identity, writing and film, his sense of himself as a Marrano, circumcision as a metonymy, forgiveness and hospitality, and absence and presence. This reflection is one that may enable us to challenge or at least to question Derrida's ideas as well as to understand them. I begin by examining the importance of 'elsewhere' to the film and Derrida's concerns about identity.

The Elsewhere of Derrida

Derrida's philosophy is presented in a distinctive way in *D'ailleurs Derrida*, where the audience has an intimate experience of him as an individual and an experience of his philosophy as spoken, enacted and contested. This film is very different from the film, *Derrida* (Dick and Kofman 2002), which features Amy Kofman's interviews with Derrida, asking him to discourse on various topics, and interviews with his family, and friends. It is not concerned with 'capturing "the man himself"' as Guthrie notes. (2011, 534) Rather, *D'ailleurs, Derrida*, takes a poetic and suggestive approach to his biography. Fathy allows Derrida to talk

freely concerning what interests him and she films him on location in Spain to evoke his childhood in Algeria, discussing El Greco's and Lorca's work there, shows his life in France and teaching in America at the University of California, Irvine, and in Paris. He was not able to visit Algeria at that time due to the security situation, so Fathy films the 'childhood' scenes without him, conveying an impression of nostalgic memories or 'home movies' through the use of Super 8 film, as well as archival footage of his mother, both interspersed with the contemporary scenes. (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 37, 147; Peeters 2013, 489).³ In each case, the locations are not named; it is for the viewer to determine and it has been assumed that he was filmed in Algeria (for example, Guthrie 2011, 534; Wills, 2004). Few other friends appear, apart from Jean-Luc Nancy explaining how they met and Derrida's concept of the graft, and Derrida's partner Marguerite and he talk about the graves of their cats in the garden, but she is not introduced. Furthermore, Fathy herself, although we know she is there, says little, apart from a question or two and a few lines from *Circumfession* and about Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, and is generally unobtrusive. One exception is when she refuses to go into Derrida's hut in the garden filled with theses and manuscripts because it is 'too dark'. Another is early in the film when we see her and the crew filming. Due to Fathy's discretion, *D'ailleurs, Derrida* allows the viewer to draw their own conclusions about Derrida's ideas and their relevance to film and philosophy.

Nevertheless, Fathy and Derrida published a book to go with the film: *Tourner les mots: au bord d'un film: 'Shooting words: on the edge of a film'* (Derrida and Fathy, 2000) with a joint introduction, separate essays by both of them, and a series of stills and production shots.⁴ She explains the conditions of filming, which were quite difficult, especially in Algiers. Fathy also questions Derrida's philosophy, pointing out that he does not find catastrophe in forgiveness as he finds it in hospitality, as I will discuss (Ibid., 31). Furthermore, Fathy reveals the lengths to which she went to find, for example, the graves of Derrida's brothers, Norbert who died when he was two years old and Derrida eight, and Paul who died before Derrida was born, the house where he lived in Algiers, the school he was excluded from in 1942 because he was Jewish, and the synagogue he remembered from childhood. (Ibid., 34–49) Likewise the filming in Almería and Toledo in Spain is partly to explore Derrida's Jewish-Spanish origins. All these considerations may suggest that the film is a biographical one or that it is a documentary and to some extent that is true. The story of Derrida is being told by someone else, as Derrida

cannot fully tell his own story, and any story is only alluded to through short vignettes, images, sound, and music rather than a narrator.⁵

However, Fathy insists, the film is neither documentary, biography, nor fiction (Ibid., 15; Derrida and Fathy 2016, 543). It is biographical in that Fathy takes a great deal of effort to trace Derrida's life, especially his childhood in Algeria, but that is not the primary aim or achievement of the film. Instead, I would suggest, it is an attempt at a genuine collaboration to explore the relation between philosophy and film, where Derrida reflects on film and its unique qualities, and Fathy enables spectators to understand and question Derrida's philosophy. Derrida himself and his philosophy are the subject and object of the film, but the film does not provide a detailed history of his life, and for example, Derrida's houses at Laguna Beach, Ris-Orangis and his childhood home in El Biar, a suburb of Algiers, are also filmed but not identified, so there is a kind of disorientation for the viewer, who has to guess where they might be. Furthermore, Fathy does not use voice-overs or inter-titles in the film, so the images and sounds, such as that of waves on the shore or a dripping tap, have to do their work without explanation, or the audience has to link Derrida's memories with an image from elsewhere in the film. The images of Algeria, taken by Fathy alone, also have to converse with the images of Derrida in the present in Spain, USA and France (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 65). Derrida notes at one point that he always betrays his readers by not addressing a singular, unique, reader. A film is bound to betray any singular viewer in the same way. Yet the film also tries, I argue, to do justice to the singularity of Derrida's experience and thought, partly through its evocation of place, especially Algeria. It also contributes to a development of Derrida's relevance to film theory and philosophy that goes beyond an extension of his views on writing to film, a possibility that, for example, an earlier study by Peter Brunette and David Wills explored (1989). If the film had to be categorised, it would be as a documentary art film that could be treated as a meditation on philosophical themes from Derrida's work, weaving and juxtaposing these themes with the biographical elements and creating a poetic and evocative work of art.⁶ The film does not have a narrative structure; rather one philosophical idea leads to another in a sequence of associations. This structure is parallel to the way Derrida's notions lead from one to another throughout his *oeuvre*.

This sequencing of ideas allows Fathy to address philosophical themes that interest Derrida in a way that is sympathetic to but not uncritical of his approach to them. Antoine Spire, interviewing Derrida, suggests that

in the film '[i]t looks as if the specter of Derrida is drifting about in the film', and Derrida replies:

Spectrality is at work everywhere, and more than ever, in an original way, in the reproducible virtuality of photography or cinema. And it's one of the themes that Safaa Fathy, who was also aware of my interest in the *revenant*, chose to privilege, along with the themes of the secret, the foreigner, the *elsewhere*, sexual differences, Judaic-Arabic-Spanish, the Marrano, forgiveness or hospitality. Spectrality also because the film all the time evokes people who are dead—the spectrality of my mother, some family tombs, the burial of the Count of Orgaz, and so on. (Derrida, 2005a, 158)⁷

Some of these themes are more prominent than others, for instance, sexual difference is not discussed or evoked in detail, whereas the theme of *elsewhere* is crucial to the entire construction of the film.

The term 'd'ailleurs' in the film's title can be translated as 'moreover', 'besides', 'in another way', 'otherwise', or even 'in other respects' and these terms may seem more apposite than 'Derrida's elsewhere', the English title of the film. Yet at the beginning of the film it is suggested that 'elsewhere' is of particular interest to both Derrida and Fathy, and that deconstruction, along with other significant themes, are characterised by reference to an 'elsewhere'. The title is probably best put as 'From Elsewhere, Derrida' in order to reflect the style and themes of the film of Derrida as outsider and outcast. David Wills says that the title means 'Moreover Derrida' before it means 'Derrida from Elsewhere' and so a logical and temporal shift is stressed over a spatial one, but he does not explain why it must mean 'moreover' *first* when it can mean both (2004). Furthermore, the spatial shifts from one country to another are central throughout the film. Through the images of so many different places, the cuts between the locations, and Derrida's obsession with secret origins, they evoke an elsewhere of Derrida. There is a whole series of them portrayed: Derrida is living in France but he is from Algeria; he teaches in America but he is French; he speaks French but it is not his language;⁸ and he speaks English when his language is French. He is always elsewhere, not at home, from elsewhere, or thinking of elsewhere. To take the point further, the memories of elsewhere are screened as distorted by imagination and the passage of time. For example, when Fathy searches for the 'great synagogue' it turns out to be a *little* synagogue (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 49). Then the locations themselves have a kind of elsewhere, as this synagogue that was originally a mosque, became a synagogue and then became a mosque again, an example for Derrida of the close ties between

the Abrahamic religions and of the vagaries of colonisation. The history of colonisation means that there is constant change to the names and the meanings attributed to places; Derrida's specific 'elsewhere' is connected to him as a colonial and post-colonial product, and he is filmed while walking through a colonial museum. Another example of the disruption of 'elsewhere' is how Algeria is filmed when there is snow on the ground, a twice in a lifetime occurrence, so that Algeria is not really Algeria. Furthermore, Derrida is to appear 'elsewhere' to the film, a kind of stranger in the film (Ibid., 74). Perhaps this why he seems like a ghost haunting the film. Another reason is the colours, which are washed-out and muddy in the contemporary sequences and so they contribute to the sense of watching a dream about Derrida rather than a direct representation of him.

I argue that the film both presents Derridean deconstruction and questions it, a form of film that is an illustration of a philosophy and also more than that. It illustrates in some scenes, for example, where Derrida is in an aquarium discussing how uncomfortable it is to be filmed. In many other scenes, however, the film acts as a counterpoint to what Derrida is saying. While Fathy is interested in and understands Derrida's sense of deconstruction, she is also interested in place, images, how a scene looks and sounds, and how the viewer can relate a philosophical idea to their experience. Moreover, the philosophical ideas are explained through reference to Derrida's life, so that his voice, gestures, and movements all contribute *both* to an understanding of deconstruction and a sense that there is more to philosophy than deconstruction. Nevertheless, Derrida is also interested in showing how his philosophy is a philosophy of film: this is not just a film of philosophy or a philosopher.

Writing and Filming

Within the film Derrida talks about film as a kind of writing, or writing as a kind of film-making. The idea of writing contributes to the theme of an elsewhere, as he sees it as always beyond its own present, not fully present. Further, Derrida implies that making a book is like editing a film in the sense that in both cases we have a text or inscription, then we select from it, cut it up, splice it together, and edit it to make a seamless form. He notes that the silences and exclusions of writing are also important to the film, yet the film also takes Derrida's writing and makes it into sound, image, and atmosphere. Furthermore, he is a kind of material for the film, as the film is a biographical film of sorts, but is cut up and

re-edited to make a film that moves from one place to another. There is no obvious narrative to the film, as I observed, but what provides its centre is Derrida, his life and works. In the text, Derrida makes the point that only one film is made from all the possible films that could be made, so one has to be blind to all those other films to see the film; (2000, 79)⁹ thus seeing of the film is a kind of blindness.

Derrida also addresses the question of autobiography and writing. For him, of course, autobiography is impossible autobiography – by which he means the idea that he knows who he is. He suggests he is always divided in himself, and that is before the shooting of the film even starts. The possibility of saying ‘I’ is linked to writing in general, to a deferral and differing that is like that of *différance*. According to Derrida, we cannot control or know our identity any more than the meaning of our writing, as he says in ‘Otobiographies’: ‘the effects or structure of a text are not reducible to its “truth,” to the intended meaning of its presumed author, or even its supposedly unique and identifiable signatory’ (Derrida 1985, 29). Derrida has never met a ‘me’; he is just an actor in the film, he claims. The ‘me’ does not really exist and is not present. Rather, we are always searching for it, and autobiography and biography search for it. For instance, Derrida writes in order to search for his identity and to create himself through his writing. If he found his identity, however, he would not write and in a sense would not live, he asserts. The audience of a film could never really know him, yet they can experience something of his life, his presence, in Fathy’s film, even if it appears spectral.

The film has Derrida as a kind of ghostly presence throughout, as Spire notes. From Federico García Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* (1932/1989), Derrida takes the idea of the haunting of a place by a woman to describe the braiding of masculine and feminine voices together.¹⁰ For Derrida, when we speak, the ‘I’ is made possible by the tangling of voices, but women’s voices are symbolically repressed when one tries to reduce the different voices to one. He suggests that the masculine and feminine is braided in his voice, as they are in any ‘I’, but that we so often try to separate out these voices. However, the ghosts come back, the multiplicity of different voices return, just as the *revenant* haunts and we should be open to that. The *revenant* is a visible ghost or someone who comes home after a long absence, as a person may return to a country they have not lived in for a long time, as Derrida appears to return to Algeria even though he is not there. A ghostly effect is created by Fathy editing his voice over some of the scenes in Algeria, so that he seems to be there, which could explain why so many viewers believe he was

there. His physical absence is countered by the presence of his voice, which writes him into Algeria.

Finally, writing and film can be brought together in relation to their shared indecorum. Writing is based on defiance, repression, and resistance, Derrida says, whereas reading is deciphering the calculation of self-protection in writing. He notes the impropriety of writing; self-protection says we should not do that because it is unjustifiable and immodest. This is equally true of speaking, appearing in a film, and making a film; it is daring to expose ourselves in that way. The subject (or actor) has to ask forgiveness for that impropriety and the fact that writing and film erase the singularity of the reader and viewer. Even if I leave a secret word for someone I love, Derrida argues, it becomes decipherable for others and so a betrayal. I address 'anyone' rather than the singular individual. Writing is a betrayal or perjury in that sense, and so film is a betrayal of the singular viewer as it is made for an 'anyone', not an individual. Is the film a betrayal of Derrida? In some ways, Fathy's efforts focus on not betraying Derrida, on making a deconstructive film about deconstruction. But should not a film betray its subject, in the sense that Derrida describes 'betrayal as truth'? (Derrida 2005a, 157) The film faithfully betrays Derrida by allowing his philosophical ideas concerning identity and sovereignty to be open to scrutiny and challenge, and one of the most important themes related to his identity is that of the Marrano.

The Marrano's Marrano

The not-meness of any identity is shown in the film, and the audience is dislocated from place, not knowing the location, and sometimes not sure who is speaking. And yet the film allows the audience to capture the tempo and quality of Derrida's speaking voice, and to relate that to his philosophy, his background, his interests. As Fathy explains, Derrida has for many years identified with the figure of the Marrano, the Catholic who is secretly Jewish, the clandestine Marrano. Marrano literally means 'pig' or 'disgusting' in Spanish. In Spain and Portugal during the Inquisitions (1478–1834) Sephardic Jews were forcibly converted to Catholicism to avoid murder or banishment. However, they continued to practice Jewish tradition in secret.¹¹ Toledo in the film represents this crossroads of cultures and religions that Derrida relates to.

What interests Derrida is the connection with his own supposed Judeo-Spanish origins and even more importantly, the culture of secrecy of the Marrano. He also takes things a step further by fashioning himself

as a Marrano's Marrano, a second-order Marrano, because he is far from the Judeo-Spanish origins. Derrida identifies with holding a secret like the Marrano, a secret that is bigger than himself and that he does not have access to. The thought is that he is clandestine, secret, invisible, and a universal Marrano; he is without a place or at least he experiences himself as without a place, and sees himself as giving an outsider's philosophy of the outsider. This appears to be an odd claim coming from someone who has been called the most famous philosopher in the world. However, I think we can interpret Derrida as describing his experience as excluded from school during the occupation of Algeria, as an Algerian in France, of someone who is not sure of their lineage, who does not feel quite at home even though he taught a course at the same time on the same day in the same place for thirty years (5pm Wednesday ENS). The claim also reflects his concern with the secret.

In a number of works, Derrida has equated lack of secrecy with totalitarianism; for example, in his essay 'Prolegomena: History of the Lie' (2002) he argues that we should respect secrecy.¹² Correspondingly, the Marrano leads a secret life and so resists fusional communities, of which totalitarianism is the most extreme example. In a discussion of his personal experiences elsewhere, Derrida connects his persecution for being Jewish when he was young with his distrust of such communities (Derrida 2007b, 15). Just as he rejects the clear identity of the 'me' he rejects any identity of the 'we'. Derrida argues that to talk to ourselves, hear ourselves, and talk to others, we have to think of the interruption, the infinite distance that remains within and between self and others. His image is that it is like throwing a dice or casting a line: we do not know if we will find someone, and it is mad to say 'we' for there is no 'we'. Therefore the theme of Derrida's own lack of identity or confused identity is linked with the lack of identity of a community more generally. The other very personal theme that Derrida connects with his search for identity is circumcision, an attempt to mark someone as belonging to a community.

Circumcision

In *Turner les mots*, Derrida suggests that the figure or motif of the wound or circumcision is the most continuous theme in the work. He also calls it the 'metonymy of metonymies' (Derrida 2000, 82). Again, this is a reference back to the cutting of writing and the cutting of editing in the film, as well as to his own Jewishness. At the same time, Derrida wants to think of circumcision as an experience that everyone has in

becoming part of a community. He uses circumcision as an emblem of the way we are all marked, wounded, scarred, and cut by traditions. Circumcision is an inscription or writing: it leaves a mark on the body, or a trace, but of course it is not only marks on the body. Any wound, physical or psychological, leaves a scar. That scar is an inscription or trace in a wider significance that shows how we have 'disymmetrically received the law', because we are marked by the community before making a choice. Derrida argues that there are equivalents in every culture: marks, dates, shibboleths, all refer to circumcision in the broad sense. A shibboleth is a term or custom that distinguishes members of the group from outsiders.¹³ Circumcision also, for Derrida as an individual, represents the great unfinished work, the work that would never be written, the work that ensures that his body of work will never be complete, will always be deferred.

Derrida wanted to write a book about circumcision but it is the book that could never be written: the ruin or scattered archive. In the film, he references the notion of 'archive fever' (1996) a concept he associates with a concern about his works outliving him. Likewise, the film is filled with images of ruins, for example, in Tipaza, Algeria, that mirror the uncompleted or deteriorated work.¹⁴ The 'ruin' that Derrida wished to write was about circumcision and about himself. He aimed to reveal his unconscious, and the mark of circumcision on his unconscious. However, Derrida knew that he would not write and could not write that book, although he wrote about circumcision in *Circumfession* (Bennington and Derrida, 1993).¹⁵ First, the project was unlimited, it would have run to two hundred volumes. Second, the project was 'like a book about the umbilicus of my dreams'. It would have gone to the roots of his unconscious but such a thing – circumcision – should never be shown. That would be too great an impropriety. This reference to the unconscious and psychoanalysis is really important to the film, and Derrida stresses this point, as he links psychoanalysis to an understanding of his life. Thus, the meaning of the way that the film shows the archival shots from his childhood, and the unexplained shots of his youthful home and the streets of Algiers, can be interpreted as images of what might be hidden in the mind of the philosopher.¹⁶ Here too, Derrida suggests that the secret plays a role in politics. But in this case, it is not keeping secrets from ourselves. Rather it is that if I am tyrannical inside myself, I will be tyrannical outside. Thus, we have to deal with the unconscious, and constantly analyse ourselves. In that sense, psychoanalysis challenges the dominance of deconstruction, just as psychoanalysis intrudes into Sartre's existential interpretation of his

childhood in *Words* (1964). As I said, the film questions deconstruction, or rather questions Derrida's deconstruction in implicit ways, and that further emerges through the presentation of forgiveness and hospitality.

Forgiveness and Hospitality

Fathy notes in *Tourner les mots* that forgiveness, for Derrida, is not a catastrophe in the same way that hospitality is (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 31). She is pointing out that in spite of his assertion of an analogy between the two concepts, his articulation of them implies important differences.¹⁷ The film also juxtaposes the words with images that appear to strain against them. For example, Derrida discusses hospitality while in a seemingly inhospitable place of ruins in the desert. On the one hand, the desert scene could evoke the tradition of nomadic hospitality for the visitor he mentions. On the other hand, it can suggest his feeling of being lost and deserted and alone. One such experience was when he was arrested and imprisoned in Prague in 1981 due to his work with Czech dissidents, where he was charged with drug-smuggling, as an experience of anti-hospitality or a strange distortion of hospitality. But then in the prison a Hungarian gypsy, another prisoner, welcomed him to the prison, and helped him to prepare himself for the experience, what Derrida reads as a kind of rehearsal. He thought he had readied himself, in that he had prepared a place for being in jail in his life, and acted so as to bring about his arrest. Derrida claims he said to himself that '[t]his is good, it only happens to me, I was waiting for it'.¹⁸ So it was not unexpected, more like a visit than pure hospitality as Derrida defines it. I should say that he only spent one day incarcerated, although he endured a seven-hour interrogation (Peeters 2013, 332–41).

Derrida's argument is that a pure hospitality is a kind of catastrophe, a completely surprising and dangerous openness to whatever comes. Pure hospitality is not a political category, as no politics or law could be open to the event of the disaster of hospitality by definition, he says. Even the most hospitable countries protect themselves from it. Hospitality is only possible as impossible, what cannot happen and so I cannot know what I must decide in relation to hospitality. It is impossible in its requiring some sovereignty or place from which to offer it at the same time as its limit or pure hospitality implying the complete undermining of any such sovereignty or place. There are some similarities between hospitality and forgiveness in having both pure and impure forms that must be negotiated, and in involving an openness to the other and to what is surprising.

The question of forgiveness also ties to that of the secret both in the sense of a crime that cannot be spoken of and in the sense of a forgiveness that happens through the unconscious. However, forgiveness is the healing of a wound; it is not a catastrophe. Fathy films Derrida discussing forgiveness in a teaching context in Paris, which underlines the differences between forgiveness and hospitality. The figures Derrida talks about in relation to forgiveness in his seminar are Hegel, Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton and Desmond Tutu, all figures of reconciliation and recovery, rather than of disaster. As he describes it, first the crime makes a wound or trauma and the wound leaves a memory in the scar, as in circumcision. This memory or trace needs to be healed, and that can be healed through a talking cure. Derrida cites Hegel as seeing the significance of talking to reconciliation, or how the word of reconciliation is opposed to silence. 'As soon as we begin to speak we are beginning reconciliation', that is, even if you are declaring war, Derrida contends. Unlike the calamity of hospitality, forgiveness heals the wound rather than exposes us to danger. In that sense, Derrida has to forgive Fathy for cutting his life up in the film, and for making an abrupt cut from his lecture on forgiveness and Nelson Mandela to Jean-Luc Nancy walking down the street and opening his front door. And the spectator has to forgive him the impropriety of appearing in the film. So, to take his word seriously, in the film Derrida is speaking to the audience, he is reconciling with us explicitly. The betrayals of the film are forgiven and so the wound is healed rather than a catastrophe caused. A different betrayal of Derrida occurs through the very presentation of Derrida's 'elsewhere', his spectral existence. This film both shows the necessity and impossibility of having an identity, of being 'Derrida' and undermines the claim of impossibility, as we can see.

Absence and Presence: the Impossibility and Necessity of Being

What Derrida says about his life may be said of anyone who always exaggerates. I refer here to his comment that '[i]n short, I exaggerate. I always exaggerate' (Derrida 1998, 48). He says 'I am the luckiest and happiest person in the world and yet I am destitute, sad, impatient, jealous'.¹⁹ 'I am these contradictions and so is anyone and yet this is Derrida. What should we make of these contradictions? His concern to focus on certain concepts means he has to focus on their opposites. One of the scenes left out of the film involved two priests asking Derrida why he is so interested in purity (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 31). An embarrassed Derrida replies that he is interested in contamination and

if you are interested in contamination then you need to talk about purity.²⁰ This shows how deconstruction always invokes its opposites, and Derrida has to bring in this contradiction to describe his views. When I showed this film to students in one of my courses with a section on Derrida's work, many of them were wiping away a tear or two. Someone said that Derrida reminded them of the Dalai Lama, and a number accusingly asked me why I had not shown them the film before they read Derrida's writings or heard any lectures on his work. They would have understood what he was saying, his philosophy would have made sense, they said. What is it that makes (some) people respond to the film in that way?

Part of the answer is related to a sense of identity that Jean Améry picks up on. Like Améry, Derrida stresses the impossibility of being who he is; and yet the viewer experiences through the film the other side, the necessity of being Derrida. Améry discusses the necessity and impossibility for him of being a Jew. It is necessary, on the one hand, because he is seen as Jewish by others and to have solidarity with other Jewish people, and impossible, on the other hand, since he did not grow up with the Jewish tradition (Améry 1980, 82–101). Equally, Derrida refers to the idea 'that I still feel, *at once, at the same time*, as less Jewish *and* more Jewish than the Jew [*plus que Juif*], exemplarily Jew, but also hyperbolically Jew' (Derrida 2007b, 16). The impossibility is that of the aporia and the undecidable, to which everyone has a responsibility. That undecidability is one important reason why Derrida is so critical of Sartre's distinction between being authentically or inauthentically Jewish (Ibid., 18–30). Yet the film shows that even if his view is that we are never a me and we never meet a me, nevertheless he is Derrida, not an actor playing Derrida.

While Fathy stresses the undermining of any identity and identification, and uses countershots to stress that disconnection, the viewer can also experience the shots as linking two scenes, as providing that connection instead. She uses countershots or reverse shots to juxtapose two images: for example, the shot of the two little boys, Derrida and his brother Norbert, with a view of their mother. Other examples are Derrida and his students in Paris who 'see without seeing', a reverse shot of ruins and a beach, and Jean-Luc Nancy who 'sees without seeing' Derrida working in his study in the US (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 65–66). Nancy met Derrida in 1969 when he was 29, after he sent an essay to Derrida, who responded and said he was feeling alone at that time. Nancy had had a heart transplant, which Derrida links to the idea of graft or heterogeneity, a heterogeneity at the heart of

the self. A countershot of Derrida in the garden is also shown during Nancy's interview. For his part, Derrida uses the image of the heart transplant to comment on how he has been transplanted into France. He also talks about the Abrahamic tradition that is 'sealed' or marked by Christianity, and that we cannot escape Christianity, we can only deconstruct it by not avoiding it. Teaching his seminar in the US, Derrida refers to Nancy's book about Christianity and its self-deconstructing nature, whereby world-wide Christianisation is the self-deconstruction of Christianity (Nancy 2008). A brief shot of Nancy appears at this point. So does the film make us experience the dislocating, distancing, rupture of deconstruction? Or does the film, for example here, affirm the link between Nancy and Derrida, the ties of friendship, the shared thought of the heart transplant, and the deconstruction of Christianity? Arguably, the film does both because it is the viewer's interpretation that allows the possibility of these different meanings.

The camera and the viewer are meant to constitute a third place as a kind of witness, which Fathy believes breaks down the distinction between subjective and objective and direct and indirect (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 66). There's a scene where Derrida is driving through the desert, listening to music, and then the film cuts to him driving along Rue d'Ulm in Paris to the École Normale Supérieure, listening to the same music, Lili Labassi.²¹ So it is clear that the music is non-diegetic, not of Derrida's life as such. That is Fathy's way of being faithful to Derrida's thought, by stressing the film's own cutting and editing. However, should not the film be unfaithful to be faithful? A film that just showed deconstruction or talked about deconstruction would not be a deconstructive film, since deconstruction is an account of the self-deconstruction of texts.²² On the one hand, the audience might have an experience of a close connection, and of identifying and understanding Derrida, but the film breaks that connection, and makes the audience unsure of what is being seen and heard. As he contends, we are singularities with an interrupted connection and that interruption must remain. On the other hand, the film shows how silence, the not-said, the pauses are essential to Derrida's texts, how his spoken voice matters, and how his concerns are autobiographical and related to his specific childhood. So it is faithfully unfaithful in evoking his presence. On the visual level Fathy describes her approach as being 'concerned with the unseen, or the invisible, whose effect shapes the addressee's reaction to the piece.' (Fathy 2008, 172) In that sense, the experience of the film is not even limited by the spoken words, the images, the haunting music, and the sounds of the sea. The idea of the unseen and broken links

is also underlined by motifs of the misplaced tile in Derrida's childhood home, the cat that he does not see, and the letter that Derrida posts in Toledo.

Finally, the film ends with a scene where Derrida sounds very Nietzschean, remarking: 'I would like to repeat it all'. He could relive everything again: good or bad.²³ But then he takes it back, in a sense, by saying '[i]f past evil has a future it's not a curse but no longer a blessing. If the negative proliferates then I don't want to repeat it'. Derrida asserts that life is only understood at the end, at the moment of death, where we might realise whether there is something that corrupts the entire happy memory. He suggests that a lie, an error, a fault, or what he calls the seed of a catastrophe could undermine our contentment. The tragedy of existence is that the meaning in a long life is only determined at the last moment. At last, wandering through the desert away from the viewer, he says that he is the happiest and luckiest person in the history of humanity and yet 'sad, deprived, destitute, disappointed, impatient, jealous, desperate, and that if the two certainties are not mutually exclusive, then I do not know how one can risk even the least sentence' (Derrida 1993, 268–70). Here Derrida is proposing that we must accept the tension between these two ways of understanding our life, and likewise the viewer must accept the tension of a film that portrays non-identity or not-meness and suggests identity.

Conclusion

While the film plays with the tensions between biography and documentary and the very idea of filming a philosopher of deconstruction, ultimately the film works by giving Derrida the location and time to speak his philosophy, and by allowing the film to do its own work, to allow us to question his understanding of philosophical ideas, such as the Marrano's Marrano, circumcision, forgiveness and hospitality. Fathy sees the presence of things in the film as evoking absence (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 68). However, the spectator can also experience the intimate presence of Derrida as he refers to absence, and see the link between the poetic evocation of his life and his thought. The film ends with him saying simply 'I Sign', with a final huge close-up of his face, cropped, and throughout he appears to haunt different spaces, either with his image or his voice. Yet the voice of Derrida in *D'ailleurs, Derrida* (1999) is also a conversation with us (Ibid., 69). The film shows both the intimacy of the voice and the body, in experiencing the living philosopher, and the deferral or distancing of that experience.

Fathy cuts between different places to make us realise the paradoxical character of a search for identity and identification. Yet the film allows the viewer to think; to feel, that they have found that identity, and in some sense understand Derrida even though he is elusive, and in so doing, to question his philosophy of spectrality.

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Notes

1. Fathy (1958-) grew up in Egypt and studied arts and theatre in Paris. She has made other films, including *Dardasha Socotra* (Safaa Fathy 2006), a documentary concerning the Yemeni island Socotra, *Nom á la mer* (Safaa Fathy

- 2004), a film of Derrida reading one of her poems, and more recently the documentary *Mohammad sauvé des eaux* (*Mohammad saved from the waters*) (Safaa Fathy 2013) and also writes poems and essays.
2. Sinnerbrink's article compares the two films, arguing that *Derrida* (2004) demonstrates cinematic thinking more effectively.
 3. Derrida also appeared in the film *Ghost Dance* (Ken McMullen 1983), discussed as an example of the 'philosopher cameo' where the philosophers play themselves, by Trine Riel (2015).
 4. The first section is translated in Derrida and Fathy (2016). In his preface to this translation, Max Cavitch says that the book is about friendship, and that '*D'ailleurs, Derrida* is the record and the product of a cinematic collaboration that helped determine their friendship's shape and destiny' (Derrida and Fathy 2016, 541). In an interview, Derrida discusses how he sees the relation between the film and the book as 'at once connected to each other and radically independent' (Baecque 2015, 35).
 5. For his part, in the book Derrida describes the work of himself as Actor and Fathy as Author, as well as an A to Z of themes from the film (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 71–126).
 6. See Carl Plantinga for his conception of a documentary film as an 'asserted veridical representation' (2005, 114–5). David LaRocca and Timothy Corrigan are sceptical about documentary films' consistency in producing such representations (2016, 30).
 7. Derrida discusses El Greco's painting *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586–8, Toledo, Spain) in *Circumfession* (*Jacques Derrida*, Bennington and Derrida 1993a, 150–2). In the film, he describes how found the painting on the anniversary of the day he was told that his mother was dying and then his mother had come back to consciousness by the time he arrived at the hospital.
 8. See *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998) for Derrida's description of his relation to the French language (2007b, 20), and the relation to the motif of elsewhere (1998, 70–1).
 9. The theme of blindness is significant for the film, with the figure of the blind man of Toledo Fathy shoots to Derrida's understanding of film (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 71–86), and to his work on the portrait (1993a).
 10. Jean-Paul Martinon's chapter on the film concentrates on mourning, the braid of Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (1932/1989), and ghosts, using Derrida's *Aporias* (1993b).
 11. See *Aporias* (1993b, 74; 77; 81).
 12. See also *A Taste for the Secret* 2001. An example of this focus on secrecy is in Kant's view that we should respect secrecy in friendship, as Derrida observes in *The Politics of Friendship* (2005b, 257); however, Kant's political thought is based on principles of publicity.
 13. See Derrida's discussion of the Shibboleth and Paul Celan's work (1986).
 14. In her work Amy Hubbell stresses the connection between ruins and the impossibility of returning to the vanished past of Algeria (2015, 194).
 15. *Circumfession*, a text Derrida wrote linked to Geoffrey Bennington's *Derridabase*, is an attempt at systematising Derrida's thought in *Jacques Derrida* and provides several passages for the film (Bennington and Derrida 1993). Kamuf's introductory remarks on the film stress how important this text is in being read out and in providing significant themes about the process of being surrendered to others (2010, 112–14).
 16. Fathy also traces the journeys the young Jacques took with his father collecting orders for wine and spirits (Derrida and Fathy 2000, 50–54).
 17. See Derrida's *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001).

18. This could be understood as a reference to Kafka's story 'Before the Law' in *Acts of Literature*, 1991, which he was working on at the time (Powell 2007, 151).
19. As Kamuf (2010) points out, this is a quotation from *Circumfession* (Bennington and Derrida 1993, 268–70).
20. See Anderson for an analysis of Derrida's contamination between the ethically singular and general, and ethical duty and social and moral norms in relation to Todd Haynes' *Far From Heaven* (2012, 131–67).
21. Lili Labassi is a Jewish chaabi (popular) singer and violinist who performed and recorded in Algeria in the 1920s and 1930s.
22. For example Sinnerbrink argues that *Derrida* (2002) is more successful at performing deconstruction than Fathy's film (2016).
23. Derrida makes a similar claim in his final interview, where he says: 'When I recall my life, I tend to think that I have had the good fortune to love even the unhappy moments of my life, and to bless them. Almost all of them, with just one exception (2007a, 52).