

Nietzsche's Forgotten Umbrella —Memory, Life and History*

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Abstract

While forgetfulness is usually treated as a defect of memory, especially in relationship to the past, Nietzsche famously praises it as a creative, affirmative and fundamental element of life and of “the unhistorical.” In an unpublished Nietzschean manuscript we find the sentence, “I have forgotten my umbrella.” This “forgotten umbrella” reminds us that history, or memory, is just like an umbrella—by turns opened and closed, unfolded and folded, remembered and forgotten. We open it only when it can serve our lives. Doubtless the question of forgetfulness is a (Heideggerian) question of *time* and of *Being-in-the-world*—but also a (Derridean) one of the *deconstruction* of memory, of life and of history. That is, forgetfulness is an umbrella which philosophers of history had forgotten and left (deliberately or unconsciously) somewhere until Nietzsche found it and used it to protect “life” from the heavy rain of “remembering” and the hot sun of “Being.” Thus this paper

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aims to explore the deconstructive nature of forgetfulness and its problematic relation with memory, life and history. In so doing, I will also examine the problem of why and how we can artistically reconcile “forgetting” with “remembering” in order to serve and (*re*)create or (*re*)engender our own lives.

Key Words: Nietzsche, forgetting, memory, life, history

Memory recaptures, reverses and suspends what is already accomplished in birth—in nature. (Levinas, 1969: 56)

[T]here could be no happiness, no serenity, no hope, no pride, no *present* without forgetfulness. (Nietzsche, 1996: 39)

“I have forgotten my umbrella” is an unexplained and mysterious sentence isolated in quotation marks in one of Nietzsche’s manuscripts discovered after his death. In *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles* (1979), Derrida points out that these words could be a citation, a sample, a note, a reminder or an overheard sentence. The forgetfulness of the umbrella’s owner can mean something or nothing at all. There is, however, no infallible way of understanding the author’s real intention or the true occasion of these words; they remain an unrecognized trace, an insoluble riddle on the horizon of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, the forgotten umbrella of this mysterious sentence reminds us that Nietzsche’s philosophy of forgetfulness has long been overlooked—just like a forgotten umbrella leaning against a dark corner of time, *there*. Within the vast library of volumes dedicated to examining the relations between memory (including traumatic memory) and history, the concept of forgetfulness appears as an unnoticed lacuna, one not yet really studied rigorously, or seriously, in the academic field of history. Nietzsche is perhaps the only exception.

While forgetfulness is usually treated as a flaw or defect of memory, especially in regard to our relationship to the past, in *Untimely Meditations* (1997) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1996), Nietzsche extols it as a creative, affirmative and fundamental element of life and of “the unhistorical.” That is to say, so long as the horizons of our lives are defined by the trajectories of Hegelian historiography and Apollonian rationality rather than the art of forgetting and the will to power, Nietzsche sees no hope for true human dignity, for true happiness in life. Doubtless the question of forgetfulness is a question of *time* and of *Being-in-the-world*. Or rather it is a question of the *deconstruction* (not mere Heideggerian *destruction*) of memory, of life and of

history.¹ The aim of this paper is thus to explore the deconstructive nature of forgetfulness and its problematic relation with memory, life and history. Rejecting the Socratic (and Hegelian) concept of morality which privileges reason and philosophy over the will and over art, and by remedying the poststructuralist (pantextualist) approach which privileges texts and discourse over life experience and reality (such as those in academic journals), I will suggest why, and how, we may take a *pragmatic* stance and create a life-art style of history—artistically combining “forgetting” and “remembering”—in order to further the Nietzschean project of life-engendering, and serve our own lives *here and now*.²

¹ The first goal Heidegger achieved in *Being and Time* (1962) is what he calls “the destruction of the history of ontology” (44). Yet the aim of this task is neither “negative” nor “positive” but rather “deconstructive” (it “shakes off” the tradition of ontology and, at the same time, “stakes out” the affirmative possibilities of that tradition). Therefore, it is neither “destruction” nor “construction” but rather “deconstruction.” Heidegger writes: “to bury the past in nullity is not the purpose of this destruction; its aim is positive; its negative function remains unexpressed and indirect” (44). Although he coins the word “deconstruction” to replace Heidegger’s “destruction,” Derrida’s praxis is indebted to Heidegger’s critique of fundamental ontology. Nevertheless, as a “supplement” of Heidegger’s destruction, Derridean deconstruction is certainly not a mere copy of its “origin.” “One important difference between Heidegger and Derrida lies in their concepts of time” (Spivak, 1976: xlix): Heidegger thinks of time as the model of pure auto-affection where Being is produced without associating with an object, while Derrida suggests that such a pure auto-affection of Being is always already *under erasure* owing to an irreducible element of hetero-affection. Therefore, Heidegger’s “destruction of the history of ontology” is, like Marx’s critique of capitalism, for Derrida critical but “pre-deconstructive.” “Pre-deconstructive here does not mean false, unnecessary, or illusory. Rather it characterizes a relatively stabilized knowledge that calls for questions more radical than the critique itself and than the ontology that grounds the critique” (Derrida, 1994: 170).

² Nietzsche, one may safely claim, can be seen as one of the four cornerstones of postmodern theory; the other three are Heidegger, who places Being *under erasure*; Marx, who offers a potent critique of capitalism; and Freud, who puts the psyche into question. Nietzsche’s rejection of universal truth, critique of morality and the Enlightenment, conceptions of agency and self-creation, and insightful method of genealogy are surely seminal to postmodern thought. Yet we must admit that there is an anarchistic trend in

I. The Power and Significance of Forgetfulness

History regards the past and is constructed by and through memory. Yet it can be an unbearable burden for mankind. Marx rightly states: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (1975: 300). Tilting against the hegemonic oppression of early capitalism, Marx urges the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century to abandon "the dead" in favor of the poetry of the future. I am certainly not going to delve into Marxist debates or advocate some sort of anti-historical theory or form of nihilism here. Rather I want to highlight one fact regarding Marx's "nightmare" and Nietzsche's "forgetfulness." Although history, according to poststructuralist thinking, may be an endless flow into the unknowable future, there are always two kinds of history which we actually experience in our lives: one makes possible the future by remembering; the other, having been forgotten or repressed, weighs on us like a nightmare. Yet a dose of "active forgetting" may end this nightmare that weighs "on the brain of the living." Nietzsche points out that such forgetting can give us "a little silence;" it is "the temporary shutting of the doors and windows of

Nietzsche's thought: "God is dead," and thus we are forced to stand alone in the universe without any God-given Truth. In fact, Nietzsche had no respect for the truths that are sanctioned by religions, states and societies. Moreover, he believed that the will is stronger than reason and thus art is more significant than philosophy. Accordingly, he asserted that a true thinker, like a true artist, must be prepared to create his/her own truths, even his/her own morality to serve his/her life. Attacking the Hegelian analytic and "destructive" tradition of history, Nietzsche argues that "we want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life"—like art. This examination of Nietzsche's idea of forgetfulness in terms of memory, life and history is primarily based on *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1996) and *Untimely Meditation* (1997).

consciousness” (Nietzsche, 1996: 39), which enables consciousness to free itself from all disturbances, thus “making room for the new, making room above all for the superior functions and functionaries—those of governing, anticipating, planning ahead” (39).

Specifically, forgetfulness can actively provide its counter-faculty, memory, with a salutary break from its taxing digestion of the past—such is the use of what Nietzsche calls “active forgetfulness” in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1996). Active forgetfulness is not a deficiency or disease of our brain but a vital force, a form of nutrition for our memory, for human life and history. For this reason, Nietzsche claims that “there could be no happiness, no serenity, no hope, no pride, no *present* without forgetfulness” (1996: 39).

In the essay, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations* (1997), Nietzsche describes the phenomenology of forgetfulness as an essential part of history itself, thus asserting the affirmative use of history in serving life. This essay attempts to demonstrate that German historical approaches in the nineteenth century were repressive and destructive to life³ by examining three distinct stances we may take in our engagement with history (“the unhistorical,” “the historical” and “the suprahistorical”) and three different kinds of history (“monumental history,” “antiquarian history” and “critical history”). It is an essay that opens with the categorical statement of a desire—“we want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life”—and then proceeds by stating several oppositions in order to demonstrate the possibility of realizing this goal. To begin with, history is placed in opposition to life. Although Nietzsche does not directly define

³ The main thrust of “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” is to examine and challenge scholarly givens; namely, the repressive and destructive Hegelian historical vision(s) of the German nineteenth century. Nietzsche writes: “I believe there has been no dangerous vacillation or crisis of German culture this century that has to be rendered more dangerous by the enormous and still continuing influence of this philosophy, the Hegelian” (1997: 104).

what he means by history, certain clues emerge from his discussion of memory and of “the unhistorical.” The latter categories themselves are developed *via* another opposition, that of animal and man or of nature and culture. Here the praxis of forgetting plays the pivotal role: “the man says ‘I remember’ and envies the animal, who at once forgets and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog and is extinguished forever. Thus the animal lives unhistorically for it is contained in the present . . . and at every instant appears wholly as what it is . . .” (1997: 61).

History concerns *the past* and is characterized by the power of *remembering* while “the unhistorical” concerns *the present* and is characterized by the power of *forgetting*—“a child which, having as yet nothing of the past to shake off, plays in blissful blindness between the hedges of past and future” (1997: 61). However, it is evident that the child’s forgetfulness is not strictly a forgetting, “*having as yet nothing of the past to shake off.*” It is forgetfulness *per se*. That is, this forgetfulness is *prior* to any memory. Later in the same passage man’s existence is described as “fundamentally . . . an imperfect tense that can never become a perfect one. If death at last brings the desired forgetting, by that act it at the same time extinguishes the present” (1997: 61). Thus a totalized or “perfected” forgetting is *to-come* with death.

Moreover, the unhistorical existence of the animal, granted that Nietzsche somehow divined that this is a happy state, “within a horizon reduced almost to a point” (1997: 63), is possible—the result of an almost-full presence within the present. Its equivalent is possible, to man only in death, at which moment it is snatched away just at the point of being given. These insights from the text lead to my first deconstructive thesis: “the unhistorical,” or the art of forgetting, is not of the same order as, but rather is transcendent to, memory or history; thus it refers not to history’s opposite (as a *non-* or *anti-history*) but to *history’s other* or *the other of history*. This idea is further developed in my second deconstructive thesis: forgetting, or the capacity to feel unhistorically, is according to

Nietzsche “more vital and more fundamental, inasmuch as it constitutes the foundation upon which alone anything . . . truly human can grow” (1997: 63). This thesis cannot be thought of effectively as a destruction of memory but instead as the *deconstruction* of memory or history for the following two reasons.

First, history is the past subjected to thought, reflection, comparison and language; therefore, *re-presented*. It is the (or a) past which is *present-able* and *present-ed*. In contrast, “the unhistorical” refers to a past that is *im-memorial*. A past of otherness *prior* to memory, hence *un-representable* and *not* represented. This *an-archic* past preceding every *re-present-able* past, not as an element in the temporal series of memory but as something transcending it, is purely external to the mutually-conditioned opposition of memory and amnesia, a pure “exteriority” to this opposition. Forgetfulness, which is the power of the “unhistorical,” if described in the ontological language of being is a being-otherwise separated irrecoverably from the binary of being and non-being. It regards the other of being, man’s other, the *other* man. History, or memory, is set in motion only when it itself is drawn up into its unconcealment of the past and into its representation of forgetfulness. Forgetfulness, laying the cornerstones of memory and history, thus always already precedes them.

Second, “the child” (as an instance *prior* to memory) and “death” (as a point resistant to all memory) are separated from man, the *locus* of memory, by an irremediable rupture. Hence, man as the synchrony of being finds himself and the contemporaneity of his existence impotent upon the near shore of an unbridgeable stream with no access to, or even vision of, the opposite bank, the source of all forgetting. The locus of memory is thus anterior to death and posterior to the child; it is an “anterior-posterior.” Emmanuel Levinas⁴ believes that “anterior posteriorly: separation

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), found that the primordial ethical experience of Being had been neglected by Heidegger’s hermeneutic metaphysics of Being (for the Other is assimilated into the Same by the Western

is not thus 'known' but it is thus produced. Memory is precisely the accomplishment of this ontological structure" (1969: 170). Whenever man relives his own childhood, organizing and producing memory in terms of such an ontological structure, it is only as *reminiscence* that he does so. Levinas writes:

By memory I ground myself after the event, retroactively: I assume today what in the absolute past of the origin had no subject to receive it and had therefore the weight of a fatality. By memory I assume and put back in question. Memory realizes impossibility: memory, after the event, assumes the passivity of the past and masters it. (1969: 56)

Consequently it is through a perpetual *re*-working of one's memory that one is able to *re*-produce the past and to gain access to forgetfulness. This is, as it were, a remembering of *the history of history*, and/or remembering of the remembering of history—a remembering that the acts of organizing and ordering memory itself have a history, the recalling of which is nothing but the *re*-figuration of the past within history. This is then not a destruction but a *deconstruction* of history. Nietzsche thus refers to the double relation between "the historical" and "the unhistorical:" he believes that man becomes man by the double gesture of imposing limits on "the unhistorical," and this through the ordering of history on the one hand and the *re*-introducing of lost life into history *via* "the unhistorical" on the other (1997: 64).

II. On Nietzsche's Idea of History

Before returning to these two theses on the deconstructive

philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger). Thus he promoted a phenomenology of the Other or the Other of phenomenology through an analysis of the "face-to-face" relation with the Other. That is, the ethical for Levinas is not the traditional consensus regarding social behavior or legitimated moral norms or laws; it is "an Ethic of Ethics" commencing in the encounter with an absolute alterity, the *face* of the Other that opens towards infinity. Levinas is also Derrida's close friend and admired tutor.

nature of forgetfulness, we need to more fully explore Nietzsche's idea of history. In examining his idea of history, I am summoned by more oppositions: history, contends Nietzsche, is commonly viewed from two standpoints—"the suprahistorical" and "the historical." The suprahistorical man, raising himself to a vantage point above history as an outcome of historical reflection, has gleaned as it were the essence of history. At this level, all feelings of suffering and injustice in the soul of the man who acts are absorbed or transcended. As a result, the suprahistorical man "no longer feel[s] the temptation to go on living or to take part in history." The pointlessness of reliving the past dawns upon this man, who comprehends that there is "no salvation in the [historical] process . . . [and that] the world is complete and reaches its finality at each and every moment" (1997: 65-66).

Hence, the world for suprahistorical men can be seen as the eternal return (through infinite time) of a finite quantity of energy such that "the past and the present are one, that is to say, with all their diversity identical in all that is typical and as the omnipresence of imperishable types, a motionless structure of a value that cannot alter and a significance that is always the same" (1997: 66). Nietzsche considers this doctrine of "sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types and species," to be "true but deadly" (1997: 112). Here the power of history goes beyond limits, and all its consequences are crystalline. The future, with no *not-yet* possibilities to come, is thus uprooted. As a result, historical justice, even when it is ethically genuine, becomes a "dreadful virtue," one which can only emasculate the living thing and bring it down because the judgment of history is bound to be annihilating (1997: 95). Here is a knowledge attended by paralysis, for all action is considered futile.

The historical man too refuses to relive the past; but for a different reason. He believes that history is a "process" which increasingly reveals the meaning of existence as it unravels itself. This historical culture, which arises from Hegelianism and freely lends itself to a Darwinism, insists upon understanding history's

own origins from a historical perspective, understanding history as resolving its own problems so that we elide the very fact of the muteness of the factual, of the ambivalence of historical facts and events. Morality, says Nietzsche, lives against history: “speak of any virtue you will, in every case it becomes a virtue through rising against that blind power of the factual and tyranny of the actual and by submitting to laws that are not the laws of the fluctuations of history” (1997: 106).

From this commentary upon Nietzsche's analysis of “the historical” and “the suprahistorical” it can be seen, first, that history in the suprahistorical context reveals its “essence” and through this revelation passes a judgment which paralyzes life. Secondly it can be seen that history cannot judge itself but in its claim to self-judgment stands opposed to morality. There are three species of “the historical” which, for Nietzsche, pertain to the life of man, each belonging to a specific environment, each relevant to a particular type of life activity. These are “monumental history” for the performance of great and noble deeds, “antiquarian history” for the conservationists and “critical history” for those suffering from injustice. Monumental history views the past as a concatenation of great moments in the struggle of the human individual, uniting mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks. It subscribes to the principle of iteration: “the greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and may thus be possible again” (1997: 69).

However, such a belief is both dangerous and destructive—assimilating the differences into the “same” and the “totality.” Foucault points out that “Nietzsche's criticism, beginning with the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, always questioned the form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself” (Foucault, 1977: 224). The violence of cutting, selecting and assimilating the past is necessary to universalizing, and thereby making contemporary, what was individual in the past

while condemning the rest to oblivion. The result is an unavoidable fatalism, which sees a logical necessity in history if one were to believe in the absolute veracity of monumental history. If the causes are the same, the effects will have been reproduced faithfully.

Evidently, it is a false conjecture. A truly historical *connexus* “of cause and effect,” when “fully understood, would only demonstrate that the dice-game of chance and the future could never again produce anything exactly similar to what it produced in the past” (1997: 70). One should therefore deal with approximations and generalizations so as to utilize the “effects” at the expense of the causes. Such an attitude to history, though, is dangerous as it augments “effects without sufficient causes” (1997: 71) and encourages adventurism. It also leads to the reification of monuments, which in turn, hinder the advent of the new. Nietzsche thus strives to establish a distinction between history and mythic fiction, negatively as it were, by pointing out the instability of such a distinction when history is monumentalized as a collection of effects (1997: 70). As a result of all this, he concludes that “monumental history” must not rule over the other two forms.

“Antiquarian history,” the sentimental safeguarding of tradition and its artifacts for the common people, is also deemed inadequate for the purposes of life as it only “preserves” without being able to “engender” life. Lacking an instinct for the new, this species of history undervalues what is in the process of *becoming*, although in its tendency to revere the past, it gives meaning to life by invoking a sense of *belonging*. There is, for that very reason, a high risk of becoming stuck in the accumulated past, which will overpower the other modes of history and hold back any solid resolve to attempt anything fresh in life. This can, much like “monumental history,” ultimately paralyze the man of action and smother the new evolving life of culture. Nietzsche writes: “[a]ntiquarian history itself degenerates from the moment it is no longer animated and inspired by the fresh life of the present”

(1997: 75). "Critical history," on the other hand, is a purging practice which delivers selected parts of the past to judgment in order to build up a better future. The former two historical stances, Nietzsche believes, must be balanced by a "critical history" which, by exposing the unjust origins of inherited tradition, wipes out the almighty power of the past to confine present action.

Nietzsche makes several observations on these three types of history. It is neither justice nor mercy that selects the portion of the past to be judged, but life, "that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself" (1997: 76). In truth, to *select*, by its very nature, is to *suppress*, to *assimilate* and thus to be unjust; this implies the lack of the *ego*, its desire for *presence, meaning, the effacement of the Other*. Accordingly, to live and to be unjust amount to the same thing: life does not arise from knowledge nor does it operate on the basis of the latter at the moment of action. Even if justice were to pronounce the sentence, the result, in most cases, would still be the same. Life, because it is unjust, requires a self-forgetfulness or a forgetting of injustice which, under the purview of "critical history," is suspended in order to judge that part of the past considered culpable. "If he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it" (1997: 75-76).

The critical-historical man thus always attempts to live *freely*; free from a pre-given overarching structure of the subject, he is allowed a free construction of his self, or what the late Foucault calls "the care of the self" (1986: 43-67). That is, by depicting the unjust origins of the past, critical history calls for a new burst of historical creativity in the present so that one may live (or create) one's life as a work of art. However, the critical historians themselves are products of the past, "victims" of an ineffaceable memory. As a result, if "critical history" becomes too dominant, the past will be obliterated to the point at which life becomes doomed to the void of an ahistorical and destructive nihilism. For

this reason, “critical history” must also be balanced by the other two kinds of history.

Nietzsche is almost indistinguishable from Levinas—although the latter on many occasions considers himself quite distant from Nietzsche—especially when Nietzsche says that the best we can do is to:

confront our inherited nature with our knowledge of it, and through a new and stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a second nature so that our first withers away. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were *a posteriori*, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate. (Nietzsche, 1997: 77)

This is, in Levinasian terms, the *other-to-come* which is always already infinite because of the welcome it offers to *an-other* past, a past that is *other*, that acts counter to our own past and questions it, an irruptive past not of our own time. The latter is a past that is always already present-*ed*, thereby dominating every present, a past that is a *contretemps*. Although all second natures are weaker than the first, subordinate to them, there is still the knowledge that “this first nature was once a second nature and that every victorious second nature will become a first” (Nietzsche, 1997: 77).⁵

⁵ Nietzsche’s “second nature that will become a first because what is currently first was once a second” is conventionally interpreted in terms of a “dialectic” between founding and preserving force. However, it can be argued that “forgetting” the first nature is a remembering, not only that it was once a second (whose desire to be a first now lies repressed within what has in fact become a first) but also of a certain (pre-originary) first’s non-entry into any second, so that it remains a *first which is also last*, remains the very impossibility and nature of an *event*. Could this be the second nature we must cultivate, the nature of forgetting or forgetting of nature, nature as an *egoism* or the way of *the same*?

III. The Deconstructive Nature of Forgetfulness and its Abuses

This *pharmakon*, this “medicine,” this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent. (Derrida, 1981: 70)

Such then are the three species of history—monumental, antiquarian and critical. Owing to the faculty of memory, which like “a leaf flutters from the scroll of time, floats away—and suddenly floats back again and falls into the man’s lap” (Nietzsche, 1997: 61), man has to live in the historical mood and mode. Accordingly, by analyzing these three categories of history, Nietzsche intends to demonstrate how men tried to use them together in “the historical” in order to maintain the vitality of life and culture. All the same, the problem is that the coexistence of “the historical” and “the unhistorical” seems paradoxical: how can we actively live in historical and unhistorical moods and modes at the same time? To answer this question we need to enter the domain of Derridean deconstruction, which will also enable me to further develop my two initial theses regarding the significance of forgetfulness, and to explain how “the historical” and “the unhistorical” may be creatively combined. If the problem of history arises, then, from a blind adherence to the *re*-presentation of memory, how is forgetfulness related to deconstruction?

Deconstructive interrogation, according to Derrida, destabilizes and complicates the horizontal opposition and hierarchical difference between *presence* and *absence*, in order “to show the constitutive undecidability, radical incompleteness or untotability of textual, institutional, cultural, social and economic structures” (Critchley, 1999: 163). It mimics the oscillations of difference, the displacements of oppositional logic; it interrogates all foundations in a questioning that is neither foundationalist nor anti-foundationalist and puts into question the

authority of the questioning-form itself. Thus deconstruction as double-movement interrogates our responsibility *before* memory (in the sense of both *prior-to* and *in-the-face-of*)—an a-historical interrogation of history in all its forms and manifestations—and subjects this responsibility itself to interrogation. Such an endeavor involves the suspension of that which is known, customary—above all the suspension of morality itself (perhaps as Nietzschean transvaluation of all values)—which inevitably leads to anxiety.

However, as Nietzsche himself well knows, this interval of anxiety is the heterogeneous space necessary for any transformation: the “forgetting [which] is essential to action of any kind” (1997: 62), the “condition—unhistorical [and]⁶ anti-historical through and through—[which] is the womb not only of the unjust but of every just deed too” (1997: 64). As Nietzsche says, “He who acts is, in Goethe’s words, always without a conscience, so is he also always without knowledge” (1997: 64). Henceforth, Nietzsche’s own praxis of deconstruction reveals two “styles:” an *ahistorical* movement that formulates logico-formal paradoxes together with an evidently *historical* movement. The interval between them helps us bring to light the unbridgeable gap between forgetfulness *per se* and a *specific act* of forgetting. Owing to this internal lacuna within forgetfulness, history, if it at all *is*, is only *there*—in a dark corner of time. Such a distance where forgetfulness is concerned is surely not a spatial gap but *time* itself in its very nature as a perpetual pending or an insufficiency.

Henceforth, forgetfulness in its twofold deconstructive nature cannot be anything but *avenir*, always a *to-come* without guarantees. It is a performative, a *perhaps*; due to its structural anxiety it is an irreducible interval between the *im*-possibility and the possibility of *re*-presentation of *what is forgotten* as memory or history. Due to the *incalculability* and *openness* of forgetfulness,

⁶ This conjunction attempts to convey the inevitable oscillation to which “forgetting” and hence the “unhistorical” is subject when one endeavors to thematize it as either “prior” to memory or as a forgetting within the realm of memory.

the *re*-presentation of the past is open to abuse. Our tendency to *re*-present the past thus faces two caveats: there is the danger of *immunizing the real* and the danger of the *will to power*.

In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994a) and *The Illusion of the End* (1994b), Jean Baudrillard points out that the mass media, especially TV, produce—with all the global power of simulation—instant and brief copies of repressed histories for the masses. The suffering, violence and horror of the past are nowadays “reheated” harmlessly on TV, thereby injecting the media-addicted public with the hype of a “pathological reactualization of a past;” the masses are desensitized and “immunized.” This *re*-heating of history, in the simulated world of (indifferent) information, is ironically also a *re*-cooling of history. In other words, historical events, in all their “weightiness” and “depth,” are cheaply presented by the modern mass media in exchange for the tears (and dollars spent on advertised products) of the masses. “The masses, neutralized, mithridatized by information, in turn neutralize history” (Baudrillard, 1994b: 3).

Another risk or danger is that of the *will to power*. History, in the East or West, is doubtless often manipulated by the authorities as a political instrument to shape and control people’s ideology and identity. Following Nietzsche, Foucault pursues his radical project in many books, most clearly perhaps in *Power/Knowledge* (1980), showing us how historical knowledge, discourses and practices are shaped not by the meaning of language but by the relations and exercise of power. Foucault writes that “the history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning” (1980: 114). To *re*-present the past thus is inevitably to exercise the will to power.

However, there is a third caveat to counterbalance these two. William H. Thornton and Songok Han Thornton assert that “[i]t is often charged that the will to represent the past, whether in fiction or non-fiction, is a cloak for the will to power. This caveat, however, should be balanced against the fact that power has a

better cloak in the *will to forget*" (1993: 119). Indeed, the power to silence the past is far greater, far more dangerous than the power to (mis)re-present the past and/or to immunize the masses (against the shocking reality of the present, just-past or just-to-come). The death sentence given to the past of *the Other* is, after all, to ruthlessly and indifferently *forget* it. This abuse of the deconstructive nature of forgetting in our relationship with the past highlights "forgetting" not only as a question of *memory* and *life* but also of (*in*)*justice*. To remember, or to forget, is always already an ethico-political question.

For this reason, the (ab)use of the past as the *re*-presentation of history unavoidably becomes a two-fold *pharmakon* for life, a medicine which has no proper or determinate character but is rather potentially both *poison* and *remedy* and thus can be—alternatively or simultaneously—*beneficent* or *maleficent*. It is open to becoming both (a) justice and injustice. Furthermore, the impossibility of history's presenting itself due to the un-*re*-presentable nature and irreducible forgetfulness of the "unhistorical" makes the monument an *avenir*. And that Nietzsche was aware of this is evident in the manner in which, and the means by which, he invokes history: the Nietzschean potions prepared as antidotes to the poison of history is a combination of "the unhistorical" and "the suprahistorical," themselves poisonous.

The unhistorical and the suprahistorical are the natural antidotes to the stifling of life by the historical, by the malady of history. It is probable that we who suffer from the malady of history will also have to suffer from the antidotes. But that we suffer from them is no evidence against the correctness of the chosen treatment. (1997: 121)

There is no absolute *cure* just as there is no absolute *truth*—both have been knocked off their pedestals in the postmodern era. What cannot be cured must be endured nevertheless. Besides, although such a poststructuralist reading of the deconstructive nature of forgetting may seem to lead the

re-presentation of history into the domain of the ethico-politically undecidable, that two-fold *pharmakon* of/for life, it is actually up to us to correctly *choose* what in history to *remember* and what to *forget* according to the genuine needs of our lives, with a view to giving ourselves a useful and happy life in the context of *hereness* and *nowness*, the context of human action. Accordingly, what really matters is “how” we manage to live both “historically” and “unhistorically” at the same time in order to serve, (re)create, “engender” our own lives with minimal conflict or contradiction. Nietzsche’s idea of history as *art-life* provides us with a possible praxis here.

Rejecting Socrates’ reason-oriented morality and philosophy, Nietzsche believes that art is the meaning of life and that life would be unbearable without art.⁷ It is clear that Nietzsche allocates the task of mediation to history, for “history is the antithesis of art” (1997: 95) and life must be lived as a unity of form and content, i.e. with *artistic style*. That is, the only means by which history will be useful to life is as a *work of art*. It is in the building of this artistic monument that history functions as the link between great individuals from every epoch living as it were contemporaneously through a “spirit-dialogue” across the deserted (desert-like) intervals of time. “The goal of humanity cannot lie in its end but only in its highest exemplars” (1997: 111). This Nietzschean monument is the place where history is forced to “present” itself for judgment by the “ahistorical,” to offer up its body (corpus-corpse) as the conduit for a “spirit-dialogue;” this implies a performative and affirmative historicism at the point of action (art-life). This art-life style of history, providing us with a remedy (*pharmakon*) for life, is an affirmation of historical knowledge as the fundamental condition for any meaningful movement (or moment) of self-creation.

⁷ Nietzsche believes that Socrates, who neglects the Dionysiac power of art (in e.g. music and Greek tragic drama) and upholds Apollonian rationalism and philosophical morality, stands behind our progress-oriented, mechanical and superficial modern science with its degrading of art-life.

There are, on the one hand, Nietzschean historicists in whom the desire for self-creation and autonomy dominates (Heidegger and Foucault), and on the other hand, non-Nietzschean historicists in whom the desire for community dominates and who see Nietzsche's highlighting of self-creation as a pure "aestheticism" or "irrationalism" (Dewey and Habermas) (Critchley, 1999: 86). Accordingly, in "The Sublime Dissociation of the Past", F. R. Ankersmit points out that Nietzsche's conception of forgetting will be easily refuted (or made irrelevant) by a consistent historicism (2001: 298). Diane Elam also believes Nietzsche's "art of forgetting" is difficult to put into practice (1997: 65). Indeed one may safely state that Nietzsche's conception of art-life-oriented historiography is an open target for any traditional or community-oriented historicism.

Nietzsche is well aware that his historiography as "artistic style" would be "contrary to the analytical and inartistic tendencies of our time, which would indeed declare it false" (1997: 96). He hence emphasizes "a history which, lacking the direction of an inner drive to construct, does nothing but destroy, in the long run denaturalizes its instruments: for such men destroy illusions and 'he who destroys the illusions in himself and others is punished by nature, the cruelest tyrant'" (1997: 96).⁸ Only if the *re*-presentation of the past can disengage itself from *the* all-present Truth and endure being transformed into *a work of art*, will it perhaps be able to preserve our instincts or even evoke them (1997: 95-96). That is to say, the attempt to be completely historical—*hypocritically* transforming the past into pure, mechanical, scientific and illusion-free knowledge—is, for

⁸ Nietzsche uses Christianity as an example to show how traditional historical studies denaturalize the past. He writes: "What one can learn in the case of Christianity—that under the influence of an historical treatment it has become denaturalized, until a completely historical, that is to say just treatment resolves it into pure knowledge about Christianity and thereby destroys it—can be studied in everything else that possesses life: that it ceases to live when it is dissected completely, and lives a painful and morbid life when one begins to practice historical dissection upon it" (1997: 96-97).

Nietzsche, the way to destroy the very life of history and thereby annihilate the open possibilities of the future.

Foucault, in the 1960s, developed his own postmodern historical methodology or “archaeology”—which mainly focused on the analysis of theoretical knowledge rather than practices and institutions. Nevertheless in 1970, under the influence of Nietzsche, “Foucault began to make the transition from archaeology to genealogy and thereby to a more adequate theorization of material institutions and forms of power” (Best & Kellner, 1991: 45). Turning to the Nietzschean genealogical concern with power relations and placing more emphasis on the material conditions of discourse, Foucault actually widened the scope of his archaeological analysis rather than breaking it off since both methodologies aimed to assault the continuity and totality of history. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”(1977), Foucault speaks highly of Nietzsche’s critical conception of history as a work of art, moving away from the blind pursuit of ontological Truth and monotonous finality drawn out from a history pictured as mere linear continuation.

The *Untimely Meditations* discussed the critical use of history, its just treatment of the past: its decisive cutting of the roots, its rejection of traditional attitudes of reverence, its liberation of man by presenting him with other origins than those in which he prefers to see himself. Nietzsche, however, reproached critical history for detaching us from every real source and for sacrificing the very movement of life to the exclusive concern for truth. (1977: 164)

Daniel Breazeale, in his introduction of *Untimely Meditations* (1997), also claims that the most significant feature of the book “is precisely the way in which its author seeks simultaneously to concede the inescapable historicity of human existence and to affirm the creative capacity of human beings to overcome themselves and their past” (xv). To be more precise, Nietzsche’s “active forgetfulness,” the *art-life* thrust of forgetting, does not urge us to completely abandon the past as might a transcendental nihilist, but to adopt both “historical” and “unhistorical” perspectives upon our lives at the same

time by creatively transforming “the historical” into a work of art in order to “enact” it at the present moment. In this way the historicist holds up a torch for us, affirmatively turning the *shadow-behind* into a *light-ahead*. If the power of memory is bound to be subject to that of forgetting, if the thought of men is bound to be determined by petty egotism and if the *re*-presentation of the past is bound to be subjective and perspective, then *memory* and *history* must be used more honestly, more creatively and affirmatively to serve and engender life. Thus spake Nietzsche.

IV. Conclusion

Too often historiography, cutting life asunder by dividing it between the past and the present without any shared borders, makes “the historical” ineffective for the use of life *here* and *now*. That is, the accumulated and nightmarish knowledge of the past often paralyzes all action in the present since any action signifies its very nature of *hereness* and *nowness*, which means, to a certain extent, a *rupture* with the past. Nietzsche’s forgotten umbrella reminds us that history, or memory, is just like an umbrella, at once opened and closed, unfolded and folded, remembered and forgotten by turns. We open it only when it can positively and affirmatively serve life. In other words, forgetfulness is, figuratively speaking, an umbrella which Hegel and the other “philosophers of history” had forgotten and left somewhere, deliberately or unconsciously, until Nietzsche found it and used it to protect “life” from the heavy rain of “remembering” and hot sun of “Being.” “Forgetting, then not only attacks the essence of Being inasmuch as it is apparently distinct from it. It belongs to the nature of Being and reins as the Destiny of its essence” (Derrida, 1979: 143).

Heidegger says that “all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being” (1962: 31). His deconstruction of traditional ontology therefore is guided by the reexamination of a single question: the question of the meaning of

Being. One of Heidegger's major contributions, in *Being and Time* (1962), is his insight into *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*)⁹ as the existential structure of *Dasein* ("being-here"). That is, the questioning of Being's meaning as projective *thrownness* is the ongoing experience of *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world. The true meaning of Being-in-the-world thus always already veils itself in endless *thrownness*. And so the question of the meaning of forgetting, which is also vitally grounded in temporality, is bound to be *thrown* into the question of Being inasmuch as the essence of forgetting can never be reduced to that of the remembering (existential-ontological presencing) of Being.

Indeed, the question of forgetting (like the question of Being) veils itself *in* and *through* time, as the unfolding of a metaphysical inquiry. Anything meaningful to Being, Heidegger believes, depends on *das Nichts*, "the nothing." Nothingness is in actual fact the most rudimentary ground for the meaning of Being. Thus, "*Dasein* means: being held out into the nothing" (1993: 103). One may then also say that the ground or horizon of forgetfulness is also "nothing," yet only through such a forgetfulness can memory and history approach and *re-present* the past. That is why Nietzsche asserts that "forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic" (1997: 62). This repeats the idea highlighted in our first deconstructive thesis—forgetfulness, a being-otherwise separated irrecoverably from the binary of being and non-being, is *prior* to memory and history: it is "in proximity to" (as Heidegger would say) not history's opposite as *non-or-anti-history* but *history's other* or *the other of history*. The forgetting of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) always already *forgets* its essence *in* and *through* time. Thus it can never be remembered and presented in its full presence as eternal truth. This is why the question of forgetfulness is also a question of *time* and of *Being-in-the-world*. Or: it is a question

⁹ *Thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*) "is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over" (Heidegger, 1962: 175). Given that *thrownness* is an ongoing movement, which is always influenced by *Dasein*'s facticity, it is therefore this movement which creates the turbulence (*Wibbel*) of falling in everydayness.

of the *deconstruction* of memory, of life and of history.

In effect, when we attempt to recall here “the lost umbrella,” the idea of forgetfulness, it is not only the forgotten umbrella that is remembered but also the very act of forgetting the umbrella. Nevertheless, what can really be remembered, found or answered is the specific act of forgetting rather than the essence of forgetfulness. To claim that we have fully understood the ontological meaning of the forgetting of Being, and thus perhaps of Being itself, would be deceptive and dangerous for Heidegger. It would be equally deceptive and dangerous to claim that we have fully unpacked and thus remembered the essence of forgetfulness for Nietzsche. That is, we are surely still far, and must remain far, from clearing up the fog which veils the essence of forgetfulness. Henceforth it, like *the otherness of history*, must always remain unknown and open to both memory and history, one of which (memory) makes possible the future (by remembering), while the other (history), insofar as it has been unintentionally forgotten, weighs on us like a nightmare. But one must creatively *remember* (the historical) and actively *forget* (the unhistorical) in equal measure in order to live honestly, affirmatively and happily *here* and *now*, like a work of art.

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尼采遺忘的雨傘——記憶、生命與歷史

賴俊雄

摘 要

「遺忘」一般均被視為一種記憶的不足或缺陷，然而尼采卻視之為生命不可或缺之至寶。在他一份未發表的手稿中寫著：「我忘了我的雨傘」。這句日常平淡的話語提醒了我們，歷史與記憶猶如一把雨傘——不斷地被打開、收起；想起、遺忘；使用、擱置。我們使用它，僅當它可以為我們的生命服務。無用置疑，「遺忘」的問題即是「時間」的問題及「存在於世間」的問題。或者可以說，是記憶、生命及歷史「解構」的問題。簡言之，「遺忘」有如一把被歷史哲學家們有意或無意遺忘的雨傘，卻被尼采將之拾起並用來為「生命」抵擋「記憶」的豪雨及「存在」的艷陽。本文的宗旨，首在探討「遺忘」的解構本質以及與記憶、生命及歷史之間的辨証關係，進而，探討我們「為何」與「如何」藝術地結合「遺忘」與「記憶」來服務並創造生命。

關鍵詞：尼采、遺忘、記憶、生命、歷史