

# The Lick of the Mother Tongue: Derrida's Fantasies of "the Touch of Language" with Augustine and Marx<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Augustine's *Confessions* makes the impossible attempt to return to a time before language. Augustine claims that before we are aware of language, we learn our mother tongue through the touch of the mother. This lesson in language that we often first learn through a gentle touch—the nipple of the mother in the mouth of the infant—is later reinforced by a violent touch—the switch of the schoolmaster. Augustine suggests that any memory of a time before “the touch of language” is purely imaginary. And yet his autobiography is driven (by a death drive) to return to a time before the touch of the mother (tongue).

While Augustine confesses the personal fantasy of returning to an imaginary *time before* the touch of the mother (tongue), Karl Marx articulates the communal fantasy of *a time to come* when we will forget our mother tongue. The fantasy of forgetting the mother tongue is the fantasy of rearticulating ourselves as individuals or a society: the fantasy of self-expression in the creation of a new shared tongue. And yet, as Marx confesses, this fantasy of forgetting the mother tongue that predetermines us is a failed fantasy. We find ourselves bound by the mother tongue, trapped between two imaginary temporalities: the time before and after the touch of language.

Jacques Derrida turns to both Augustine and Marx to repeat the fantasy of escaping the mother (tongue). His lectures on *Spectres de Marx* and his personal autobiography “Circonfession” (or in English, “Circumfession”), both published in the early 1990s, do not explicitly speak to each other (cf. Derrida, 1993; 1991). And yet both works are possessed by the dream of a time before/after the mother tongue: a failed political fantasy confessed also as an unrealized personal

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obsession. Derrida responds to Marx's analysis of our repeated failure to forget the mother tongue by turning to Augustine's analysis of the mother's touch: we cannot forget the mother tongue because it is licked upon our skin. Even if we could successfully destroy one political (symbolic) system in the creation of the new, the echo of the old is etched into our skin.

The following chapter explores the relationship between the mother tongue and the mother touch by turning to Derrida's relationship to Augustine and Marx. Section one, "Nightmares and fantasies of the mother tongue," explores the relationship between the imagined time "before" and "after" language repeated throughout the history of philosophy: from Augustine's religious ponderings, to Marx's political manifesto, to Derrida's reiterations of both within a psychoanalytic framework. Section two, "Fantasmatic foreskins," argues that the fantasy of escaping the mother tongue is connected to the fantasy of escaping the mother touch. Language first enters us unconsciously through touch. Even when we denounce words that have been attributed to us (our given names), our skin retains the etchings of our first words/touch. The fantasy of being-before-language is often represented through the image of a layer of untouched skin shed at infancy: a layer of skin that possesses our daydreams and haunts our nightmares. I conclude with the suggestion that our repeated failure to escape the touch of language surfaces in the form of barely perceptible interruptions within the language that has been touched upon us.

## Nightmares and fantasies of the mother tongue

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx famously compares the dream of the revolution-to-come to the imagined experience of forgetting one's mother tongue (cf. Marx 1979: 106). The series of peasant uprisings erupting in the German states in the 1830s and 1840s—the revolt of the tailors, the pyrotechnics, and potato farmers—seemed to be generating a force that would culminate in a final shattering of all former political articulations. Without clearly knowing what new political articulation would take the place of the old, each small revolt nevertheless attempted to begin a new sentence. Although the young Marx and his revolutionary companions anticipated the emergence a Hegelian self-articulated community, the grand disappointment of 1848 failed to generate a new language.<sup>1</sup> As Marx would later assess the period, what appeared to be a revolutionary breaking point only took the form of newness while ultimately reproducing the content of that which each revolt rebelled against. They sang new words set to an ancient tune.<sup>2</sup>

The proletarian attempts to achieve new political expression failed to rip themselves free from repetition's inertia.<sup>3</sup> Despite being slightly older and perhaps slightly disillusioned, Marx of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* returns to the Young

Hegelian dream of a new common language in the erasure of the mother tongue: a revolution-to-come that would not reproduce the contents of that which it aims to destroy. In contrast to the lingering fantasy of a revolution that would “not borrow its poetry from the past but the future” (Marx 1979: 106), the weight of Marx’s text looks backward at failure rather than forward toward fantasy, offering an analysis of how proletarian revolutions actually tend to unfold. Rather than erasing the mother tongue, we find ourselves ensnared by it. We try to define ourselves in a single new utterance, but the mother tongue wraps itself around our ankles and pulls us back into itself. Our failed attempts to create a new language that breaks with the content of the old result instead in glitches within the mother tongue, as Marx describes it, instances of scrambled syntax (Marx 1979: 108) or stuttered speech (Marx 1979: 106–107). In such a way, just when the proletarian revolutions seem to gain momentum, to say something new, they interrupt themselves mid-sentence. In contrast to the fantasy of revolution as a decisive breaking point, actual proletarian revolutions occurred not as a great event, but rather as a series of glitches: events that restarted before they began. Rather than creating a new language, actual proletarian protests and revolts tend to leave us stuttering within our native language. We fail to create something new, but we can no longer smoothly repeat what has already been said. The grand failure to create a new common language leaves us with a series of mini-failures as we fail to articulate our visions of the future through the mother tongue in which we are stuck.<sup>4</sup>

The thought of being deprived of one’s first language would seem to belong to the genre of nightmares rather than fantasies: the nightmare of losing one’s voice, of being unable to speak while standing (perhaps naked) before an audience, of being unable to call for help when in danger. The experience of losing one’s language is the real nightmare of someone who has suffered a stroke or a refugee in a new country where her own linguistic economy counts for nothing. This blurring of fantasy and nightmare is not surprising given Marx’s intricate theory of historical genre. We learn that on the world-stage it is often difficult to distinguish freedom from bondage, which often takes the form of a comedy while preserving its tragic contents. Marx’s manipulation of genre likewise shows itself in his blurring of the distinction between fantasy and horror in his extended metaphor of forgetting one’s first language.<sup>5</sup>

In the late twentieth century, Derrida not only repeats the Marxist fantasy-nightmare of the destruction of the mother tongue as a political metaphor set between tragedy and comedy (with both sides bordering on horror), but expresses it also as a secret confession. His 1993 *Specters of Marx* highlights the linguistic metaphors of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, focusing on the historical moment of June 1848. A few years earlier, Derrida published his autobiography, “Circumfession”, which follows the final days of his mother. In many respects the two texts do not

seem related: one takes the form of a political lecture with its focus on Marx; the other takes the form of an introspective analysis of his own estranged relationship to Judaism with references to Augustine. And yet both texts are possessed by the nightmare-fantasy of escaping one's native language: first as the fantasy of a communal dream of revolution, then as a personal dream of redemption.

As I have noted, although *The Eighteenth Brumaire* dreams of a language to come, the weight of the text looks backward toward the failure of history to make a radical cut with its past. When Derrida repeats the vision of a great event to come, he also confesses to its impossibility: a dream that gains in intensity through its deferral. The tension between the stubborn fantasy of an imaginary new language that overwrites the old and the stubbornness of the mother tongue, which does not allow itself to be forgotten, produces a new kind of expression in the form of failed expression: the repetition of our failed protests and revolts, our failure to say anything new, fills us with deep desire and insecurity which causes us to stutter in our native tongue, which we cannot escape but can no longer smoothly articulate ourselves in. We become like a new expatriate who in attempting to speak, think, and dream in a new language begins to speak her own language as if it were a second language. When speaking her mother tongue, she may adopt the accent of those in her new country, speaking disjointedly as she grasps for words that once readily came to her. Before she can master the new language, she begins to relate to her native language as if it were a foreign tongue. In such a way, the failure of revolution can leave a people in worse conditions than before a revolt. Our relationship to the old is disrupted, but there is nothing substantial to grasp onto in its place.

Derrida self-consciously sets himself up for failure in taking on the personal quest to say something that escapes the mother tongue. As he writes in the opening pages of his confessions:

This dream in me, since always, of another language, an entirely crude language, of a half-fluid name too [. . .] I hear them snigger, poor old man, doesn't look likely, not going to happen tomorrow, you'll never know, super abundance of a flood after which a dike becomes beautiful like the ruin it will always have walled up inside it.

(Derrida 1993: 1.4-6)

The opening imagery of the pent-up levee mirrors the imagery of the barricade in *Specters of Marx*. Derrida illustrates the tensions of June 1848 Paris through the images of the double barricade: while revolutionary chaos swelled up behind the monstrous barricade of Saint Antoine that would later lie in ruin, the barricade du Temple was an inanimate stone-faced obstruction, letting out “not a cry, not a

sound, not a breath” (Derrida 1994: 118–119). “Circumfession” redoubles the image of the double barricade in the gaping mouth of the confessor, who is met by the blank stare of the mother who no longer recognizes her son. Derrida describes the experience of his own facial paralysis that distorts his mouth into a gaping sneer. His open mouth alludes to his desire to burst forth in a superabundance of new speech, and yet he can barely let out an inaudible groan, which is met by the mother’s silence. In the tradition of a Marxist tragic-comic horror, the text blurs tragedy and comedy, nightmare and fantasy. As Derrida weeps over the deteriorating health of his mother, he fantasizes, to his own horror, about the death of the mother (tongue): “Here I am, since always [. . .] in alliance with death, with the living death of my mother” (Derrida 1993: 27.137). The impending event of the death of the mother both devastates him and, even in his grief, bizarrely excites him. As Derrida explains, the text will have been successful if he writes a single sentence that escapes the grasp of being translated back into what is known. To write a new sentence is to write the death of the mother.

Derrida’s text explicitly connects the dream of a new language to the dream of a time before the mother tongue. The nightmare of the mother tongue—an inheritance that one attempts to disown—is positioned between two fantasies: the fantasy of a time before an inherited tongue and the fantasy of a language to come, which is out of reach. “Circumfession” self-consciously strings together carefully selected—as well as openly contrived—memories; it is a reflection on the self but also a meta-reflection on autobiography, the genre of self-articulation. Derrida’s confessed goal of the text is to give birth to himself in the death of the mother. The death of the mother, in whom he has his definition, is also the death of all previous articulations of his self. The fantasy of the mother’s death is the fantasy of suicide (Derrida 1993: 7.36–40). In this sense, the text that traces Derrida’s “deconversion” away from Judaism also strives to achieve a conversion: the birth of a new self in the death of the mother. In the death of the one who gave him his name (not only his given name, but his secret name given to him as an infant at *Brit Milah*), he attempts to express himself in a new utterance: “I have been seeking myself in a sentence” (Derrida 1993: 2.13). Parallel to his lectures on Marx in which he analyzes the failure of the proletarian revolts to articulate even a single new sentence, Derrida takes on the personal task of attempting to give birth to himself in the construction of a single sentence that escapes being retranslated back into what is already known of himself, his memories, his writing: an unrecognizable utterance that breaks free from repetition’s inertia both in form and content.

## Fantasmatic foreskins

Derrida’s reflection on the death of the mother (tongue) mimics Augustine’s *Confessions*, which opens with a speculation on how he first became entrapped by

“the bonds of [his] human tongue” (Augustine: I.ix.14). In contrast to Marx who fantasizes about a time after being-in-language as we know it, Augustine’s fantasy about being free from the bonds of the mother (tongue) takes the form of a fantasy of a time before being-in-language. According to Augustine, the time before symbolic thought and speech is a time before memory. As he speculates, memories of a time before our speaking-being are likely based on stories our caregivers have told us about ourselves or are based on what we have observed in other infants. Nevertheless, Augustine creates an imagined memory of the moment when language first enters him, displacing his infancy. Since our relationship to our own infancy is fantastical, our infancy neither properly belongs to our memory nor can it be properly forgotten or left behind. The fantasy of a prelinguistic self thus haunts us. As Augustine puts it, “Infancy did not ‘depart’ for it has no place to go. Yet I was no longer a baby incapable of speech but already a boy with power to talk I discovered only later” (Augustine 1998: I.viii.13). Language first enters us before we are aware of its existence. Its touch is as gentle as a mother’s nipple between the lips of an infant. Augustine takes this example beyond metaphor, equating these first moments of skin-to-skin contact between the infant and mother as the child’s first lesson in language. As he claims, when the infant takes in nourishment from the mother, it also takes in “the word” of God (Augustine 1998: I.vi.7). Derrida layers this curious passage in the *Confessions* with his own fantasy of the first words of his mother spoken over skin. He recounts a “memory” of his early childhood when he suffered from a fever and was barely conscious. His mother wept and prayed over his body. His earliest “memory” of his mother’s touch is a memory of his first word: “Well I’m remembering God this morning, the name [. . .] as I heard it perhaps the first time, no doubt in my mother’s mouth when she was praying, each time she saw me ill [. . .] I hear her say, ‘thanks to God, thank you God,’ when the temperature goes down, weeping in pronouncing your name” (Derrida 1993: 23.117–118). Sitting by the bed of his dying mother, Derrida experiences the sensation of the word “God” which his mother touched upon his feverish skin. The bodily memory of the name of God lingers on his skin, even as he confesses to no longer adhere to his mother’s faith. After his conversion to Christianity, Augustine still cannot escape the sensational touch of the women from his past who continue to haunt him in his dreams; after Derrida’s “cut with Kippur,” he cannot shake the touch of the name of God.<sup>6</sup> Both Augustine and Derrida confess to the failure of a radical conversion (or deconversion), in which we forfeit one symbolic system for another. For even when we renounce our given names, our skin reverberates with the touch of our first words.<sup>7</sup> The touch of the mother (tongue) is “the first event to write itself on my body [. . .] we have to learn to read without seeing” (Derrida 1993: 23.120)<sup>8</sup>.

The mother tongue takes us captive by layering itself upon our skin. As Augustine conceived it, language enters us twice: first through a gentle touch, then by force.

Augustine continues to imagine what it must have been like to learn his mother tongue by comparing it to his painful experience as a student who was forced to learn Greek. Even as an adult, Augustine remains freshly wounded by the memory of being beaten by his teachers when he, as any child would, wanted to play rather than devote himself to his language studies. In Augustine's mind, language is something that is quite literally beaten into our skin:

I learnt to articulate my wishes by training my mouth to use these signs. In this way I communicated the signs of my wishes to those around me, and entered more deeply into the storm society of human life [. . .] it was set before me as my moral duty in life to obey those who admonished me with the purpose that I should succeed in this world, and should excel the arts of using my tongue [. . .] I did not understand why such knowledge was useful. Yet if ever I was indolent in learning I was beaten. This method was approved by adults and many living long before me.

(Augustine 1998: I.viii.13; I.ix.14)

In a similar vein to Marx, the tyranny of the mother tongue represents for Augustine the reproduction of the status quo, which is driven by the economic agenda of one's society.<sup>9</sup> For Augustine, the mother tongue is not merely a metaphor for the status quo, but the vehicle of the reproduction of societal values. In order for an infant to express its desires, it must learn to translate them into the mother tongue. But the conversion of infant desire into articulated desire also destroys the former as the child must align the form and content of her desire with that of the adults. Augustine's discourse on touch and language highlights two sides of desire: that which is articulated within the symbolic economy of the mother tongue, and the fantasy of a desire that cannot be said. Augustine imagines the events through which the unspoken desire of his infancy was displaced by the words that overwrite him, allowing him to appear as subject. And yet, although he compares this first exchange of unspoken desire for language to his violent experiences of learning languages in school, he also maintains that language has always already been pressed into his skin (inserted directly into his mouth through the skin of his mother). While force shapes our desire by teaching us how to speak, the mother tongue first enters us without our awareness, leaving us without an opportunity to consent or protest, leaving behind no trace or memory of a time before.<sup>10</sup>

The fantasy of a time before language is the fantasy of an untouched layer of skin. The fantasy of being untouched by language requires "the memory" of an actual event in which we identify ourselves as having been cut off from our unspoken desires. The articulation of one's subjectivity is thus constituted by a real cut that

symbolizes our original separation from our first skin: a fantastical pre-subjective foreskin untainted by touch and language. Augustine locates the agent of the cut in the symbolic figure of the schoolmaster and the real lick of his switch; Derrida locates the agent of the cut in the figure of his mother and the lick of the mother tongue. He imagines the moment of his own circumcision—a memory mixed with historical legacy—as the first violent touch of the word:

on the seventh day, when they would put on orange-flower water in Algeria [. . .] mingling with the blood right on that wound that I have never seen, seen with my own eyes, this perfumed water attenuates the pain which I suppose to be nil and infinite, and I can still feel it, the phantom burning, in my belly, irradiating a diffuse zone around the sex [. . .] without forgetting all the theories according to which circumcision, another word for peritomy, that cutting of the surround, is instituted by the mother, for her, the cruelty basically being hers, and sometimes the very act of cutting off that sort of ring [. . .] even the remains would belong to the mother whom it is said that in the past, in my ancestors' country [. . .] had to eat the still bloody foreskin, I imagine by first sucking it, my first beloved cannibal, initiator at the sublime gate of fellatio.

(Derrida 1993: 13.65–66)

With the ritual cut of Brit Milah, which is at once a naming ceremony, an alliance is drawn between the mother touch and the mother tongue. Derrida's many references to the mother's mouth, lips, teeth, and tongue suggest that our given names are licked upon our skin. "Circumfession" layers all the ways in which one may be licked (by a switch, by lightning, by a tongue). He chases and is chased by the monster mother tongue as he chases and is chased by the phantom foreskin: "My tongue [. . .] the one that has always been running after me, turning circles around me, a circumference licking me with a flame and that I try in turn to circumvent, having never loved anything but the impossible" (Derrida 1993: 1.3). Between Augustine and Derrida we find an answer to Marx who questioned the seeming impossibility of escaping language as we know it: the revolutionary goal of shattering the mother tongue fails because our first tongue is licked upon our skin. We cannot forget the mother tongue without shedding our first skin. Or to put this differently, even if we could displace one symbolic order in the creation of a completely new order, our body would still retain the impression of the former. Perhaps this is also what Marx has in mind when he rejects the metaphor of critique as a surgeon's scalpel. Lifting a graft of skin will not kill the cancer. We must completely rip off our first skin (Marx 1975: 177; Derrida 1993: 44.234–235).



## Conclusion

“The touch of language” is a metaphor for the grip of language upon our thinking and being. But it is also literal in two senses. In the first sense, the way we are touched or not touched by others is informed by the names we are given. In the second sense, we first grasp the meaning of certain words through a corresponding touch or lack of touch. Symbolic thought is not required to associate “bad” with being struck or “good” with being stroked. Words are soaked into our skin and stored as bodily memory. We are interpellated as subject both by what we are named and by how we are touched or not touched. These haptic and linguistic interpellations cannot be untangled.<sup>11</sup>

The very real grip of language upon our bodies, which shapes our subjectivity, seems to be embedded in a kind of negativity that is expressed through fantasy. One of these fantasies in Western philosophy is the framing of our speaking- being as embedded between two cuts: one that separates us from a time “before” and another that separates us from a time “after” our determination by the touch of language. Donna Haraway has argued in reference to Marx and post- structuralism that the dream of a common language to come is at once the dream of shared experience “before” our individuation (and alienation) in language: “the myth of an original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate” (Haraway 2000: 292). Our inability to return to a time before or transcend our being-in-language is often represented in the history of Western philosophy through the fantasy of the mother as the gatekeeper. The figure of the mother is developed through the (constructed) memories of our first experiences of touch: an imagined touch in which the caregiver and child cannot be distinguished and the memory of the first violent touch. The first cut from the unity with the mother’s skin is often imagined to be at the hands of the mother (or in Derrida’s fantasies the mother’s lips, tongue, and teeth). With this cut, the blissful skin-to-skin unity of infancy is converted into the dominance of the mother tongue over the body. The fantasy of the first cut is doubled in the fantasy of a second cut. The first severing of our shared skin at the hands of the (m)other is repeated in the fantasy of final cut by our own hands. In some fantasies this second cut takes the form of an individual spiritual conversion or messianic end. Other fantasies of the cut take the form of a world-political conversion in the form of revolution.

The tradition of the conversion narrative stretching from Augustine to Derrida is about the failure to achieve the second cut: testimonies of the failed attempt to repeat and thus recode a first cut from a fantastical origin. The failure to actualize the second final cut can result in small disturbances—a negative glitch—within what has already been articulated for us. Negativity shows itself where the fantastical skin of our materiality pulls at the seams. Marx frames the failed

proletariat revolutions as a stutter and scrambled syntax belonging to a historical stage: symptoms of the failed attempt to forget the mother tongue. As discussed above, Marx claims that in order to achieve new expression we cannot draw on the poetry from an imagined past. However, there is also a kind of poetry that emerges from within the mother tongue in both the failure to repeat an imaginary past and the failure to actualize an imaginary future. As Gilles Deleuze notes, it is precisely the stutter within the mother tongue that makes “language trembl[e] from head to toe” (Deleuze 1998: 109). Marx himself similarly states that despite the failures of the revolutions of the nineteenth century “all Europe trembles at the June Earthquake” (Marx 1979: 109).

As Derrida fails to articulate himself in a single new sentence, the poetry in *Circumfession* emerges in passing instances of stuttered or scrambled speech: the scrambling of fantasy and nightmare, the scrambling of the imaginary Monster Mother and Derrida’s actual mother Georgette. Speech becomes disoriented in the physical failure of the body as expressed in the example of his mother’s body covered in open sores and his own facial paralysis. Derrida weeps over his mother’s body, a repetition and inversion of his first memory of “the word” entering him as a child. His mother responds “I have a pain in my mother.” The scrambled syntax of mother and son. The scrambled syntax of one articulated subject and another. Our repeated failure to escape the touch of language surfaces in the form of barely perceptible interruptions within the language that has been touched upon us. The symptom of our failure to forget, shatter or return to a time before the touch of the tongue results in tiny ruptures of negativity—a shiver passing over one’s skin, a stutter in one’s speech—the unconscious resistance of our body from being fully articulated by another.

## Notes

- . 1 Although Hegel himself saw the French Revolution as the realization of such a self-articulated community (cf. Hegel 1970: 328–363), Hegel’s followers known as the Young Hegelians insisted that Germany must undergo its own revolution in the nineteenth century, instead of romanticizing the events of other countries as its own.
- . 2 In Marx’s words, “And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle-cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and borrowed language . . . In a like manner a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit

- of the new language and can freely express himself in it only when he finds his way in it without recalling the old and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new” (cf. Marx 1979: 103–104).
- . 3 For another perspective on the concept of repetition in its relation to touch and language through a Marxist perspective see the contribution by Bara Kolenc in this book (Chapter 6).
  - . 4 Many movements that seek to radically reconstruct a stage of history take Marx’s metaphor quite literally. In order to reshape the character of a nation or group, for example, the people must learn to articulate themselves and their desire in a new tongue (often in the tongue of an oppressor). For this reason a new regime or dictator often introduces a new lexicon: introducing new terms, making old terms obsolete, or recoding words to mean something contrary to their original sense. For a fictional illustration of the way a new regime redefines itself through the creation of a new language in the destruction of a mother tongue we may consider Orwell’s Newspeak in *1984* (cf. Orwell 1950).
  - . 5 In “Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche,” Judith Butler similarly characterizes the “touch of god” as a tactile predetermination and compares this to Merleau-Ponty’s pre-immersion of the tactile subject in a palpable world (Butler 2004: 181–205).
  - . 6 For another perspective on the specific way in which names touch upon us see Jela Krečić’s contribution in this book (Chapter 9).
  - . 7 For further psychoanalytic perspectives on the way words are etched onto the infant’s skins cf. Freud 2001b; Anzieu 2016: 114.
  - . 8 For an interpretation of the link between the reproducibility of language and commodity-value in relation to touch see Mirt Komel’s contribution in this book (Chapter 1).
  - . 9 Derrida connects Augustine’s stubborn resistance to learning Greek to his own failure to learn Hebrew. He revisits his memory of being expelled from his Hebrew school for his failure to learn Hebrew. By connecting Greek and Hebrew, Derrida places emphasis on two languages which represent an ideal origin: Greek being the sacred language that gives birth to Western philosophy and Hebrew being the sacred tongue of the Hebrew scriptures. Both languages point to an ideological origin. We might note that Marx too, like many European Jews, had little to no knowledge of Hebrew: Marx, like his father, was raised with a liberal secular education and baptized Lutheran. The philosophers’ desire to forget (Marx) or circumvent (Derrida) the mother tongue is haunted by the absence of language “before” their first tongue: not only a time before language but a missing original tongue before the mother tongue. Although I frame being-in-language (represented through the fantastical figure of the Mother Tongue) as between two fantasies of a time before and after language, there also might be

another way to grasp the fantasy of before and after, as the fantasy of being in a language that is other (worldly). A time before language is layered by the fantasy of a missing originary or sacred language. The time after language is also layered with the fantasy of existing fully in a new language that erases the mother tongue (Marx's dream of a new common language after revolution, Derrida's dream of articulating himself in a single new sentence). The ontic experience of learning a second language or having one's writing translated into another language (by another) connects us more deeply to the desire/fear of existing ontologically outside of what has already been articulated or how we have already been articulated as subject. The desire for radical rearticulation is at once the terror of defacement beyond recognition.

- . 10 This use of "interpellation" is used by Louis Pierre Althusser in 1970 to refer to the way we are called up as ideological subjects by the way we respond to our environment. Althusser's sense of being a hailed subject places emphasis on the way we answer to the names we are given. This process can even be as general as turning our heads in response to "Hey you." However, his sense of interpellation includes the way we are unconsciously conditioned by all of the social experience and practice that touches upon us (cf. Althusser 2001).

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