

On the theory of written enunciation: The notion of interruption-resumption in autobiography

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It is sometimes fitting to welcome with respect a *fortuitous event* in all its absurdity, in order to attempt to obtain meaning from it; that is, to note a coincidence, a correspondence, a tiny and opportune moment offered by fortune, so as to discern in things what Ernst Bloch named a 'real possible', or even a utopia. An event of this kind occurs in the description of my exposition, where I read: 'On the theory of written enunciation: The notion of interruption-resumption in autobiol' — here an interruption — immediately a resumption in the term 'autobiography'. There was no more exact way to designate the aim of my endeavor: there inscribed, written in my title, by chance, is what this title indicated and announced. an interruption-resumption between autobio//logy and autobiography. Voice and discourse are interrupted to be resumed, instantly, after the minute duration of an instant, in a script, and that script concerns a life, 'my' life, a life which is attempting to turn in on itself, to reflect itself, and to tell of itself by writing itself.

My remarks are thus intended to be a contribution to a theory of written enunciation or of autobiography. This is discourse of the most abstract generality, but tested on the most specific text, on *one* text, or, more precisely, on two statements from Stendhal's *La Vie de Henri Brûlard*. In this, one can discern here and now the resumption of an interruption, of a split between theoretical generality and concrete singularity, between a discourse of truth and a practice of reading and writing devoted to all the effects of a text. My remarks will thus be a discursive maneuver, a tactic of writing in and on this split with the aim of resuming, in a language called critical, an interruption, a textual syncope in which Henri Beyle at Civita Vecchia sought to invest at the same time a desire to write himself and a writing of this desire, thus discovering, from beginning to end of his effort, what I shall call the paradoxes of autobiographical enunciation.

It is by a presentation of these paradoxes that I would like to approach my subject; this, by referring to the decisive analyses of E. Benveniste. In

this way my remarks will also be an homage to a voice silent for several years — a eulogy — and an epitaph — an inscription — on a very recently sealed tomb.

I will thus begin with Benveniste's distinction between narrative and discourse in order to indicate immediately its particularities. The story is characterized by a specific mode of enunciation consisting of erasing, of excluding the marks of enunciation in the enunciated. The narrative is a 'discourse' with an absent narrator. The events of the story *seem* to tell themselves in the narrative without recourse to the producing act behind the narrative, to the narration. Thus, and this is my first point, it seems that narrative enunciation, in relation to discursive enunciation, is presented *negatively* by Benveniste: the narrative is the discourse minus the signs of the discourse, of enunciation. The narrative enunciation reserved for the written language characterizes the narrative of past events or it is even the representation of facts arising at a certain moment in time without any intervention of the speaker in the narrative. But here a second oddity appears in Benveniste's text: 'In order that they may be written as being produced, these facts must belong to the past; certainly it would be better to say: as soon as they are written in an historically temporal expression (according to the *narrative* mode of enunciation), they become characterized as past.' This is a strange inversion of the first definition: it is this absence of intervention (whose characteristic is writing) by the speaker, which specifies events as past. From whence comes this idea: that by opposition to the voice, which is always in the present, writing would always be in the past. But this is a paradoxical idea, since, in a certain respect, one might also say the reverse: the fleeting evanescence of the voice, of the living word, necessitates a perpetual 'already-gone', demanding feeble and successive memorizations, full of gaps and holes, of the conversational word; while writing is always in the present, at least through its material existence of markings, of indices covering the surface of the page.

This double oddity of Benveniste's text indicates the paradox of the enigmatic 'synthesis' thus characterized by writing and by the absence of the narrator in the narrated, of the stating in the stated, the silence of the stating in the stated. What then is this 'historical' enunciation? Or rather what are, for Benveniste, the formal indications of this temporal synthesis of the past in narrative enunciation? The first oddities now reappear: these indications are *negative* indications as to the verbal categories of tense and person. 'The narrative as mode of enunciation excludes all autobiographical linguistic forms', writes Benveniste. It excludes the formal apparatus of discourse; it likewise excludes the present, the future, and the perfect, the relation of person I/you and the circumstantial adverbs linked with it;

discourse is therefore by implication autobiography or rather, discourse is, in essence and in definition, autobiophonic. But what about this discourse called autobio-graphical?

Let us examine this point more closely: speaking of discourse, of discursive enunciation, Benveniste notes that it makes use of all the personal forms of the verb, 'he' as well as I/you. 'Explicit or not, the relation of person and the present tense are everywhere present.' Thus, discourse includes the formal indications of narrative enunciation, but the latter excludes those of discourse. So the 'he' in the narrative will be the absent character, opposed to no other person, while in discourse, the 'he' will be a nonperson opposed to the dialogical person I/you. Here a notable difficulty arises: the historical narrative — implication or presumption from common sense — has been written by someone, but through the effects of reading, the recipient *forgets* that the text has been written by someone — the events *seem* to narrate themselves. He forgets because of an injunction emerging from the text itself, because of a power inherent in the 'historical' narrative. This is the *effect* of a power inherent in the textual arrangement, in this specific enunciative mode, but its characteristic is precisely not to mark itself or to make itself explicit in the text itself.

In autobiography, on the other hand, the relation of person may be implicit; it is, however, everywhere *present*. Thus, it may be present in the implicit mode only; it recalls itself ceaselessly, even when it is not linguistically present. The effect of the autobiographical narrative is the *memory* of the enunciation. How does it happen that, in considering the material reality of a written text, we have, in one case, an effect of forgetfulness, in the other, an effect of memory?

Let us reflect on these strange asymmetries obliquely indicated by Benveniste's text. Everything occurs as if narrative enunciation were characterized by the exclusion of the marks of discursive enunciation, or constituted by a negation of the entire enunciative apparatus from which it nonetheless arises. In other words, if there is a possible temporal synthesis of the past in the universe of discourse, there is also another possible synthesis, a narrative synthesis, which would only be constituted by the negation of the first. I have attempted to conceptualize this negation (characterized first by writing, then by the absence of the stating in the statement), by transfer of the Freudian notion of denial (*dé-négation*), as denial of the enunciating subject, as simultaneous placement and suppression of the enunciation itself. Everything takes place as if, in the historical narrative, the writing subject were saying — but undoubtedly since he is writing, he is unable to say anything else; it is the fact of writing itself — 'What I am saying, I am not the one who is saying it, it

is writing itself". It writes itself, so I speak. The present here reveals itself as a scission or syncope of the present; or in another language, the enunciative mode of the narrative would consist of the expulsion, outside of the subject, of its product, and of the return of the excluded, the expelled, as object in reality, but past reality. That would be the essential operation of writing: the present, its present divided, syncoped, would manifest itself in writing as re-presentation of reality, that is, as past present in representation. In writing a story, therefore, I make the dead speak while silencing myself; the story writes itself. But in so doing I silence them and henceforth it is indeed I who speak; but what is written is not what I say. In telling a story, I indeed speak to you about something, but what you read is something other than what I say to you; in the machination of writing, something is said *hic et nunc*; but what you read is the representation of the absent third party, of the 'terzo incomodo' (the extra), as Stendhal says in the singular text that I am going to read.

I would like to pursue for another moment this reflection on the presuppositions of Benveniste's theory of enunciation, and to do so in the direction opened by the article on *Catégories de pensée, catégories de langue* (Categories of thought, categories of speech), but, in a way, inverting its course; not by questioning philosophical discourse with semantic query but by questioning the semantics of enunciation through its two fundamental and universal categories, person and tense, with philosophical query. These categories are necessarily conjoined; which means that they exist as a first synthesis or 'constitution of the subject' which is temporal and a second which is subjective. Benveniste has taught us that the position of the subject, me, is the reflection of a universal structure of linguistic oppositions inherent in discourse, the reflection, image, or product of a universal form of discourse: the one who speaks refers always, with the same indicator 'I', to the one who is speaking. Who can not see then that within the uttered 'I' is united the most massive, the most redundant of identities — the *same* marker 'I' — with the most singular and most extreme of differences, difference *itself*; for the act of saying 'I' for the one who says it is each time new; each time it achieves — bit by bit — the insertion of the speaker into a new moment of time and into a different texture of circumstances and discourse. A systematic identity, the 'I' as a form of speech is similar to other forms, other parts of the system. But in the phenomenology of the speaking experience, 'I' is that singular semantic unit, unique, different at each moment: complete difference. Moreover, this conjunction of same and different is dialogical, since 'that act of discourse which utters "I" will appear every time it is reproduced as the same act for the one who hears it; but for the one who utters it, it is a new act each time ...'. In other words, it is the other who

fills the empty identity of the form, who transforms it into a complete identical act or who even brings about the phenomenological difference of the 'I's in identity. It is the other who constitutes 'I' as Me. The 'ontic' identity of the Me is itself the difference (dialogical structure of its constitution) between formal systematic identity and (actual) material phenomenological difference. The being of the Me is the being of the difference, not at all 'the identity of non-identity and the identity of the same', but the nonidentity of identity and the nonidentity of the other.

The 'linguistic deduction' of temporality is, on the other hand — if one dares construct this geometric monstrosity — at the same time parallel and perpendicular to the subject-person *ego*; it is another way of opening the split of the 'now'. Indeed, it is a permanent present of discourse in its execution; 'this present', writes Benveniste, 'which moves along with the progress of the discourse, *all the while remaining present*'. This permanent present is none other than the enunciative present or permanence: discourse itself. But at the same time, it is a *now present* which, itself, is reinvented each time a man speaks, because it is a new moment, not yet lived, where the punctual coincidence between the event and the act of discourse is indicated, where the event of the act of discourse comes forth. On the one hand, the 'nows' of the enunciation fragment the permanence of the enunciative now. On the other hand, one may say that they constitute it, complete it, realize it. The permanent present is the discourse form: the now present is the act of this form, the instant agency of speech. Benveniste continues that this fundamental relation of the permanent and the instant in the now (which, in a certain respect, creates a temporal redoubling of the relation of discourse and speech) of the *ego* of speech, of its present, of the presence of the present as *ego*, is *implicit*. If it is made formally explicit, 'it is through one of those frequent redundancies in everyday usage' and, I might add, through a metadiscursive stance of the *ego* in relation to its discourse about which the same implication of the present is indicated. What does this mean, if not that this presence of the present of the *ego* is not at all signified in its discourse. No signifier marks it *as such*. Only the 'progress' of the discourse obliquely *indicates* it by its existence instead of silence. On the other hand, the past and the future are *signified*, are marked by signifiers and *express* themselves in discourse, but language does not situate them in time according to their own position, nor by virtue of a relation which should then be other than that of the coincidence between event and discourse, but only as points of view looking ahead or back in terms of the present. It is the signifiers of the past and of the future which, in discourse, border the absence of signifier, the missing signifier of the present (permanent-now).

The theoretician of enunciative semantics posits this paradox at the

fundamental point of any theory: that all discourse and its speech acts are constituted by signifiers which signify what they are not (the non-coincidence between event and discourse, past and future), but that these signifiers may only produce their significance based on what the discourse does not signify, and by the fact that discourse does not signify itself but indicates by absence (the present). Thus the enunciative present is a coextensive *hole* in the totality of discourse and in each of its parts, a *lack at its surface* and in each of the points; a hole, a lack around which it constitutes itself as a signifying discourse, as a discourse of the past or of the future. This is a hole, lack, or rather tiny fissure, an erasure of the present in the signifying expression. Speaking of the past and the future, the two other temporal references, Benveniste says very clearly that they are necessarily made explicit in a signifier and that in return, they cause the present to appear as a limit, an axis, a line of separation between what is no longer present and what is not yet present. If the being *ego* is the discursive difference of the systematic identity and of the difference (of speech), if its presence in itself is this difference, then its present, the present of its presence is in turn, and twice so, the difference between the 'permanent' of its discourse and the 'now' of its speech — the difference between its silent autoindication and the expressive significance of the nonpresent, past, and future. Could all this juggling of differences be what was called the living present of the phenomenological monad? The living present, the immanence of life to itself is always already 'apostasy', a distancing always already begun, the opening of indication and signification.

I would now like to leave this extremely general level of philosophical presuppositions of a theory of enunciation to situate myself at the other pole of my remarks, in the extreme singularity of an autobiographical text by Stendhal, *La Vie de Henri Brûlard*. I would like to read it, to rewrite it; to write my own autobiography of the reader and of Henri Beyle and first to give you my strategy of a reading-writing of the autobiography of Stendhal. My first question is: how is it going to stop, how is it going to begin to tell itself? If autobiography means to write the narrative of one's own life, I am weighing my words, you recognize the two fundamental aporias of this very particular narrative, since it must necessarily open and close with two statements which are at once necessary and unpronounceable, unutterable — 'I was born', 'I died'. Writing of the conceptualization of birth as *my* birth, just as writing of the conceptualization of death as *my* death, are equally impossible; or, to paraphrase the famous formulation of essence by Aristotle: '*to ti ên einai*', the autobiographical narrative would only be able to answer the question 'What will being be?' with the utterance of 'what being was'. Whence my two hypotheses: (1) The

autobiographical narrative would, in a certain respect, be a ruse of *writing*, a maneuver to *state* the first and to *state* the second of these two conceptions. Since their impossibility interrupts me even before I have begun to write, at the beginning and at the end of the text of my life, the writing of my life, the telling of my life would be to resume from this interruption. (2) This ruse of writing is itself made up only of microbirths and micro-deaths, is nothing more than a fabric of resumptions and interruptions, a text full of holes and patches. But shouldn't the beginning of the book *La Vie de Henri Brûlard* give me some explanations? May I not proceed with the study of its first two chapters as the beginning of the reading and the narrative, as the origin of the story, as the basis of the narration: simultaneously textual matrix and transcendentalization of writing, conditions for the possibility of the very production of the text? Why the first two chapters? Because at the end of the second chapter occurs a unique textual event which marks an interruption in what was just written on the three levels I have indicated: beginning of the narrative/origin of the story/basis of the narration. 'After so many general considerations, I'm going to be born. // My first recollection is of having bitten my cousin's cheek.' This is a ruse of writing which allows Henri Beyle to utter: 'I was born', the unpronounceable conceptualization of birth.

After having written so many general considerations, I will *next* write the narrative of singularity, *my* narrative of *my* life: a *before* of the *discourse* of generalities — an *after* of the *narrative* of my individual. Between the two there is an interruption, empty space, hole of the 'I', hole of the present of enunciation, its paradox, its aporia. In fact, the 'after' points out from all indications, in order to be signifying, a moment present until now which is after the general considerations, just as the narrative which is going to write itself points out a now starting from which it produces its enunciative significance. From now on I shall write a narrative, that of my life. The present moment of the enunciation is a moment of interruption between 'until now' and 'from now on', the moment of an inaugural act of writing which can not be effected since the statement which must then be formulated is necessarily the unpronounceable 'I was born'. The ruse consists of writing 'I am going to be born' since, in order to write it, the minimal necessary condition is that I be born. This is humorous: the future is a past, the past, a future; the temporal synthesis of the subject in writing may only produce itself in the paradox of the present, that is the subversion of the form of internal sensibility where the past and future are linearly articulated, beyond and thanks to the interruption of the present, to its syncope. Hence two possible deviations will equally destroy the form of tense: first, that of

ontological eternity, birth, that is, existence at its origin, 'I', is only the predicate of an essence beyond time — 'Me'; secondly, that of the text and of the writing — my existence at its origin is nothing more than that of the text-narrative that I am going to write. The writing of the text-narrative would be a sort of ontological argument through which I make myself exist as text; afterwards I do not exist any longer, but I am going to be born as text. But do I not already exist as text, since I have already written general considerations? Not at all, because the general considerations arise from discourse, while the narrative, and only the narrative, may make me come forth *de-negatively* as an autonomous textual identity, or to paraphrase Benveniste's formula: it is only in the story that 'I' narrates himself as his events surge forth on the horizon of the story without any intervention by the 'I' narrator.

'I am going to be born. My first recollection is of having bitten my cousin's cheek.' Instead of the unpronounceable 'I was born', we have the enunciative syncope between 'I am going to be born'/'my first recollection is ...'. Resumption from the syncope is produced by the utterance 'my first recollection is ...', which conceals it and conceals with it the unpronounceable 'I was born'. Indeed, 'my' refers to an 'of me' which is the necessary implication of it, me who precedes in some way the singular memory and gives to it its ontological basis. And the aporia prolongs itself in the irreducible ambiguity of the term 'first', which, in this case, signifies (and the present 'is' underscores it sufficiently) at once the first to come here-now that I am writing and the first in date in the past, the first utterance of the discourse of my memory. An origin is here confused with a beginning: beginning of a narrative, of my narrative; origin of the story, of my story in my conscience of myself. My oldest present is my most present present, the child of Grenoble, the consul at Civita Vecchia. It is and it is not: it is resumption of the syncope and of its resumption. I add this in passing: that the first recollection might now be (and that the oldest present might have been) that of having bitten the cheek of Mme Pison Du Galland is perhaps not insignificant.

But now, near the end of the book, near the end of chapter 40, the text, with this strange utterance, is going to repeat its beginning: 'I am going to be born, as Tristram Shandy said, and the reader is going to leave childishness behind'. Whence my rewriting-resumption of the text in this new interruption in which the quasitotality of the book *La Vie de Henri Brûlard* disappears: 'After so many general considerations, I am going to be born/I am going to be born as Tristram Shandy said and the reader is going to leave childishness behind.'

First, it is not 'I' who says 'I am going to be born', but another, Tristram Shandy: the repetition of the paradox of the statement of my

birth is displaced, since when I say 'I was born', I lend my voice and my pen to the other who told me that 'I was born' in Grenoble in 1783. Another says 'I' in his/my place in another book and that since the beginning; however, I the reader do not learn this until nearly the end of the text that I am reading. 'I' is substituted for another who says 'I', but in a key point, a tactical point, since it is there a matter of life and death, that is, of origin and end, of beginning and conclusion, of basis and manifestation, of enunciation and enunciated. When I say 'I am going to be born', another is born instead of me, in my place, another whose life 'I' has read and writes as his own (at least at this point of beginning, of origin, of basis; at least at this point of conclusion, of end, of accomplishment). By means of this interruption and this resumption, a simultaneous triple substitution is effected: I and he, reading and writing, life and death. I disappropriate myself of myself through the other and I assume the other through myself. Property and usurpation, suitable and unsuitable, literal and figurative are exchanged for one another. The suitable only constitutes itself by assuming a face; perhaps the suitable is never more than the metonymic movement of the grasped metaphor, paralyzed at its limits; thus Narcissus and his reflection in the mirror of a sleeping, dead water.

Second, there is thus a birth and a death, the first, *nearly* at the beginning; the other, *nearly* at the end. Two births, a birth, a death for what? 'After so many general considerations, I am going to be born, my first recollection is ...'. I had so many violent sensations relating to the tiny event which I am going to relate, but in what way? What did I desire with passion? I no longer remember ('I am going to be born, as Tristram Shandy said, the reader is going to leave childishness behind'), or more briefly: 'I am going to be born, my first recollection is ... I no longer remember, I am going to be born'.

With the first birth, in this liminal instant where simultaneously I already exist and I do not yet exist, I am going to enter into the text, I am going to make myself exist through and in my narrative of myself. With the second, death, I am going to enter — I who am another and who usurps the other as I — into the unrelatable narrative of my desire, an impossible narrative since I have no recollection of its object. Or more precisely still, I am only going to relate a narrative, while the story of it is my own desire, and that is not writable. Likewise, the reader is going to leave childishness behind, is going to leave behind the narrative of this tiny event in order to enter into that of my desire, but that narrative is impossible, I have no memory of it. The reader is going to emerge from the text, because the text is quite simply going to end. The writing is going to cease.

First birth: this is the desire to write, which begins and originates in the

memory of the bite: writing is then the reinscription in the text of what was inscribed in the body of the other, recollection-representation of what is lost, but thus I live.

Second birth: this is the writing of the desire, the writing of the violence of the sensation, the writing of mindless and complete happiness, but then I write no more, I can no longer write because I have no memory. I die for the text, and the writing ceases, since there is none where desire is fulfilled. Such is the unassignable instant of the 'I died' in writing, the last two pages of *La Vie de Henri Brûlard*, where one will read of the agony of the text in the mortal approach and arrival of Milanese happiness without memory — in the present moment of the act of writing which ceases.

Here, I will interrupt my *commemorative* remarks of a singular death. There are two births or one birth and one death: thus the difference is repeated, repetition lying in the difference itself; I mean the interval in which *La Vie de Henri Brûlard* is written, in which is written the life of Beyle. There we rediscover, singularized in the event of writing and in those past events of a life which has been lived, the great general presuppositions of enunciation concerning the same and the other, identity and difference in the syntheses of time (tense) and person: the autobiographical text is only written and can only be written by repeating these differences, by repeating difference itself, by interrupting itself and resuming.

By introducing the notion of interruption-resumption, I am not presuming to introduce a new concept in the field of Benveniste's semantics: this is a matter of an instrumental operational notion which seeks to approach as closely as possible the synthesis of time and the synthesis of subject in and through the 'I', an enunciative agency of writing. I say 'as closely as possible', since this 'I', operator of the totalization, untiring worker of transcendental syntheses, this 'I' which writes and is written presents itself in the text as doubly fissured: first of all, there is a temporal scission: I am going to be born, as me related, told. But as soon as that me appears written, I am already born. The instant-instance of his birth may never mark itself in writing except by the white of the page which separates the utterance 'I am going to be born' and the utterance 'my first memory is ...'.

Next, there is a subjective scission, for 'I' is going to be born twice, once a little after the opening of the text, and once a little before its end. If 'I' is born a second time, it means that 'I' was not yet born the first time, unless the second time 'I am going to be born' refers to the unpronounceable conceptualization of my death and thus signifies in the text only the death of the text, from the narrative to the writing of happiness.

I am going to be born and to die, I am going to die and to be born, Eros

and death drive are bound together in the indiscernible of the interruption-resumption, the undeterminable split of repetition and difference. In other words, in creating themselves, the syntheses of time and of subject deconstruct themselves; narrative representation at once divides the two opposite poles from each other and welds them together: interruption-resumption. It could well be that we must reconsider this double notion of interruption-resumption in terms of the notion of rhythm so difficult to contemplate and to write about; this is not the least of the signs addressed to us by the text of him whose memory we honor, this article on the notion of rhythm where sounds, still audible, the echo of the great paradoxes of enunciation which it befell him to repeat after Aristotle, Plato, or Augustine.

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